

AN ENGLISH HEAVEN

A World War One Play

by Claire Jones

SchoolPlay Productions Ltd

AN ENGLISH HEAVEN
and
IS THERE HONEY STILL?

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CAST

Mrs. Lovegrove	<i>The Postmistress</i>
Molly	<i>Her niece, The telegraph girl</i>
Marigold Collis	<i>A Farm-worker</i>
Daisy Collis	<i>Her older sister, working in munitions</i>
Vicky Carter	<i>Housemaid at the Hall</i>
Jean Jackson	<i>A gypsy-ish mother of four children</i>
Mrs. Skeet	<i>The Churchwarden's mother</i>
Martha Comley	<i>Manager of the Home Farm</i>
Dorothy Smythe	<i>A VAD. Guest at the Hall</i>

Voices off: The Postman

A small child

Young man's "Voice over" [Optional]

The set is quite simple, with some shelves and boxes and tins of groceries. Newspapers are spread out on the counter.

Ideas for clothes may be obtained from costume books and contemporary sources. All are dressed simply for working (except THEA).

There is scope for developing the ending, using further improvisation, and lighting effects and music. It should be kept very simple.

The idea for this play came from the village of Shere, in Surrey, still a very small community, but a hamlet in 1916, which nevertheless has 33 names on the War Memorial in its church, many being from the same families.

The title comes from Rupert Brooke's poem, "The Soldier".

AN ENGLISH HEAVEN

by Claire Jones

The Scene is a General Store and Post Office in a small Surrey village. It sells everything and is open all hours. It is now 7.25 a.m. on 1st July 1916 and the store is open for the morning papers.

(Mrs. Lovegrove, the Postmistress, is marking up the papers helped by her niece, MOLLY, who also acts as telegraph girl. MOLLY is idling over a magazine and eating a toffee).

Mrs. L: There - and that's the Times and Morning Post for Abinger Hall. Did Vicky say she'd call in to get them?

(No answer).

Mrs. L: Molly!

Molly: Sorry Auntie.

Mrs. L: I've told you before about putting sticky fingers on customers' papers. And eating sweet stuff before breakfast. You'll ruin your teeth.

Molly: It was only one fell out of a jar.

Mrs. L: After you'd given it a push, I'm sure. Did you hear what I said about Vicky calling in?

Molly: Expect she will.

Mrs. L: She'd better be quick then, or you'll have to take them with the rest. What's the time?

Molly: Twenty-five past seven.

Mrs. L: That late? I'm all behind like the cow's tail this morning.

Molly: We've nearly finished. Anyway, Fred Comley'll be along with the cart soon. We can send the papers with him.

Mrs. L: You'd like that, wouldn't you? Lazy little cat!

Molly: My feet ache every morning, Auntie, walking all that way. Fred don't mind taking the papers.

Mrs. L: Fred's too soft in the head to mind anything. If he takes them every day, he'll start wanting wages.

Molly: Anyway, I don't feel too good. Got a sore throat and I was shivering all night.

Mrs. L: Listen to her! First day of July, and she's shivering. You tell that to the Marines, my girl! Going to be a nice summer day.

(Enter MARIGOLD and DAISY COLLIS).

Marigold: That's right, Mrs. Lovegrove. Going to be real sunny.

Daisy: There's a lark singing in Ewhurst fields.

Marigold: Shame Daisy has to spend it indoors.

Daisy: Go on! Have your fun! You just wait till December, Marigold Collis, when you're dragging turnips up in the frost - and I'll be indoors, filling nice warm shell cases.

Marigold: Any sign of Fred, Mrs. L? He's got some day-old chicks for me.

Daisy: I'm getting a lift with him today. Don't want to be late - I can earn a bit extra, if I'm early.

Mrs. L: No, I haven't seen him yet, but Martha never lets us down. She'll get Fred up and doing, she doesn't like the milk to be late.

Marigold: Any post yet?

