

WHAT DID YOU DO IN THE WAR, MUM?

by

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(A play based on the recorded memories of London Pensioners)

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THE CAST ENTER, SINGING AND CARRYING AN ASSORTMENT OF CLEANING AND COOKING UTENSILS WHICH THEY USE AS INSTRUMENTS: EMPLOYERS CARRY A TRAY AND A SAUCEPAN, HELEN HAS A BUCKET..

SONG
We're gonna hang out the washing on the Siegfried Line.
Have you any dirty washing, mother dear?
We're gonna hang out the washing on the Siegfried Line,
Cos the washing day is here.

Whether the weather be wet or fine,
We'll just rub along without a care.
We're gonna hang out the washing on the Siegfried Line,
If the Siegfried Line's still there.

HELEN
Before the war, there weren't many jobs for women

EMPLOYER
Wanted - woman for cleaning.

HELEN VOLUNTEERS. EMPLOYER HANDS HELEN A SCRUBBING BRUSH.

HELEN
We had to learn to scrub. I used to go round the houses with a bucket of water and clean their steps: whole flight of steps for tuppence.

HELEN STARTS SCRUBBING.

EMPLOYER
Wanted - a good plain cook - live and sleep in.

RUTH VOLUNTEERS. EMPLOYER HANDS RUTH A SAUCEPAN.

RUTH
We were brought up to go into service. My first job was service.

RUTH STARTS STIRRING THE SAUCEPAN.

EMPLOYER
Wanted at once - six waitresses.

JEAN VOLUNTEERS. EMPLOYER HANDS JEAN A TRAY.

JEAN
We never had no picking and choosing when we left school. I wouldn't have chosen to stay on at school though. I never liked school.

EMPLOYER
Young lady shop assistant wanted for bakers, twenty-six shillings a week and tea.

EMPLOYER
Wanted - young lady as barmaid.

EMPLOYER
Cutter required - young lady for infants' garments.

EMPLOYER
Copy typists and girl clerks required.

EMPLOYER
Nearly 80% of all women in work were single.

EMPLOYER The girl of fourteen tends to drift into the most remunerative employment immediately available, keeping the alternative of marriage always in view.

RUTH CHANGES COSTUME INTO MAN AND OFFERS RING. JEAN ACCEPTS IT. WEDDING MARCH BEHIND. JEAN LINKS WITH HUSBAND.

JEAN Before the war married women weren't allowed to work there.

EMPLOYER You wouldn't employ married women because of the break in having children.

EMPLOYER TAKES BACK TRAY AND APRON.

JEAN Once you got married, you had to leave. So when I got married, I left.

HELEN Anyway, it was considered beyond the pale for married women to be so hard up that their husbands couldn't keep them.

HUSBAND The day you go out to work, I'll pack up. If I couldn't afford to keep you, then I shouldn't have married you. The husband goes to work and earns the money. The wife stays at home and has the children.

SONG Home, home, sweet, sweet home,
 There's no place like home.
 There's no place like home.

HELEN And housework's a full-time occupation.

HELEN HANDS JEAN THE BUCKET, ETC. JEAN FOLLOWS HELEN'S INSTRUCTIONS, WORKING AT TOP SPEED.

HELEN A lot of people only had outside water. In a corner of the scullery you'd have a copper. You'd light a fire under it, then you'd bucket the water into the copper to heat up and then bucket it out again into the tin bath. You'd do your washing on a scrubbing board. You'd start washing at half-past-six in the morning and finish at five that night. The next day you'd spend starching and ironing. You had a flat iron that you heated on the range. Every bit of carpet you swept by hand - you had to give it seven brushes, each part. You used to have to get on your knees and clean the flues, and do the black-leading.

JEAN We had to go shopping practically every day. Our pantry was out in the garden, a meat safe, with a wire front. We kept it on a stone. You couldn't keep stuff fresh for more than a day.

HELEN You had to cook on the old-fashioned range. And we had large families before the war - a lot of children to look after.

SONG 'Mid pleasures and palaces, though we may roam,
Be it never so humble, there's no place like home.
A charm from the skies seems to hallow us there,
Which, seek through the world, is ne'er met with elsewhere.

Home, home, sweet, sweet home.
There's no place like home.
There's no place like home.

JEAN We knew there was going to be a war and my husband was called
up, rushed off.

HUSBAND I'm going abroad.

JEAN Abroad!

HELEN After upsetting everybody, it turned out he was only going to
the docks at Cardiff.

JEAN HUGS HER HUSBAND AND THEN WAVES HIM OFF.

HELEN The Government ordered the evacuation of schoolchildren from
London. I had to let my two sons go. One was six and one
was twelve.

HELEN WAVES THEM OFF.

HELEN I looked up and saw their smiling faces, in an open-topped
bus, with their tickets on, with all the other evacuees. I
had new suits on the two boys and I'd made them look smart.
I didn't hear for days afterwards, and I was so upset.

JEAN & HELEN ALONE Home, home, sweet, sweet home.
There's no place like home.
There's no place like home.

A SIREN SOUNDS. JEAN & HELEN JUMP UP, FRIGHTENED.

JEAN That Sunday morning, the sirens went, and people went mad and
all rushed for their gas masks, all rushed down the shelters
and waited. Come on, Mum!

HELEN I don't care. I'm going to get my Sunday joint cooked, war
or no war.

JEAN And she did.

HELEN Of course, nothing happened.

THE ALL CLEAR SOUNDS. RUTH RETURNS.

JEAN It was a false alarm. As for the bombing, that didn't start
for quite a long time after. Nothing seemed to happen. It
was called the "phoney war."

OFFICIALS ENTER AND DISTRIBUTE FORMS.

OFFICIAL Every household will receive a form. Householders must fill in this form on a given night stating who is living there and whether they are living there temporarily or permanently.

THE WOMEN BRING THEIR FORMS BACK TO THEM INDIVIDUALLY.

RUTH I had a problem with this temporary or permanent business.

OFFICIAL (TO RUTH) Well, permanent means "intending to remain there indefinitely."

RUTH I know what it means. It's my mother-in-law. She's just moved in with us. She thinks she's moved in permanent. But I think she's only moved in temporary.

HELEN My two boys were evacuated and the people where they went thought they was there indefinite, but I missed 'em. So I had 'em back. So they were permanent there, but now they're permanent here.

JEAN My husband filled this in.

OFFICIAL But I see your husband's in the army.

JEAN He did it when he was home on leave.

OFFICIAL Then he shouldn't be down as permanent.

JEAN He'd better be permanent, or I'll have something to say about it!

OFFICIAL A rather difficult job!

OFFICIALS DISTRIBUTE REGISTRATION CARDS.

OFFICIAL Registration cards were issued from these records, and then, on the same register, ration books were issued.

OFFICIALS DISTRIBUTE RATION BOOKS.

HELEN Rationing was terrible.

OFFICIAL Nearly half our food comes across the sea. The U-boats attack our ships. Now, here is your part in the fight for Victory. When a particular food is not available, cheerfully accept something else - home-produced if possible.

OFFICIALS DISTRIBUTE RECIPE LEAFLETS.

HELEN I used to make my kids bananas out of parsnips. I used to boil them and put this banana essence in them. My kids used to think they had bananas. We did a lot of things like that.

SONG Yes, we have no bananas.
 We have no bananas today
 We've broad beans and bunions,
 Cabbages and onions,
 And all sorts of fruits and, say!
 We have nice juicy tomatoes,
 And old-fashioned potatoes.
 But, yes, we have no bananas.
 We have no bananas today.

OFFICIAL Keep loyally to the rationing regulations. Above all -
 whether you are shopping, cooking, or eating - remember, FOOD
 IS A MUNITION OF WAR, DON'T WASTE IT!

JEAN If you had meat one week, you couldn't have it the next, cos
 you wouldn't have enough coupons, and you could only have one
 egg on the book. We used to have to make cakes without eggs.

SONG Hey, little hen, when, when, when
 Will you lay me an egg for my tea?

OFFICIAL Imitation Eggs: Make a batter. Cut a tomato in two and put
 it into the batter. Lift each half out with a spoon, keeping
 the round side up, and put it into hot fat. The tomato
 shines through, looking like the yolk of an egg. If cooked
 in bacon fat you can almost imagine that you have the bacon as
 well.

SONG Hey, little hen, when, when, when
 Will you lay me an egg for my tea?

