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# Enthusiasm For War

by

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Enthusiasm for War

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## CHARACTERS

MARY WILSON; *late 40's slightly over-weight with unkempt graying hair. A crusader for the White Feather Brigade\* with her sights on social advancement.*

ELLI SIMPSON; *late 20's early 30's; Mary's co-worker and friend at the Munitions factory*

MARTHA SMITH; *a rather short and heavy-set co-worker in her late 40's*

JACK WILSON; *Mary's son, not quite 15; a thin and weak but intelligent boy*

CHORUS; *older male with booming voice; an authoritative figure wearing an early 20<sup>th</sup> century tweed suit*

LADY ELIZABETH SUMNER; *50's to early 60's; a respected high-society lady and officer in the White Feather Brigade*

MRS. SUZANNE WHITTY; *a young and pretty lady in her mid to late 20's*

MRS. BROWN; *another lady, late 30's to early 40's*

SERGEANT EARLY; *a large, mustached male recruiter in his late 20's to early 30's*

DOCTOR; *an older male with thinning hair, a mustache and glasses*

CHAPLIN; *a younger squirrely-looking man in his mid-20's; a smoker; wears glasses*

SERGEANT; *(in the trenches); mid 20's; a large soldier with a big mustache*

LIEUTENANT; *a young soldier in his early to mid-20s*

LADIES; *four or five young to middle aged women—officers in the White Feather Brigade. The Ladies wear dresses, sashes, and attend tea parties together.*

## TIME AND PLACE

*Lancaster, England beginning in early 1915 through late 1916  
Great Britain is fully engaged in The Great War*

## ETC.

\*The White Feather Movement was a propaganda campaign in England during WWI to encourage men to enlist in the army. White feathers (a symbol of cowardice and failure to fulfill their male duties) were distributed by women of the Order of the White Feather to any man they saw who seemed capable of joining the army that was out of uniform.

The **Pals battalions** of World War I were specially constituted units of the British Army comprising men who had enlisted together in local recruiting drives, with the promise that they would be able to serve alongside their friends, neighbors and work colleagues ("*pals*"), rather than being arbitrarily allocated to regular Army regiments.

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## PROLOGUE

(*AT RISE: CHORUS alone in SPOTLIGHT.*)

CHORUS

(*From: "The Ballad for Peace and War"*)

*Oh meet it is and passing sweet  
To live at peace with others,  
But sweeter still and far more meet  
To die in war for brothers.  
The soil is safe, for widow and waif,  
And for the soul of England,  
Because their bodies men vouchsafe  
To save the soul of England!*

(*SPOTLIGHT OUT.*)

## ACT I; SCENE 1

(*AT RISE: inside a munitions factory. MARY and ELLI are taking a smoke break. Like all the factory workers, they wear white smocks and are covered in yellow powder. MARTHA is visible off to one side eaves-dropping. ALL WOMEN in the factory speak with heavy Cockney accents.*)

MARY

(*Lighting a cigarette*) Yea know Elli...you don't 'ave to be so bloomin' scared. We're on the Kings business after all.

ELLI

(*Shyly*) I know Mary...I try to give 'em a feather and they just walk by, payin' me no mind.

MARY

You got to begin yellin' at them and make a bloody scene... 'ow many time 'ave I got to tell ya that?

ELLI

I'm not like you Mary...I can't do that

MARY

---

<sup>1</sup> Owen, Wilfred, The Ballad of Peace and War (part of the original poem)

*(Trying to sound proper, speaking without heavy accent)* Elli Simpson...Dear soul...how will you ever move up in this world? How will you ever become a lady?

MARTHA

*(Crossing closer; aggressively)* I don't rightly think she'll be a lady...and 'either will you Mary Wilson. None of us will, we're stuck where we are...and it was 'ow God planned it.

*(MARY and ELLI turn away from MARTHA who crosses away, smoking.)*

MARY

What a terrible woman she is...Well Elli...your 'usband's with the Pals so there's still 'ope for you.

ELLI

If you say so Mary...I don't think like you. *(Joking with her)* I'll bet you'd be a lady if Captain 'arding proposed to you... wouldn't you Mary? That Martha Smith doesn't know what she's talking about, does she Mary?

MARY

Captain 'arding and I are just friends...I was dear friends with his late wife, Alberta. We were suffragette sisters together in the cause and marched shoulder to shoulder together into the fray many times... *(Looking disgusted)* barin' the jeers from blokes on the street together many times... If she were still alive... *(Staring off)* she would 'ave been an important lass with the feather, I can tell you that... if she were still 'ere with us, God bless her soul.

ELLI

I think I met Mrs. 'arding with you one time Mary...I think I did.

MARY

It's possible...we were together quite often... 'er 'usband...Captain...well 'e was a lieutenant back then with the King's Reserve Corp... 'e always supported his wife and the rights for woman to vote. 'e's a gentleman you know...an officer...

ELLI

'e's a gallant sort Mary...isn't 'e?

MARY

'e is...I wish you wouldn't say things like 'e's going to propose to me though...it gets me 'opes up and dreaming about it Elli...it's cruel. 'e just needs someone on the 'ome front to write too...that's all.

ELLI

I'm sorry Mary...I 'ear about 'im written' to you and I just think too much and get excited, that's all. I just want to see you 'appy...your always dreamin' about livin' in the country...you know...livin' like a lady...and I want that for ya Mary, even if it's just a dream.

MARY

Well...it doesn't 'ave to be a dream...you don't 'ave to marry your way into that...if you can get into the tea circle with proper ladies, then... (*Staring off*) then weekends in the countryside drinking tea and discussin' poetry...you know Elli...betterin' yourself.

ELLI

I guess Mary... (*Excited*) 'e writes to ya from the front...right Mary? Captain 'arding? He writes ya?

MARY

(*Now excited*) 'e did send me a poem in 'is last letter though.

ELLI

(*Excited*) Was it a love poem Mary? Was it?

MARY

(*Acting superior*) No, but it's a glorious poem though...about the glory of battle...It's a bit long though and really only for those who can appreciate poetry, not for the casual reader you know.

ELLI

I love poetry Mary...you know that. But my John though...I'm just bloomin' 'appy with a letter from 'im. 'e's not one for poetry though...even though 'e tells me many blokes there are into poetry and read it in the barracks.

MARY

(*Dramatic*) If my John were still alive 'e might have been an officer with the Pals by now... 'e loved poetry, 'e knew it...and could recite many poems from memory, mind you.

ELLI

(*Rolling eyes a little bit*) Yea, Maybe 'e would have been an officer...Speakin' of officers...did you hear about the position as secretary yet?

MARY

Not yet...but I'm keepin' me fingers crossed... 'ow exciting it would be. I was already invited to Mrs. Whitty's 'ouse for tea this Saturday.

ELLI

Oh Mary...that must mean you're goin' to be chosen...How excitin' for you! You really deserve it though Mary, with all the blokes you've gotten to join already. I don't know Mrs. Whitty. Is she a lady, Mary? Is she?

MARY

Well... (*Reluctantly*) yes you could say she's a lady... but she's an officer because 'er 'usband's an officer with the Pals... so she 'as a certain standing. I do know that she's close friends with Lady Sumner though... (*Staring off*) just think...to get into Lady Sumner's circle

MARY, *Continued*

of friends, they say once you're in with them, you're always in with them...that's what they say...

ELLI

Well you deserve it Mary with all your 'ard work. How is young Jack doing these days? He must be getting big, 'ey?

MARY

*(With disgust)* 'e's probably off readin' some book somewhere or doing some 'omework...I swear that boy has no sense of adventure. 'e 'as the nerve to question his mother about me givin' feathers and gettin' blokes to join. 'e'll be joinin' soon enough...I can tell you that...'e'll be joinin' soon.

ELLI

Oh Mary...'e's so young...let the men do the fightin'.

MARY

We all need to make sacrifices during this time... *(Stern; staring at ELLI)* all of us.

ELLI

*(Puts head down)* Ok Mary...I need to get back to work.

MARY

Good idea!

*(BLACKOUT.)*

## ACT I; SCENE 2

*(AT RISE: Several weeks later; break time inside the munitions factory. MARY and ELLI smoking.)*

ELLI

Oh Mary...I'm so sorry about Captain 'arding ...I'm sorry Mary. Such bad luck for you, Mary.

MARY

Captain 'arding was valiant... such a valiant man.

ELLI

Who did they pick for secretary Mary? Who was it? Do you get to be an officer Mary? What was tea like at that lady's 'ouse? What was it like Mary?

MARY

No, They chose Mrs. Fisher because ‘er ‘usband was a bloomin’ drunk who served in some war in Africa or somethin’ – a nobody – and she ‘asn’t done anything useful for the feather and she gets to be an officer. (*Puts hand to her head; regains control*) I didn’t go to Mrs. Whitty’s for tea...I didn’t go...with Captain ‘arding dyin’ and all...it didn’t seem proper...to go and enjoy some tea when men are dyin’ during a retreat...it didn’t seem right...so I combed the streets of Lancaster and got seven men to join that day—seven men.

(*MARTHA enters.*)

MARTHA

Looks like no marriage for you Mary Wilson, huh? I guess the angels at the Mons didn’t protect your Mr. ‘arding, did they Mary Wilson? (*Laughing/taunting*) ...did they?

MARY

I don’t ‘ave time for the likes of you Martha Smith...no time at all to deal with your ‘atred. Just because your ‘appy with your lot in life, that doesn’t mean the rest of us can’t try and better ourselves.

MARTHA

Who are you tryin’ to fool Mary? Yourself? You’r not tryin’ to better yourself...you’r trying to better your position...you’r not one of them Mary and never will be...get that through your bloomin’ ‘ead.

MARY

Captain ‘arding was a fine man, and I take offense to your attitude about ‘is death.

MARTHA

I’m sure ‘e was a fine bloke...in fact we knew ‘is servants daughter, Mary Jones...’e was never going to marry the likes of you Mary Wilson...never. (*Walks away laughing*)

ELLI

(*Whispers*) I still think you deserved to be secretary Mary...I don’t care what Martha Smith says...you could be a lady Mary...I know it.