Mrs. L: No.

Marigold: Mind if we wait?

Mrs. L: No, nice to have company.

Daisy: We'll have some toffee while we wait, shall we Mari?

Marigold: Yes - quarter of treacle, please.

(MOLLY weighs it out).

Daisy: I've just thought - there's something missing.

Marigold: Yes, your purse. Come on - pay up!

Daisy: *(Doing so).* No, it's not that. It's to do with hearing that lark. Yes! That's it! It's quiet. The guns have stopped.

Mrs. L: So they have.

(They go to the door and listen).

Mrs. L: There now, we'd got so used to them, muttering and grumbling away all the time.

Marigold: Funny, isn't it? Us here in England hearing the guns in France. Sort of ghostly.

(A silence for a minute).

Daisy: *(Shudders).* Don't talk about it.

(VICKY CARTER enters cheerfully).

Vicky: Hey, what's the matter with all of you? Someone walk over your graves?

Mrs. L: I'd put it more tactfully than that, Vicky.

Vicky: Sorry, but you ought to see your faces. Long as fiddles. What's's the matter?

Daisy: We'd just noticed that the guns have stopped.

Vicky: Oh. Yes. Quiet, isn't it?

(Pause).

Vicky: Wonder what they're doing out there?

(Another pause).

Mrs.L: Well - this won't get the work done. Can you take the papers up to the Hall, Vicky?

Vicky: All right, give them here.

Daisy: Busy up there?

Vicky: Not really. His Grace is in Scotland, and with the young men away at the front, there's just Lady Vinnie and a friend staying. Oh, and Master Edward's down from school.

Marigold: Piece of cake, your job.

Vicky: We still have to clean, just the same. Any post?

Mrs. L: Drives you mad, it does. Any post, any post, all day long. I wish I had a shilling for every

Daisy: You'd make a fortune! We're waiting too, Vicky.

Vicky: Thought there might be something for our Sarah. Gets so low just now.

Marigold: Must do, with that old sourpuss Henry Lodge in that pub.

Daisy: Waters down his beer, they say.

Vicky: Since George went away, she says she can't go out of her room without he gives her a right old pair of fish-eyes! It's all quite legal, but for some reason he thinks it's not quite nice for her to be seen in public!

Mrs. L: When the baby due?

Marigold: Ten days, isn't it?

Vicky: Mmm, any minute.

Marigold: What a time to have a baby.

Vicky: They weren't to know George'd be called up. To hear his father talk in the public bar, you'd think they'd planned it deliberate.

Marigold: No, but you'd think that - well

Mrs. L: You can stop that, Marigold Collis right away. Babies are God's gift they are.

Daisy: Not if what I hear from the girls in the factory is right.

Mrs. L: You girls nowadays, no respect for anything.

Marigold: Sorry Mrs. L. I suppose working on a farm makes you learn a lot!

Vicky: It's not a very feminine job, Mari. Seems more a man's work, if you ask me.

Marigold: Someone's got to do it.

Daisy: She's best with the animals. And dad would go off his head with no help at all.

Marigold: I miss the boys. Never realised how much they had to do. They ought to make us girls into an army like the men. The Farm Army.

Daisy: Oh, go on!

Marigold: Why not? It's a job, just like Daisy's ammo factory.

Mrs. L: You mean - be paid for what you're doing every day?

Marigold: I'd rather do that than those nasty shells. It's not healthy. D'you know, it makes your skin yellow.

Vicky: Ugh - does it really?

Daisy: Course it doesn't.

Marigold: How do you know? You haven't been there long enough yet. All those chemicals. You can give me pigs any day.

Daisy: Thank you!

Vicky: Talking of animals, (*perching on the shop counter*) I saw something the other day. It was Master Edward. You know he's in his last term at school, and he'll be going to France soon. I think he misses his brothers. Well - I was coming across the Green and I saw him. He had his black mare with him

Marigold: Briony. She's a likely hunter.