OFFICIAL Four Fruit Jam: Wash and peel four ounces of cooked beetroot
 and carrot. Chop finely. Add strawberry jelly and
 blackcurrant jelly. Leave to set. Eat within three days.

OFFICIAL Shoot Straight Lady! You've got a fighting job on hand, too.
 These are significant days, and anyone - man, woman, or child
 - who is less than fighting fit is a pull-back on the total
 war effort. FOOD IS YOUR MUNITION OF WAR!

JEAN You had to queue up everywhere.

RUTH We didn't have time for nothing. We were too busy queueing
 up for food - when they'd got some in.

 RUTH AND JEAN COME FROM DIFFERENT DIRECTIONS AND MEET.

RUTH Hello. How you doing?

JEAN All right, ta. How's yourself?

 ANOTHER WOMAN PASSES, SEES THEM TOGETHER AND STOPS IN HER
 TRACKS.

RUTH Could be worse. Heard from your Charlie?

JEAN Yes, I have. He's finished his basic training now and he's being posted.

 THE WOMAN ASSUMES IT'S A QUEUE AND TAGS ON BEHIND.

RUTH Oh! Where to?

 JEAN SILENTLY INDICATES THE OTHER WOMAN.

RUTH Shouldn't have asked, should I? "Walls have ears."

JEAN (TO WOMAN) What you doing here anyway?

WOMAN Same as you, of course, queueing up.

 HELEN JOINS ON THE END.

HELEN What we queueing for?

RUTH If you saw a queue, you joined it, and found out what it was for later.

OFFICIAL In wartime, production must be for war and not for peace.

OFFICIAL Saucepans become - steel helmets.

 JEAN LAUGHS AND PUTS THE SAUCEPAN ON HER HEAD. THE OFFICIAL TAKES IT FROM HER.

OFFICIAL Women wanted for railway jobs: ticket collectors...

 HELEN SHAKES HER HEAD.

OFFICIAL ...girl guards...

 HELEN SHAKES HER HEAD.

OFFICIAL ...and cleaning out railway carriages.

HELEN Oh I could do that!

 OFFICIAL PASSES DUNGAREES AND BUCKET.

HELEN It was difficult fitting the hours in round looking after the boys, but it was good money because we had danger money.

OFFICIAL Women wanted as bus conductresses.

RUTH I could do that.

HELEN Oh, no, that's really hard going. You have to get up at 4.30 in the morning and go to work in the dark.

RUTH SHAKES HER HEAD.

OFFICIAL Women wanted for post office work.

RUTH (NODS) You went to "school" in the post office. You had to learn each district in London.

OFFICIAL HANDS RUTH A POST OFFICE HAT OR MAIL BAG.

OFFICIAL After their training these women become very fast and accurate sorters.

OFFICIAL Women wanted for sewing work.

JEAN I've done some dressmaking.

OFFICIAL HANDS A GIANT NEEDLE.

JEAN They had me making made sand bags! Then there was chin-straps for soldiers - a shilling for twelve of them. Then khaki belts with great big buckles. It was hard work and whenever my husband was on leave, I used to take time off. I got the sack from there because I took too much time off.

SONG Underneath the lantern by the barrack gate,
Darling, I remember the way you used to wait.
'Twas there that you whispered tenderly
That you loved me, you'd always be
My Lilli of the Lamplight,
My own Lilli Marlene.

JEAN One night, Charlie come in and said he was going abroad. He was sent off to Gibraltar.

SONG Orders came for sailing somewhere over there.
All confined to barracks was more than I could bear.
I knew you were waiting in the street,
I heard your feet, but could not meet.
My Lilli of the Lamplight,
My own Lilli Marlene.

HUSBAND GOES.

OFFICER Serve in the WAAF with the Men Who Fly!

JEAN I'd like to join the forces.

HUSBAND RETURNS BRIEFLY.

HUSBAND No! One of us is enough. And I'd never know where you were.

OFFICER Join the WRENS and Free a Man to Join the Fleet!

JEAN My mum didn't want me to go either.

HELEN Your husband's in it. Your brothers are in it. And you're the girl. You should be at home with me.

OFFICER Join the ATS!

JEAN I really desperately wanted to go in one of the services.

HELEN Well, you can't join the forces in your condition.

JEAN What condition?

HELEN What condition! Just look at you! I'll book you in at the clinic to see the doctor.

HELEN LEADS JEAN OFF. IRIS COMES ON.

OFFICER Join the WRENS! Join the ATS!

IRIS I wanted to do something useful. And I wanted to do something before they asked me to do something.

OFFICER Serve in the WAAF!

IRIS My brother was already in the Air Force, but mother wouldn't let me go.

MOTHER I need you at home. I'd be worried about you.

IRIS (TO AUDIENCE) She wouldn't. She always thought a lot more of my sister than she did of me.

MOTHER Anyway, you're not to go.

IRIS Well... I was above the age. I was twenty. (PAUSE: DECISION) I told her a lie. (TO MOTHER) Mother, I'm going to Haywards Heath for the day.

MOTHER What on earth for?

IRIS I caught the train to London and went to Adastral House.

MOTHER GOES. OFFICER COMES FORWARD.

OFFICER Yes, your medical was quite satisfactory. You're A.1.

IRIS You had to be A.1 to get into the WAAF's.

OFFICER Now... the only jobs that are open at the moment are cooks and waitresses.

IRIS Cooks and waitresses?! No. Thank you very much, but I don't want to be either a cook or a waitress.

OFFICER Oh, not good enough for you, isn't it!

IRIS I've got a trade, so I'll wait until you've got some other vacancies.

OFFICER And just what qualifications do you think you've got?

IRIS I'm a G.P.O. trained telephonist.

OFFICER A telephonist? (IRIS NODS) And properly trained? (IRIS NODS) By the G.P.O.? (IRIS NODS) Ah, well, in that case... The fact is we're desperate for signals people. You're in. Go back home and you'll be hearing from us within days.

OFFICER GOES. IRIS JUBILANT.

IRIS Well, that was on a Wednesday. I still said nothing to my mother.

MOTHER RETURNS.

MOTHER Have a good time in Haywards Heath?

IRIS I didn't like deceiving her. But I've always been a bit of a rebel anyway. My sister was a goody-goody and I was the rebel. So, next morning, the Thursday, the village postmaster knocked at the door with the post and there was this telegram.

THE OFFICER HANDS A TELEGRAM TO MOTHER.

MOTHER It's a telegram! It's your brother, Leslie! I know it is. His plane's crashed! He's been killed!

IRIS TAKES THE TELEGRAM FROM HER.

IRIS No. Look, it's addressed to me. It's for me.

MOTHER Why would they send a telegram to you? What do you want with telegrams?

IRIS (OPENING IT) I've been accepted into the WAAF.

MOTHER Accepted? What do you mean?

IRIS PASSES THE TELEGRAM OVER.

MOTHER (READING) "Report to Adastral House on Monday..." But how can you be accepted if you haven't applied?

IRIS I have applied. I've had my medical and I've been accepted.

MOTHER Behind my back!

IRIS It's no good, mother. I've made up my mind. I'm going and you can't stop me. I've got to get ready.

IRIS FETCHES A SMALL BAG.

IRIS I had to bring (SHE CONSULTS THE TELEGRAM) a toothbrush ...and that was all! Once we got there we'd be given a uniform. Oh, and we had to take the telegram as proof.

IRIS TAKES THE TELEGRAM BACK FROM HER MOTHER.

IRIS And our birth certificate.

MOTHER GIVES HER THE CERTIFICATE, STONEY FACED.

IRIS And some other means of identification. Mother, do you think a library ticket will do?

MOTHER BURSTS INTO TEARS.

IRIS Once she knew I was really going - of course, she cried her eyes out. We had a tearful farewell.

MOTHER HUGS HER, SOBBING LOUDLY.

IRIS (OVER HER MOTHER'S BACK) She broke down, and she made me cry too. But I didn't let her see me. Come on, mother, cheer up.

SONG Wish me luck as you wave me goodbye,
Cheerio, here I go, on my way.
Wish me luck as you wave me goodbye,
With a cheer, not a tear, make it gay.
Give me a smile, I can keep all the while,
In my heart while I'm away.
Till we meet once again, you and I,
Wish me luck as you wave me goodbye.