MARY

Thank you Elli...we both could be...the first step is to stay away from the likes of Martha Smith...it’s a good place to start. She’s nothin’ but a commoner with a common name. Who we associate with and ‘ow we spend our time is ‘ow we are perceived in this life. Remember that Elli.

ELLI

I will Mary...I will. But I associate with you Mary...so that’s good enough for me. Do you think it’s true what they said about the angels protecting the lads during the retreat?

MARY

I ran into Mrs. Brown the other night and she and some of the other ladies were talking about it, so if they say it's true... then you can bet on it!

ELLI

I'll remember that Mary...I will.

MARY

It was in the papers, so it must be true. Mrs. Brown and the other officers in the white feather are well-educated ladies of fine breedin'. They are in the know about what is really goin' on...they are all basically married to officers who are currently serving, so they get all the real news. All of them with the exception of Mrs. Fisher who's 'usband died a bloody drunk... and 'e was no officer anyway. Who is she to get the position over me Elli, who is she?

ELLI

I wish you could 'ave been made an officer Mary...you would 'ave been a great officer. We need good officers in the feather...ya know to show us 'ow it's done...getting' men to join and all. No one can do it like you Mary...no one.

MARY

Well...I would 'ave gotten more done than Mrs. Fisher, I can tell you that...she's too old to 'ave any real energy to get things done anyway... (*Making a fist*) Oh that Mrs. Fisher...who does she think she is?

ELLI

Maybe young Jack could be an officer Mary...he's still goin' to school, no?

MARY

(*Laughs a little*) Jack an officer? I don't think so...but if his father were still alive he might have been an officer serving with the Pals right now...then...then what would Mrs. Fisher have to say?

ELLI

Why do you think your late husband would 'ave been an officer? (*MARY makes a face*) I'm not tryin' to upset you Mary...he worked in the coal yards right? Just like my John.

MARY

Elli, please...'e was not like your John. 'e knew poetry and purchased insurance to keep Jack in school. 'e didn't want that for 'is son.

ELLI

I'm not speakin' against your late 'usband... (*Long pause*) I don't know anything Mary...maybe 'e would have been an officer.

MARY

Well...I didn't get the honor of being chosen as an officer, but we'll see what happens...anything is possible during war time Elli...anything. We just need to keep our heads down and continue to work hard.

(BLACKOUT.)

### ACT I; SCENE 3

(AT RISE: A SPOTLIGHT on CHORUS.)

CHORUS

(V. THE SOLDIER)

*If I should die, think only this of me:  
That there's some corner of a foreign field  
That is forever England. There shall be  
In that rich earth a richer dust concealed;  
A dust whom England bore, shaped, made aware,  
Gave, once, her flowers to love, her ways to roam,  
A body of England's, breathing English air,  
Washed by the rivers, blest by suns of home.*

*And think, this heart, all evil shed away,  
A pulse in the eternal mind, no less  
Gives somewhere back the thoughts by England  
Given;  
Her sights and sounds; dreams happy as her day;  
And laughter, learnt of friends; and gentleness,  
In hearts at peace, under an English heaven.<sup>2</sup>*

(BLACKOUT.)

### ACT I; SCENE 4

(AT RISE: A working class flat located in Lancaster, England. The room is decorated with British Flags and Union Jacks. Mary's son JACK is seated at the kitchen table. MARY enters reading a paper magazine and carrying a bowl of food. She wears a khaki uniform that does not fit well. MARY places the bowl of food in front of JACK while remaining focused on the magazine.)

MARY

<sup>2</sup> Brooke, Rupert. 'V. THE SOLDIER' from Cross, Tim. *The Lost Voices of World War I*. 55.

...and it says 'If I should die, think only this of me: That there's some corner of a foreign field That is forever England.'... Oh, isn't that lovely? 'e was a real Tommy Atkins... that Rupert Brook, and so 'andsome...'e was. *(Now with a more "proper" accent)* I think I'm going to read this at tonight's meeting, Jack. What do you think about that?

JACK

Yes, mum—you've read that to me many times now. I 'eard you practicin' readin' it the last two nights. You know... you are so committed to the cause of the war... but I remember you swearin'... when was it? Last year? You swore that you would never stop until women were allowed the right to vote. What 'appened to that cause?

MARY

*(Stares at JACK for a long moment)* I'm still committed to the Suffragettes Jack... but this war is going to get us the vote quicker than if the war 'adn't 'appened in the first place... we're doing all the men's jobs now... and in many cases better than the men... and that will get us the vote *(crosses her arms)*. They depend on us now... *(long pause)*... Oh Jack, I can only imagine what Miss Davison could have done for the white feather movement if she 'adn't sacrificed herself for the Suffragettes... and Mrs. 'arding... she would have been an important member of the feather... they knew the meanin' of sacrifice... I wonder if these officers *(sarcastically)* in the white feather know the bloody meanin' of sacrifice.

JACK

Who's not speakin' like a lady now Mum?

MARY

*(Gives JACK a stern look)* Mother... not 'mum', 'ow many time do I 'ave to tell ye to speak like a gentleman?.. *(Staring at JACK)* I'm just trying to instill some sense of urgency in you Jack! *(Proudly)* Last meetin' of the ladies brigade it was announced that I... again... for the third straight month got the most dodgers to join than anyone in the Barnsley Chapter of the White Feather. *(Pause)* Those shirkers out there make me so bloody sick!

JACK

*(Long pause—looking at his food)* You got some bloomin' factory dust in my food again...

MARY

*(Making light of his complaint)* It's just a little munitions dust... it's good for you.

JACK

I doubt it's good for you... you should wash it off when you get 'ome... it's makin' your skin turn yellow.

MARY

*(With pride)* I know, they've taken to callin' us canaries now... some say it's the reason that some of the younger girls can't get pregnant... but we all 'ave to make our sacrifices for the cause of England in crisis. *(Getting louder)* I can't worry about a little factory dust when we're sendin' men off to die for our empire!

JACK

We all know ‘ow you like to put any bloke on the spot for not bein’ in uniform.

MARY

Jack, you know ‘ow upset I get about all of this...If your father were still alive, ‘e would have raced off to fight those Huns, instillin’ some sense of ‘onor to our family... (*Sarcastically*) my father’s too old and my brother...my brother says ‘e can’t join because of the problems ‘e’s got with his leg. (*Smiling at JACK*) That leaves you Jackie...

JACK

(*Surprised at her suggestion*) I’m not even fifteen yet, mum—

MARY

(*Speaking quickly*) That doesn’t matter, that doesn’t matter... I’ve already spoke to the ‘ead master, and we all agree that it’s time for some of the younger lads to start joinin’ up. You’ve all received some trainin’ at school and (voice level building) if your father ‘adn’t purchased that insurance, you’d ‘ave been workin’ in the coal yards long ago! You’ve been lucky to ‘ave stayed in school this long! (*Waving her finger side to side*) Don’t you think that Lancaster’s not goin’ to meet its patriotic duty to the King! And don’t you think for a moment that we won’t fill our quota for Lord Kitchener’s Army...because we are goin’ get it done!

JACK

Lads my age are dyin’ all the time in the mines...that’s why Da got the insurance for me...so I could finish school and make somethin’ of me self, outside of a life livin’ underground.

MARY

Lads your age are dyin’ everyday? Is that what you said? Well...let them all die! We need coal to keep our factories runnin’ in order to win this bloomin’ war. (*Lowering her voice*) ...you know I’m doing my best every day to make a difference in this war, Jackie. (*Sighs*) If only your father were still ‘ere, God rest ‘is soul...everything could be so different. I might have been an officer with the White Feather Brigade by now...and if I had a little bit more education...and if your father was already with the Pals— (*Laughing strangely*) —but no one knows the poetry like I do Jack...the new patriotic stuff...I research it...but you know that, don’t you?...I love the stuff that brings a tear to me eye when I read it out loud. (*Almost yelling*) I have consistently gotten more blokes to join than anyone in the White Feather Brigade! (*Calms down*) At least in the Barnsley Chapter. Mrs. Fisher’s only in the position as secretary because ‘er late ‘usband served in the Boar War...the Boar War... (*Sarcastically*) Was he killed in the Boar War? No—I don’t bloomin’ think ‘e was. ‘e died a drunk Jack...a drunk...a bloody drunk (*JACK looks up at her*) and she becomes an officer before me, can you believe that? Can you Jack? Please tell me. Does that seem fair to you that she-? (*Sighs; long pause*) Your father would already be fightin’ by now if ‘e were still ‘ere...well... at least trainin’ with the Pals ‘e would be...God rest ‘is soul...I mean ‘e wouldn’t ‘ave been an officer the way Lady Sumner’s ‘usband is, but ‘e might ‘ave gotten a commission, I think ‘e would ‘ave...No one knew poetic verse the way your father did Jack, no one...’e could recite Shakespearean sonnets with no effort...’e knew about weapons as well Jack...you’ve seen ‘im cleanin’ ‘is pistol before...’e loved that gun...I think ‘is dream was to take that pistol into battle with ‘im, I think that was ‘is dream alright...’e used to take it out when ‘e was readin’

MARY, *Continued*

Lord Tennyson ‘Fight on, Fight on!’<sup>3</sup> ‘e would say with ‘is pistol in ‘and, ‘e knew poetry Jack let me tell you that (*Trying to seem sophisticated*) ...and that brings a certain genteel air about someone, you know...when you know poetry. The Army would certainly ‘ave noticed that about your father and would ‘ave commissioned him...at least I think they would ‘ave (*Staring off dreamily; then looks at Jack still eating*) Look at you...’ow well you do in school...it shows good breedin’ you know... (*Beat*) Oh that Mrs. Fisher... let’s see what she says after I read this poem to everyone tonight Jack...let see what she says then. (*Makes a fist staring off; long pause, relaxes and stares at JACK again while he eats; then excitedly*) Did you hear that there were British angels at the Mon?...It’s true you know...The brave souls from Agincourt covered the Army while it was in retreat...It’s true...and everyone’s talking about it.

JACK

(*Looks up at her; taken aback*) Where did you ‘ear that?

MARY

It says so...in the reports...I told you that everyone’s talkin’ about it.

JACK

What reports?

MARY

(*Getting angry*) I don’t know...the news reports... (*Like part of a clique*) I told you that everyone’s takin’ about it.

