

Ralph. Act 2 Scene 1

*The sound of machine guns, distant.*

*RALPH and EVA are revealed. RALPH is in France. He is in full service marching order, exhausted from marching, leaning against the tarpaulin. EVA sits, quietly tacking the hem of a white muslin dress by lamplight in MAY's kitchen.*

RALPH. Oh my dearest, my own little pocket Venus . . . my rose of Clayton-le-Moors. This is no letter you'll ever get. My love. Sweet Eva. It's come. After God's long ages it's come and we're up to the line for the big push. But for the moment we're lost, as ever. Lost three times finding support trench. Now lost again. It's like a bake oven this summer night. I'm in a muck sweat. My sore throat's back. I've spewed my ring up twice. They say Jerry's beat but there's lads seen his observer balloons up all afternoon watching every move we made. I was ready enough once. Christmas when they sent us off to fuckin Egypt to fight Johnnie Turk. But he was whipped before we got there so I'd got myself ready for nowt. I was ready when they brought us back and into France. But it's been up and down, round and round, in and out, waiting and waiting till I don't know how I shall go at it. I've heard the flies buzzing out there. Every shell or bomb as falls short sends up clouds. Still, they're only old regulars lying out there, who, as May would say, are very low at the best of times. I've been a bastard to you Eva, if you only knew. Slept with whores. And one little mam'selle in Amiens who'd take no pay. I sat on her doorstep right after and cried for you. All I want to volunteer for now is a night raid on your bosom in a field of snowy white bedsheets. That's a fact.