

Return to the City



Introduction

In 1939, before the outbreak of the Second World War, the British Government had made plans to move children from London and other large cities – to ‘evacuate’ them to the safety of the countryside. It was expected that the cities would be badly damaged by enemy air-raids:

War was declared on 3 September, and in those first few days of September almost 600 000 children were sent out of London. On evacuation day the children met at their schools and were taken to the railway stations. Each child had a label with their name, address and age printed on it. They were supposed to bring only what they could easily carry, and their luggage was to include underwear, nightclothes, a comb and a toothbrush. Each child was to bring a packet of food that would last the day. No one, except the authorities, knew where they were being sent. It was a trip into the unknown. Their only link with home was an official postcard which each child had been given. As soon as they reached their destination, it was to be posted to their parents with their new address.

One child sent home a card reading: ‘Dear Mum, I hope you are well. I do not like the man’s face much. Perhaps it will look better in daylight. I like the dog’s face best.’

Billeting officers had been responsible for finding homes which would take in all these city children. Many people did not welcome the thought of sharing their homes with strange children, especially those from London’s worst slums, who were said to be dirty, badly fed and poorly clothed. In other cases, children from comfortable homes found themselves in dark, damp cottages, often without electricity or sanitation. Some families expected the children to work as unpaid servants or farm labourers and to eat their meals apart from the family. Others found it a real hardship to feed the children adequately on the eight shillings and sixpence paid by the authorities. For huge numbers of children, it was their first experience of country life. Some got into mischief through ignorance or boredom, but many others found happy homes and flourished in the open spaces and fresh air of the countryside.

As the first months of the war passed, the expected air-raids did not take place. Homesick and bored, many of the evacuees returned to the cities, in spite of publicity urging parents to leave the children where they were safe.

After the battle of Dunkirk, when the British forces were driven out of Europe by the advancing German armies, there seemed to be a very real threat of invasion. In June 1940 there was a second wave of evacuation and many children were also sent overseas, to Canada and the USA.

The real bombing of London – the Blitz – began in earnest in September 1940. Now the civilians in the big cities were in the front line of the battle. London was bombed for 57 consecutive nights, and often in daylight as well. Thousands were killed and injured. In one night alone, 1436 people were killed and 1762 injured. The fires that broke out after the air-raids devastated the city. But Londoners faced their ordeal with astonishing courage and cheerfulness.

In 1941 Winston Churchill said: ‘I can see the damage done by every attack but I also see, side by side with the devastation and amid the ruins. . . . the spirit of an unquenchable people’.

Staging the play

If only a small acting space is available, the actors can bring on and take off essential furniture and properties. If you have a large acting space, then it can be divided into four main areas and the furniture set permanently in place: a table, chairs and wireless set to represent the Bradys’ front room; two milk churns and a ‘gate’ (e.g. a plank supported by two chairs) to represent the farmyard; upturned tables, chairs and boxes to represent the warehouse; a placard on which is written ‘Platform 9’ and a tea trolley to represent Paddington Station. Other scenes, which do not require a setting, can take place between or in front of the above. Bill Brady, the storyteller, needs to be positioned so that he can observe the actors, i.e. either among the audience or on his own downstage of the acting space.

Costumes for this play are very simple – but you can use blazers and jackets instead of anoraks, for example, which would look too modern. Trousers and shorts, instead of jeans, and simple cotton dresses for the girls will help to make your play look right.

Lighting changes should be kept to a minimum. The lights can be lowered during the scene in the warehouse to help give more atmosphere.

Sound effects

The following sound effects, essential only if the play is to be performed to an audience, are available on *BBC Records RED 126M*.

Air-raid siren
Aircraft
Bombing
All-clear

Also, Neville Chamberlain’s ‘declaration of war’ speech is available on *BBC Records REQ 571*.



1 Bad news! (London, Sunday, 3 September 1939)

10.45 a.m. The Bradys' front room. Dad is sitting at the table reading a newspaper. Mum is knitting in an armchair. A large wireless stands silent on a sideboard. Bill Brady is watching the scene. An air-raid siren sounds and he turns to address the audience.

Bill Brady: That sound still brings shivers to my spine even after more than forty years! It was familiar enough when I was your age, though. It warned people in every town and city to take shelter – enemy bombers were on their way!

(The siren begins to fade.)

I'm Bill Brady, by the way. And this is the story of something that happened to me when I was a lad. I lived with my mum and dad in London. *(He points to the characters on stage)* That's them – waiting for me to come down to breakfast on what turned out to be a very important day. A Sunday it was. I still remember it as though it was yesterday. . . .

(He turns upstage to watch the following scene. Mum gets up and opens the door. She calls up the stairs.)

Mum: Billy! Billy! Do you know what the time is? *(There is no reply. She turns to Dad.)* I'll make a fresh pot of tea.

(Mum exits. A moment or two later, Young Billy enters in his pyjamas.)

Young Billy: Why are we having breakfast in here? Has Christmas come early or something?

(Dad ignores him. Young Billy sits down at the table. Mum comes in with a tray of tea and Young Billy's breakfast.)

Mum: About time too! It's nearly eleven o'clock.

Young Billy: It is Sunday!

(Billy takes his breakfast and starts eating. Mum pours the tea.)

(With his mouth full) Why are we having breakfast in here, Mum, instead of the kitchen?

Mum: Don't talk with your mouth full!

Dad: You're lucky to get breakfast at all at this time of the morning.

(Mum hands their tea to Dad and Young Billy and sits down with her own cup. Young Billy continues eating until he suddenly notices the wireless.)

