

THE POINT OF IT ALL V2

A short play by Nick Miller

CHARACTERS (2 x male 1 x Female):

Neville - Demob Officer
Charlie - Young RAF Navigator
Hilda - War Office Secretary

SETTING: Demob office. September 1945

*Older man seated behind a desk surrounded by paperwork.
Hilda ushers him into the room*

Hilda: Young man to see you.

Officer: Show him in, Hilda. Thank you.

(Charlie walks in nervously and stands near the desk)

Officer: Sit yourself down, son.

Charlie: Thank you, sir.

(The officer is scanning his paperwork)

Officer: What's your name, son?

Charlie: Charlie sir. Charlie Hibbert.

(Officer looks up his records)

Officer: Here we are. Hibbert Charles Arthur.

Charlie: Albert, sir. Charles Albert.

Officer: Sorry, lad. Need new specs. Bloody things are all scratched. And I can't read the writing.
Flight Sargent Hibbert! RAF then?

Charlie: Yes, sir. Navigator.

Officer: Navigator? Brave man. Tough job.

Charlie: Don't know about that, sir. Flight Lieutenant Morris was my pilot. He was more the hero.

Officer: Take the compliment, lad. You talk to any pilot and they'll tell you they are nothing without you boys. You are in the arse end of the plane. Nothing but a flashlight, pencil and a load of bloody logarithms.
I'd have been useless at that. What with my eyes.
And I was hopeless at arithmetic at school.

(Officer notices the booklet Charlie is holding)

Officer: That your logbook?

Charlie: Yes sir.

Officer: May I?

(Charlie passes it over for the officer to inspect. He notices all the letters inside)

Officer: What's all this?

Charlie: Letters, sir. I used to write to my ma and pa every day. And my chums at work. They used to write back. Kept everything.

Officer: This is amazing. All these Air Mail letters. You've been around ain't you?

(He studies some letters)

Central Mediterranean Forces. Italy. Cyprus. Turkey.

(He comes across a medal amongst the papers)

And don't ever lose this, son.

Are they still with us? Your parents?

Charlie: No, sir. Lost both of them. Only got my younger brother now.

Officer: Oh, son. I'm so sorry. What happened?

Charlie: It was the Junkers. The planes the Gerries used in the Blitz. Died in their beds, sir. My brother was out helping the wardens. Can't forgive himself.

Officer: How do you mean?

Charlie: He can't forgive himself that he wasn't with them. The house was bombed. They were in their beds. Crashed through the floor. Broke their backs. Got covered in rubble.

Officer: So sorry, son. So so sorry.

(More affirmative)

Well you tell your younger brother... what's his name?

Charlie: Henry, sir.

Officer: Well you tell Henry from me. He's one brave young man. Couldn't have beaten the Nazis without him. Those wardens were out in the streets making sure everyone was safe. Getting people to turn off their lights in the blackout. He was a hero. You got that?

Charlie: Thank you, sir.

Officer: Thank YOU, Charlie. And Henry. Thank you for your service.

Charlie: Thank you, sir.

Officer: Charlie...

Charlie: Yes sir?

Officer: The war's over, mate. There's no hierarchy any more. That's all gone. You can call me Neville.

Charlie: *(Unsure... hesitates)*
OK, sir... I mean Neville. I'm not sure how I feel about... Do you mind if I don't...

Officer: Ha ha. It's alright, son. You can call me whatever you like. You should hear what Hilda calls me!

Hilda: *(Ears prick up)*
What's that?

Officer: I was just saying, if you ever called me sir I reckon I'd faint.

Hilda: *(Cheeky laugh)*
You don't wanna 'ear what I calls him.

Officer: *(Laugh)*
See, Charlie? It's over. Turns out Mr Hitler didn't just have one ball. He had NO balls. It's over, son. We're all the same now, Charlie. All the same.

(There is an uncomfortable pause as Charlie looks down at his lap)

Officer: Charlie? You OK?

Charlie: I don't anything will ever be the same.

Officer: *(Slightly laughs)*
I know what you mean, son. But we have to... make the best of it, I suppose.
(Pause)
You got a wife, Charlie? Is there a Mrs Charlie?

Charlie: I don't have a wife.

Officer: You got a sweetheart?

Charlie: *(Pause)*
I ... I'm not sure.

Officer: You're not sure? How can you not be sure?

Charlie: Well I did before I went away.

Officer: Oh. What happened? Is she, er...

Charlie: No she didn't... she's OK.
(Means she didn't die)
I proposed to my girl before the war. Joined up a few years before. Didn't make it as a pilot but I trained as a navigator. So I knew I'd get called up.

Officer: Didn't she wait for you?

Charlie: She said she would.

Officer: You don't have to tell me Charlie. I'm not meaning to be a nosey parker.

Charlie: No it's OK.
(Pause)
Because I was away for so long...

Officer: Oh. Did she...

Charlie: She went with a Yank.

Officer: Oh. I see, Sorry, son. What will you do?

Charlie: I'm not sure.

Officer: Happened a lot, I'm afraid to say. Give 'em their dues. Brave lads, the lot of them. But they couldn't keep it in their trousers when our boys were away fighting. I suppose at least she fessed up.

Charlie: She had no choice.

Officer: *(Officer and Hilda look at each other knowingly)*
Ah. I see. Is she...?

Charlie: Three months.

Officer: *(Pause)*
What will you do? D'you love her?

Charlie: Sort of wish I didn't.