JACK

I read Mr. Machen’s article about the retreat and angels aren’t mentioned anywhere in it.

MARY

(*Angry*) Why do you ‘ave to be difficult? Jack, huh? Can you tell me that? Why so bloody difficult? Always tryin’ to be right all the time.

JACK

I’m not tryin’ to be difficult mum... (*Beat; changing the subject*) Are you goin’ to see Mrs. Whitty tonight? Please tell ‘er I said ‘ello.

MARY

I don’t know why you like her so much...she thinks she’s so bloomin’ great.

JACK

She was my teacher—

MARY

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<sup>3</sup> Lord Tennyson, Alfred, ‘The Revenge’ from Stallworthy, Jon, *The Oxford Book of War Poetry*, p. 113.

*(Sarcastically)* Yes...yes...I know, the teacher you were so in love with...I swear you loved her more than your own mum.

JACK

*(Looks directly at her)* Come on now, you know that's not true mum...you know that...

MARY

Ok...ok...I'll tell 'er you said 'aye'.

JACK

She is a lady though mum...you 'ave to agree with that.

MARY

Yea *(Defeated)*...I know she is...but it's all because of who 'er father was...but 'er mum was more common than we are.\

JACK

\I doubt that...

MARY

\No, it's true...'er mother was a commoner. 'er father was just a 'ead master...Whitty's an Irish name anyway... so who does she think she is? She would 'ave done better to keep 'er maiden name...it's not like she's royalty after all.

JACK

*(Surprised)* I 'eard her mother was related to some Duke or something.

MARY

That's not what I've 'erd. Anyway... her 'usband is a lieutenant with the Pals, so she's all set as far as I can tell. I don't need you being all *(Sarcastically)* 'say 'i to Mrs. Whitty for me'... she has nothin' to worry about and could stand the chance of bein' nationally glorified if her 'usband does something 'eroic... .. *(Brings her hand to her mouth, upset)* You know that you've upset me now Jack...why do you always do this to me? Why? Do you enjoy seein' your mums suffer? Do you? *(Voice rising)* As a punishment you will write your apology in poetic verse, and I'll expect it when I return! *(JACK starts to say something and MARY puts up her hand.)* —That will be all Jack.

*(MARY rises and takes JACK's food away then exits.)*

JACK

*(Shaking his head)* Good bye Mum *(Takes some paper and pen out of his bag and begins to write)* Let me write 'er bloody apology before I get to work...write 'er an apology...for what? For readin' more than just the bloody poetry section of the newspaper?... *(Reading out loud as he writes)* I'm sorry you were mad, and that I was bad. *(Stops writing)* No that's bloody stupid. *(Begins again)* I don't feel the same as you about the war... *(Stops)* ...and that's...no good...I don't want to kill 'er...It doesn't matter what I write because she'll be all full of glow

JACK, *Continued*

when she come back from her meetin' anyway. *(Begins writing again)* Dear Mother—I'm sorry I made you mad, and that I was bad. I want to make you proud...so I will say out loud, that I will join the pals when I'm of age, and set sail, to kill the Hun... on a foreign stage. *(Stops writing)* That should make her 'appy...the talk of killin' Germans and all... *(Shakes his head and looks down)*...I pray to God...

*(JACK takes out his school work as LIGHTS FADE OUT.)*

## ACT I; SCENE 5

*(AT RISE: Several hours later; MARY'S flat. JACK with his head down on the table sleeping, books open in front of him. MARY enters excitedly.)*

MARY

Jack wake up! Wonderful news! Oh such wonder news...'appy days are 'ere again!

*(JACK slowly picks his head up and hands her a piece of paper with his apology.)*

JACK

'ere is my apology Mum...please don't stay mad at me.

*(MARY reads the note and smiles.)*

MARY

Well...not your normal creative wordin', but the message it sends is unmistakable. I'll save this for when you return in glory! *(Smiles again)* Oh, Jackie, *(Touching his arm)* they're going to let you join now. *(Speaking fast; business-like)* You need to get there before it's over anyway...all you need to do is tell a little white lie that you are already sixteen. I already 'ave the paperwork filled out stating that you turn sixteen next week—

JACK

*(Apprehensive; frightened)* But I'll be fifteen next week Mum ...you know that—

MARY

I know...I know...just listen to me for a moment... *(Stern)* ...it's just a little white lie and is for the greater cause of England. *(Softer)* We need you...and you could take your fathers pistol with you and fulfill a dream of 'is. Look 'ow much 'e's done for you from the grave. *(Smiles again and puts her hands on both his cheeks)*...we need you now Jack... and now before it's all over.

JACK

But I need to finish school—

MARY

*(Loudly; firmly)* What you need is to serve your King and country...that's what you need and are going to do!

JACK

*(Timidly)* If you think that it's for the best...

MARY

*(Gently)* I do...I really and truly do... *(Sighing dramatically)*...You know, I read my poem to the group and they loved it...although I'm sure many of them had 'eard it before bein' a refined group of women that they are. Mrs. Fisher didn't say anything during the whole bloomin' meetin'...not a thing...what 'as she done for the white feather movement? Nothin'... that's what she's done Jack...nothin'...and she gets to have tea with the ladies and I don't because of some silly African war...can you beat that? *(Becoming excited)* I even heard that they sometimes hold the officer meetings at Lady Sumner's country estate...Can you imagine having tea there? *(Dreamy)* Can you? Oh... you don't care... *(Building animosity)* But Mrs. Fisher...she gets to have tea with them...we'll see after you're off fightin' what she 'as to say...then we'll see what she says...'er 'usband's dead like mine and my son...My son will be fighting for the King...let's see who should be the officer then...and after all I do Jack...all I do, and she get to be an officer. Well, tomorrow we're going down to the recruiting station after tea... *(Loudly)*... they'll be expectin' you!

*(BLACKOUT.)*

## ACT I; SCENE 6

*(AT RISE: Outside the recruiting station. The place is gloomy and busy, with many informed men walking quickly about. JACK and MARY walk along the sidewalk together, MARY in her khaki uniform. CHORUS appears as the town crier.)*

CHORUS

Oyez! Oyez! Oyez!! The White Feather Brigade! Ladies wanted to present the young men of York to Lancaster...the Order of the White Feather for shirking their duty in not coming forward to uphold the Union Jack of Old England! God save the King!<sup>4</sup>

MARY

*(Stops; looks inside her bag)* Good...I've got some.

JACK

Some what?

MARY

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<sup>4</sup> 'White Feathers' A Novel Method of Making Young Men Enlist' *Chatham News*, September 5, 1914, p. 8 from Gullance, *The Blood of Our Sons* 73. The names of the towns are changed from 'Deal to Walmer' to 'York to Lancaster' for purposes of the story.

Me white feathers... to give to any bloke of service age not in uniform! These shirkers will be shamed into uniform if it means the death of me! Come on...you 'eard the crier.

JACK

Please don't.

MARY

Please nothin'...these men owe a debt to this bloomin' country, and we woman are 'ere to make sure they fulfill their manly obligations...See there's one right there, ok we're 'ere, you go inside and I'll take care of that bugger over there not in uniform.

*(MARY exists in a rush with white feather in hand; JACK enters the recruiting station and walks up to the counter.)*

SERGEANT EARLY

Can I 'elp you young man?

JACK

I guess I'm 'ere to join the regiment sir.

SERGEANT EARLY

Sir? *(Aggressively)* You better learn your rank boy. I'm a sergeant! That means I work for a livin'! *(Smiles)*

JACK

Sorry sir—I mean sergeant.

SERGEANT EARLY

*(Softer)* Ok lad, what's your name?

JACK

Jack Wilson, sergeant.

*(SERGEANT checks his list and nods his head.)*

SERGEANT EARLY

Yes...I know your mother... she's already done all the paperwork on you so this should be quick...you just need to see the doc and chaplin and you'll be good to go...I'll tell you young man...your mother... she 'as done some outstanding work for us. You must be extremely proud of 'er.

JACK

Yes sir...I am.

SERGEANT EARLY

Well then... (*Leads JACK around to the other side off the counter; points*)...take off your shirt so the doc can take a look at you.

(*DOCTOR crosses towards JACK and begins his examination.*)

DOCTOR

(*With stethoscope to JACK's chest*) Mmmm... You're a bit thin. How old did you say he was, Sergeant Early? (*Looking at SERGEANT EARLY*)

SERGEANT EARLY

Sixteen sir... 'e's Mrs. Wilson's boy.

DOCTOR

Cheery oh...you must be extremely proud of her. She has done so much for us.

JACK

Yes sir—I am.

DOCTOR

Well ok then... (*Examining JACK's back*) ...are you ready for the big adventure?

JACK

(*Beat; unsure what to say*) I read 'Pilgrim's Progress' sir.

DOCTOR

What about sports lad? Do you play any sports?

(*The DOCTOR examines the front of JACK's thin body*)

JACK

No sir, I've never been very good at sports. I like to read though.

DOCTOR

Well... they'll be little time for reading. Some hard work will build those muscles in no time.

(*DOCTOR begins to shuffle JACK towards SERGEANT EARLY.*)

SERGEANT EARLY

All right lad, follow me to the Chaplin's office.

(*SERGEANT EARLY takes JACK to another room where a Chaplin, in British officers' uniform, is reading the newspaper and smoking a cigarette. SERGEANT EARLY knocks on the door.*)

SERGEANT EARLY, *Continued*

Good afternoon Sir, I've got a new one for you.

CHAPLIN

*(Looks up from newspaper; puts cigarette in ash tray)* Well... *(Looking at JACK)* ... all right then, are you ready to take the oath son?

JACK

Didn't you want to speak to me first father? *(Hopeful)*

SERGEANT EARLY

*(Aggressively in JACK's face)* You'll refer to the CHAPLIN as Sir! *(Softer)* ... Don't you see them bars on 'is shoulders?

CHAPLIN

*(Irritated)* Are you ready to take the oath?

*(CHAPLIN stands, ignoring what was just said; SERGEANT EARLY to his side.)*

JACK

*(Timidly)* Yes, sir.

*(CHAPLIN places his bible in front of JACK and directs him to place his left hand on it and raise his right hand.)*

CHAPLIN

*(Raises his right hand)* I swear by almighty God.