Vicky: And Mr. David's Rowan, the one he rode in the point-to-point at Chiddingfold. He was taking them to the station.

Marigold: Oh, surely the army hasn't taken them?

Vicky: Yes, it looked like it.

Marigold: Oh, that's wicked. He loved those horses. Why didn't he let the groom take them?

Vicky: I think he wanted to do it himself.

Daisy: You could have given him a hand.

Vicky: No I couldn't. He was crying.

(*Pause. A sympathetic sigh.*)

Mrs. L: Poor little scrap.

Marigold: They took our two best plough horses. But that's not the same as animals like that.

(*Another pause. MOLLY snivels.*)

Mrs. L: Use your handkerchief, Molly.

Molly: (*Inaudibly*). poor horses

Marigold: Oh, they'll be fine, you see, Moll. The army looks after them well. Just the parting hurts, but they'll be all right

Daisy: (*Changing the subject*). What's all this rubbish, Vicky, about letters for your Sarah? We know what you're after.

Marigold: Can't see what she sees in our Tom, myself.

Vicky: (*Blushing*). You mind your own business.

Marigold: 'Tis our business, isn't it Dais?

Daisy: Oh yes. Reckon we're fussy who we get for a sister-in-law.

Vicky: You know it's not come to that yet.

Mrs. L: Oh, don't tease the poor girl. Mind you, I don't see how she tells the two apart. Sure you've always got the right one?

Vicky: Sure.

Daisy: Oh, it's easy. Tom's slower than Stan, that's all. But they're both thick-heads!

Marigold: Must be to fancy Vicky!

Vicky: Oh, you are rude, Mari!

Molly: I like your Stan better myself. See him on the football field with his sleeves rolled up and all his leg muscles

Mrs. L: (*Shocked*). Molly, what have you been reading?

Molly: Nothing, Auntie.

Mrs. L: I never heard the like. Stan Collis's muscles are nothing to do with you. At your age!

Molly: Don't care! Is it really true that Brighton Football Club wrote to him, Marigold?

Marigold: You know quite well they did - you probably steamed it open.

Mrs. L: We've done no such thing!

Molly: Why didn't he join them?

Daisy: Dad wouldn't let him go. He thinks football's a flighty way to make a living.

Marigold: There won't be much played this year anyway. I counted it up - nearly all the team's gone.

Vicky: Tom and Stan and your Peter and our George.

Marigold: Arthur Jackson.

Molly: He's not up to much.

Marigold: Albert Skeet in goal. Here - remember the first time they played him, and Mrs. Skeet turned up in her Sunday hat?

Daisy: (*Imitating*). As the churchwarden's son I expect

Vicky: And he let in five goals! Your Stan's language!

Marigold: And remember when Viscount John and Mr. David used to come down and kick a ball around?

Vicky: And Viscount John said he never could get the hang of it, 'cos they always played their own sort of football at Eton.

Marigold: The 'Field Game'.

Molly: Football is a field game, isn't it?

Mrs. L: Never mind. He enjoyed it. God rest him. (*Pause*).

Daisy: (*Falsefully cheerful*). They're probably playing Jerry at five-a-side.

Marigold: (*Strained*). Yes

Daisy: (*Hastily*). What's holding Fred up? I'll be late.

Mrs. L: He'll be here, don't fuss.

Daisy: It's all very well saying that, but you don't know our forewoman. They ought to send her to the front, she'd win the war single-handed. Looks quite a bit like the Kaiser - without the helmet.

Molly: Kaiser Bill's got a moustache.

Daisy: So's our forewoman. (*Laughter*). Oh - I just thought of something. Mari and I were just talking about it, coming along. Could we get a food box together to send to the boys? Sort of treat them? Could we do that?

Mrs. L: Bless you, of course. Don't know why nobody thought of it before. They send parcels from the Hall I know, but they come from posh places like Harrods.

