

**BLACK 'ELL: A WAR  
PLAY IN ONE ACT**

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Black 'Ell: A War Play in One Act by Miles Malleson

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**MILES MALLESON**

**BLACK 'ELL: A WAR  
PLAY IN ONE ACT**



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MAIN

BLACK 'ELL

**PLAYS OF THE  
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# BLACK 'ELL

*A War Play in One Act*

By Miles Malleson

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Miles Malleson  
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Seventeen West Eighth Street

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# BLACK 'ELL

was first produced at the Neighborhood Playhouse, New York, on the evening of April 2nd, 1917, with the following cast:

MRS. GOULD .....	<i>Hannah Trynz</i>
MR. GOULD .....	<i>Bennet S. Tobias</i>
ETHEL .....	<i>Frances Goodman</i>
COLONEL FANE .....	<i>J. F. Roach</i>
JEAN .....	<i>Rose Beatrice Schiff</i>
MARGERY WILLIS .....	<i>Bella Nodell</i>
HAROLD GOULD .....	<i>William A. Rothschild</i>

SCENE: The morning room of the Gould's home; breakfast time.

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## BLACK 'ELL

**A**BOUT nine o'clock on an August morning in 1916, MR. AND MRS. GOULD are having breakfast. They have been happily married some twenty-five years. Their income is about a thousand a year, and there is nothing to differentiate their dining-room—or their whole house, for that matter—from other dining-rooms and houses of the same class.

MR. GOULD is reading a daily paper propped up against something on the table. Presently he drains his large coffee-cup and pushes it across to his wife. She re-fills it, carries it round to him, and returns to her place. The breakfast continues. He finishes the bacon and eggs on his plate. She has been watching, and asks him if he will have any more. She does that by a little noise—a little upward inflection of inquiry and affection. (The affection is unconscious and unobtrusive—the result of twenty-five years and about nine thousand breakfasts together.)

The little noise catches his attention from his paper. He eyes his own empty plate; he eyes the inviting eye on the dish in front of her, and grunts. A little downward inflection of assent. He gets his second helping and the breakfast continues in silence.

\* \* \* \* \*

Then, quite suddenly, crashing into the silence, a loud double knock at the front door, followed by a violent ringing. It is as if they had both been hit unexpectedly.

MRS. GOULD. A telegram!

MR. GOULD. Sounds like it.

[Their eyes meet in anxiety. She rises in the grip of fear.]

MRS. GOULD. Oh, Fred, d'you think it's—can it be that, at last? Have you looked—the casualty page?

MR. GOULD. Yes, yes, of course I've looked. I always look first thing—you know that as well as I do.

MRS. GOULD. It wouldn't be there—not till to-morrow. They always send from the War Office first—by telegram.

MR. GOULD. [Trying to quiet her in a voice that trembles with anxiety.] Now, mother, mother, we go all through this every time a simple telegram comes to the house.

MRS. GOULD. [Back in her seat, too frightened to do anything but just sit there and wait.] It's about him, I feel—I know it's about him.

MR. GOULD. Don't be silly. [He goes up to the window.] There's

the boy—it's a telegram all right. Why doesn't Ethel answer the door? Oh, there, she's taken it in. [*He comes away from the window. Again their eyes meet.*] Now, mother, there's no need to be anxious—not the slightest reason to get frightened—not the slightest. [*With a poor attempt at a laugh to fill in the wait.*] What a fuss about a telegram! [*The wait lengthens.*] Where is Ethel? I wish the devil people would use the telephone.

[*And even as he eyes it reproachfully, the thing rings. It startles them both.*]

MR. GOULD. [*Ungratefully.*] Damn it! [*Attending to it.*] Yes? Hullo! What's the matter? What is it?

ETHEL, the maid, enters.

ETHEL. A telegram, sir.

[*MR. GOULD doesn't want his wife to open it, but he is attached to the telephone.*]

MR. GOULD. [*Holding out his spare hand for it.*] Here, give it to me. [*ETHEL gives it to him and stands waiting. He continues into the telephone.*] Yes? I can't hear. Who are you?

