

MAY NOT BE BORROWED

DIED OF WOUNDS

BY

HAROLD G. BELL

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DIED OF WOUNDS

DRAMATIS PERSONAE.

- JOHN STURDEE - Master grocer.
MARY STURDEE - His wife.
LENNY - Their eight years old son.
DAVID STURDEE - John Sturdee's brother.

DIED OF WOUNDS.

SCENE.

A living room with usual decorations in JOHN STURDEE'S house. A table with newspapers etc. is in centre. JOHN STURDEE, a big, corpulent man of fifty, is in arm chair to left of table, and his wife, obviously his junior by some years, is in an armchair to the right and is sewing. LENNY is between them on the floor turning over the pages of an illustrated periodical. At the back the room opens to the garden by means of curtained French windows which have been left open on account of the closeness of the night. Just inside the windows to the left is a couch. At middle right is a door leading to the hall, which when opened, allows the hall light to shine into the room, and also discloses a telephone on a small table in the hall. JOHN STURDEE is reading a newspaper. Time 8 p.m.

- JOHN (FLINGING NEWSPAPER ON TABLE) Mary, I can't read tonight. After all my experience in public affairs, I find I'm quite excited over the opening of the Soldiers' Memorial Hall tomorrow. (HE LIGHTS HIS PIPS AND PUFFS.) You know I feel sure it's going to mean a lot to me.
- MARY In what way, John?
- JOHN Well, in a few weeks the Democratic Party will be choosing it's candidate for this constituency. The sensible people will certainly re-elect them again and this constituency's a walk over. Whoever receives the Party's nomination will simply walk to the Government benches in the next Parliament.
- MARY Will they, John?
- JOHN I know it rests between Anderson and me and we're both down to talk tomorrow. Two Federal ministers will be there. One's going to open it - and a lot of the Party officials, and I've got an idead in the back of my head that whoever makes the best impression out of Anderson and me, will get the nomination. I'll talk as I've never talked before! Can you imagine it Mary? Federal member for the suburb.
- MARY It would be nice, John.
- JOHN (SUCKS HIS PIPE REFLECTIVELY FOR A FEW SECONDS) Well, after all, I have given the community good service, even if I do say it myself. Now, just look back for a while. I've done twelve years in Council; had a term as Mayor; still president of the Reform Association and I'm a Grand Master of the Lodge. Why, even during the war I personally collected £800 for the patriotic funds. And instead of putting my own capital back into my business I put it into War Loans. (BITTERLY) And they said it wasn't repudiation when they reduced my interest.
- MARY You have worked hard, John.
- JOHN Yes, but tomorrow's the day I'll be talking to the future and who know what it will give me? Every word must mean something and I must finish on a note that will ring in their ears.
- LENNY (EXCITEDLY) Look, Mother. (POINTS TO THE PICTURE IN THE PAPER
- MARY Sh, Lenny. You mustn't interrupt your father.
- JOHN (RISING) Yes, a note that will ring in their ears. (HE LIFTS HIS ARMS DRAMATICALLY) "And the soldiers shall live forever in this hall". Something like that, something simple, yet symbolical. Anyhow, that's quite good. (HE LIFTS HIS ARMS AGAIN) "And the soldiers shall live forever in this hall".
- LENNY (LOOKING UP AT HIS FATHER) Is Uncle David going to live there?

JOHN suddenly scowls and sits down. MARY glances quickly at him, then continues her sewing.

MARY Lenny, you must not interrupt your father!

JOHN Have you seen him lately?

MARY Not since last Saturday.

JOHN He was blind drunk again on Tuesday. Good God! What an advertisement for me. (HE SUDDENLY JUMPS UP, PUTS HIS HANDS IN HIS TROUSERS POCKETS AND PACES UP AND DOWN) What do you know about that? I never thought about it before. Anderson had a son killed at the War and will have his name on the Roll of Honour. What a start he's got on me. And all I've got is a drunken sot of a brother who's always acting queerly to my detriment. (FIERCELY) But I'll over ride it all tomorrow. Those people will see a man they'll be glad to have. I'll be Federal member for the suburb I've done so much for. Who knows what might follow. Cabinet rank! Anything may happen.