JACK

I swear by almighty God

CHAPLIN

That I will be faithful and bear true Allegiance to His Majesty King George V...

JACK

That I will be faithful and being true Allegiance to His Majesty King George V...

CHAPLIN

*(Slowly)* his Heirs, and successors, and that I will, as in duty bound, honestly and faithfully defend His Majesty...

JACK

His Heirs, and successors, and that duty bound, honestly and faithfully defend His Majesty...

CHAPLIN

*(Slowly)* his Heirs, and Successors, in person, Crown, and Dignity, against all enemies, and will *(Loudly)* observe and obey...

JACK

Heirs, Successors, person, Crown, Dignity, against all enemies, and will observe and obey...

CHAPLIN

*(Slowly)* All orders of His Majesty, his Heirs, and Successors, and the Generals and Officers set over me.

JACK

All orders of His Majesty, the Generals, and Officers set over me.

CHAPLIN

So help me God.

JACK

So help me God.

CHAPLIN

Ok then...sign here... *(JACK leans over to and begins signing.)* ...initial here and here...and here... *(Pause)* ...and here... *(JACK initials; CHAPLIN turns paper to next page.)* ...and sign here. *(JACK signs.)* Congratulations young man, *(Shakes JACK's hand)*, we're proud of you. Sergeant Early will show you out.

*(CHAPLIN hands paperwork to SERGEANT EARLY who then grabs JACK by the arm and pulls him close as they leave the office.)*

SERGEANT EARLY

*(In JACK's face)* Here are your orders! *(Hands JACK an envelope)* Report here next Tuesday at 8:00 am sharp and don't plan on coming back until we've won this bloomin' war. There is a list in there of what you'll need to bring.

*(JACK exits the recruiting station. MARY is out front waiting for him. She is very excited.)*

MARY

*(Excitedly; like a child)* Are those your orders? *(Takes orders from JACK: puts her hand over her mouth with joy.)* This is our day today! I'm going to frame this and 'ang it over the mantel for everyone to see during teatime. *(Leans in close to JACK)* Remember I told you about Mrs. Fisher, who got the job as secretary? Well... she's come down with a spot of the flu and with your joinin' today... *(Pauses holding her breath)* ...I could be the next lieutenant of The White Feather Brigade, Barnsley Chapter. *(Puts her arm around JACK's shoulder)* What do you think about your ol' mum now, huh? Just think... tea with the ladies at one of Lady Sumner's estates...can you beat that? I'm not tryin' to get too excited but...but everythin' is just fallin' into place...

JACK

That's great Mum, they all knew who you were at the recruiting station.

MARY

Oh yes, I've brought them the most recruits for months now. But you're the one that elevates my status in the organization now Jackie. Oh, 'appy days...we should get some champagne and celebrate. You're a man now so... I guess you can 'ave a drink...

JACK

I don't want a drink... I have some 'omework I still have to do—

MARY

'omework? Forget about 'omework...you'r going to fight for the King.

JACK

It's something I want to finish before I have to leave... *(Sarcastically)* Lieutenant Wilson.

MARY

Fine...I'll be celebratin' at me meetin' tonight then... *(Angry but laughing)* ...I'd rather celebrate with them anyway...But soon enough I'll be celebrating with the officers of the organization...the Ladies...and that's where I belong, Jack...you know that, don't you?

JACK

*(Absently)* I do know that... *(Long pause)* ...Mum...this isn't because of Captain 'arding is it? The reason you got me to join so soon.

MARY

Soon? The bloody wars gonna be over before you know it...Captain 'arding 'as nothin' to do with it. 'e was just a friend and a noble man.

JACK

Yea...I guess.

*(JACK shakes his head. As MARY and JACK return to flat not looking at each other, LIGHTS FADE OUT.)*

## ACT I; SCENE 7

*(AT RISE: The Munitions factory; MARY and ELLI take a cigarette break.)*

ELLI

What 'appened Mary? You're full of glow today...

MARY

Mrs. Fisher is sick Elli and unable to perform 'er duties for the feather.

ELLI

Oh...that's too bad for 'er but do you get to be an officer now Mary, do ya?

MARY

I don't see why Lady Sumner wouldn't finally recognize me.

ELLI

Who's Lady Sumner Mary?

MARY

Oh Elli...you really are out of touch...she runs the whole Barnsley chapter of the White Feather. You're a part of the bloomin' organization Elli, you should already know who she is.

ELLI

I only know what you tell me Mary...I'm too busy taken' care of everything since John left. It's 'ard sometimes, Mary.

MARY

Don't speak to me about what is 'ard Elli...my 'usband's been dead for years...what I wouldn't give to 'ave 'im 'ere to go off and fight for the King...that's why Jack just joined.

ELLI

Jack joined the Army?

MARY

Yes...I took 'im to the recruiting station just yesterday to swear 'im in.

ELLI

But Mary... 'e's so young...I don't like the thought of children goin' off to fight for us.

MARY

'e was very enthusiastic to join up. I mean...I couldn't stop 'im, 'e's a man now.

ELLI

Oh Mary....that's...

MARY

That's what?

ELLI

I don't know...it's sad, that's what it is...

MARY

Well...Jack and I don't see it that way...we think it's goin' be glorious.

ELLI

'e's just so young...it scares me...does it scare you Mary? Your little boy goin' off to war?

MARY

'e's no little boy... 'e's a grown man.

ELLI

I didn't mean that 'e was a little boy Mary...I meant that 'e'll always be your little boy...right Mary?

MARY

Yea, I guess...I don't think like that Elli...'e's a young man going off to do 'is duty for the King. 'e's in the pals, so I'm sure the older men will look out for 'im.

ELLI

I 'ope they do...you should let me know what company 'e ends up in. Maybe my John could keep an eye on 'im.

MARY

Jack will be able to take care of 'imself Elli.

ELLI

I didn't mean to suggest that 'e wouldn't be able to take care of 'imself. I just thought—

MARY

You were tryin' to 'elp...I got it. We do not require any assistance from you Elli—Jack and I are right where we want to be, thank you.

(BLACKOUT.)

## ACT I; SCENE 8

(AT RISE: CHORUS, as town crier, stands at a train station reading the poem, "In Flander's Field" aloud as recruits board the train. JACK and MARY wait nearby.)

CHORUS

(*"IN FLANDERS FIELD"*)

*In Flanders Fields the poppies blow  
Between the crosses row on row,  
That mark our place; and in the sky  
The larks, still bravely singing, fly  
Scarce heard amid the guns below.  
We are the Dead. Short days ago  
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,  
Loved and were loved, and now we lie  
In Flanders fields.  
Take up our quarrel with the foe:  
To you from failing hands we throw  
The torch; be yours to hold it high.  
If ye break faith with us who die*

*We shall not sleep, though poppies grow  
In Flanders fields.<sup>5</sup>*

MARY

Oh...I love that poem. 'If ye break faith with us who die' (*Stern-faced*) we will never break faith. I heard some excitin' news but you can't tell anyone. (*Leans into JACK*) They are going to shorten all of your trainin' so you can be part of the big push...but don't tell anyone...or that you 'eard it from me.

JACK

(*Pulling away from her*) I doubt that's true, where did you 'ear that?

MARY

Jackie...don't be distant. You barely spoke to me the last couple days.

JACK

That's because I don't want to go...

MARY

Now Jack...you 'ave to be brave now and be a man. Your country needs you...if you missed it you would never forgive yourself. Did you remember to bring your father's pistol with you? (*Staring off*) Oh Jack, It's going to be glorious.

JACK

(*Becoming upset*) ...but it's not going to be glorious...it's goin' to be 'orrible. (*Holding back tears*)

MARY

(*Grabs him aggressively*) Get a 'old of yourself... what if someone see's you... don't you think I would go if they would let me? You know I would...is that what you want? Yer poor Mum to go fight for you?

(*MARY thinks; remembers a poem.*)

MARY, *Continued*

*O meet it is and passing sweet  
To live in peace with others,  
But sweeter still and far more meet,  
To die in war for brothers.<sup>6</sup>*

JACK

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<sup>5</sup> McCrae, John 'IN FLANDERS FIELD' *World War One British Poets*. Edited by Candace Ward. New York: Dover Publication, Inc., 1997. 12.

<sup>6</sup> Owen, Wilfred. '1914' from Cross, Tim. *The Lost Voices of World War I*. 54.

*(Getting control of himself)* Please Lieutenant Wilson... *(Long pause; almost yelling—sarcastic...a little crazy)*...

*O it's Tommy this, an' Tommy that, an' "Tommy, go away";  
But it's "Thank you, Mister Atkins," when the band begins to play,  
The band begins to play, my boys, the band begins to play,  
O it's "Thank you, Mr. Atkins," when the band begins to play.<sup>7</sup>*

MARY

*(Ignoring his attitude)* Very good Jack...I expect you to write some poetry while you'r fightin' on the front...send me some poetry Jack and make me proud...make me proud so I can read your immortal words at me meetin's.

*(Another long pause as MARY looks at JACK, takes a piece of paper out and begins to read.)*

MARY, *Continued*

*(Looking at paper but trying to recite from memory lines from Shakespeare's "Henry V" speech)*

If we are marked to die, ...we are enew...enow  
To do our country loss; ...and if to live,  
The fewer the men the greater the share of glory

*(Long pause; looks at speech)*

Oh...here we are...

JACK

*(In control)* Good-bye Mother, I know you'll be a full officer soon enough.

*(JACK kisses her cheek and begins boarding the train.)*

MARY

*(Begins to read again)*

We few, we 'appy few, we band of brothers—

JACK

Good bye Mum! *(Exits)*

MARY

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<sup>7</sup> Kipling, Rudyard. "Tommy". First Stanza. In Allison, Alexander W., Herbert Barrows, Caesar R. Blake, Arthur J. Carr, Arthur M. Eastman, and Hubert M. English, Jr. *Norton Anthology of Poetry*. With Essay on Versification By Jon Stallworthy, Third Edition. 868. New York, London: WW Norton & Company, 1970, 1975, and 1983.

