

## Tom and May. Act 1 Scene 6

TOM. Just a few lines sir.

RIVERS. I trust she's in health?

TOM. Oh yes sir.

RIVERS. Now guard. What can you hear?

TOM Nothing sir . . .

.RIVERS. You can hear men sleeping. Seven hundred men kipping like babies . . . deep in the land of nod . . . all tucked up in their pits . . . and each and every one of those men is depending on your eyes and ears. That's what soldiering's about . . . comradeship. So that some night when you've got your head down you know that there's a man out there who'll look out for you, no matter what. That's where we're different from civy street. No one can divide us from each other. What dismays an enemy is the knowledge that every man he faces on the other side is loyal and attentive to his fellow at all times . . . not because he's ordered to be so . . . but out of the love he bears his brother in arms. Guard! Guard attention! Guard . . . stand at ease! Guard carry on.

As RIVERS goes and TQM stands guard a light begins to grow around the table In MAY's kitchen. Gradually TOM becomes aware of it.

### Scene Six

*TOM moves slowly towards the table. He looses off his equipment and places it on a chair with his rifle. He hangs up his greatcoat and, removing his tunic, places it over the back of a chair. All the time he is listening as a man does in a sleeping house. He sits at the table. From above we hear EYA and R ALPH . . . muffled laughter followed by EVA shushing R.ALPH . . . then RALPH murmuring: My love. Oh my love!*

MAY enters with a lamp. She is in her nightdress with a coat over it.

MAY. Can't you sleep?

TOM. I just thought I'd sit in the kitchen . . .

*She looks up at the ceiling, nervously, then sits at the table. Another burst of laughter from upstairs.*

MAY. Whatever shall I do? I shouldn't have let them, should I? I said to him: Ralph it's eleven o'clock. He says: Right, I'm going and then trots off up the stairs! Oooh, he's got some face! I haven't shut my eyes. But it's funny too . . .

TOM. What makes you laugh?

MAY. That leg of the bed you mended. It's never been right. I kept thinking: It'll come off! It'll have them over! (Pause.) All these months she's been like a sister to me. I can refuse her nothing . . . nothing at all. Yet it is wrong of them. I always thought there was more to her than there seemed to be when she first came. She's so 'open' . . . no, I don't mean 'open' . . . so 'level'. She'll sit where you are of an evening and I'll find myself doing all the talking. And she'll smile and she'll listen and she'll comment . . . sensibly . . . and all the time she's being exactly herself . . . never putting on, or saying things for effect. (Listens.) Here . . . are they asleep?

TOM. Aye. I think so. In the arms of Morpheus.

MAY. Morpheus? Is that what it is? Well I hope they are for old Mrs Big Ears next door can put a cup to the wall and catch everything.

*She gets up, uncertainly, then goes into the scullery and returns with some flowers and wire.*

Shouldn't you try and get some sleep?

TOM. In a bit. What are those?

MAY. Nosegays. I've had an order for a wedding. Buttonholes and corsage. It's years since I did any.

TOM. Whose wedding?

MAY. Oh, not round here. Mrs Dickenson's niece is marrying an officer from the King's Own Liverpools.

TOM. I must pay you something, May.

MAY. What for?

TOM. Staying here.

MAY. Don't insult me. Your money should go to Salford to your aunt . . . who must wonder why you spend your leave here and not there.

TOM. She gets my allowance. Hardly spend a bean at camp. You don't need to. That's the great thing about the army. You don't need money. Everything's found. It's an exchange. It's really opened my eyes. I mean it proves it . . .

MAY. Proves what?

TOM. That money's not needed. It's not necessary. Not really. People think it is because they're too boneheaded to see. . . that it isn't. It gets in the way!

MAY. Don't raise your voice!

TOM. It's a free exchange of skills . . . of produce of hand or brain. That's what's needed. Not money. (Indicates flowers.) The skill you put into that. . . to exchange it freely for that which you need in return.

MAY. And what do I need?

*TOM Is stopped by this.*

Dreamer.

He reaches for a nosegay. M A Y is on edge and starts as he comes close.

TOM. I should have picked you some in Staffordshire.

MAY. I always think of it as Black Country.

TOM. No . . . not Penkrige. It's a picture. There's a lake. I've tried to do it water colour, but there's a real knack in getting reflections. I should get oils.

MAY. How much do oils cost?

*TOM suddenly takes her hand awkwardly.*

N o . . . n o . . .

TOM. They're up there.

MAY. I know they're up there. Girls used to be taught to show restraint. To be 'spiritual'. Now they say 'What use is it thinking like that anymore?

TOM. Then what use is it?

MAY. I must go upstairs and you should try to get some sleep in the parlour.

*She goes to the bedroom door. She pauses.*

Tom . . . would you do a sketch of me?

TOM. Now?

MAY. No, not now. While you're here. You've sketched Eva . . . but you've never done a likeness of me, have you?

TOM (bitterly): How d'you want it?

MAY. What d'you mean?

TOM. 'Spiritual'?

MAY. I said it was how we were taught.

TOM. As the Lady of the Lake . . . or the Angel of Mons?

MAY. Oh Tom! Do you think me so silly?

MAY comes to him. He clings to her.

TOM. I can't draw spirit. . . I can only draw your face . . . and y o u r b o d y . . .

MAY. If I'd only known you now! If I'd only known you as you are now. Why did you have to come here as a boy?

*She takes his arms from her and goes off.*

*TOM remains as lights fade.*