MARY I hope you get the nomination, John.

JOHN (EXULTINGLY) Don't worry - I'll get it! After all these years of waiting I must get it! I've fought my way to a pedestal in this community and it is only fitting that it should be given a chance to give me its final reward. Do you wonder that I hate David for the disgrace he brings on me? He's regarded as a bit strange everywhere. And this periodical drinking - if only he would go away.

MARY He gets so ill sometimes, John.

LENNY I hope he doesn't go away. He tells me bonzer stories but I can't understand them.

JOHN Bah! He makes himself ill. Thank God intelligent people can see the difference between us!

MARY They can, John.

JOHN (SEATING HIMSELF) That's right, Mary. I'm foolish to worry about him. I should be thinking about tomorrow. (REFLECTIVELY) "And the soldiers shall live forever in this hall".

DAVID STURDEE, hatless, appears in the open French windows. Although grey and his face is pain-stained he still looks JOHN'S junior by ten years. He is cleanly but shabbily dressed, and leans heavily on a stick to ease the burden of an artificial leg. His appearance is not noticed immediately by the occupants of the room.

JOHN I think I'll slip down to the Club - they'll know for sure who will be there tomorrow.

MARY I'll leave the coffee on the stove for you, John.

JOHN (RISES AND WALKS TO MARY AND LIFTS HER CHIN WITH HIS FINGER) You know, I'm lucky to have a woman that understands me like you do, Mary.

MARY I do my best, John.

JOHN (BOISTEROUSLY) As if I can't see that! And it is good for a man to know his wife is so whole heartedly with him.

LENNY (JUMPS UP AND RUNS TOWARDS HIM AS HE SUDDENLY NOTICES DAVID IN THE DOOR WAY WITH HIS EYE FIXED ON MARY AND JOHN) Hallo, Uncle David.

DAVID Hullo, Lenny. (HE PATS THE CHILD ON THE HEAD WITH HIS
DISENGAGED HAND BUT LENNY TAKES IT IN AN EFFORT TO HELP
DAVID AS HE PAINFULLY MAKES HIS WAY TO THE COUCH ON WHICH
HE SINKS, THEN LOOKS AT MARY AND JOHN WHO ARE GAZING AT HIM)
Hullo, brother. Goodnight, Mary. (LENNY SITS ON THE COUCH
BESIDE DAVID)

JOHN Good night, David. You rarely call when I'm about. What is
it - money?

DAVID No, brother. Not even money. (HE PUTS HIS ARM ROUND LENNY)
I've come to see my little mate.

JOHN Tonight you're at least sober.

DAVID You're right as usual, brother, at least sober.

MARY alternates her gaze anxiously between the two men.

JOHN If accounts are right you gave a grand performance on Tuesday.

DAVID It was splendid. Unlike you I am never conscious of my
audience.

JOHN Um! I suppose you were eavesdropping before you came in.
(DAVID'S FACE SHOWS CONTEMPT BUT HE DOES NOT SPEAK. JOHN
WALKS TO DAVID AND STANDS MENACINGLY OVER HIM) Will you be
at the ceremony tomorrow?

DAVID Only in spirit brother. Only in spirit. (MARY GIVES HIM
A FRIGHTENED GLANCE)

JOHN I'd like you to stay away. Your presence would not only
remind me, but also a lot of other people who will be there
of your unsavoury reputation. My God! If you started drink-
ing and attended...

DAVID I said I would be there only in the spirit, bother; not
spirits. What a grand sight it will be. The cohorts will
be gleaming in purple and gold.

JOHN (FROWNING AS HE WALKS TO MARY) I think I'll go now. Don't
you give him any money.