For 'e to-day that sheds 'is blood with me... Shall... Shall be my brother upon Saint Crispin's Day.<sup>8</sup>

*(SOUND OF TRAIN PULLING AWAY.)*

MARY, *Continued*

Good bye Jackie...I'm proud of you. *(Smiles; begins crossing away)* Oh Jack...just do something brave that we can be proud of...something gentlemanly and maybe you could get a field commission. It's easiest to get commissioned during a war...just think...

*(LIGHTS CROSSFADE to reveal her vision of her son, JACK in an officer's uniform, bravely leading his men into battle. SFX: BOMBS EXPLODING/GUNSHOTS.)*

JACK

Follow me!

*(JACK points his father's pistol as the LIGHTS CROSSFADE back to MARY.)*

MARY

...just think...it could 'appen...maybe all those books Jack has read will inspire 'im... *(Long pause; looks down)* just think of the possibilities then...'e could be commissioned and who knows the possibilities then...anything is possible when a war is goin on...anything!

*(BLACKOUT.)*

## ACT II; SCENE 1

*(AT RISE: MRS. WHITTY's middle class flat; MRS. WHITTY and LADY SUMNER sit together drinking tea.)*

LADY SUMNER

Mrs. Whitty, whatever are we going to do about Mrs. Fisher being so sick? Who are we going to get to replace her? I was not excited about giving her to position to start with, but now the choice of woman is...shall we say 'substandard'.

MRS. WHITTY

*(Nodding in agreement)* Lady Sumner, I already thought you had decided to make Mrs. Wilson an acting lieutenant to do Mrs. Fisher job.

LADY SUMNER

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<sup>8</sup> Shakespeare, William. *Henry V*, Act IV, scene III from *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*, 510-511. Gramercy Books, New York. 1975.

Yes, yes, you had asked me about that before...but now I'm not so sure. She's so...so something...I don't know...how would you describe Mrs. Wilson?

MRS. WHITTY

I would say she's an extremely hard worker...that is how I would describe her.

LADY SUMNER

Yes...well she is that, and she always gets the most men to join...that is true. But the way she goes about it though... is not... lady-like.

MRS. WHITTY

She's trying, Lady Sumner...she so wants to be a lady but just doesn't know how.

LADY SUMNER

Maybe it's not in her and never will be.

MRS. WHITTY

She has done a great job raising her son all by herself. I was his teacher and he was an outstanding student.

LADY SUMNER

That cannot be easy.

MRS. WHITTY

It's up to you Ma'am...but she has done so much for the organization.

LADY SUMNER

Alright then, Mrs. Whitty, on your suggestion we'll give her a shot, but I will not be holding any meetings at my home for the time being. We'll see how she progresses as an acting officer...but if Mrs. Fisher gets well, the Mrs. Wilson is out.

MRS. WHITTY

The decision is yours Lady Sumner—

LADY SUMNER

Yes I know it is...but didn't her son just join the pals?

MRS. WHITTY

Yes Ma'am...he left last week with a bunch of new volunteers. He is so young though...I thought he was only fourteen or maybe fifteen at the most...but I could be wrong.

LADY SUMNER

I hope she didn't force him in service underage in order to better her standing in the feather...we don't need our children yet.

MRS. WHITTY

Yet? Lady Sumner, please.

LADY SUMNER

There have been a great many deaths already Mrs. Whitty. More than most people know I fear. My husband has been to the front and it is not pretty, but I know he tries to hold things back from me to keep my spirits up.

MRS. WHITTY

Then why do you think there are more deaths than are being reported?

LADY SUMNER

My husband's servant reports directly to me on a regular bases...you cannot count on the men to give us the truth of the situation over there my dear. Multiple sources are the way to get the true story...anyway...we still need to get more men from Lancaster to join up.

MRS. WHITTY

*(Lowers head; ashamed)* I always think that the more men we get to join, the safer my husband will be.

LADY SUMNER

My dear...the big push is about to begin. You have nothing to fear, my husband has been preparing for this war his whole life. He won't lead them into destruction.

MRS. WHITTY

I know...I know... we all have great faith in Lord Sumner as a leader. My husband is so proud to be serving under him.

LADY SUMNER

As well he should be...it is great the way the whole Pals battalions were formed. The idea of the men who all live near each other fighting together will keep them all safer.

MRS. WHITTY

Oh, I agree Lady Sumner...they'll fight harder for each other.

LADY SUMNER

Oh they'll be fighting all right...with courage and honor... making Lancaster proud.

MRS. WHITTY

Yes Lady Sumner...I know they will. So...are you decided that Mrs. Wilson will take Mrs. Fisher's position?

LADY SUMNER

Yes Suzanne...on an acting basis only until such time as Mrs. Fisher can resume her duties.

MRS. WHITTY

Very good Ma'am...I know how excited she'll be.

LADY SUMNER

Yes I'm sure she will be...I want to be clear with you though Mrs. Whitty that we will not be having meetings at my estate for the time being...and that decision is final.

MRS. WHITTY

Whatever you say Lady Sumner...

LADY SUMNER

Good...I'm glad that is clear...let's see if Mrs. Wilson can host the next officer meeting at her home. I'd like to see how she lives.

MRS. WHITTY

I'm sure she'll be delighted to host the next officer's meeting or just have us over for tea.

LADY SUMNER

Yes...I'm sure she will (*MRS. WHITTY suddenly looks pale and coughs.*) Oh dear...are you all right?

MRS. WHITTY

I'm so sorry Lady Sumner...that was not proper.

LADY SUMNER

Are you not feeling well?

MRS. WHITTY

No, I'm fine Lady Sumner...thank you for your concern. (*Long pause*) I just found out I'm with child.

LADY SUMNER

Oh, that's wonderful news my dear. How long have you known?

MRS. WHITTY

I just found out for sure the other day...but please don't tell anyone yet. My husband does not even know yet.

LADY SUMNER

Of course I will keep it dark...I can keep a secret Mrs. Whitty, there is no need to worry about that.

MRS. WHITTY

Of course Lady Sumner I did not mean to imply—

LADY SUMNER

Now, now...it'll be our little secret. Are you going to write your husband or wait to tell him in person?

MRS. WHITTY

I'm not sure...what do you think I should do? I don't want him worrying about me when he has so much on his mind already.

LADY SUMNER

I think you should wait my dear...they'll be at the front soon and when the big push begins they'll be home before you know it...but of course the decision is up to you. I do know how hard all the officers are forced to work though.

MRS. WHITTY

Maybe it will bring him strength?

LADY SUMNER

It could...it could...but it could also cause him to become a bit emotional. I don't know your husband the way you do of course, but some men become quite touched by the prospect of becoming a father...you know, become emotional and that might not set a good example for the lower ranking soldiers.

MRS. WHITTY

*(Teary-eyed)* Yes Lady Sumner... *(Now laughing)* he probably would become a weepy mess. I think I'll wait a little while before telling him. Maybe on his next leave instead of a letter.

LADY SUMNER

Now that sounds very sensible.

MRS. WHITTY

Well thank you for taking the time to meet with me Lady Sumner, I know how busy you are. So I'll tell Mrs. Wilson that she's acting lieutenant until more word on Mrs. Fisher's condition is revealed.

LADY SUMNER

Yes...you may tell her to start wearing a dress like the rest of the officers and take off that ridiculous looking uniform, but she is not to wear a sash as an acting officer...for now. See if she's available to have us over for tea and we'll go from there. (LADY SUMNER starts to get up from her chair)

MRS. WHITTY

That's sounds wonderful Lady Sumner.

*(MRS. WHITTY rises and curtsey's to LADY SUMNER. LIGHTS FADE OUT.)*

## ACT II; SCENE 2

*(AT RISE: MARY's flat. LADY SUMNER and MRS. WHITTY drinking tea along with FOUR OR FIVE LADIES all wearing dresses and in hats. THE LADIES wear sashes with the exception of MARY. LADY SUMNER rises.)*

LADY SUMNER

All come to order...Ladies...Come to order...The Barnsley Officers of the White Feather Brigade will come to order.

MRS. WHITTY

Oh Lady Sumner, I thought we were just meeting for tea. I was not aware we were having an official meeting.

LADY SUMNER

Now Mrs. Whitty...you know that as a commander in the organization, I can call a meeting whenever I please...we're all officers here. With the exception of Mrs. Wilson who is filling in as acting lieutenant until Mrs. Fisher gets well...

LADIES

Here...here...

LADY SUMNER

Now ladies, Mrs. Wilson has asked to start this meeting with a new poem she has discovered...and promises that it will lift our spirits with all the bad news as of late. *(Aside to MRS. WILSON)* I'm happy you're not in that ghastly uniform tonight Mrs. Wilson...it doesn't look proper on a lady. *(Loudly)* ...Ladies...attention Ladies... *(OTHERS become quiet)* ...Mrs. Wilson

*(MARY, wearing a nice dress and hat, doing her very best to speak in the most refined and proper English accent, stands and addresses THE LADIES.)*

MARY

Thank you Lady Sumner...I found this at the library written in an American Newspaper by an American soldier whose conscience forced him to join the French Foreign Legion even though those Americans have just ignored the atrocities that the Huns are committing against us. It's rather somber...but it really gets to the heart of sacrifice we all must be willing to make, and that feeling of sacrifice lifts my spirits...as I hope it lifts yours. It's entitled 'I Have A Rendezvous With Death'.

*(MARY pauses and dramatically takes a deep breath. THE LADIES look at each other surprised by the name of the poem.)*

MARY, *Continued*

*I have a rendezvous with death  
At some disputed barricade,  
When Spring comes back with rustling shade  
And apple-blossoms fill the air-  
I have a rendezvous with Death  
When Spring brings back blue days and fair.*

*It may be he shall take my hand  
And lead me into his dark land  
And close my eyes and quench my breath-  
It may be I shall pass him still.  
I have a rendezvous with Death  
On some scarred slope of battered hill,  
When Spring comes round again this year  
And the first meadow-flowers appear.*

*God knows 'twere better to be deep  
Pillowed in silk and scented down,  
Where Love throbs out in blissful sleep,  
Where hushed awakenings are dear...  
But I've a rendezvous with Death  
At midnight in some flaming town,  
When Spring trips north again this year,  
And I to my pledged word am true,  
I shall not fail that rendezvous.<sup>9</sup>*

*(MARY sighs and stares off.)*

MRS. WHITTY

Oh Mrs. Wilson...that's an awful poem.