IRIS I didn't know what I was going into. All I knew was I had to report to London. And there was this great big truck - like a furniture van, only open at the back.

OFFICER In there!

PAT AND MARGARET JOIN HER AND THEY ALL CLIMB IN.

IRIS It had two benches in it, and we just sat on these benches.

THEY SIT IN A ROW AND SWAY ABOUT.

IRIS We rattled along. In fact we nearly fell out once or twice. We had to hold on for grim death going round corners.

THEY SWAY ABOUT VIOLENTLY.

IRIS They're eager to get us there. How did you come to join?

MARGARET My brother's in the RAF. I suppose I was a bit jealous really. And I wasn't very happy at home. My father's very strict.

PAT I came to join up with another couple of girls. Then one changed her mind about joining at all, and one went in the army. But I decided on the WAAF.

IRIS Why the WAAF?

PAT I think it'll be more fun. And I fancy the blue.

MARGARET Yes, I like the WAAF uniform better. I don't like the colour of the ATS uniform at all.

PAT I didn't mean the uniform, love, when I said I fancy the blue. I mean the men. There's something about air force boys. "Serve in the WAAF with the men who fly!"

MARGARET (STARTING TO SNIFF) I didn't have to volunteer, you know. I could have been reserved. I was working in the food industry. I didn't have to come.

MARGARET STARTS TO CRY.

PAT Oh, boy!

IRIS Shove over and let me sit next to her.

PAT SWAYS TO HER FEET AND MOVES OVER. IRIS SQUEEZES PAST TO PUT HER ARM ROUND MARGARET AND GIVES HER A HANKIE.

IRIS Go on, have a good cry. That's what I feel like as well.

MARGARET I wish I hadn't come. I want to go home.

IRIS You said you weren't very happy at home.

MARGARET No, I wasn't. I've always been so shy at home, bad at mixing. I thought I'd be better in the services. Do you think they'll let me go home?

PAT You can't change your mind like that the minute you've volunteered for something.

IRIS Well...what would our mothers think if they could see us now!

MARGARET CRIES EVEN MORE. MARGARET COMFORTS HER AGAIN.

PAT Where are we going, anyway? Anybody know?

IRIS We were in that lorry six or seven hours. When we left London it was broad daylight and when we arrived it was as black as the ace of spades, right out in the country.

THEY ALL CLIMB OUT AND ARE MET BY THE SERGEANT.

SERGEANT Welcome to Innsworth Court.

PAT Where's that?

SERGEANT Gloucester. Right. Fall in everybody. Left, right. Left, right.

MARGARET GETS CONFUSED.

SERGEANT Oh dear, we always get one, don't we? Don't you know your left from your right, young lady? This is your left. What is it?

MARGARET (NEAR TO TEARS AGAIN) Left.

SERGEANT And what's this one?

MARGARET Right.

SERGEANT Well now, we start with our left. And then we follow on with our right. Right? Now, at the double, when I give the word - over to the clothing store. Left, right. Left, right.

THE GIRLS RUN ROUND THE STAGE UNTIL SHE STOPS THEM.

SERGEANT And... halt! Now, I'm not going to say this twice, so listen very hard. You'll be issued with two sets of uniform. They're both exactly the same - but you will wear one every day and keep one for best. And what's best? Best is for parades. Right.

THEY ALL NOD FRANTICALLY. SHE ISSUES CLOTHING.

SERGEANT Skirts - two. Tunics - two. Shirts - four. Shoes - two pairs. Towels - two. Pyjamas - two pairs. Stockings - grey - four pairs. Knickers - black for everyday wear - three pairs. Knickers - grey silk for best - three pairs.

PAT (TO IRIS, GIGGLING) When do we wear our best knickers then?

IRIS (TO AUDIENCE) Real passion killers they were. We used to call the black ones "blackouts" and the grey ones "twilights"!

SERGEANT All right. Carrying your issue in a manner which will prevent you dropping it all over the place, line up and, on the command... left, right, left, right. To your sleeping quarters.

IRIS It was a nissen hut with a funny old stove in the middle of it and beds down either side.

SERGEANT You will all be on parade at 6.30 a.m. bright and early. I shall expect to see your buttons clean and shining like a row of little stars. I shall expect your shoes to be polished so that I can see my face in them.

THEY START TO PUT ON THEIR UNIFORMS.

SERGEANT I shall expect your uniforms to be kept pressed without a single crease. I shall expect to see your hair two inches above your collar, and not one single hair out of place.

IRIS We had to tie a bootlace round our heads and roll all our hair up into it.

IRIS DOES MARGARET'S HAIR.

SERGEANT I shall come round with a ruler and I shall measure your hair and if it's less than two inches above your collar, you'll be put on a charge.

MARGARET STARTS CRYING AGAIN.

SERGEANT What's this? Snivelling? We don't want any snivelling here. We want everybody here nice and cheerful. We want you all singing. All together now... (SINGS) "You are my sunshine..." You all know it. And when I say I want you singing, I mean I want you singing, or else. You'll sing and you'll be happy or you'll be put on a charge.

THEY ALL SING, QUIETLY AT FIRST, GROWING LOUDER.

SONG You are my sunshine, my only sunshine.
You make me happy when skies are grey.
You'll never know, dear, how much I love you.
Please don't take my sunshine away.

The other night, dear, as I lay dreaming,
I dreamt that you were by my side.
Came disillusion when I awoke, dear,
You were gone and then I cried.

You are my sunshine, my only sunshine.
You make me happy when skies are grey.
You'll never know, dear, how much I love you.
Please don't take my sunshine away.

BY NOW, THEY SHOULD ALL BE DRESSED AND PRESENTABLE.

SERGEANT And... fall in. Left, right. Left, right. Get your legs up higher. Higher. Higher. Left, right. Left, right.

PAT I suppose there's got to be discipline. I suppose we have got to do these things.

IRIS I don't really mind it. I always liked physical exercises at school.

PAT Let's hope there's better things to come.

SERGEANT Left, right. Left, right. And, stand at ease. Now, you will all take the oath of allegiance.

SERGEANT HANDS OUT PAPERS.

SERGEANT Take these in your hands and repeat after me what's written down there. "I swear...

OTHERS I swear...

SERGEANT ...to keep the secrets...

THE OTHERS CONTINUE IN MIME AS IRIS COMES FORWARD TO SPEAK TO THE AUDIENCE.

IRIS It was just like being in court.

SERGEANT ...King and Country.

OTHERS ...King and Country.

SERGEANT And I agree to abide by...

OTHERS And I agree to abide by...

SERGEANT ...the Secrecy Act.

OTHERS ...the Secrecy Act.

MARGARET (TO IRIS) What is the Secrecy Act?

SERGEANT All right. Let's have your signatures here. That's just to show you've said it and you understand what it's all about. You, what is it all about then?

MARGARET Er... secrets?

SERGEANT It's about careless talk. CARELESS TALK COSTS LIVES!

OTHERS CARELESS TALK COSTS LIVES!

SERGEANT SINGS If you've news of our Munitions,

OTHERS SING Keep it dark!

SERGEANT SINGS Ships or planes or troop positions,

OTHERS SING Keep it dark!

SERGEANT SINGS Lives are lost through conversation.
 Here's a tip for the duration,
 When you've private information, keep it dark!

OTHERS SING Keep it dark!

ALL SING If you've news of our munitions, keep it dark!
 Ships or planes or troop positions, keep it dark!
 Lives are lost through conversation.
 Here's a tip for the duration,
 When you've private information, keep it dark!

MARGARET Once I got used to it, I really loved being in the WAAF. You
 found your friends. You found types... and birds of a
 feather stick together. You found your own level.

MARGARET STARTS SINGING AND THE OTHERS JOIN IN.

MARGARET You are my sunshine, my double woodbine,
 My box of matches, my Craven-A.
 You'll never know, dear, how much I love you.
 Please don't take my sunshine away.

BY THE END OF THE SONG, THEY ARE MARCHING VERY SMARTLY.

ALL Left, right. Left, right.

PAT Passing-out parade.

THEY ALL SALUTE SMARTLY AND DISPERSE.

PAT I wanted to do Operations Intelligence - all secrets about
 where the boys were flying to.

SERGEANT No. There's too many wanting to do Operations Intelligence.
 You can be a cook or a waitress.

PAT Isn't there anything else?

SERGEANT You wouldn't want it.