Vicky: What a good idea. From their own shop. Count me in.

Mrs. L: Choose what you want, and I'll let you have it wholesale.

Daisy: Oh thanks, Mrs. L., you're a love. Things in tins, coffee, potted meat, sardines - the twins love those

Vicky: In tomato sauce well, so I heard

Mrs. L: Come with me, Daisy, and we'll make a list. Lend a hand Molly. Can you two watch the shop?

Marigold: Yes, of course.

(MRS. L., DAISY and MOLLY go out).

Vicky: Come on Mari, sit down.

Marigold: I didn't mean to tease, Vicky. I know how it is with you and our Tom.

Vicky: That's all right. Same as you and Peter.

Marigold: Yes.

Vicky: Tom and I were just walking out, but you've got a ring (*MARIGOLD takes it out from round her neck*). What're you wearing it there for? Doesn't your Dad approve?

Marigold: Oh no, it's not that. I left it on my finger the other day, and it fell in the pig-swill. (*They laugh*). Seems odd though, having it. Can't believe my luck.

Vicky: Peter is nice. Fancy you, 'Mrs. Schoolmaster'.

Marigold: Expect everyone wonders what he sees in me

Vicky: Rubbish!

Marigold: Jean Jackson....

Vicky: Oh well, she's just a jealous cat.

Marigold: We are an unlikely couple though. I never had much education - preferred the open air.

Vicky: But you know how he loves the countryside and teaching the children to love it too.

Marigold: Yes

Vicky: There you are then you're right for each other, honestly. Anyone can see that.

Marigold: Oh Lord, Peter does seem so far away.

Vicky: He'll be home before you know it. He'd better be, that material I bought for a

bridesmaid's dress will have faded.

Marigold: Bridesmaid! Never mind that, Vicky. We'll make it a double wedding, even if I have to put a boot behind Tom!

(MRS. LOVEGROVE, MOLLY and DAISY enter).

Daisy: We've made a list. All looks very tasty. I wouldn't mind it myself.

Marigold: Shall I take it home and show it to Dad?

Voice off: Postman!

(All move to the door).

Mrs. L: Thank you, Mr. Northcote! Any registered?

Voice: None today.

Mrs. L: See you noon then. *(She brings in the post).*

Daisy: Better look quick, Mari. Jean Jackson's coming down the street.

Marigold: Oh lor! If there's one from Peter, I don't want to share it with the whole world.
Hurry up!

Mrs. L: Only got one pair of hands my girl. Come on Molly, do your share.

(They sort, while MARIGOLD and VICKY fidget).

Mrs. L: There you are! Miss Mari-gold Collis. Best handwriting.

(She hands the letter over. MARIGOLD takes it gently. DAISY watches with affection).

Daisy: Take it outside, Mari, by yourself.

Marigold: *(Dashes for the door, colliding with JEAN who is coming in).* Morning Jean.
Just going to look for Fred Comley.

(She goes out).

Jean: First time I've ever heard of anyone chasing Fred.

Mrs. L: She's expecting some chicks from him. What can I do for you, Jean?

Jean: I made a list out somewhere. *(Searches in her bag, then shouts off).* Harold! Stop splashing your sister in the horse trough. And leave off shaking that pram.

Child's voice: *(off)* I wasn't.

Jean: You was! Mind, I'm watching now! Here's the list Mrs. Lovegrove. I've got a day's cleaning work, so I'm taking them to their Gran's. They don't like going to their Gran's.

Daisy: No, we can see that.

Jean: Harold! That's Elsie's clean pinafore! Oh my, I won't half warm your backsides for you in a minute. Any post, Mrs. Lovegrove?

Mrs. L: Just sorting it out now, Jeanie.

Jean: Not that there'll be anything for me. Arthur only writes when he wants something. You waiting for a letter, Vicky?

Vicky: Might be.

Jean: You've got a lot to say this morning. Any news of Sarah?