*(MARY looks surprised.)*

LADY SUMNER

Now ladies...let's not get excited. I guess it just proves once again that the Americans do not know the first thing about poetry...I think we can all agree on that. (*THE LADIES nod their heads and MARY puts her head down as being embarrassed.*) We have some serious business to address...and that is why I called this meeting instead of just enjoying a nice cup of tea and civil discussion. (*Long pause; LADY SUMNER looks down, upset*) Some of the lads from Chestnut Grove are planning a football game this Saturday up at Ryelands Park...Can you

LADY SUMNER, *Continued*

<sup>9</sup> Seeger, Alan. 'I HAVE A RENDEZVOUS WITH DEATH' Letter from Alan Seeger from Tim Cross. *The Lost Voices of World War I*. 33

believe the nerve? Even after the speech by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle was published in every newspaper, and a copy of the speech also hangs by the town hall. There *was* a time for football, but not now!

LADIES

Here...here...

LADY SUMNER

*(Stern)* I'm assigning Mrs. Wilson as her first official duty as acting lieutenant to take a group of volunteers to get those shirkers to join or have their game disrupted!

*(THE LADIES applaud.)*

LADIES

Oh...yes, yes!

ONE LADY

God save the King!

MARY

*(Attempting to sound refined)* I'd be honored Lady Sumner...

LADY SUMNER

Now ladies...don't forget at the next meeting to extend your sympathies to Mrs. Booth for the loss of her son, horses trampled the poor lad during a training exercise...most tragic...

MRS. WHITTY

Oh...the poor dear

MARY

*(Slipping; speaking with heavy accent)* Poor Mrs. Booth for 'er son not even makin' it to front before dyin'...at least his death would 'ave meant somethin.

LADY SUMNER

*(Gives MARY a dirty look, as if she were inappropriate)* I think we'll all agree that it means something to Mrs. Booth...

MRS. WHITTY

Maybe we could do something for her...you know activate the organization to help some of the widows and mothers—

LADY SUMNER

That's a nice thought Mrs. Whitty, but our focus is to ensure Lord Kitchener has the number of men he needs to win this war...and to ensure that the men of Lancaster do their noble and honorable duty.

LADIES

Here...here...

*(THE LADIES begin to speak amongst themselves.)*

LADY SUMNER

Mrs. Wilson...could I speak with you for a moment?

MARY

Oh don't worry Lady Sumner...I'll find those shirkers and have the Chaplin ready to swear them in on the football field.

LADY SUMNER

Mrs. Wilson...I have complete confidence in your ability to influence these young men into doing to right thing...I wanted to speak to you about your son Jack...

MARY

What about Jack? He's proudly serving in the Barnsley Pals...

LADY SUMNER

Have you heard from Jack over these past weeks?

MARY

Not lately... *(Goes to a drawer and pulls out a letter)* not for a week or so now...but I assumed he was too busy.

LADY SUMNER

My husband writes me that he's having the most difficult time with soldiering...like...he has difficulty carrying his pack, and shooting...you know, those types of things.

MARY

Well...it'll make a man out of him...It'll be good for him...

LADY SUMNER

I just hope he's not sent home before finishing the training...that would not do well for any chance you have of replacing Mrs. Fisher...on a more permanent bases.

MARY

*(Excitedly)* I promise you he'll be fine Lady Sumner...I'll write him tonight with some encouraging words.

LADY SUMNER

I would highly recommend that...

*(LADY SUMNER leaves MARY and begins speaking to other woman in the room. MRS. WHITTY approaches MARY.)*

MRS. WHITTY

Mrs. Wilson...please forgive me...wherever did you get these pastries?

MARY

There's a French place at the end of our block...I got them to hang the English flag for Jack instead of their French flag they had hanging out there before.

MRS. WHITTY

Oh...that's wonderful Mrs. Wilson...I hope everything is all right with Lady Sumner.

MARY

*(As refined as possible.)* Everything is fine with Lady Sumner, but thank you for asking.

MRS. WHITTY

Please tell me...how is young Jack doing?

MARY

Jack is proudly serving in the Barnsley Pals.

MRS. WHITTY

Yes, I know...we're all very proud of him...I was just asking in case my husband could be of some assistance to Jack.

MARY

Your husband—

MRS. WHITTY

My husband is a lieutenant in the 1st Company, 14th Barnsley Battalion and could be of some assistance to Jack...could watch over him, I mean.

MARY

Thank you Mrs. Whitty, *(Being rude by speaking with accent)*, but Jack can take care of 'imself.

MRS. WHITTY

But Jack is so young...I'm sure they could still send him home. I mean the push is going to go on whether Jack is there or not.

MARY

Thank you, Mrs. Whitty but we thought it was best if Jack went and served now...I mean the war will be over in less than a year.

MRS. WHITTY

I know...we're all praying it is...so many have died already. Jack always did so well in school...you know that if you waited a few years, maybe Jack could get a commission. I mean... they are commissioning young men who are well educated. That is how my Archie was commissioned with the Pals...Jack is what, fifteen?

MARY

He's sixteen, Mrs. Whitty...I started him late in school. Maybe that's why he did so well. Jack and I discussed the situation and we both agreed that it would be better for everyone if Jack served now and not miss the war.

MRS. WHITTY

But my husband could still be of some service to young Jack...watch over him and help him. You know... protect him...some of these recruits are rough fellows.

MARY

*(With heavy accent)* Thank you Mrs. Whitty, but Jack can take care of 'imself.

MRS. WHITTY

*(Disappointed by the response)* Thank you for your hospitality today Mrs. Wilson.

*(LIGHTS FADE OUT.)*

### ACT II; SCENE 3

*(AT RISE: Once again at MARY's flat with a gathering of LADIES in hats drinking tea. LADY SUMNER rises.)*

LADY SUMNER

I call the Barnsley Chapter of the White Feather Battalion officers to order...We are here to honor the work of one of our own...Ladies please stand... *(ONE OF THE LADIES hands a plaque to LADY SUMNER who reads the inscription.)* The inscription reads...Certificate of Merit is awarded to Mrs. Mary Wilson...For outstanding dedication and resolve in support of his majesty the King George V, and the White Feather Brigade, Barnsley Chapter.

*(THE LADIES applaud.)*

MARY

*(Accepting the plaque)* Thank you all so much...It is my privilege to do the King's work at this time of crisis. Thank you all. Thank you Lady Sumner.

*(THE LADIES speak among themselves.)*

LADY SUMNER

Congratulations Mrs. Wilson, on two fronts.

MARY

How's that Ma'am?

LADY SUMNER

Jack will make it through his training after all. He's had a number of difficulties but when I wrote my husband about the work you've done for us, he sent word down to keep an eye on your son. He's going with Barnsley to the front for the big push.

MARY

Ma'am... Lady Sumner—thank you for all your concerns...I've been so honored.

LADY SUMNER

You must get quite a bit of information working at that factory, yes?

MARY

We do hear all the gossip from the trenches because the mail is so fast and our factory has been running non-stop.

LADY SUMNER

I know it is dear...that cricket game, where you got every player to join... that still amazes me.

MARY

Thank you Lady Sumner.

LADY SUMNER

Not only are you a proud member of the White Feather but a canary as well. That kind of dedication sits well with headquarters.

MARY

Thank you so much Lady Sumner ...is there any new word on Mrs. Fisher's health?

LADY SUMNER

No...but as far as I last knew...she was still not well...you have to remember that her husband was a Corporal who served in the Boar War, so she has a certain standing, she is a pensioner after all.

MARY

Yes, Lady Sumner ...I know that...but still... my son is on his way to the western front in France, not some far off war in Africa.

LADY SUMNER

I have not forgotten that or all the work you have done on our behalf.

MARY

Thank you Lady Sumner ...I didn't mean to imply—

LADY SUMNER

*(With gloved hand waves her off)* No implication was taken Mrs. Wilson.

*(LADY SUMNER moves to speak to OTHER LADIES. MRS. WHITTY approaches MARY.)*

MRS. WHITTY

Congratulations Mrs. Wilson...you must be so proud today. (*Touches her*)

MARY

(*Pulling away*) Thank you Mrs. Whitty...it's truly an honor.

MRS. WHITTY

How is young Jack doing?

MARY

Jack is shipping out to the western front with the rest of the Barnsley Pals.

MRS. WHITTY

Yes, I know he is...I was just wondering how he was doing?

MARY

He's proud to be serving his King and country.

MRS. WHITTY

Yes...I know...they all are. I mean is he scared? I know that I am...my husband would never admit it, but I think he scared as well...He written me some of the most wonderful love poems to me in letters...I would love to share them with you, because I know how much you love poetry.

MARY

(*Registering disgust*) Oh course...whenever you're not busy. (*Clutches her plaque*) Excuse me, Mrs. Whitty.

(*MARY crosses to OTHER LADIES as they begin to exit. LIGHTS FADE OUT.*)

## ACT II; SCENE 4

(*AT RISE: CHORUS in SPOTLIGHT.*)

CHORUS

(*ANTHEM FOR A DOOMED YOUTH*)

*What passing-bells for these who die as cattle?  
— Only the monstrous anger of the guns.  
Only the stuttering rifles' rapid rattle  
Can patter out their hasty orisons.  
No mockeries now for them; no prayers nor bells;  
Nor any voice of mourning save the choirs, --*

*The shrill, demented choirs of wailing shells;  
 And bugles calling for them from sad shires.  
 What candles may be held to speed them all?  
 Not in the hands of boys but in their eyes  
 Shall shine the holy glimmers of goodbyes.  
 The pallor of girls' brows shall be their pall;  
 Their flowers the tenderness of patient minds,  
 And each slow dusk a drawing-down of blinds<sup>10</sup>*

(SPOTLIGHT OUT.)

## ACT II; SCENE 5

(AT RISE: The trenches of France; JACK sits in a bucket, moaning and weeping.)

SERGEANT

Wilson...Private Wilson...pull yourself together...you're goin' on an officers patrol in two 'ours. Gets yourself together man...

JACK

I'm alright Sergeant...

SERGEANT

Good...just remember to stay low lad and you'll be alright...listen to the lieutenant and you'll be square... (Pause) Now listen...I won't let the boys take your ration of rum tonight...you're gonna need it.