PAT Yes, I would. Anything but a cook or a waitress.

SERGEANT Right then, we'll teach you how to do pay accounts.

SERGEANT BRINGS OUT A BAG OF MONEY. PAT SETS UP A TABLE AND
ARRANGES THE MONEY IN PILES.

IRIS We had pay parade every other Friday. You had your pay book
 and you all had to line up. They'd call out your name just
 like you were in school...

PAT I was the one who called the names. I was petrified when I knew I had to do it. (VERY QUIETLY) ACW 1, Cunningham.

THE SERGEANT GLARES AT HER.

PAT (MUCH LOUDER) ACW 1, Cunningham.

IRIS You walked forward, stopped and saluted.

PAT Number?

IRIS 440547. And then you put your left hand out.

PAT Two guineas.

PAT ISOLATES THE MONEY. THE SERGEANT PASSES IT TO IRIS.

IRIS Two guineas had to last you a fortnight.

MARGARET It wasn't an awful lot. I was always hard up.

PAT Well, it's only spending money. You get your uniform and your lodging and your food.

PAT COUNTS THE MONEY INTO THE BAG. SERGEANT GIVES MARGARET A PILE OF FORMS. SHE SITS AT THE OTHER END OF THE TABLE.

MARGARET I was doing clerical work. It was mostly Servicing Forms for aircraft. Each aircraft had a form and I'd keep them up to date, with the number of hours they'd flown, so they knew exactly how they were for maintenance. I worked more or less office hours. It wasn't very exciting really.

PAT I hadn't got the knack for accounts. I could never get my figures to balance.

MARGARET AND PAT SING.

SONG Why did we have to be A.1 fit?
Why march and drill all day?
Just to sit at a desk and fill in forms,
And add up the airmen's pay?

PAT Anyway, I'd already met my husband and I got married on my first leave. We got married in uniform...

WEDDING BELLS. THE OTHERS FORM AN ARCH WITH THEIR ARMS. MAYBE SOMEBODY GIVES HER A POSY.

PAT Then I discovered I was pregnant. Morning sickness isn't very pleasant in a nissen hut and everybody else knows before you do, more or less.

PAT CLUTCHES HER STOMACH AND HER MOUTH AND THE OTHERS REACT.

PAT They gave me three months sick leave. I felt a bit embarrassed. I'd rather wasted their time what with the training and the kitting out. So, I came out as I went in, still ACW 2, the lowest of the low.

PAT AND MARGARET LEAVE.

IRIS I was posted to Biggin Hill to report to the Signals Officer.

OFFICER Ah, I see you have G.P.O. training.

IRIS Yes, ma'am, I was manually trained at New House Exchange and I've worked in all the London Exchanges.

OFFICER Then you'll be a great asset. We're getting girls here with no training at all.

IRIS Within a month I was a Leading Aircraftswoman - that meant a propellor on your arm and an extra shilling a week. And within another month...

OFFICER Well, Cunningham, the Corporal's been posted to another station. Do you feel capable of taking over the Exchange?

IRIS Yes, ma'am, I do. (TO AUDIENCE) I thought - anything for a laugh.

OFFICER Right, Corporal, go to the stores and draw yourself a pair of tapes.

IRIS They called them tapes, not stripes. So, I was in charge of the Exchange. We had three boards, side by side, though you could couple them together if you wanted.

IRIS SITS AT ONE BOARD WITH A GIRL ON EITHER SIDE. A THIRD GIRL WATCHES WHILE IRIS DEMONSTRATES.

SONG I do my duty every day, I'm a plugger up of calls.
I sit at the board and push my plugs in all the little holes,
Group Captains, Pilots, all come up to hear me speak my mind,
And if I hand wrong numbers out, tis then they start to bind.

IRIS Some of the girls I had to train from the very beginning.

SONG It's "Have you got my number, Miss? For goodness sake, be quick.
It's strictly a priority call." That man I'd like to kick
For having cut off other calls in order to do his bidding,
His opening words are "Hallo, my sweet." I know then he's
been kidding.

IRIS You had to know your junctions and learn all your extensions.
At Biggin Hill, there must have been a couple of hundred
extensions.

IRIS CHANGES PLACES WITH THE WATCHING GIRL BUT SHOWS HER WHERE TO PLUG EVERYTHING.

SONG Then N.C.O's who long ago should have had their discharge papers,
 Come on the line and shout and rave and cut all sorts of capers.
 They seem to think that a couple of tapes gives them the right to bellow
 What they think of me and the G.P.O. to every WAAF and fellow.

IRIS We used to do twelve-hour shifts, eight in the evening till eight in the morning. Being in charge, I wasn't always on the board. I might be sitting behind, watching.

IRIS SITS BEHIND. THE NEW GIRL PAINFULLY FINDS THE CONNECTIONS. EVEN THE OTHER GIRLS ARE HESITANT.

SONG So the next time you pick up the phone and have to wait at all,
 Just think of me, the little WAAF, who plugs in all the holes. Don't think I'm knitting 'comforts' or drinking canteen tea,
 For if you could but see me, I'm as busy as can be.

IRIS We were the first to get the air-raid warnings and we used to have to give out the warning to the fire stations, the police stations, whoever had a siren. We had to warn the hospitals as well. There were about twenty different numbers. The Ops Officer would ring down and ask for me.

ONE OF THE GIRLS RECEIVES A CALL AND HANDS IT TO IRIS.

GIRL It's for you, Corp.

IRIS Corporal Cunningham here, sir.

OFFICER Air-Raid Warning Red.

IRIS Air-Raid Warning Red. Right you are, sir.

THE GIRLS JUMP UP IMMEDIATELY AND IRIS SITS DOWN DRAMATICALLY, COUPLING THE BOARDS TOGETHER.

IRIS The girls used to get out of my way. I used to sit down quick and plug up all the calls by heart, ring them all together to save time - shove all the cords in at once. I used to just put my hand in front and pull the lot back, then push them forward to speak. As soon as all the lights came up, I had to wait for a few seconds to make sure they'd all answered me, then I'd call out - "R.A.F. Biggin Hill. Air-Raid Warning Red! R.A.F. Biggin Hill. Air-Raid Warning Red!"

SIREN NOISES. DARKNESS LIT BY SEARCHLIGHTS.

- JEAN These awful guns started banging... and when we looked out there were things coming from the sky, all lit up. I thought they were men going to land. Everybody in the house, we all ran for a shelter and these lights were coming down wholesale. They were flares. They dropped thousands of flares to light up the dockland before the bombers came over. They flattened all round. It was the Tower Bridge area, Woolwich, Deptford - all those places. Everything was blazing. The sky was blazing all night.
- IRIS Air-Raid Warning Red! Air-Raid Warning Red!
- JEAN I was expecting my baby at the time. I was on a camp bed and the bombs were dropping, and my camp bed top went up and down with a crash, and then the bottom end went up and down. We could hear such screaming from somewhere. We never found out who it was.
- RUTH I was a part-time air-raid warden. I used to work one night on and one night off. You weren't paid. It was a thing you volunteered for. My job was to walk up and down the streets in the blackout looking for any bombs that might be dropped, people in trouble, anything suspicious.
- RUTH SINGS TO HERSELF TO GIVE HERSELF DUTCH COURAGE.
- SONG Air-raid precautions can be fun,
 If we're cheerful - every one.
 Don't be dismal, wear a smile.
 'Twill be quite O.K. in a while.
- RUTH It was a neighbourhood thing really. People knew who their wardens were.
- HELEN COMES RUNNING ON.
- HELEN Ruth, thank goodness I've found you. The baby's started.
- RUTH You had to run back to the bunker and phone Headquarters and they'd send police, ambulance, fire brigade, whatever was needed. And then you had to start to organise things until they got there. (TO HELEN) They're on their way. Now, she can't have the baby in the shelter with the whole street watching. She'll have to have it in the house.
- HELEN We'll put the mattress under the stairs.
- BANCROFT I was a driver with the London Ambulance Service. We were in a garage at the top of Knights Hill. We were on all night waiting for calls, taking ambulances out for people who'd been injured, getting them to hospital as quick as we could. We also had a car for the midwife.
- MIDWIFE There's a baby on its way. Can I have a driver?

BANCROFT I'll come. The men never would go out with her.

MIDWIFE I'm going to report those men. They always make excuses. It's always the women who come out.