DAVID (AS JOHN OPENS THE DOOR LEADING TO THE HALL) Have I received
each of my thirty peices of silver?

LENNY (RUNS ACROSS THE ROOM TO JOHN) Good night, Father!

JOHN Goodnight son, I nearly forgot you. (KISSES LENNY) Your
father has a lot to worry him tonight. Goodnight, Mary.
(SCOWLS AT DAVID)

DAVID Remember, brother, I'll be there in the spirit. (JOHN SLAMS
DOOR)(LENNY RUNS BACK AND TAKES HIS PLACE ON THE COUCH BESIDE
DAVID AND LINKS ARMS)

LENNY Tell me a story, Uncle David.

MARY and DAVID look at each other without hearing
LENNY'S remark. MARY walks over and puts a hand on
DAVID'S forehead.

MARY Is it much worse tonight?

DAVID It's terrible, Mary. The hammers beat so up there.

MARY Why did you come tonight?

DAVID I was frightened.

MARY It seems so trite and commonplace for me to tell you to be
brave, you who have been so brave.

DAVID If I were brave, Mary, I would leave the shadows; seek either utter darkness or utter light. It's this world of half-light, half-darkness, that maddens me.

LENNY understands dimly that for the time being he is not of the trio and looks uncomprehendingly from David's forehead and sits beside him on the side opposite MARY

MARY Not that way, David, not that way.

DAVID Is there any other way?

MARY Isn't there some way you can come back. Something that would take you back to - (PAUSES)

DAVID 1913?

MARY (SOFTLY) Yes 1913. You published "Springtide" in 1913.

DAVID (SLUMPS BACK ON COUCH) Did I ever really write verse? Did I ever really think there was something fine and beautiful in life? Did I ever really visualise a universal friendship between men? Something that would light their eyes to banish those ghastly lurking fears. Mary, what was it I really lost over there - you would know?

MARY You never lost anything, David.

DAVID Then what happened?

MARY Something - something was soiled. No! No! I don't mean that! You found something, David. That's it! You found something - something terrible and nasty; something that wounded you.

DAVID And the wound has never healed.

MARY No; the flesh was too sensitive. Oh! I know how dreadful it has been for you since your return - all the penalties you have suffered and all for what? (BITTERLY) Duty! They call it duty to mangle the finest things among us. They can patch the body, but what can they do for the mind?

DAVID What could they do? If only one of far famed duty's bullets had found me!

MARY Oh, David - you mustn't speak like that! No matter how beaten down you feel, never give in. Whenever you feel like that will you come and see me?

DAVID That's why I came tonight.

MARY I thought so.

DAVID I thought I'd reached the end today. I wanted it to be the end.

MARY Do try hard.

DAVID If it's not too late.

MARY It's not too late.

LENNY It'll be too late to tell me a story soon, Uncle David.

DAVID I don't think I'd better tell you a story tonight, Lenny. You mightn't like it.

LENNY But I like all your stories, Uncle.

DAVID Will you keep your promise?

LENNY Yes I'll remember 'em all until I'm twenty one. Gee but that's a long way away.

DAVID If I had my way, I'd never let you grow up.

LENNY But, uncle, I'd never be a man then.

DAVID All men are fools, Lenny.

LENNY You're not a fool, Uncle.

MARY You'd better tell him a story, David. It'll do you good. You know your own words - you always say you talk through him to the old days.

DAVID The old days! Springtide! And then came Autumn and Winter. I never knew a summer.

MARY Yes. "Springtide". Uncle David will tell you a story while I finish my sewing, Lenny.

She returns to her armchair and takes up her sewing.

LENNY (SLIPS DOWN AND KNEELS BEFORE DAVID ON WHOSE KNEES HE LEANS)
Come on, Uncle, I'll like it no matter what you say.

DAVID Do you like flowers?

LENNY My word! We have some lovely ones in the garden.

DAVID Yes and some lovely ones in the house. One a sturdy little bud just beginning to open and the other is the sweetest of them all.