MRS. GOULD. [*Tortured by the delay.*] Oh, Fred. Please—finish talking—and open it.

MR. GOULD. Don't be silly, dear. [*Then hastily to the telephone.*] No, no, nothing. No. I wasn't talking to you. Oh—yes—very well, come round. [*He rings off.*] It's that Willis girl. I never can hear a word she says—she seemed very excited about something—said she wanted to come round.

MRS. GOULD. It may be about him. Some news in the papers we haven't seen. Please—please—tell me what's in it.

MR. GOULD. Nothing to do with the boy at all, you bet your life—somebody wants to meet me at the club.

[*His hands are trembling and he is having some difficulty in opening it. It comes out upside down. At last he gets it right and looks at it; but his eyes aren't so good as he always thinks they are.*]

Where are my spectacles?

MRS. GOULD. Oh, Fred!

MR. GOULD. Mother, don't be silly. Ethel, where are my spectacles? I had 'em—

[*He gropes on the table. It is ETHEL that finds them. Adjusting them, he reads the message and hands the telegram to his wife.*]

MRS. GOULD. Oh, my dear—father—my dear—

[*The tears in her voice overwhelm her words.*]

MR. GOULD. There, there, there—mother—now quiet.

MRS. GOULD. Yes.

[*ETHEL has not left the room; she is standing awkwardly, but unable to go, by the door.*]

MR. GOULD. Ethel, Master Harold is in England again—it's from him—he's home on leave—he'll be back with us this morning. That's all.

ETHEL. Yessir. Thank you.

[*She goes out.* MR. GOULD looks at his wife. *When he is quite sure that she is too occupied with her handkerchief to notice him, he pulls out his own; and walking to the window, does his best to efface any signs of weakness.*]

MRS. GOULD. It's two hundred and forty-three days since he left here, and ever since then, every hour almost, he's been in danger—and now—he'll be standing in this room again. We must telephone to Jean—she'll come round.

MR. GOULD. Don't we—don't you—want the boy to yourself for a bit?

MRS. GOULD. He must find everything he wants when he comes home—and he'll want her. Father, if he's home long enough perhaps they can get married. I had a talk to her the other day. Dear, dear Jean—what this'll mean to her. She must be here when he comes. [*She has risen to go to the telephone and notices the breakfast table.*] Dear, aren't you going to finish your breakfast?

MR. GOULD. No. The young rascal's spoilt my appetite. Does he say what time he's coming?

MRS. GOULD. It says this morning—that's all. [*She is at the telephone.*] Number 2147 Museum, please. Yes, please. Father, will you send Ethel to me? [*MR. GOULD goes out.*] Is that you, Bailey? It's Mrs. Gould. Would you ask Miss Jean to come round here at once? She started? Oh! Something to tell us? Well, I suppose she's heard Master Harold's coming home—she hasn't? Then what is she coming to tell us? You don't know—yes—well, she ought to be here now if she's been gone ten minutes—yes. Good-bye, Bailey. [*She rings off.* *ETHEL is in the room.*] I wonder what—Margery Willis was excited, too, father said; and she's coming round. Ethel, what's the telegram say exactly? It's on the table.

ETHEL. [*Reading.*] "With you this morning, Harold." That's all, Mrs. Gould.

MRS. GOULD. Yes. [*She puzzles over it for a moment—then.*] His room must be put ready, Ethel.

ETHEL. Yes'm, of course.

MRS. GOULD. I'd better come and see about it myself.

ETHEL. We can do everything quite well.

MRS. GOULD. I'd like to do it myself. It seems the same as when he used to come back from school for the holidays—getting his room ready—it seems only the other day. I can remember the first time he ever came back from a boarding-school—quite distinctly I can remember—he came in at that door and ran across the room with his arms open—to me there—and jumped right into my arms—and now, the things he must have been through—and he'll be standing in this room