

## ***My Boy Jack* (1915)**

Based on Rudyard Kipling's 1915 poem, *My Boy Jack*, David Haig wrote a play by the same name that premiered in 1997. It was later adapted as a movie starring David Haig as Rudyard Kipling, Daniel Radcliffe as John "Jack" Kipling, Kim Cattrall as Caroline Kipling, and Carey Mulligan as Elsie Kipling. The film *My Boy Jack* was released in 2007.

***My Boy Jack* by Rudyard Kipling:** [Poetry By Heart | My Boy Jack](#)



The film opens in England 1914, as John is taking his medical examination for admittance into the English navy. Because of his terrible myopia, the navy officials give him only five minutes of their time before dismissing him and denying him the ability to enlist in the navy. John is the son of Rudyard Kipling, the author of *The Jungle Book* and a proud believer in the British Empire. Rudyard is extremely displeased at the denial of John's voluntary service and—despite Caroline and Elsie's vehement disapproval—uses his influence as a renowned British writer to get Jack admittance as an officer into the Irish Guard. Jack shares a heartfelt conversation with his sister, where he shares that he isn't comfortable in their family house; he feels that he can't be himself at home and needs to "be with other people."

***Jack & Elsie:***

[https://youtube.com/clip/Ugkx-ef\\_Pa09-IORgmsfZiKaFgExuvoXIAh6?si=hHZO6rqz01tKfil5](https://youtube.com/clip/Ugkx-ef_Pa09-IORgmsfZiKaFgExuvoXIAh6?si=hHZO6rqz01tKfil5)

Rudyard stands unapologetically by his decision to send Jack into the war, and he expresses his immense pride in him as he leaves home for officer training. Jack spends the next year or so in officer training where he adapts to his unique situation of wearing spectacles as a soldier. After months of training, he eventually is put in charge of training newly recruited soldiers. He and his regiment depart to Loos in Northern France, and the Germans are dominating the battlefield

due to England's lack of modern warfare technology. Many of the soldiers are suffering from trenchfoot, and they turn to Jack to help them with their troubles. The battle grows closer, and the Irish Guard is suffering great losses. At home, Caroline and Elsie are worried sick, but Rudyard maintains his pride in Jack and doesn't doubt that his service is anything less than honorable.



*Jack adds tape to his glasses, so they don't fall down when he is shooting.*

Jack celebrates his 18th birthday in the trenches with his unit the day before they move in on the Germans in the Battle of Loos. Days later, his family receives a letter in the mail saying that Jack has gone missing, and he is believed to be wounded. His family is devastated, but Rudyard maintains that Jack must already have made it to safety and that they just haven't received that parcel yet. Caroline sets out on a tireless investigation to find her son, covertly blaming her husband for their son's disappearance. She conducts countless interviews with English soldiers to try to find out what happened to her son, and if he is ever coming home again.

***Happy Birthday Jack:***

<https://youtube.com/clip/UgkxZQrwJ7Go2QivJAaoWqmZgEZ3bY6NTxgB?si=Itoz-U2ltBYvi7KS>

*My Boy Jack* is an emotionally-powered story that navigates the themes of patriotism, parental expectation, duty and honor, and resilience. The differences between the expectations and realities of war are made obvious by juxtaposing the bright, hopeful English homefront with the dark and rainy training camps, trenches, and battlefields. The scenes become more gloomy as the film progresses, which demonstrates the decreasing hopefulness of all of the characters in a subtle, yet powerful, manner.

***War & Home:***

[https://youtube.com/clip/UgkxXLQXmvqEBrg4ouzZF9L2o3\\_I9DIFu1wA?si=cCjYs3fMRGOdYarz](https://youtube.com/clip/UgkxXLQXmvqEBrg4ouzZF9L2o3_I9DIFu1wA?si=cCjYs3fMRGOdYarz)

The film is very particular with its use of background instrumentals in the most emotive and important scenes. Eerie music backgrounds each time as Rudyard discusses the casualties of each battle with his council. They discuss how they will break the news of their massive losses to the public over the instrumentals that convey the direness of the war. As Caroline and Rudyard conduct their final soldier interview, the same music that played during all of Rudyard's previous meetings plays while they find out Jack's fate. Once the soldier leaves their house, the music cuts off, and uncomfortable and despairing silence fills the air as Rudyard and Caroline process the information from the soldier. The choice to leave the scene unaccompanied by instrumentals is one that marvellously conveys the raw emotion of the moment and makes the viewer feel a sense of the discomfort that the characters are feeling in the moment.

***The Music Ends:***

[https://youtube.com/clip/UgkxIYV4qBxC\\_YcgeOmlOrZoEWMzan6UILb5?si=bYMavvNxL2uoPhU](https://youtube.com/clip/UgkxIYV4qBxC_YcgeOmlOrZoEWMzan6UILb5?si=bYMavvNxL2uoPhU)

The acting in this film was incredible. Daniel Radcliffe played a troubled, gentle, and deeply caring Jack who loved his family (and his sister, especially) more than anything. Jack's hopes and fears and everything in between were felt through Radcliffe's performance. Caroline Kipling was a strong-willed American woman who was concerned for her son's safety more than she was concerned about him "doing his bit" for the country. Kim Cattrall is a witty actor who gave her character so much depth, despite Caroline's efforts to manage emotionally. David Haig was the perfect Rudyard; his confliction about his decision to enlist Jack manually becomes more pronounced throughout the film, even though he rarely states these feelings. He has several vulnerable moments where it is clear he feels the responsibility of the danger that his son's life is in, but he doesn't choose to voice these vulnerable feelings in most of the film. Elsie is a deeply loving sister who Carey Mulligan does a beautiful job of portraying. She is often quiet, but clearly sensitive. She has no problem standing up to her father when it is in defense of her brother, and Mulligan makes the internal battle Elsie goes through evident.

***Elsie:***

[https://youtube.com/clip/Ugkx1RFwac4aTf4NqElX6v6vXzOuLW7HOYd\\_?si=LU6QiU5GfNrtaTZ-](https://youtube.com/clip/Ugkx1RFwac4aTf4NqElX6v6vXzOuLW7HOYd_?si=LU6QiU5GfNrtaTZ-)

*My Boy Jack* makes it clear that war is not heroic. It destroys lives and families, just as it destroyed Jack's. Patriotism exists at the cost of human suffering and sacrifice, and this film evokes those emotions powerfully.