NOISE OF GUNS, BOMBS, SHATTERING GLASS, ETC., THROUGHOUT THIS SEQUENCE.

BANCROFT One thing to be said for the blitz - it does take your mind off the blackout.

THE MIDWIFE AND DRIVER ARRIVE AND MEET RUTH.

MIDWIFE (TO DRIVER AND RUTH) I want you two to stay in the hall and then if the bombing becomes very bad or gets any closer, you can help move us into a shelter. So, don't wander off, will you? (TO JEAN) Now, the main concern is to have the baby.

THE MIDWIFE AND HELEN BEND OVER JEAN.

BANCROFT I know what she means about wandering off - the girl who used to be on my van, she was a gold medallist in first aid, and she was always wandering off to do her own thing. One night we had to go up to Crystal Palace - the Crescent there was one blaze of light. It was a furnace, it was terrific. She was so full of zeal, she went off, hunting for people in the ruins. You weren't supposed to do that. I had to take the casualties and go off without her.

A BABY'S CRY.

HELEN The baby arrived - a war-time baby. She was born at five minutes to twelve on the 10th of May, 1941, and that was the worst blitz on London.

THE BLITZ SOUNDS FADE.

SONG Go to sleep, my baby, close your pretty eyes,
Angels up above you, are looking at you, baby, from the skies.
There's a great big moon a-shining, stars begin to peep.
Time for mummy's little darling to go to sleep.

JEAN After the baby was born, I didn't do war work, because I had to look after the baby.

JEAN AND HELEN TAKE THE BABY OFF, BOTH VERY HAPPY.

FRAN In April, 1941, they brought in conscription for single women, between 19 and 30. I thought if I volunteered before I was actually called up, I might get more of a choice. Trouble is with my bad eyesight, they won't accept me into the WAAF's or the WRENS.

COUSIN You don't want to go in the ATS like I did. I hate it, loathe it. It's all marching and saluting every Tom, Dick and Harry.

FRAN No, I can't see myself doing that. I don't take kindly to that sort of thing.

LAND ARMY WOMAN National Service Women's Land Army - Enrol Today!
Lend a Hand on the Land!

FRAN I wonder.

COUSIN If you're not fit enough for the WAAF's, they won't take you on to do heavy farm work, will they?

FRAN Anyway, I went to the Labour Exchange and got the necessary forms and wrote and applied. And I was accepted, near enough straight away. I didn't have to go for a medical or even an interview. After about a month, my gear arrived.

LAND ARMY OFFICIAL HANDS OVER KIT BAG AND LETTER.

LAND ARMY With a letter saying to go to Paddington Station on such a day.

FRAN PEERS INSIDE THE KIT BAG AND GETS OUT A FEW ITEMS.

FRAN There was a pair of heavy army boots, a pair of Wellingtons, a topcoat, a green jumper, some shirts, socks, and some jodhpur type breeches. And denim dungarees. And a pork-pie hat.

It was only top gear. Your underwear, your nightwear, anything else, you had to find the coupons for. The worst thing was getting these clothes. I had to rob Mum of her clothing coupons to get them. And I had to take my own towel, soap and flannel.

I tried my breeches on, and I thought, Good Lord, I'll never work in this lot. In those days women didn't wear trousers. I'd been brought up that it was indecent. It was really strange, because I'd never been away from home or worn trousers in my life.

FRAN PICKS UP THE KIT BAG.

I went to Paddington Station wondering what the heck I'd let myself in for. When I got there, there was a huge crowd of us all going down towards Berkshire. We reported to Land Army Officials.

LAND ARMY (VERY POSH) And what is your name, deah?

FRAN Frances Debbing.

LAND ARMY (LOOKING AT LIST) Ah, yes, Frances Debbing. Yes, Frances, we've been looking for you. We're pairing you off with Maude Wade. Maude, deah, here's Frances now.

MAUDE (VERY COCKNEY) Hallo.

FRAN At the other end, we were put into various cars and dropped off at our billets.

ENTER MRS. BIRD.

LAND ARMY (WITH LIST) Good afternoon. Mrs. Bird? Good. Here are your two Land Army Girls, Mrs. Bird. This is (CHECKS LIST) Frances Debbing and this is... Maude Wade.

FRAN AND MAUDE Hello.

MRS. BIRD NODS BUT SAYS NOTHING.

LAND ARMY Now, Mrs. Bird, here is their first week's board. Fifteen shillings each. (HANDING IT OVER) Now, you will let me know if there are any problems, won't you?

MRS. BIRD Don't you worry, I will.

MRS. BIRD GOES.

LAND ARMY And here are your first week's wages, girls - in advance, you understand. You ought really not to be paid anything at all until you've done a whole week's work, but I don't expect you've thought to bring any money with you. Girls don't. So, your wages are thirty shillings a week, and fifteen shillings has already gone to Mrs. Bird, which leaves fifteen shillings for you.

MAUDE Not much, is it? They get twenty-one shillings in the WAAF and they get free knickers.

LAND ARMY There's nothing to spend it on in the country, anyway.

LAND ARMY OFFICIAL GOES. MRS. BIRD RETURNS WITH TWO PLATES WHICH SHE PLONKS DOWN ON THE TABLE.

BIRD Your meal's ready.

FRAN And I thought, oh, good old-fashioned farmhouse cooking. This'll be good.

BIRD You'd better eat it before it goes cold. It's lamb and potatoes, and the parsnips are out of our own garden.

MRS. BIRD GOES.

FRAN Well, I didn't like parsnips to start with. The lamb was decidedly mutton and very fatty, and the mashed potato was all lumps.

MRS. BIRD RETURNS WITH ANOTHER PLATE AND REMOVES THE FIRST TWO.

BIRD I've made you a special jam tart for pudding.

MRS. BIRD GOES.

MAUDE The jam tart looks all right.

FRAN But it was only a very little jam tart, and it had to last two days.

MRS. BIRD RETURNS.

BIRD I expect you're tired. I'll show you to your room.

SHE LEADS THEM ROUND AND BACK TO THE TABLE WHICH NOW DOUBLES AS A BED. SHE PATS IT.

BIRD You'll be very comfortable. It's a nice big feather bed.

FRAN I was an only child and I'd never slept in a bed with anybody else in my life. It horrified me that I had to sleep with Maude.

MAUDE Come on. I've always had to share a bed - and usually more than two of us. But I've never been in a feather bed before.

MAUDE JUMPS ON TO THE TABLE ENTHUSIASTICALLY AND IS HORRIFIED. FRAN FEELS IT.

FRAN It was the hardest, lumpiest feather bed I'd ever had the misfortune to see.

MAUDE I swear it's never been plumped up in a hundred years.

FRAN It had two large mountains on either side and a huge valley in the middle.

FRAN SITS ON IT GINGERLY AND FALLS OVER TOWARDS THE MIDDLE. SHE JERKS HERSELF BACK TO THE EDGE. SO DOES MAUDE. THEY BOTH FALL INTO THE MIDDLE AGAIN.

FRAN It didn't matter what you did, you couldn't get away from each other.

MAUDE GIVES UP AND SETTLES DOWN HAPPILY IN THE MIDDLE.

MAUDE At least we'll be warm.

FRAN JERKS HERSELF BACK TO THE EDGE BUT THEN ROLLS OVER. SHE FALLS ASLEEP. A COCK CROWS. FRAN WAKES UP AND GAZES IN HORROR AT MAUDE. SHE SLIDES BACK FROM MAUDE.

FRAN The next morning revealed a further horror. I woke up and my nose was rubbing Maude's hair, and she was alive with nits. Her hair was absolutely white with them.

FRAN GETS UP.

MAUDE (YAWNING) It's not time to get up already is it?

FRAN I had to tell her.

MAUDE What you got up for?

FRAN I'm sorry, Maude, but... do you realise... that you've got nits?

MAUDE (SITTING UP THRILLED) Ooooh, have I? Ooooh, fancy that!

FRAN I can't sleep with you like that. You'll have to do something about them.

MAUDE (ABASHED) Oh. Well... What can I do?

FRAN Luckily, I used to be a hairdresser, so I knew what to do. Tonight, when we finish work, we'll go into town and get something. All right?

MAUDE Yes. All right.

MRS. BIRD ENTERS WITH TWO DISHES TO PUT ON THE TABLE.

BIRD Here's your breakfast. It's porridge. Give you a good start to the day.