JACK

(Still sitting on the bucket) No...I don't want it...you can have my ration Sergeant.

SERGEANT

No boy!.. (Laughing) You're goin' to drink your ration tonight...and mine as well. We're gonna send your useless ass over the top in proper fashion.

JACK

(Lowers head) If you say so Sergeant...oh (Moaning)...

SERGEANT

I do... you have one hour to get yourself together and get some grub so I can inspect you before you go over the top. (Exits)

(LIEUTENANT enters as JACK continues to moan.)

<sup>10</sup> Owen, Wilfred. 'Anthem For a Doomed Youth'. Edited by Candace Ward, *World War One Poets*, 25.

LIEUTENANT

Wilson! What the hell is wrong with you now?

JACK

I don't know Sir...I'm not right...I can barely walk.

LIEUTENANT

*(Sarcastically)* Well thank God for that...you won't need to walk where we're going tonight.

JACK

*(Upset)* Sir...the Sergeant told me I was going on patrol with you tonight...I don't think I can make it Sir...I don't think I can.

LIEUTENANT

You are going with me over the top tonight Wilson...you're the only one from the platoon who hasn't been on a night patrol yet. Do you think your life is more valuable or something? Is that what you think?

JACK

No Sir...I'm just not supposed to be here...I'm sick...I need to be sent to the rear.

LIEUTENANT

Not supposed to be here? Last I knew the Army was still made up of volunteers...no Wilson, you're right where you need to be and will be tonight with me... *(Kinder)* Now get yourself together lad before we go over...go get some grub, it'll make you feel better.

JACK

I can't eat Sir...everything goes right through me.

LIEUTENANT

Then don't eat...but be ready to go in two hours.

JACK

*(Still sitting on the bucket)* Yes Sir...

*(JACK moans as the LIEUTENANT departs quickly. LIGHTS FADE OUT.)*

**ACT II; SCENE 6**

*(AT RISE: MRS. WHITTY's middle class flat. MRS. WHITTY and LADY SUMNER sit together drinking tea.)*

MRS. WHITTY

Lady Sumner...thank you for coming by again...I was hoping to discuss something with you.

LADY SUMNER

My dear...thank you for the invitation for tea...I am always looking for a reason to leave my gardening for a trip into town, although things are getting sparse. Shopping I mean...

MRS. WHITTY

Yes Lady Sumner, things are getting hard to come by. But I did want to speak to you about some business regarding the feather.

LADY SUMNER

Oh Mrs. Whitty...Barnsley has done so well answering the Kings call to duty. It makes one so proud and makes us all look extremely good in London. I know firsthand that Princess Marie was extremely impressed with Barnsley...the dedication to duty has been most impressive.

MRS. WHITTY

I'm glad you feel that way Lady Sumner...especially with what I hoped to discuss with you.

LADY SUMNER

Well what is it my dear? And you haven't yet told me if you told your husband yet about our little secret...

MRS. WHITTY

No...not yet my Lady, but I haven't been feeling well so I keep thinking he'll be coming home for a short leave soon.

LADY SUMNER

Hmm...I'm not sure about that...you should do what you think is best, but I thought we had come up with a plan last time we were alone together...but again I support any decision you make.

MRS. WHITTY

I'm sorry Lady Sumner...but I wanted you to speak to you about Mrs. Wilson...I know you don't like to discuss moving her up but—

LADY SUMNER

But what? Is she threatening to lead a rebellion or something? I thought that plaque we gave her would keep her happy for the time being. I told you that I don't like that woman... but I don't dare say anything in public with her son missing, and presumed dead, mind you.

MRS. WHITTY

Of course not Lady Sumner, but there is a call for her to become a full-fledged officer with Mrs. Fisher still being so sick and...

LADY SUMNER

Is she still that sick?

MRS. WHITTY

She's worse actually, and on death's door I'm told.

LADY SUMNER

So much death in our lives...

MRS. WHITTY

*(Becoming emotional)* Yes...I pray all the time...and I always feel like...

LADY SUMNER

Like what dear?

MRS. WHITTY

*(Almost crying)* Like the more people Mrs. Wilson gets to join, the safer it will keep my Archie...safe, I mean... And she just lost young Jack...she has no husband, he died in the mines years ago...I mean—I didn't know him but I knew his son, young Jack...who was such a great student. It is such a great loss... *(Crying)*

LADY SUMNER

*(Trying to calm her)* My dear...my dear...if promoting Mrs. Wilson will make you feel better than by all means we'll promote her.

MRS. WHITTY

Thank you Lady Sumner... *(Gaining control)* I'm alright now...it's—

LADY SUMNER

It's nothing my dear...I had four children, I think you forget that sometimes. I know how it is when you are with child.

MRS. WHITTY

Thank you Lady Sumner...I'm all right now.

LADY SUMNER

Good...is that all you wished to discuss with me?

MRS. WHITTY

No... *(Begins crying again)*...no...Lady Sumner I just found out that her son is dead and no longer missing.

LADY SUMNER

*(Surprised)* Oh...I hadn't heard that yet.

MRS. WHITTY

*(Regaining control)* My husband wrote me about it, and his letter made it to me before they have even broken the news to Mrs. Wilson.

LADY SUMNER

The mail is so efficient now days.

MRS. WHITTY

So do you think we could promote her before she finds out from the Army that Jack is dead? I just think she'll weather it better...that's what I think Lady Sumner... *(Upset again)* ...that's what I think.

LADY SUMNER

*(Comforting her)* It's alright dear...It's all right...if promoting her makes you feel better then that's what we'll do. I guess I do owe her for helping me look so good in London...so yes, *(Making up her mind)* by all means we'll promote her.

*(LIGHTS FADE OUT.)*

## ACT II; SCENE 7

*(AT RISE: MARY's flat. THE LADIES have gathered once again to drink tea and meet. LADY SUMNER rises.)*

LADY SUMNER

I call the Barnsley Chapter of the White Feather Battalion officers call to order...again we wish to thank Mrs. Wilson for hosting this event...Meetings here are becoming a regular occurrence *(Smiles at MARY)*. It's good for us ladies to come down to where the workers live anyway and make sure we're seen...this is the home front of the war after all. Without our factories, we would be lost...

*(LADY SUMNER hands a piece of paper to MRS. BROWN.)*

MRS. BROWN

*(Begins reading)* Attention to orders Ladies. *(THE LADIES stand at attention.)* We do hereby put special trust and confidence in the patriotism, honour, and fidelity of Mrs. Mary Wilson... I do appoint her third lieutenant of the White Feather Battalion, Barnsley Chapter, signed Lady Elizabeth Sumner...Congratulations, Mrs. Wilson.

*(LADY SUMNER places a sash on MARY; ALL THE LADIES applaud.)*

LADY SUMNER

Now Ladies...Mrs. Wilson would like to read a poem in honor of her son Jack who we all know is listed as missing in action...we are all praying for his safe return... Mrs. Wilson...

MARY

Thank you Lady Sumner. 'My Boy Jack' is by Rudyard Kipling (*Takes a deep breath relishing in her new position*) and I think appropriate in memory of my boy Jack.

*"Have you news of my boy Jack?"*

*Not this tide.*

*"When d'you think that he'll come back?"*

*Not with this wind blowing, and this tide.*

*"Has anyone else had word of him?"*

*Not this tide.*

*For what is sunk will hardly swim,*

*Not with this wind blowing, and this tide.*

*"Oh, dear, what comfort can I find?"*

*None this tide,*

*Nor any tide,*

*Except he did not shame his kind —*

*Not even with that wind blowing, and that tide.*

*Then hold your head up all the more,*

*This tide,*

*And every tide;*

*Because he was the son you bore,*

*And gave to that wind blowing and that tide!<sup>11</sup>*

I know that I only received this honour because of the heroics of my Jack. He is everything a mother could wish from an English son, valiant and honorable...my Jack.

*(MARY puts her hand against her heart. THE LADIES close to sooth and congratulate her. A moment later MRS. WHITTY approaches MARY.)*

MRS. WHITTY

Mrs. Wilson...I'm...I'm so sorry to hear about Jack missing...My husband wrote me and told me about it...he was heartbroken...Mrs. Wilson...I could come to you...sometimes it's good to cry...and you're always so busy...I worry about you...I do know that the officer that was with Jack was wounded and should be back in England soon.

MARY

<sup>11</sup> Kipling, Rudyard. 'My Boy Jack'.

[http://home.clara.net/stevebrown/html/expeience\\_of\\_war/kipling\\_my\\_boy\\_jack.htm](http://home.clara.net/stevebrown/html/expeience_of_war/kipling_my_boy_jack.htm) (accessed 23 Feburary 2009)

Thank you, Mrs. Whitty, but I'm a commissioned officer in the White Feather...there'll be time later to cry. Do you know when Lady Sumner is going to have an officers meeting at her country estate?

MRS. WHITTY

No, I'm not sure but I had hoped I could speak to you in private, Mrs. Wilson.

MARY

Whatever about Mrs. Whitty?

MRS. WHITTY

I wanted to tell you...that I was with child.

MARY

Ok...how nice... (*Disinterested*) I mean congratulations.

MRS. WHITTY

I wanted to ask you what you thought if I named him Jack...if it's a boy of course.

MARY

(*Surprised*) After my Jack?

MRS. WHITTY

Well yes... Archie's grandfather was named Jack so I could tell him that, so he would be named after both of them, but he'd be named after your Jack in my mind...but my husband doesn't even know I'm pregnant yet... so please keep it a secret.

MARY

Of course...of course...although there is only one Jack in my book so you can name your child anything you like...I don't 'ave time for this Mrs. Whitty...there is a great deal of work for me to do now in my new official position. Do you know when the next meeting at Lady Sumner's estate will be? There is a lot to plan for.

MRS. WHITTY

(*Ignoring her question*) I honour your commitment Mrs. Wilson... (*Walks away*)

LADY SUMNER

Listen all...ladies...ladies...I almost forgot to tell you all that I was down at Hastings for holiday and you could hear the artillery fire... (*THE LADIES become excited.*)...the big push should be starting soon so we can win this war and get our boys home!