Vicky: Not yet.

Jean: (*Meaningly*). Ah, well, the longer it goes, the less people count.

Vicky: What do you mean by that, Mrs. Jackson?

Jean: I mean, it's common knowledge

Vicky: Talk about the pot calling the kettle black

Mrs. L: Ladies, please! Sorry Vicky, nothing for you today.

Vicky: Oh well, tomorrow then. Goodbye all!

(*General response*).

Mrs. L: Have a couple of toffees for the way, my dear.

Vicky: Thanks, Mrs. L.

(*She goes and is heard outside calling goodbye to MARIGOLD*).

Mrs. L: Jean, please do something about your boy. I swept that yard already today.

Jean: (*Ineffectually*). Come here, Harold!

Child's Voice: No!

Jean: Oh, you are a naughty boy. I'm sorry, Mrs. Lovegrove, but they've run wild at that school lately with the new teacher. It's not been the same since Mr. Gough went. Least they treated him with respect.

Daisy: He liked children.

Jean: Never could see why he wanted to join up.

Daisy: He'd have been called up, else.

Jean: Could have got out of it.

Daisy: Like your Arthur tried to do?

Jean: He went to do his bit, did Arthur. One of the few good things he ever did, getting out of my hair. Precious little money now, but at least I get something out of his pay.

Mrs. L: Got no pride, Jeanie.

Jean: They're welcome to him. But Peter Gough may be going to marry your sister, but he's too good for round here.

Daisy: The earl offered to get him a commission, but he didn't want it. Anyway, what Peter does is none of your affair. Haven't you got no thought for your country?

Jean: Why should I? What's it ever done for me?

Daisy: Nothing, if that's your attitude.

Molly: I remember the day they went. All together, like they wanted. Sitting on the hay cart. Waving, and us waving back. All of them.

Daisy: John Comley drove the cart, and someone had put a Union Jack on the horse's back.

Molly: I was proud. I won't forget it.

Daisy: (*Hastily*). Where is that Fred? He must be along soon.

(*DAISY goes*).

Jean: Won't make no difference to me. Leastways I get some peace with Arthur gone. Bad enough with the kids growing up and

Mrs. L: There's your list, Jeanie. Collect the things on your way home, if you like. That'll be six shillings and tuppence halfpenny altogether.

Jean: Er can I have a word, Mrs. Lovegrove?

Mrs. L: (*This has happened before*). Molly! Finish that post quickly now!

Molly: I was.

Mrs. L: Well, take it out the back.

(*MOLLIE goes*).

Mrs. L: Yes, Jeanie?

Jean: Could I owe this week, only

Mrs. L: I've told you before

Jean: Only, I've not done much work this week - not been feeling too good, and Arthur's money isn't through yet.

Mrs. L: It's for your own good, you know. You'll run up such a bill, you'll never pay it off. Anyway, what's the matter with you? You've been looking peaky for days now. Seen a doctor?

Jean: Yes.

Mrs. L: Well?

(*Embarrassed pause*).

Mrs. L: There now, you're not in the family way again?

(*JEAN nods*).

Mrs. L: I'll say this for your Arthur, he picks his moments.

Jean: Night before he went away came home drunk as usual Honest, Mrs. Lovegrove,

I'm at my wit's end, with another on the way.

Mrs. L: All right, I'll knock something off the bill this time - but mind, I've got my own living to make.

Jean: Oh, thank you.

Mrs. L: Don't say no more, or I'll change my mind.

(Enter MRS. SKEET, the Churchwarden's mother [She knows it!]).

Mrs. L: Morning Mrs. Skeet. We're just sorting the post. Molly!

Molly: *(Coming in)*. Not finished yet, Auntie.

Mrs. Skeet: I did not come for post, thank you Mrs. Lovegrove. It is not Albert's day for a letter. Regular in his habits - unlike some I could name. I wanted a word with Mrs. Jackson, if you'll excuse me.