Officer: What's her name? Do you mind me asking?

Charlie: It's fine, sir. Gladys.

Officer: Lovely. Lovely name. I'm sure you'll make the right decision.

Charlie: *(Pause)*
I mean, I always wanted kids, but not...

Officer: Of course.*(Pause)*
Look. Let's talk a bit of business.
Hilda, let's show Charlie what we've got for him.

Hilda: *(Comes in carrying a suit)*
Here you go, Charlie. I think we've got your sizes but if it don't fit we'll have it tailored.

Charlie: *(Pause)*
Thank you. That looks proper smart.

Officer: You got a job to go back to? Looks like you have from these letters.

Charlie: Yes, sir. I'm one of the lucky ones.

Officer: You are, son. Fact is you're sitting here.
They reckon there are still something like 20,000 Allied
POWs still missing.
What were you working as?

Charlie: Banking, sir. I was in charge of the ledgers.

Officer: Impressive. You're obviously a smart lad.
They'll definitely need you. Lost a lot of staff in the war.
Lost a lot of branches too. Bombed to fuck.
You know what. Barclays near me in Walthamstowe.
Staff were caught in the building when the shelling
started outside.
Almost blew the whole bloody place up. They had to stay
in the basement until about 5 in the morning.
All the lighting and heating failed and there was flooding
from sewage water. Can you imagine?
Put their lives at risk just to save a load of paperwork.

Charlie: I heard about that. Basil, my chum in the office told me.

Officer: Crazy. The whole bloody thing's crazy.
Crazy, innit Hilda?

Hilda: It bloody is. You know what, Charlie?

Charlie: What, miss?

Hilda: When did you ever hear about a woman starting a war?

Officer: *(Chuckles)*
She's not wrong. But I tell you what... Mr Hitler would
run a mile if he had to come up against Hilda!

(Hilda flexes one arm muscle. They laugh)

Charlie: Bloody Ada! Oh... sorry, miss.

Officer: Don't worry, son. She's heard it all before.
I never knew any swear words til' I met Hilda.
Breaks my heart to think that Hitler killed himself.
I'd have happily done it for him.

Hilda: I would've ripped his fucking neck off

Officer: *(Laughing)*
See what I mean? Them Nazis wouldn't wanna tangle with Hilda.

Charlie: I reckon so.

Officer: How are fixed for money, Charlie?

Charlie: I'm OK for a while. Bit of savings. Got some war credits and some extra because I was overseas a lot. But it wasn't much.

Officer: Well there's a bank cheque waiting for you with the clerk. You get £83. Might sound like a lot right now but spend it wisely. Make it last.

Charlie: Thank you, sir.

Officer: Wish I could give you more, son. I really do. You've earned it. We all owe you.

Charlie: Just doing my job.

Officer: Have you had your rations yet?

Charlie: Some stuff yes. Had some tins. My parents had an allotment. So me and my brother have got some veg. We've been sharing out with the neighbours.

(Hilda comes over to Charlie)

Hilda: *(Emotional)*
Can I give you a cuddle? If you don't marry that Gladys, I'll have you. Or your brother. You are as kind as you are brave. Quite handsome, too.

Officer: Control yourself, Hilda. You're a happily married woman.

Hilda: *(Laughing)*
Married. Not sure about happily!

Officer: You wait 'til I tell your Nobby.
She's right, Charlie. That's very generous.
Not much to go around right now.

Charlie: They've had nothing. Our neighbours. And they'd do the same for us.

Officer: Charlie. Charlie. Charlie. You're quite a boy, aren't ya?
(Pause)
Has your Gladys got a sweet tooth?

Charlie: What do you mean?

Officer: *(He reaches for something in his pocket)*
I was going to give this to my Mrs.

Charlie: Chocolate?

Officer: Give it to Gladys. Assuming you still want... you know. Assuming you still want her.

Charlie: I can't take that from you.

Officer: You can and you bloody well will.

(He pushes the chocolate across the table to Charlie)

Charlie: But your wife...

Officer: You know what, Charlie. If I told my Mrs about you and I told her I DIDN'T give you the chocolate she'd box my bloody ears for me.

Charlie: I don't know what to say.

Officer: Don't say nothing. Save me some carrots.

Charlie: *(Overwhelmed)*
Thank you, sir. Very much. If you're sure?

Hilda: He's sure. Don't look a gift horse in the mouth. Especially not his mouth. He never cleans his teeth.

Officer: See what I have to put up with?
(Pause)
So what are you thinking, Charlie?

Charlie: About what?

Officer: About anything? About anything at all.

Charlie: *(Contemplating)*
I'm thinking... why?

Officer: Why what? The war?

Charlie: Yes. How can so much... so many terrible things... happen just because one man wanted more?

Officer: More?

Charlie: More land? Wasn't Germany enough?

Officer: I think he wanted less in some ways. They found camps full of dead people. Tens of thousands of bodies. Gas chambers. Fucking gas chambers. Men, women, children. Fucking gas chambers.

Charlie: We heard.

Officer: How does it make you feel?

Charlie: It makes me feel... this must never happen again. Never ever.
(Now very emotional)

Officer: If it's any consolation, I reckon it never will. Hitler's gone. Mussolini's gone.

Charlie: I hope they'll never let one man have so much power he can just invade someone else's country. And let so many of his own people die.

Officer: Well said, son. I reckon we've learnt our lesson.

Charlie: What was the point of it all?

Officer: That, Charlie... is a very good question.