

### Sarah and Bertha. Act 2 Scene Three

*Half an hour later. SARAH and BERTHA dance into the kitchen singing at the tops of their voices. MAY has changed mood. She claps her hands in time to the singing but her mood is somewhat forced. EVA appears, pouring beer from a jug into a mug*

EVA. Shall you have some more?

MAY. Of course I shall! Shall I have some more! Pour it out!

BERTHA. Ooh! I do wish you'd stop feeling!

*She has broken away from SARAH.*

SARAH. You what?

BERTHA. You know!

MAY. Sarah! What are you doing?

SARAH. Well I've got to cuddle something somehow.

BERTHA. You are becoming awful.

MAY. I think you want a bucket of water over you.

EVA. Shall I fill one up?

SARAH. It wouldn't douse me. It's your fault Bertha. You look quite the little man in that uniform.

BERTHA. I don't!

EVA. Someone doesn't think so . . .

Pause. They look at BERTHA.

SARAH. Who?

BERTHA. It's nobody . . .

SARAH. She's got a masher!

BERTHA. I haven't!

MAY. You've found a young man?

BERTHA. No!

EVA. He's an electrician.

SARAH. You've got an electrician? They earn a fortune! Where d'you find him?

BERTHA. On the tram. He works on the trams. Comes out to us and does the wires . . . you know. Well he rides on the platform sometimes. Doesn't really say anything.

SARAH. Too busy watching you go upstairs, you little goof.

MAY. Don't be so foul.

EVA. She's only jealous. He's proposed.

MAY. Really?

SARAH. Never!

BERTHA. No he hasn't! At first I thought he was a bit gormless. Although you have to be clever to do his job, I know. But he'd just stand there grinning . . . with his mouth half open, like this. I thought, Oh lor, I wish he'd go away.

SARAH. Get on to the proposal . . .

BERTHA. It wasn't. He just suddenly said in a very loud voice, 'Are you the marrying kind?' I said: 'Are you speaking to me?' He said, 'Well I'm not speaking to her.' And that was so embarrassing because two seats away there was a nun Well you know nuns when they've got their back to you, you never know what they're thinking.

SARAH. What did you say?

BERTHA. Oh I said, 'I wouldn't marry you if you were the last Person on earth.'

SARAH. Good. That'll keep him guessing.

MAY. He isn't one of these who wants to marry to avoid the conscription is he?

EVA. No, that's the thing. He can't pass the medical. He has asthma-

MAY. My goodness, I should think about it Bertha. Electricians with asthma don't grow on trees!

BERTHA sniffs and blows bet nose.

EVA. May . . . you've upset her.

MAY. What have I said?

EVA. She doesn't want to think of it that way.

MAY. Oh? Are we so sensitive?

EVA. Yes we are! She's had an offer and she doesn't want it. Isn't that enough to upset anyone?

BERTHA. Even if I liked him more I couldn't love him. I

couldn't love a man who'd stayed at home . . .

MAY. It's not his fault . . .

BERTHA. That makes it worse. If he was a dodger I could tell him straight. How could I face father? Say he was wounded or gassed. . . how could I?

SARAH. Come on! There's half this jug left. I'm not having it go flat. Drink it up. They'll soon be back. You've read what the guns have done. The Germans are blown to smithereens Buried alive in their dugouts. There'll be none left to fight. The Pals 'll be marching through the town and we'll be cheering. . . and I shall have Bill back picking his nose and spitting in the fire and breaking wind fit to blow the ornaments off the what not.

MAY. Sarah! You're in my kitchen.

SARAH. Well it isn't holy ground . . . is it Eva? Yes I fancied one of those tall bronzed Australians or Canadians but there you are. And what about Ralph. Eh Bertha . . . eh? Back to Eva's loving arms. Oh Eva! Is he masterful? Is he passionate? Is he wild?

EVA. I sometimes think I'm the one that's wild. He can be very gentle.

SARAH. Not Bill. He's a steam-hammer. If he missed me he'd have the bedroom wall down! I used to get weary of being pulverised but I wouldn't mind now. Here's to loved ones!

(EVA. And BERTHA) - I Loved ones!

MAY. Love!

EVA. Yes. Love.

MAY. You talk about love?

EVA. Yes!

MAY. It's all so sordid. So bestial!

EVA. Don't you say that!

MAY. I shall. I shall. I don't care what you think of me for it. I don't. Oh no . . . not you, Eva. I don't mean you. I envy you. You just sail right through it. It doesn't seem to affect you-

EVA. What doesn't?

MAY. This mean, dirty foul-mouthed place.

SARAH. I see. . .

MAY. Where's love round here? Men round here . . . ignorant, stoney-faced callous oafs, sitting in the best chair waiting to be fed, like overgrown babies. Big fat cuckoos in the nest. I'll tell you what love is to them.

EVA. Some are different.

MAY. Some? Yes, there's the silly and stupid side of it. You so hope there's someone who'll rise above it that you're ready to deceive yourself over fools . . . thinking other people are what they're not and never will be. There's just everything to be done before you can even think of love. Oh God I'm drunk. I'm drunk! Drunk! I shall put this aside, Sarah, thank you very much . . . and I shall go to bed. Goodnight, goodnight, goodnight.

*She goes.*

SARAH. You'll have to do something. You'll have to part.

BERTHA. I feel a bit sick.

SARAH (to BERTHA): Come on. Fresh air. (To EVA:) You'd be very well liked round here if it wasn't for that one. D' you know? Move out. Don't tell her. Just move out.

EVA. I can't. Not just yet anyway.

SARAH. Oh not that bloody Tipperary concert. Don't show up.

EVA. I must. If I didn't . . . I don't know what she'd do.

*Blackout as they go.*