Jean: Yes? What do you want then?

Mrs. S: You will kindly SPEAK to your son.

Jean: What's he supposed to have done?

Mrs. S: My poor little Samuel came home yesterday from school in tears. Your son has been calling him names and pushing him about. Pushed right in the mud at Marsh Hollow - filthy he was, when he came in. I had to put all his clothes in the wash. Covered in mud right down to his vest.

Jean: Perhaps he fell in Marsh Hollow, Mrs. Skeet. After all, he's a BIG lad for his age, and a bit clumsy, I daresay.

Mrs. S: Samuel is not clumsy, he's a delicate child. He says your son pushed him.

Jean: So he says.

Mrs. S: He is a very truthful child. Albert and I have always raised him as a God-fearing Christian. He's had a hard enough time without a mother, poor mite, but he's never lied to us. Tell the truth and shame the devil, that's the rule in our house.

Jean: *(Ominously)*. I see.

Mrs. S: My Albert was promoted Corporal, because he was the right man for the job, so I don't see why my grandson should suffer because others are jealous.

Jean: Meaning my Arthur, I suppose?

Mrs. S: If the cap fits, dear

Jean: You can shut your mouth then. I'm the only person what's allowed to run our Arthur down, and don't you forget it! And as for that runny-nosed grandson of yours, he deserves all he gets, the great bladder of lard! Coming in here, preaching at me! Jumped-up madam!

Mrs. L: Jean both of you, that's enough!

Mrs. S: Oh, don't speak up for me, Mrs. Lovegrove. It's no more than I'd expect from her sort. You're a disgrace, Jean Jackson - no better than one of those gypsies. I'd be ashamed to be seen around like you and those children - dressed in rags, and with

THINGS in their hair

Jean: What did you say?

Mrs. S: If your Harold ever bullies my Samuel again, he'll feel the end of a broom handle!

(She storms out, colliding with THEA, who is just coming through the door).

Jean: *(Yelling).* You wait, you just wait, that's all!

Mrs. L: Calm down, Jeanie, it's bad for you.

Jean: I'm going to write to my Arthur. You wait till he comes on leave. Albert Skeet is going to wish he were somewhere else, I can tell you!

Thea: Am I interrupting?

Mrs. L: Oh, no Miss. A little local disturbance, that's all. Go on, Jeanie, do.

(There is a loud yell from outside).

Daisy: *(Rushing in).* Jeanie, you'd better come. The Vicar's found Harold picking his best roses and floating them in the horse trough.

Jean: I'm coming! You see, Mrs. Lovegrove, my Arthur will hear of this.

(She goes).

Daisy: Think of Albert and Arthur in the same trench! O, hello! *(To THEA).*

Thea: Hello.

Mrs. L: You're up and about early.

Thea: I thought I'd have a walk before breakfast.

Mrs. L: You'd be staying with Lady Vinnie at the Hall?

Thea: Yes.

Daisy: Are you a nurse, like her?

Thea: Well a VAD.

Daisy: Real exciting that must be, looking after all the suffering men. And the little hospitals over there romantic

Thea: Oh, I haven't been to France or Belgium yet. I'm based at Aldershot - just having a holiday at the moment.

Mrs. L: There now, they'll send you over soon, I dare say. Lady Vinnie was in the other day, bubbling over with stories. She's a card, that one! Oh, no disrespect mind, but I've seen her since she was a toddler in her little pinafores

Thea: It must be lovely to live somewhere like this, where everybody knows you.

Daisy: *(Wryly).* Most of the time

Thea: Actually, I called in to see if the post had arrived. I wondered if there was anything for me? Smythe. Dorothy Smythe.

Mrs. L: Molly! Haven't you finished yet?

Molly: I'd be a bit quicker if persons didn't keep snatching them out of my hand and turning them over.

Mrs. L: Don't be so cheeky! Let's have the ones for the Hall. That all?