LENNY I can't see 'em anywhere.

DAVID Still, they are there. (HE LOOKS AT MARY)

LENNY But what about the story, Uncle?

DAVID Well! Well! You are impatient tonight. I was just trying to remember it. The flowers reminded me of it.

LENNY Is it about flowers?

DAVID Yes.

LENNY Good! I told you I liked 'em.

DAVID We should all like flowers - God sent them to make the world more beautiful. And even when your garden is empty, you must always remember that flowers are blooming somewhere else, where the sun is shining brighter. Just as soon as the winds blow the petals of one apart, a flower just as bright will open in some other place. But the strangest thing of all is that there have always been men in the world who like to cut the flowers, but a long, long time ago, when the world was very, very young, and men had nothing else to do they started this game, and the strangest thing of all is that they have played it ever since. When you are older, your teacher will tell you of the places where they played it first, such as Troy and Thermopylae.

LENNY Gee, Uncle David. What was the last place?

DAVID Never mind, Lenny. We won't bother over the places. You see, men only played this game because they had nothing better to do, but by and by, they found a lot of much better games to play. But the strangest thing of all is that though they would play the better games for a little while, sooner or later, they would always play the old one of trampling on the flowers. It almost seemed as if a nice tidy garden reminded them of it, and made them want to cut it down. So the men from one place would go through the thick forests just to spoil a garden

in another place, and the men whose garden had been spoiled would remember this, and later they would go through the thick forests and spoil the garden for the other people. Neither of them seemed to realise that both their gardens would always be filled with flowers if they left them alone. (MARY CEASES SEWING AND LOOKS LISTENING, AT DAVID AND LENNY. And the men had such hard journeys going through the thick forests which were terrible places. Nasty, slimy things crawled among the men and bit them; big trees fell over and killed some; and thorny bushes stuck into others and poisoned them and it was found that when one lot of men got back they had left a lot of their friends behind; that the thorns had blinded some of them, and that the slimy things had bitten the arms and legs of others which had to be cut off.

LENNY Is that why they cut your leg off, Uncle David?

DAVID Let me finish the story, Lenny. The things that I've told you about in the forest weren't the worst. There was another dreadful thing there but nobody could see it, and the only men that knew it was there were the men whom it touched; and those who stayed at home, and those who weren't touched by it, only laughed when the ones who had been touched told them of it. It was something that went inside to your heart, but you couldn't see where it went in. (HE JUMPS UP EXCITEDLY. LENNY FALLS BACK A LITTLE) It was something terrible that made the men it touched remember all the flowers that had been trampled; it even made each remember for ever and ever how many flowers he himself had cut with the terrible straight knife they gave him. He could never see properly again for the flowers with the sap oozing out of their stems were always in front of his eyes -

MARY Lenny, it's time for bed: Uncle David has finished.

DAVID (RECOVERS HIMSELF AND SITS BACK ON COUCH) I'm sorry, Mary. (HE PATS LENNY'S HEAD) That's all tonight, my son.

LENNY And didn't anybody ever find out what this terrible thing was?

DAVID (SINKS FURTHER INTO COUCH AND HIS HEAD FALLS BACK WEARILY) It was a thorn, too, Lenny but nobody could see it.

LENNY What sort of a thorn was it? My Sunday School teachers said they made Jesus a crown of terrible thorns. Was it like them?

DAVID That's just what they were.

MARY Run along now, Lenny, and get undressed and I'll come up and hear you say your prayers.

LENNY (JUMPS UP AND KISSES DAVID) Good night, Uncle! I'll remember the story when I'm twenty one. (HE LEAVES BY HALL DOOR)

MARY (WALKS OVER AND SITS BESIDE DAVID ON THE COUCH) You are making me feel frightened too.

DAVID I'm so tired. And yet I cannot sleep.

MARY I'll get you some tablets before you go. You must try and get some rest.