(*ALL cheer except for MARY.*)

MRS. BROWN

(To MARY) Just think...the war could be over soon. (MARY pulls away.) If the push begins now...let's see... (Thinking) ... it's June... (Louder to ALL) ...maybe they could be home before Christmas!

(More cheers as THE LADIES begin to leave. LIGHTS CROSSFADE to MARY who stands alone looking at a photo on the mantel of JACK in his uniform.)

MARY

Oh Jackie...how well you've done for me. (Touching her sash) I pray you survive and are just wounded...that way I could nurse you and never let them forget what they owe me...I've done everything for them and... I'm one of them now...my time has come...oh Jackie...thank you for being so brave for me...I can bare your death if I know you died bravely. That Mrs. Whitty who has everything tries to be so kind to me...but I can't accept it Jack. She was so giving...it makes me 'ate 'er...she has everything I ever wanted. I do need to start being kind to 'er though because she is dear friends with Lady Sumner...so I should be nicer to 'er and...maybe (Realization) have a good cry with her...that will bring us closer together and that is my way in to Lady Sumner's country estate for tea...oh just think of it...just think of it.

(MARY stares off as LIGHTS FADE OUT.)

## ACT II; SCENE 8

(AT RISE: The LIEUTENANT from the trenches, walking with a limp and walking stick, knocks on the door to MARY's flat. MARY's hair has grayed from stress. She answers the door and is handed a letter. She reads it as the LIEUTENANT stands by.)

MARY

(Serious) 'Jack fell as he'd have wished,'

(A SECOND LIGHT focuses on CHORUS.)

CHORUS

*“the mother said,  
And folded up the letter that she'd read.”*

MARY

(Folding the letter; smiling) 'The Colonel writes so nicely.'

CHORUS

*Something broke  
In the tired voice that quavered to a choke.  
She half looked up.*

MARY

*(Calls out dramatically) 'We mothers are so proud of our dead soldiers.'*

*(As the LIEUTENANT exits, the LIGHTS FADE OUT on MARY but remain up on CHORUS.)*

CHORUS

*Then her face was bowed.  
Quietly the Brother Officer went out.  
He'd told the poor old dear some gallant lies  
That she would nourish all her days, no doubt  
For while he coughed and mumbled, her weak eyes  
Had shone with gentle triumph, brimmed with joy,  
Because he'd been so brave, her glorious boy.*

*He thought how 'Jack', cold-footed, useless swine,  
Had panicked down the trench that night the mine  
Went up at Wicked Corner; how he'd tried  
To get sent home, and how, at last, he died,  
Blown to small bits. And no one seemed to care  
Except that lonely woman with white hair.<sup>12</sup>*

*(BLACKOUT.)*

## ACT II; SCENE 9

*(AT RISE: SPOTLIGHT on CHORUS; reads telegraph.)*

CHORUS

July 1st, 1916

The General Situation is Favourable

Great Offensive Continues – 9,500 Prisoners.

French pierce for second line – British capture Fricourt and make progress east of village and near La Boisselle.

Mightiest battle of British army – Our Ally also takes two villages, strong German positions, guns and captives.

CHORUS, *Continued*

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<sup>12</sup> Sassoon, Siegfried. *The Old Huntsman and Other Poems*. E. P. Dutton & Company, 1918. 48.

The General Situation is Favorable.<sup>13</sup>

Local Heroes Fall In Action.

Barnsley Battalion Charge the Huns, through shot and shell.

Officers and Men Make Great Sacrifices.<sup>14</sup>

*(SPOTLIGHT out. LIGHTS RISE on MARY's FLAT. THE LADIES are gathered once again. Some wear uniforms.)*

LADY SUMNER

Now ladies...we don't know everything yet. We can only pray that the list of dead and missing stops arriving...and soon.

*(THE LADIES frantically speak to each other.)*

MRS. BROWN

Lady Sumner...have you heard what happened? How did this happen?

LADY SUMNER

*(To ALL)* Now ladies I do not have any additional information other than what is being posted, so please do not bring up for discussion anything other than what is officially being put out by the government. This is not a time for rumors.

MARY

*(Approaches LADY SUMNER)* Lady Sumner ...I wanted to address an upcoming secret football game that I've discovered is being planned up at Ryelands Park again...They're trying to get cheeky with their secret games, they put an encryption in the newspaper to tell them where the next game is, I only discovered it from workin' at the munitions factory.

LADY SUMNER

Mrs. Wilson, I think your time could be better served elsewhere right now...I have heard many of the shells that were used did not work properly, and is a major reason for this fiasco. We're all starting to think that maybe some of our men should have stayed back here to oversee the munitions factory. You cardinals need to pay closer attention to what you're doing in the factory. That is where your time needs to be spent. *(Looks away is disgust)*

MARY

*(Timidly)* If you think so Lady Sumner ...

LADY SUMNER

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<sup>13</sup> BBC World War One web site. *Daily Mirror* Headlines: The Battle of the Somme, Published 31 July 1916. [http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/worldwars/wwone/mirror04\\_01.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/worldwars/wwone/mirror04_01.shtml).

<sup>14</sup> Cooksey, Jon. *Barnsley Pals The 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> Battalions York and Lancaster*. Wharnccliffe Publishing ltd, 1986, 1988, 1996. 219.

All right ladies...there will be a vigil tonight at the church. I expect you all to be there...Our next meeting of the white feather is postponed until further notice, so spread the word to all the volunteers.

MARY

*(Loud and inappropriate)* Postponed? *(Softer)* Lady Sumner are you sure? I thought the next officer meetin' *(Catching herself speaking with heavy accent)* ...I though the next officer's meeting might be at your estate...I've been dying to see it.

*(MARY starts coughing and LADY SUMNER moves away in disgust.)*

LADY SUMNER

*(Loud)* All White Feather activities are postponed as well! No more giving out of feathers until further notice. *(Looks at MARY)* ...spread the word as soon as possible. Good evening ladies...I'll see you at tonight's service...Make sure you're not late.

*(Begins to leave; THE LADIES follow her.)*

MRS. BROWN

*(To MARY)* Please Mrs. Wilson...have you any word from Mrs. Whitty?

MARY

No Mrs. Brown...but I did hear her husband was listed among the missing. I tried to call on her but she is not taking visitors...at least she wasn't available when I called on her.

MRS. BROWN

May God watch over her...She is such a wonderful sort...and such a lady, I hate to think of her in pain...I really do.

MARY

Yes ...good night to you...

*(Mrs. Brown exits. MARY is alone.)*

MARY, *Continued*

All White Feather activities cancelled? What a bunch of cowards...I lost my Jack and didn't complain one bit and now they lose a few husbands and it's the end of the world and all activities are forced to stop. *(Sarcastically)* I knew these ladies 'ad no gumption...no enthusiasm. I swear I should be runnin' the whole organization... I'd keep 'em in line and there wouldn't be a man from Dorchester to Durham not in uniform fighting for his King and country. But what do they do? They quit...it's really quite disgustin'...it really is.

*(BLACKOUT.)*

**ACT II; SCENE 10**

*(AT RISE: The Munitions factory; MARY enters with cigarette in hand, ELLI follows close behind.)*

MARY

Are you takin' a fag break or what Elli?

ELLI

Yea, I guess I'm comin' Mary.

MARY

Can you believe it Elli? The feather is disbanded...can you get over that? Please tell me—

ELLI

I didn't want to speak to you earlier Mary because I knew you would be talkin' like that.

MARY

Like what?

ELLI

*(Angry)* Like complainin' about the feather bein' disbanded and not the loss of our men.

MARY

*(Taken aback)* You know I lost my Jack over there Elli. How dare you!

ELLI

*(Still upset)* I know you lost Jack and I still mourn 'im...but we just lost our town...'ave some decency. I thought you were a lady Mary.

MARY

Elli...what's gotten into you?

ELLI

*(Crying now)* My 'usband's dead! What do you bloody think 'as gotten in to me?

MARY

*(Trying to sound proper)* Please...get control of yourself Elli...don't embarrass your 'usband's memory!

ELLI

My...what?

MARY

You 'ave to be strong now Elli...we need the rest of the men to get over there to avenge our fallen...

ELLI

You want to keep ‘anding out feathers?

MARY

Of course I do. What about the ‘onor of our fallen, don’t start speakin’ defeatism now Elli or I’ll ‘ave no time to speak to you.

ELLI

*(No longer crying; quite angry)* Really? You think I’m speakin’ defeatism because I think the whole idea behind the feather was wrong. We shamed those boys into joinin’ Mary...boys, and your boy on top. No one got more blokes to join than you Mary...and you don’t seem fazed by any of this. *(Looking intently at MARY)* You probably got the most boys to die, Mary. Did you ever think of that? You got my John to join the Army straight off and me to join the White Feather. For what? Can you answer me that Mary? For what?

MARY

Now Elli...get control of yourself. You two were ‘appy to join, so don’t blame your decisions on me.

ELLI

I’m not blamin’ you Mary...I’m just sayin’.

MARY

Sayin’ what?

ELLI

That it was wrong, Mary...the whole thing was wrong. *(WHISTLE BLOWS.)* There I’ve said it.

*(ELLI walks away; MARY stands dumbfounded as LIGHTS FADE OUT.)*

## ACT II; SCENE 11

*(AT RISE: Several months later; on the street just outside MARY’s flat. MARY, carrying some papers, enters and is quickly approached by MRS. BROWN.)*

MRS. BROWN

Hello Mrs. Wilson...oh Mrs. Wilson...hello.

MARY

*(Speaking without accent)* Hello Mrs. Brown...How have you been?

MRS. BROWN

Not well... since July, like everyone.

MARY

I'm sorry to hear that...any word from Lady Sumner?

MRS. BROWN

Only that she took Mrs. Whitty and some of the other ladies to her country estate to stay for a while. You know... to morn together...I thought you would have known about that...I was unable to attend because of Ralph Jr. but I do have a bit of good news.

MARY

And what is that?

MRS. BROWN

Well, Lord Sumner is still alive, I do know that... (*Excited*) And Mrs. Whitty had a baby boy while staying at Lady Sumer's estate...isn't that exciting?

MARY

Yes Mrs. Brown...that's wonderful. Do you know what she named him?

**This is Not the End of the Play**  
**Ending Intentionally Omitted for Security Purposes**

## Acknowledgements

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