Molly: (*Sulky*). Yes.

Mrs. L: Let's see, then. Here you are Miss - there is something here. Your lucky day.

Thea: Oh, thanks. I'll take the rest back with me, if you like.

Mrs. L: It isn't official.

(*MOLLY pleads silently*).

Mrs. L: But I'm sure it's all right this time. Thank you Miss. Here you are.

(*THEA puts the post in her pocket*).

Mrs. L: Nice to hear from your young man, I expect.

Molly: Auntie

Thea: Just a friend

Mrs. L: Well nice anyway.

(*THEA, who is dying to open her letter, moves away, and reads. MOLLY pulls at MRS. L.*).

Mrs. L: Whatever's the matter?

Molly: (*Whispering fiercely*). It's Mr. David.

Mrs. L: What is?

Molly: That letter. It's from him. I know the writing.

Mrs. L: (*Shocked*). Molly, keep your mouth shut!

Molly: That's his lady friend.

Mrs. L: Molly!

(*THEA looks up*).

Mrs. L: Nothing Miss, sorry.

(*THEA goes on reading*).

Mrs. L: Now be quiet and mind your own business.

Molly: But it's so romantic.

Mrs. L: Not another word. I'll give you romantic!

(*MARTHA COMLEY comes in hurriedly, followed by MARIGOLD*).

Martha: Morning everyone. Sorry we're late, but there was a heavy mist - held us up, and Fred has a summer cold.

Marigold: Did Fred bring the chicks?

Martha: Yes, they're outside for you. One of our best hens. They're a healthy bunch.

Marigold: Oh thank you. I'll pay Fred.

(*She and DAISY go out*).

Thea: Oh, good morning. You're Miss Comley from the home farm?

Martha: (*Surprised*). That's right.

Thea: I walked down there the other day, with Lady Lavinia. We saw your brother, was it?

Martha: Yes, Fred and I manage together. I'm sorry to have missed you.

Thea: Forgive my asking are you coping alone?

Martha: Yes.

Thea: However do you manage?

Martha: I ask myself that sometimes. We just get along as best we can. It's Dad, see. The Army wouldn't take Fred - on account he's not very bright - and Dad took a temper and said that someone from the family should go, so it'd have to be him.

Thea: How brave of him.

Martha: Nothing of the sort, if you'll excuse me. Plain stubborn, I call it. Blamed proud old fool! Thinks he's the Duke of Wellington. This is a young man's war. We've had a real job to manage, I can tell you. Fred's all right if you explain what's to be done, but you have to think for him.

Thea: Do they know up at the Hall?

Martha: They know Dad's gone to France - but we aren't taking no charity, thank you.

Thea: There's no question of that. Look, I've got a letter here from Mr. David Montague, and he's wondering how things are at home. I'm sure it would worry him to think you had any problems.

Molly: (*Who has been listening*). See, Auntie I told you

Mrs. L: (*In an awful voice*). Molly! Fetch in the milk!

Martha: Well, thank you Miss. Mr. David used to come and see us a lot. It's good of him to write, but there's no need to concern yourself.

Thea: Oh, I'm sure you think I'm interfering, but would you like me to have a word with Lady Lavinia? You could at least use some help with the harvest.

Martha: It's kind of you to take the trouble

Thea: Good morning then.

(She goes out to a chorus of 'Good Mornings').

Martha: *(Flabbergasted).* Well I never! Did you hear that? What's got the gentry so interested?

Mrs. L: Maybe got an interest we don't know about, Martha.

Martha: You mean Mr. David?

Mrs. L: Mustn't gossip.

Martha: There's obviously things going on up at the Hall! Well - I can't deny some help would be welcome. Dad doesn't write much, as you know, but when he does, he's full of the farm and what's happening. Do this - do that - oh, he's a right worrit.

Mrs. L: It's only natural.