DAVID (TAKES MARY'S HAND) How sweet you are! How patient you've been. The one person on God's earth who has understood!

MARY (SOFTLY) You know how glad it makes me to be of any help.

There is a silence during which they look at each other.

- DAVID So he intends to climb over the Hall tomorrow to a Federal seat. (HE DROPS MARY'S HAND) How faithfully and carefully we've preserved your allegiance to him when all the time I'm complaining of having lost a soul or some other high sounding inanity.
- MARY Sometimes I wonder if what was after all an outstanding incident even for the War has loomed too largely with you - if you had managed to escape that perhaps -
- DAVID Remember, Mary, there were five of them, and their papers showed they were all under eighteen. And to think they would have given me a medal for killing them. They had mothers; they had sisters; may be they had sweethearts. And doubtless God had given them tasks to do but I forestalled Him.
- MARY Is it possible that that incident crowded out something that may have been worth while? Surely the sacrificial sense was there - some sort of heroism. Something that you could look back to an find; something that might help you recover.
- DAVID Yes, I understand. Poor, lucky Brooke, He could sing - "If I should die think only this of me, That there's some corner of a foreign field that is forever England". And he died believing it! Beautiful legendary stuff. The trouble is they don't sing of what they felt or saw; they sing of what every body expects them to sing. The dreadful sickening reality is cloaked by the ghost of Homer.
- MARY (GENTLY) Is it possible for you to use the cloak?
- DAVID With the dreadful stench of rotting human flesh forever with me. With every night still alive with the screams of lacerated bodies. With the sounds of men cursing their God; their mothers; anything! Anything to relieve the dreadful terror of unseen, useless death. Homer at least sang of even man to man encounter. Mary it was dreadful. Oh, Christ when I think -
- MARY Sh! David. You are so tired -
- DAVID And he's opening the hall tomorrow that will house their spirit - the spirits who are still hovering in uncomprehending terror over fields soaked with blood that will never even dry for them, spirits that through the ages will stay there wondering what it was all about. The shrines; the cenotaphs; the halls they will always be spurned by the dead, for the dead know they are only lies erected to the living. I often wonder how many of those who returned have revived under their treatment. Twice a year they administer the anaesthetics of pomp, ceremony and praise, solemn silences and mystical hymns, binding the wounds they don't even know exist with bandages of coloured ribbon. Every quack physician exploiting the gathering of the patients for his own advertisement. And here am I always walking down avenues of dead men with five bleeding children beside me who will not die. They never speak except with their eyes; eyes that are always on me; eyes that always ask why I did it, while the blood oozes through the fingers of the hands they hold over their wounds. (HE COVERS HIS FACE WITH HIS HANDS) And I dreamed a dream of giving in some small way a message to the world.
- LENNY (HIS VOICE IS HEARD CALLING FROM ANOTHER PART OF THE HOUSE) Are you coming, Mother?
- MARY (CALLS BACK) I won't be long, darling.
- LENNY Hurry up: God is waiting.
- DAVID (SUDDENLY LOOKS UP) That's it! God is waiting.
- MARY David, please, oh please: You look so tired - if only you could sleep. You talk so much lately about (PAUSES)

DAVID The peace of utter darkness - that's what you mean. (HE TAKES HER HAND AND PUTS IT ON HIS FOREHEAD. SHE BEGINS GENTLY TO STROKE HIS FOREHEAD AND HAIR) How cool your hand is!

MARY Perhaps you could rest for a little while. You know how suddenly sleep comes to you after these speels. Would you like to lie down? (STILL STROKING SHE GENTLY FORCES HIS HEAD BACK ON TO THE PILLOW PART OF THE COUCH. THEN LIFTS HIS LEGS UP ALSO. SHE SITS ON THE EDGE AND RECOMMENCES STROKING HIS FOREHEAD. HE TRIES HARD TO BE A LITTLE GAY WHEN SHE SPEAKS.) Sometimes I think of you as my other little boy, Like Lenny.