MRS. BIRD GOES.

FRAN Well, she called it porridge. It was oats boiled in water, but she didn't get the lumps out. You had a plate of grey nasty water with lumps in it.

MRS. BIRD COMES BACK.

MAUDE Can we have some milk on our porridge?

BIRD The milk's for your tea.

MAUDE Well, can we have some sugar for it?

BIRD Sugar's rationed.

MAUDE Can we have some toast then?

BIRD The bread's for your sandwiches.

FRAN There were four slices of bread, very thinly cut. And she wafted a knife over the margarine and then wafted that over one piece of bread. And then, she wafted the knife over some fish paste and wafted that over the other piece of bread. And she slapped a lettuce leaf in the middle.

BIRD The lettuce is from our own garden. You'd better hurry. He's picking you up at seven.

FRAN Who is?

BIRD Your boss. You're on threshing.

FRAN Which farm are we working at?

BIRD Whichever farm wants you. The threshing machine goes round to different farms. Contract work.

MRS. BIRD GOES.

FRAN The boss came at seven in a battered old car.

BOSS COMES IN, WRAPPED IN FILTHY CLOTHES.

BOSS Get in the bloody back.

THEY CREATE A CAR OUT OF THE TWO CHAIRS AND GET IN BEHIND HIM. FRAN HOLDS HER NOSE.

FRAN He must never wash.

MAUDE You could plant onions behind his ears.

FRAN And potatoes between his fingers. (TO BOSS) Is it far, Mr... er...?

BOSS Too bloody far.

FRAN It was quite a way. Twenty minutes drive. But he was allowed petrol to fetch us because it was war work.

THEY GET OUT. BOSS INDICATES THE TABLE.

BOSS Threshing machine.

FRAN It was like a council dustcart.

THEY STAND STARING AT IT. THE BOSS WALKS ROUND THEM, INSPECTING THEM AS HE WOULD ANIMALS - MAYBE A PROD. HE CHOOSES FRAN.

BOSS Aaah. You'll do. Get up there.

FRAN On top of that?

BOSS Bloody get up.

BOSS GOES OFF TO FETCH THINGS. FRAN STRUGGLES TO CLIMB UP.
BOSS RETURNS AND SMACKS HER BOTTOM OR HELPS HER UP
SUGGESTIVELY IN SOME WAY. HE THROWS UP A SHEAF THEN CLIMBS
UP HIMSELF. BOSS THEN STRUGGLES PAST HER (LOSING NO
OPPORTUNITIES) ON TO A NARROW SECTION.

BOSS Stand here, see?

FRAN On that bit? It's not very wide.

BOSS BRINGS OUT A WICKED-LOOKING KNIFE.

BOSS Knife.

FRAN (TERRIFIED OF WHAT HE MIGHT DO) Ye..es.

BOSS LIFTS UP THE SHEAF WHICH IS TIED WITH TWINE.

BOSS Twine.

FRAN Yes.

BOSS Use knife. Cut twine. Into drum.

BOSS MIMES CUTTING THE TWINE AND THROWING THE SHEAF DOWN.

FRAN It looks very dangerous - with all that machinery underneath.

BOSS LAUGHS. HE SIGNALS THAT THEY SHOULD CHANGE PLACES.

FRAN Shouldn't there be a guard up? What happens if I fall in?

BOSS LAUGHS AGAIN AND DRAWS THE KNIFE ACROSS HIS THROAT BEFORE
HANDING IT TO HER. HE CLIMBS DOWN.

BOSS (TO MAUDE) You. Rake the chaff out the bottom.

BOSS HANDS MAUDE A RAKE AND PRESSES A LEVER. THE MACHINE
STARTS TO HUM. HE THROWS A SHEAF UP TO FRAN.

BOSS Catch.

FRAN CATCHES IT OFF BALANCE AND NEARLY SLIPS. SHE SCREAMS.
BOSS LAUGHS.

BOSS (TO FRAN) Cut that twine. (TO MAUDE) Get raking.

MAUDE RAKES. FRAN STRUGGLES TO CUT THE TWINE.

BOSS Get it in!

FRAN STRUGGLES WITH THE SHEAF. THE HUM CHANGES TO A WHINE.

BOSS Hear that whine! Bloody get it in.

FRAN THROWS THE SHEAF DOWN. THE WHINE CHANGES BACK TO THE HUM. BOSS THROWS ANOTHER SHEAF. FRAN CATCHES IT BETTER BUT CAN'T CUT IT.

BOSS Buggar me! Cut it! Get it in!

FRAN I can't cut it.

THE HUM CHANGES BACK TO THE WHINE.

BOSS You're wasting time.

FRAN I CAN'T CUT IT!

BOSS Buggaring about! You're losing me money!

SHE CUTS IT AND DROPS IT IN. WHINE BACK TO HUM. HE THROWS ANOTHER. MAUDE STEPS BACK.

BOSS Keep raking. You'll clog it up.

MAUDE Can you show me where the lavatory is please?

BOSS Lavatory? Out here!

MAUDE Please? Where do I go?

BOSS You bloody don't! You keep raking.

THIS NOW TURNS INTO AN UNREAL NIGHTMARE SEQUENCE. THE HUM AND THE WHINE ALTERNATE AND THE ACTORS MOVEMENTS BECOME MECHANICAL AND SPEEDED UP.

BOSS Catch.

FRAN Catch the sheaf. Heavy. Arms ache.

BOSS Cut.

FRAN Cut the twine. Hands cold. Knife slips.

BOSS Stop that whine.

FRAN Cut the twine. Stop the whine. Losing time.

BOSS In the drum.

FRAN In the drum. Make it hum. Don't slip.

BOSS Catch.

FRAN Arms ache. Back aches. Feet slip.

BOSS Cut.

FRAN Cut the twine. Hands cold. Knife slips. Feet slip.

BOSS In the drum.

FRAN In the drum. Barley, not me. Don't fall in. You'll lose
an arm. You'll lose a leg. Don't slip.

BOSS Catch.

FRAN Straw sticks in hair. Dust gets in eyes. Barley spikes in
skin. Bladder going to burst. Arms ache. Back aches.
Eyes sting. Feet slip. I MUST NOT SLIP!

BOSS TURNS THE ENGINE OFF.

BOSS All right. Dinner. You, go behind bloody hedge.

MAUDE SCUTTLES OFF WHILE FRAN CLIMBS DOWN. BOSS WATCHES
MAUDE PERFORM.

FRAN It's a filthy job. Where can we wash our hands?

BOSS Bloody hell! Townies!

BOSS GOES.

FRAN We started at 7.30 every day. We had half-an-hour's break
for dinner. No other stops. And then we went on until it
was dark. We were literally black when we got home.
(CALLING) Mrs. Bird! Can we have a bath, please?

MRS. BIRD COMES ON.

BIRD You can have a wash down in the kitchen sink. We don't have
bathrooms in Berkshire.

MAUDE RETURNS.

MAUDE I'm that tired, I can't stand up.

BOSS RETURNS AND STANDS WATCHING THEM.

FRAN We worked for that man for about a week and a half. We never
did find out what his name was. He was just Boss, and the
man that worked with him and drove the traction engine, he was
just Bosses Mate. Then one day, Boss turned round to Maude
and said:

BOSS Don't want you here no more. You can buggar off.

MAUDE What do you mean, you don't want me?

BOSS I mean, I don't bloody want you! (TO FRAN) But I'll keep you.

FRAN You can't keep just one of us.

BOSS Except I aint fetching you every bloody morning. You can come and live in the caravan with me and my mate.

 BOSS GOES.

FRAN Live in the caravan! It's filthy! And if he thinks I'm going to live in a filthy caravan with two filthy old men!

MAUDE And he can't sack me just like that. What can we do?

FRAN We can go to the Head Office in Reading. We'll refuse to go with him in the morning. We'll go to Reading instead.

SONG Run, rabbit, run, rabbit, run, run, run.
 Run, rabbit, run, rabbit, run, run, run.
 Bang, bang, bang, bang, goes the farmer's gun.
 So, run, rabbit, run, rabbit, run, run, run.

 Run, rabbit, run, rabbit, run, run, run.
 Don't give the farmer his fun, fun, fun.
 He'll get by without his rabbit pie.
 So, run, rabbit, run, rabbit, run, run, run.

 FRAN AND MAUDE ARRIVE AT HEAD OFFICE.