Martha: It'd be a load off my mind if I can write and tell him about the harvest. When he knows that's safe, he can get on with the war. Even if it's thanks to a girl you never seen before. Funny times we live in.

Mrs. L: They are that.

(MARIGOLD, DAISY and MOLLY come in).

Molly: Milk's unloaded, Auntie.

Daisy: Eight o'clock, Martha. You coming?

Martha: Yes, I'm ready. Get yourself aboard.

Mrs. L: Let's see them off, Molly.

(She goes to the door, as MARTHA and DAISY go out).

Mrs. L: Oh my, look at that sun. It's going to be a lovely day.

Daisy: Bye Mari. You'll wear that letter out. Is he well?

Marigold: Yes, they're all in good spirits. *(Simply).* I do miss him.

Daisy: Cheer up, I must go. Show me tonight. Don't work too hard!

Marigold: You too. God bless.

(They might hug. DAISY goes. MARIGOLD comes to the centre, and reads her [authentic] letter out. The lights dim. There could be a man's voice here, taking over from her).

Marigold: Darling, I can't bear you to be unhappy about me. Think of what we're doing - for England, always and all the time. The individual counts as nothing, the common cause everything, so have faith my dear, and then you will not be unhappy, even if I never return to you I am here, and I shall survive or not survive. In the meantime, I have never been truly happier

BLACKOUT

(A few days later. The Post Office is stiller and quieter than we last saw it. MRS. LOVEGROVE and MOLLIE loading the mail).

Mrs. L: That's the lot.

Mollie: *(She is very upset).* There's so many.

Mrs. L: Just try not to think about it. Ready to go.

Molly: Do I have to?

Mrs. L: It's your job, girl. Got to grow up sometime. They'd rather see you, choose how, than someone they don't know. *(She hands MOLLIE a bunch of yellow envelopes).* Take your time. And whatever you do, try to keep calm till you get back here. I don't want you brought back in hysterics. Be a brave girl, now.

Molly: Auntie ...

Mrs. L: Go on. Got your black band on? *(She inspects MOLLY - they are both wearing black arm bands).* That's right. Off you go. *(She almost pushes MOLLY out, then leans on the counter).* Oh, God help us, what's to become of us?

(MRS. SKEET enters to the Post Office bench and sits. The other ladies follow her in, with their telegrams. MRS. SKEET reads names, and enters them in her ledger).

[NOTE - This scene may be varied, or improvisations added].

Mrs. Skeet: In the absence of the churchwarden, the Vicar has asked me to enter the following names on the Roll of Honour of this parish: July 1st 1916. Killed in action. 2nd Lieutenant The Hon. David Montague, second son of the Earl of Abinger.

Thea: David was in charge of the men, when they went over the top at 7.30 that morning.

Mrs. Skeet: Sergeant Peter Gough, Schoolmaster.

Marigold: They looked over rolling farmland and heard larks singing. Peter would have liked that.

Mrs. Skeet: Corporal Stanley Collis, Private Thomas Collis of Ewhurst Farm.

Daisy: As they advanced, the twins kicked their favourite footballs towards the enemy.

Mrs. Skeet: Corporal Albert Skeet, churchwarden of this parish.

(Pause).

Mrs. Skeet: Private Arthur Jackson.

Jean: Never got my letter.

(She sits down by MRS. SKEET to comfort her).

Mrs. Skeet: Private John Comley, Tenant farmer of Abinger Home Farm. Private George Lodge. Son of the Landlord of the Royal Oak.

Vicky: July 2nd 1916, to Sarah, wife of George, a son.

Mrs. L: They walked into hell. There was no return. By eight o'clock, they were all gone.

Martha: Eight o'clock - remember? We'd just unloaded the milk, and the sun was already high in the sky.

Mrs. Skeet: Private Private (*She continues to read names*).

Thea: Thirty three of them. All the men of the village.

Vicky: July 1st. The first day of the Somme.

Marigold: Some corner of a foreign field
 That is forever England.

THE END