DAVID Mary, the blessed angels must have hands like yours.

MARY (PATHETICALLY FLIPPANT) You flatter me, sir!

LENNY Are you coming, Mother?

MARY Yes, darling, in a moment.

DAVID (PUTS HIS HAND UP AND HOLDS HER HAND ON HIS FOREHEAD) How strange! In the last few moments everything's grown so calm and peaceful. (DROWSILY) Mary, I'm going to sleep. Would you like to do just one little thing before you go?

MARY What is it, David?

DAVID (WHISPERS) Will you kiss me - just this one? (SHE LOOKS LENGTHILY AT HIM, THEN LEANS SLOWLY OVER AND PLACES HER LIPS ON HIS FOR SOME TIME. HIS EYES ARE CLOSED WHEN SHE SILENTLY STRAIGHTENS AND TIP TOES FROM THE ROOM, THE DOOR MAKING A SLIGHT SOUND AS SHE GOES THROUGH. DAVID SITS UP AND TAKES A SMALL PHIAL FROM HIS POCKET AND LOOKS AT IT)

DAVID The peace of darkness - or is it light? (HE LOOKS AT THE DOOR) Goodbye Mary - dear, gracious soul! (HE PUTS THE PHIAL TO HIS LIPS AND DRINKS, THEN FALLS BACK ON THE COUCH. HIS BODY CONVULSES A COUPLE OF TIMES AND IN DOING SO HALF TURNS TO THE WALL, BUT AFTER GIVING A LOW MOAN IT STILLS INTO THE APPEARANCE OF SLEEP.)

There is a distinct interval before Mary returns to the room. She tip toes to the centre, looks at him then tip toes to her arm chair and resumes her sewing. There is another interval before sounds are heard in the hall and JOHN enters. His face is animated.

JOHN Mary, what do you think?

MAY (PUTS HER FINGERS TO HER LIPS AND POINTS TO COUCH) He's asleep, John. He is so ill. (SHE CONTINUES SEWING)

JOHN (LOOKS AT COUCH) If he's ill, he makes himself ill with the queer way he goes on. Anyhow, he's far better asleep - he's at least out of trouble. (SEATS HIMSELF IN ARMCHAIR) Wait till I tell you the news. I saw Sharp tonight. He says that the nomination is not yet settled but rests between Anderson and me. He thinks as I do that a lot will depend on tomorrow. What's more Sharp would know. And I've got my speech allready in my mind.

MARY Would you like some coffee., John?

JOHN Not yet. You know, I think poor old Tomlinson thought he had a chance, but it is good to know there's only one danger. Just fancy, Federal member for Grovedale!

MARY It would be asplendid reward, John.

JOHN Do you know, Mary, I think I'll take a prominent part in this Defenders of Australia Movement. It's a great idea for a

great country. I might even give an aeroplane. (REFLECT-
IVELY) Um! That would mean a few thousand, though. Still
think of the advertisement. Even to the business, apart from
the political aspect. By the way, talking of subscriptions,
that Jones woman was in again today cadging for the Cancer
Research Fund and I had to give her a guinea to get rid of
her. But I'll know better about everything tomorrow night.
That's a note I might touch tomorrow, though, the young man-
hood of the country treading in the footsteps of its fathers.
We should be prepared to defend our country, Mary.

MARY

It's always been done, John.

JOHN

What's more it's the popular cry now, and all popular cries
go well with constituencies. I'll show those party officials
tomorrow that I can give a crowd what it wants. One good thing
I'm speaking after Anderson - they'll forget he ever spoke.
(MARY LOOKS UP FROM HER SEWING TO THE COUCH. JOHN FOLLOWS
HER GAZE) He seems to be well and truly out to it.

MARY

I've never seen him so tired, John. (CONTINUES SEWING)

JOHN

You're too soft with him, Mary. I do wish you wouldn't give
him money.

MARY

It's only a few shillings now and then.

JOHN

A grateful country offered him a pension, but he refused it.
Even so he still has a little from mother's estate.