LAND ARMY And what are you two doing here? I've already been informed that you've refused to work this morning. You've been paid for this week, you know. You get a black mark against your names for this sort of behaviour.

MAUDE But he said he didn't want me to work no more. Didn't want me.

LAND ARMY What do you mean, didn't want you? What exactly did he say?

MAUDE He told me to buggar off.

LAND ARMY Really!

FRAN And he says I've got to go and live in his filthy caravan with him and his mate.

LAND ARMY Live in his caravan! Are you sure that's what he said?

MAUDE Yes, that's right. I heard him as well. He wants her in his caravan as his fancy girl. And he don't want me at all.

FRAN I'm not going to live in a caravan with two old men, travelling about the country, not knowing where I'm going. They want me to be their skivvy and goodness knows what else.

LAND ARMY Now calm down. I can't strictly believe what you're telling me. But you'd better go back to your billet and stay there while I investigate the matter. (TO AUDIENCE) Many of these girls know little of the realities of rural life.

LAND ARMY WOMAN GOES.

FRAN They didn't say any more. But Monday morning, there was an official at the door.

LAND ARMY Maude, pack your things. You're coming with me now.

MAUDE GOES.

FRAN I don't know where she went. I never saw her any more.

LAND ARMY And we're sending you to Sevenoaks, to a dairy herd, to be trained as a milker.

LAND ARMY OFFICIAL GOES. TWO LAND ARMY GIRLS COME IN.

FRAN Apparently they were desperate for milkers. There were about a dozen of us in this big house with a senior girl who'd already been trained.

SENIOR GIRL Now. What do you know about cows?

GIRL Not a lot.

SENIOR (SCATHING) I presume you have seen a cow?

GIRL No. Never. You don't see many cows in Deptford. The only cow I've seen was on a Cow and Gate van.

FRAN I don't know one end of a cow from another.

SENIOR I see. Well, the front end of a cow has a head on it, and the back end has a tail.

FRAN AND THE GIRL GET THE GIGGLES.

SENIOR Towards the back end underneath, there are things called udders.

GIRL Udderneath.

SENIOR They look a little bit like this.

SHE HOLDS UP A RUBBER GLOVE. THE GIRLS GIGGLE.

SENIOR Now, milk comes out of udders.

GIRL I always thought it came out of bottles.

SENIOR I'm going to rig this up for you to practise on.

 SHE FASTENS THE RUBBER GLOVE TO THE FRONT OF THE TABLE.

SENIOR You get the general idea, do you? It looks like this and it hangs underneath the cow.

 MORE GIGGLES.

SENIOR These are teats, and you pull on the teats, and, if you're doing it right, milk squirts out and into the bucket. Now, will you bring that bucket over here, and, you, bring that stool. Right, who's going to try first?

FRAN I will.

 THE SENIOR GIRL POURS SOME WATER INTO THE RUBBER GLOVE AND FRAN SITS ON THE STOOL.

SENIOR Off you go. These two first.

FRAN Like this?

SENIOR Yes. A good strong pull. Firm but gentle.

FRAN (LAUGHING WITH DELIGHT) It works!

SENIOR Now, perhaps you'd like a go?

 THE OTHER GIRL TRIES AND IS AMUSED. SHE SQUIRTS WATER AT FRAN AND THEN AT THE SENIOR GIRL. FRAN GRABS ONE OF THE TEATS AND SQUIRTS HER BACK.

SENIOR Stop it, stop it, you silly girls! Stop it!

FRAN Sorry.

SENIOR You just wait till it's a real cow, that's all. You can go to bed now.

GIRL Bed! It's only half-past-eight! Is that cos we've been naughty girls, miss?

SENIOR No. It's because you've got to be up early.

FRAN But I'm used to getting up at six. And I don't usually go to bed before ten.

SENIOR When I say early, I don't mean six o'clock. I mean early. I mean four o'clock.

FRAN We all thought she was joking and we went to bed laughing, but she meant it. Four o'clock next morning we were rooted out of bed and walked a mile to the farm. We had to be at the farm for five o'clock. February, and bitterly cold.

SENIOR For those of you from Deptford, this is a cow. Careful, now, Buttercup. You see: head at the front, tail at the back, udders underneath.

GIRL Coo, it's big, aint it! Can't I start on a calf and work up?

SENIOR The first job is to clean the cows off, scrape all the muck off them. Then you go round with a bucket and a cloth and wash their udders.

GIRL I thought it'd be all delicate and dainty, milking cows, like in nursery rhymes. I didn't think there'd be muck.

SENIOR Right. Here's your cow. You know what to do?

FRAN (NERVOUS) I think so.

SENIOR Then sit down and do it.

FRAN SITS DOWN.

FRAN Well, we were sitting there, pulling away, with no milk at all coming out. After about ten minutes, my wrists got tired and started to ache. After about twenty minutes, I had tears pouring down my face and about a teaspoon of milk in the bucket.

SENIOR Cows are always like that when you're new. They'll be all right in a day or two when they've got used to you.

FRAN And they were.

SONG I'm milking - at last I can actually milk.
It took me some time, but I stuck it.
So now I milk Buttercup, Daisy and Jane,
And I really get froth on the bucket!
I think by next week I shall even milk four.
My word, we are Winning the War!

FRAN After a month's training, I went with another girl to a nice little farm outside Tunbridge Wells. We lived on the farm and we were treated like one of the family. This farmer's wife cooked on an old-fashioned coal range - but, oh, the food she turned out! She was a smashing cook. They kept chickens, so I had an egg for breakfast every day, and her husband had shooting rights, so we'd have pigeon pie.

- SONG I'm feeding the calves and the pigs and the hens,
(Yes, I carefully boil all the swill)
And the cows and the horses, the sheep and the ducks.
Oh, the coupons are tiresome, but still,
The hens go on laying, the pigs are eight score.
My word, we are Winning the War!
- FRAN We did everything on that farm - mucking out, digging
potatoes, dealing with the hay - everything. It was very
varied and very interesting. It was lovely. I spent three
of the happiest years of my life there.
- SONG I'm ploughing, my word I should say I can plough.
The tractor is always my choice.
I have dragged, drilled and harrowed, disc-harrowed and all,
And I sing at the top of my voice,
As I swing round the headland and turn up once more,
My word, we are Winning the War!
- FRAN And, though you could never forget the war, we lived in a
little island of our own, cut off from most things. The
bombing in London, though we were terribly worried about it
and the people who were there - it seemed as if it wasn't
really anything to do with us.
- NOISE OF SIRENS, BOMBS DROPPING, GUNS. FLASHING LIGHTS.
- HELEN When the war first started you'd duck for every little sound.
After a while you got so used to it that in your mind you'd
say... (WHISTLING NOISE) ...that's not near us. You'd hear
the whistle and you'd know it'd gone over. In the end,
people got to the stage where they didn't want to know any
more about shelters. They wanted to live as normal a life as
they could.
- JEAN I remember coming home one night - a crowd of us had been to a
dance hall. It was about one o'clock in the morning - no
buses, no trams - we had to walk - and everything in the way
of a bombardment was being chucked down - bombs (THUD),
incendiaries (CRASH), shrapnel from the Ack-ack guns
(GUNFIRE). We'd all had a bit to drink, and we started
dancing and singing.
- SONG Down the inky avenue, inky, pinky, parlez-vous,
You'll find your way, doing the blackout walk, oi!
- POLICEMAN Oi! Be quiet! You're causing a public nuisance.
- JEAN I thought that was funny, considering the noise going on round
us.
- HELEN By 1943, there was a huge labour shortage and they were doing
all this publicity - a big parade with tanks and armoured
cars, and a mock-up bomb.

LOUDSPEAKER This week's prize goes to a 73-year-old Grannie, the best time-keeper in her section. She's proud to be producing planes for handsome young airmen.

HELEN They were trying to get the older women in to work.

LOUDSPEAKER Every Woman not doing Vital Work is Needed NOW!

JEAN There was girls sitting at their machines on the backs of lorries - filing, riveting and drilling aeroplane parts as they went along. And some other girls from the factory, marching in procession.

LOUDSPEAKER Give Them the Arms and They will Finish the Job!

JEAN It was to get more recruits for the factories...

LOUDSPEAKER Don't Queue with the Shirkers, Join the Women Workers!

JEAN ...to make people want to join.