MARY

Yes, John. He always wants to return the little loans on
the first of the month.

JOHN

But gets drunk, first. Did he talk to Lenny tonight?

MARY

Yes.

JOHN

Another of those fantastic stories?

MARY

Oh just some little trifle about flowers.

JOHN

I don't like them. He always seems to me to be trying to
put something into the child's mind. He's so damned clever
when he likes.

MARY

I shouldn't worry, John. Usually they are just sweet little
things told as only he can tell them.

JOHN

What a pity he isn't like the average man. I could have had
him on the platform with me tomorrow. That gammy leg of
his would have been great window dressing. (MARY STOPS
SEWING, HER WORK AND HANDS FALLING TO HER LAP, BUT HER HEAD
IS STILL LOWERED) Can you imagine the whispers, though.
"Dopey Dave Sturdee", "How'd they keep him sober today!" If
he would only listen to me. Well! Well! So long as he
keeps away tomorrow I don't think he will matter. Whatever
you do, don't give him any money when he leaves tonight.

MARY

(RESUMES SEWING) Very well, John.

JOHN

Mary, you know you will be a proud woman if everything goes
alright. Remember wherever I climb you climb with me.

MARY

It will be nice for Lenny, too as he grows older.

JOHN

(REFLECTIVELY) Yes, I think I'll leave him the legacy of a
great father. I think I'll have the coffee, now.

MARY

I think I'll bring it in here. You didn't finish your paper
tonight. The coffee's all ready.

JOHN

Good. I'm nice and comfortable here.

MARY rises and puts her sewing on the table, looks at the couch.

MARY I shan't be a minute. (LEAVES BY HALL DOOR)

JOHN reaches to the table for the newspaper and is seating himself again in the armchair when, as though suddenly remembering, twists round and looks at the couch. He tosses his head contemptuously then rights himself comfortably. A little later MARY returns with the coffee and refreshments. She passes JOHN a cup.

JOHN Thank you. I'm just ready for this. And do you know how to make it. (HELPS HIMSELF TO A SANDWICK)

MARY I'll enjoy a cup myself. (HELPS HERSELF AND SITS DOWN) I thought I heard Lenny stirring - it's so unusual for him not to sleep.

JOHN Perhaps he's dreaming. (READS A NEWSPAPER ON KNEES WHILST EATING AND DRINKING)

MARY I'll slip out and see him when I've finished this.

JOHN Don't worry - he's probably only a little restless. (JOHN CONTINUES READING. MARY RAISES HER CUP TO HER LIPS AND LOOKS AT THE COUCH AT THE SAME TIME, THEN LOOKS AWAY. SHE IS ABOUT TO RAISE THE CUP AGAIN, BUT LOOKS AT THE COUCH INSTEAD. SHE TURNS SUDDENLY TO JOHN)

MARY John, isn't he still? He hasn't moved.

JOHN (ABSTRACTEDLY) Oh, he's alright.

MARY (LOUDER) John!

JOHN (IMPATIENTLY) (HALF RISING) Whatever is it?

MARY He hasn't moved.

JOHN (LOOKS SWIFTLY TO COUCH, THEN TO HER) What do you mean?

MARY He hasn't moved.

JOHN (RISES) David! (LOUDER) David! (HE LOOKS SWIFTLY AT MARY WHO IS STILL ABSORBED IN THE COUCH, THEN STRIDES TO CENTRE OF THE ROOM. MARY RISES, STILL STARING) David. (HE LOOKS AGAIN AT MARY THEN WALKS SWIFTLY TO THE COUCH AND BENDS OVER DAVID'S FIGURE) David! (HE BENDS CLOSER AND SHAKES DAVID'S SHOULDER) My God! What's happened! (HE PULLS DAVID'S FIGURE ON TO ITS BACK. AS HE DOES SO THE LEFT HAND AND PHIAL FALL TO THE FLOOR. JOHN STUMBLES BACK AND SHOUTS) He's dead! Good Christ! He's dead.

MARY (SUDDENLY CALVANISED RUNS TO THE COUCH SCREAMING) David! David! Why ever did you do it? (SHE FLINGS HERSELF ON THE BODY SOBBINGLY) Are you sure he's dead? Get a doctor quick.

JOHN (PICKS UP PHIAL AND SMELLS IT) He's dead alright.

MARY Oh, David. I did not know it was so close.

JOHN (PULLS HER UP FIERCELY) What does all this mean? Can't you see what he's done?

MARY (SUDDENLY CALM) Poor David! He said he was going to sleep tonight and I did not understand. Peace had to come, so why not tonight? (SHE WALKS TO HER CHAIR SEATS HERSELF, THEN BURIES HER FACE IN HER HANDS)

JOHN (FOLLOWS MENACINGLY AND STANDS OVER HER) I said, "Can't you see what he's done?". (SHAKES HER AND SHOUTS FIERCELY) Can't you?

MARY (LOOKING UP) He's found peace, John.

JOHN Found peace, be damned! The coward's way out! The whole town will be alive with this tomorrow. Everything I'd counted on - everything I'd almost lived for - thrown away in a moment. Oh God! Just how they'll talk. Suiciding in my own home with you while I'm out. (SUDDENLY PEERING AT HER) It looks bloody strange anyhow.

MARY It was not strange, John. Tell me do the angels have cool hands?

JOHN What do you mean?

MARY Nothing, John. You'd better call a doctor and the police.

JOHN The police! What a fine, juicy piece for the papers! How can I even attend tomorrow, let alone speak. And to think it would have meant so much. (HE WALKS EXCITEDLY UP AND DOWN) To think that five minutes ago --

MARY He was dead five minutes ago.

JOHN When did he do it?

MARY I don't know. It must have been when I said Goodnight to Lenny. I thought he was asleep.

JOHN (SHOUTS) I always knew he would injure me in some way. Him with his sneering, clever talk! Why did you ever encourage him about the place? (HE LAUGHS MOCKINGLY) Federal member for Grovedale! With twenty thousand whisperers doing their worst. It isn't fair - I haven't deserved it!

MARY John you must call the police - or shall I?

JOHN Don't worry! I'll call them and it's you that will have to do the talking. (HE SUDDENLY SLUMPS INTO THE CHAIR) No - it isn't fair to think that the Soldiers' Memorial Hall would have been opened and a thing of the past by this time tomorrow night. And I won't even be there.

MARY John!

JOHN Alright - I'll call them. (LEAVES BY THE HALL DOOR WHICH HE LEAVES OPEN. THE HALL LIGHT SHINES INTO THE ROOM AND JOHN CAN BE SEEN AT THE TELEPHONE. LENNY IN PYJAMAS RUNS INTO THE ROOM)

LENNY Mother!

M MARY hurries to the door and switches off the room light. LENNY is standing in the shaft of light from the hall where MARY joins him and puts her arms round him)

MARY Darling, whatever made you get out of bed?

LENNY What's wrong, Mummy? I thought I heard Dad shouting. Were you crying?

MARY Sh, darling. (JOHN FINISHES AT THE TELEPHONE AND STRIDES TO THE DOOR, BUT STOPS ABRUPTLY AT THE LACK OF LIGHT, THEN SEES THEM IN THE SHAFT OF LIGHT) It's Lenny, John, he couldn't sleep.

LENNY What's wrong, Dad? I thought I heard you calling out.

JOHN Nothing's wrong, my son. Your Uncle David has gone away.

LENNY Gone away. But he can't go away, Dad. You said so yourself.

JOHN What do you mean?

LENNY

Didn't you say (UNCONSCIOUSLY LIFTS HIS ARMS IN
IMITATION OF HIS FATHER AND MIMICS HIS VOICE) "The
soldiers shall live forever in this hall?"

CURTAIN.