LOUDSPEAKER Be a real Commando of Industry! Train to strip engines! Learn to use a Micrometer! Train as a Riveter! Repair Spitfires!

JEAN Well, I wasn't getting much money from my husband, from the army...

LOUDSPEAKER It is women who are Driving our machines full speed ahead to Victory! Enrol today! Special pay and privileges!

JEAN Mum, I think I'd like to do munitions work. You can earn good money.

HELEN It's very dangerous work. I'd sooner have no money and have you safe. Anyway, you won't like it.

JEAN But then you had to go whether you liked it or not. Or you were punished.

OFFICIAL Five pounds a day fine while the default continues.

JEAN I've got a baby.

OFFICIAL Haven't you got anybody to look after the baby?

JEAN No, I haven't.

OFFICIAL Where are you living?

JEAN With my mother.

OFFICIAL Well, your mother can look after the baby. Where there is more than one woman in the household who is not at work, it should in general be assumed that the elder is in charge of the children.

JEAN But my Mum got cantankerous.

HELEN I'm not taking the responsibility of looking after a baby with the bombing going on. I'm not looking after her while you go out enjoying yourself. Why don't you put her in a nursery?

JEAN There isn't any nurseries. And if there was, I won't earn enough money to pay for one.

OFFICIAL It is assumed that the practice of leaving babies in the care of grand-parents or the woman next door is being resumed. (HELEN SNIFFS) It is not therefore anticipated that the need for the provision of Day Nurseries will be widespread.

HELEN IS STILL ANNOYED BUT TAKES THE BABY AND GOES.

JEAN So I went into a factory. I was soldering panels for aeroplanes. I had to solder all them little bits of wire for all the instruments. At the time, I never thought that my wires would kill people. You just had to do it. But it's wicked to have to kill anybody. Those that plan wars should be the ones in the firing line.

THREE GIRLS SET UP THE FACTORY BENCH.

FIRST You haven't got any change, have you? Three pennies for a threepenny bit?

JEAN Here we are.

THE FIRST GIRL RUSHES OFF.

JEAN You don't have to pay for the toilet, do you?

SECOND (LAUGHING) Don't speak too loud, they might hear you.

THIRD She wants the penny for her overall.

JEAN For her overall?

SECOND We're meant to take our overalls home with us on Saturday. If we forget, we have to pay a penny to the supervisor to get them back.

FIRST GIRL RETURNS, PUTTING ON HER OVERALL.

SECOND Here, she thought you were going to spend a penny!

FIRST I could do with it. I'm dying to go.

JEAN You go then, love. It doesn't do you any good if you don't go when you want to.

FIRST No. I'll try and last till dinner-time.

JEAN You go now.

FIRST It's too embarrassing. You have to ask permission off the supervisor. And all the men smirk and shout things out. And even then, he doesn't always let you.

SECOND And you're only allowed so long. Then they knock at the door.

THIRD And you're not allowed to smoke, even in the toilets. If you're caught smoking, it's instant dismissal.

SECOND And for swearing. You can be suspended for swearing.

FIRST And we're meant to wear goggles for soldering, but we haven't got them.

SECOND And we're meant to have a pint of milk a day, but we never get it.

TEA LADY GOES PAST WITH TRAY OF CUPS. JEAN REACHES FOR ONE BUT SHE CARRIES ON.

THIRD And we don't get a tea-break. The men get one, but we don't.

JEAN You mean they expect us to work twelve hours on the trot with only one break?

FIRST It's cruel, aint it?

JEAN There is a labour shortage, you know. They need us, not the other way round. We don't have to put up with these conditions. We're needed. We're important.

FIRST That's what they say on the wireless.

SONG You've heard of Florence Nightingale, Grace Darling and the rest.
You've all seen Greta Garbo and our bosom friend, Mae West.
But there's a little lady I want you all to meet,
Working on munitions and she lives just down our street.

She can't pretend to be a great celebrity,
But still she's most important in her way.
The job she has to do may not sound much to you,
But all the same, I'm very proud to say -

She's the girl that makes the thing that drills the hole that holds the spring
That drives the rod that turns the knob that works the thingumebob.
She's the girl that makes the thing that holds the oil that oils the ring
That makes the shank that moves the crank that works the thingumebob.

MISS GRAFTON APPEARS. THE GIRLS STOP SINGING. ONLY JEAN CONTINUES.

JEAN (SINGING) It's a ticklish sort of a job making a thing for a thingumebob...

GRAFTON I realise you're new here, Jean, so I won't take disciplinary action this time.

JEAN What?!

GRAFTON We don't allow singing at Graftons.

MISS GRAFTON MOVES ON.

JEAN I'm not going to put up with that. Miss Grafton!

GRAFTON Well, Mrs. Granwell, what's your problem?

JEAN Well, Miss Grafton, it's not just my problem, it's everybody's problem. How would you like to have to ask permission to go to the toilet? How would you like to work six hours without a break, without a cup of tea?

GRAFTON The other women managed all right... till you came along.

JEAN Then how is it the men can't manage? The men have a break. They have tea brought to them morning and afternoon, and cakes on a trolley. And we're just across the way, sitting watching them, longing for a cup of tea. We get very annoyed that they should be treated differently. The men get a tea-break and we want one.

GRAFTON It's out of the question.

JEAN No, it isn't.

GRAFTON Oh, and what do you propose to do about it?

JEAN Well, I might start a trade union for the girls. I've got enough girls interested to start it.

GRAFTON What do you want with a trade union?

JEAN The same as you want with the Masters Federation. You forget you've got all sorts of people working here now. Not just girls of 14 who have to do what they're told. You've got girls of all classes coming from good jobs in town, being forced to work on munitions.

MISS GRAFTON GOES.

JEAN But I kept on, and at the finish we got the morning and the afternoon tea-break.

MISS GRAFTON RETURNS WITH THE TRAY OF CUPS. THE GIRLS GRAB CUPS AND COME OUT TO DANCE AND SING.

SONG She's the girl that makes the thing that drills the hole that holds the spring
That drives the rod that turns the knob that works the thingumebob.
She's the girl that makes the thing that holds the oil that oils the ring
That makes the shank that moves the crank that works the thingumebob.

It's a ticklish sort of a job making a thing for a thingumebob,
Especially when you don't know what it's for!
But it's the girl that makes the thing the drills the hole that holds the spring
That works the thingumebob that makes the engines roar.
And it's the girl that makes the thing that holds the oil that oils the ring
That works the thingumebob that's going to win the war.

THE ALL-CLEAR SOUNDS.

HELEN I remember V.E. Night. The biggest thing was no blackouts. We put all the lights in the house on and opened all the windows and doors. It was a very warm night in May, May the 8th. Bonfires were lit in the street. And you could walk out in the streets without having a torch.

JEAN After the war, some women stayed in the factory but a lot of women were glad to leave because their men came home.

CHARLIE RETURNS.

JEAN Well, you'd want to be at home with your husband. I hadn't seen Charlie for over four years

CHARLIE You're married. You ought not to need a job. And all the time you're staying there, the man who used to do your job before the war is out of work.

- JEAN I fell for my eldest boy straight away. Once I knew I was having a baby, I decided to leave.
- HELEN There weren't so many jobs for women after the war. When the war was on, the women were needed. After the war, the men got their jobs back. But, you see, we really went through an awful lot. We were all worn out.
- SONG When the lights go on again, all over the world,
And the boys are home again, all over the world,
And rain or snow is all that may fall from the skies above,
Our kiss won't mean goodbye, but hello to love.
- JEAN When my husband came home, we had parties and everything.
But when he gets in bed of a night-time, you'll find him waking up - screaming. You've got to calm him down. This is what the family don't know. I expect there's a lot of wives like me.
- OFFICIAL On the whole, during the war, women became more independent. They thought more for themselves. They had to. They found out what they could do. Not only in going out to work, but managing their families and their affairs while the men were away.
- FRAN Women enjoyed the feeling that they could learn and put their hands to anything that turned up. They found they could do all these things that they'd been told they couldn't do.
- IRIS We realised there was more to life than housework. Whether we could always act on it, once the war was over, well, that was a different kettle of fish. But at least, we saw.
- SONG When the lights go on again, all over the world,
And the ships will sail again, all over the world,
Then we'll have time for things like wedding rings,
And free hearts will sing,
When the lights go on again, all over the world.