Young Billy: What's the wireless doing in here? *(Making a face)* The vicar's not coming to dinner, is he?

Dad: Less of your cheek, son.

Young Billy: I only asked. *(He finishes eating. Then, in a whisper, to Mum.)* Has Dad won the football pools?

Mum: Don't be so daft!

Young Billy: Has somebody died?

Mum: No, Billy.

Young Billy: Why won't you tell me what's so special about today? What's going on?

Mum: For goodness' sake, Dad, switch on the wireless. There might be some news.

(Dad does so.)

Young Billy: News of what, Mum? Are they closing down the school and giving us all a week's holiday?

(The radio crackles into life.)

Dad: Quiet, son. There's something we want to hear.

Announcer: This is London. You will now hear a statement by the Prime Minister.

Young Billy: Mr Chamberlain? I didn't think politicians worked on Sundays!

Mum and Dad: Sssh!

Mr Chamberlain: This morning the British Ambassador in Berlin handed the German Government a final Note stating that, unless we heard from them by 11 o'clock that they were prepared at once to withdraw their troops from Poland, a state of war would exist between us. I have to tell you now that no such undertaking has been received, and that consequently this country is at war with Germany. . . .

(Dad switches off the wireless.)

Young Billy: So that's why we had breakfast in here.

Mum: At least the waiting's over.

Dad: We've been expecting it long enough.

Young Billy: What'll happen, Dad?

Dad: It'll all blow over in a couple of months. Don't worry, son, you'll be all right.

Young Billy: What do you mean, I'll be all right?

Mum: You're going to be evacuated, Billy. With all the other children round here.

Young Billy: What's . . . *evacuated* mean?

Dad: You'll be sent to the seaside or to the country.

Mum: Somewhere safe away from all the bombs.

Young Billy: I'm not going anywhere.

Dad: You'll do as you're told.

Young Billy: Can't I stay here with you? Do I have to be . . . *evacuated*?

Mum: You'll like it, Billy. You'll have all your friends from school with you. And your teachers.

Young Billy: I definitely don't want to go!

Dad: Now don't be stupid, son. This is serious.

Young Billy: Do I *have* to go? Really?

Dad: Come on, Billy. Put a brave face on it – for your mother's sake. She'd be worried sick if you stayed here.

Mum: It's for the best, Billy. And, you'll see, it won't be for long. Now, come on. Give me a hand to clear the table. Dad, you bring the wireless back through to the kitchenette.

(As they leave the stage, Bill Brady turns to speak to the audience again.)

Bill Brady: And that's how I first learned about the war and that I was being evacuated – as it turned out, to a farm in Wales. Mum was wrong about it not being for long, though. Me and my mates were away for twelve whole months. Things in Wales were certainly different from what we were used to at home. We were townies. We didn't understand country ways. When we first arrived, I didn't even know milk came from cows. I thought it came straight out of bottles!

2 Living with strangers (twelve months later on a farm in Wales)

Bill Brady turns upstage as a group of children enter. They are obviously bored. Young Billy climbs on to the farmyard gate and starts to balance across it.

Vera: If Mr Roberts sees you up there, Billy Brady, you won't half get told off!

Young Billy: At least it would liven the place up a bit.

Jack: There's never anything to do around here.

Mike: Why can't we go back home?

Young Billy: *(Jumping down)* What about a game of football?

Rita: We don't want to play football!

Joyce: No!

Young Billy: I didn't ask you.

Joyce: Anyway, Mr Roberts said you're not to. It scares the hens and they stop laying.

Mike: What will we use for goalposts?

Young Billy: How about the milk churns?

Rita: You can't!

Jack: Why not?

Rita: They're full of milk, that's why not!

Mike: We only want to borrow them.

Joyce: Mr Roberts will go potty if he finds out.

Jack: He won't find out, will he? Unless you tell him!

Rita: Anyway, he's confiscated the football.

Young Billy: I know where he's hidden it though!

(Young Billy rushes off. Mike and Jack start dragging the churns into place.)

Rita: Well, I'm not playing.

Joyce: Nor am I.

Vera: Jack's right, though. This place is dead boring.

Rita: We could go into town.

Vera: It's Sunday.

Rita: So?

Vera: The shops will be shut.

Joyce: And there are no buses on Sundays.

Rita: Let's go for a walk, then.

Vera: We're always going for walks. I'd rather play football.

Joyce: Anyway, I have to be back for my dinner at one.

(Young Billy returns with the football. He holds it up triumphantly. Jack and Mike cheer.)

Young Billy: What did I tell you?

Joyce: You wait till Mr Roberts finds out.

Young Billy: You three keep a look-out in case he comes.

Rita: Who do you think you're bossing about?

Joyce: You can keep your own look-out. *(To Vera and Rita)*
Come on, you two. Let's go down to the post box.

Vera: What for?

Joyce: I've got a postcard to send to my mum.

Vera: Not another one! I'll play football.

Joyce: Please yourself. Are you coming, Rita?

Rita: OK. Vera's right, though. Your mum will soon have enough postcards to wallpaper the whole house!

(Joyce and Rita go, leaving the others to start their game.)

Young Billy: Bags I'm in goal!

Vera: You're always in goal.

Jack: Let's take turns.

Young Billy: All right. Me first!

Vera: I'll be captain.

Mike: We don't need a captain. We're only taking shots.

Vera: I'll shoot first then.

(They take turns to try scoring goals. After a few attempts, Young Billy makes a spectacular dive, but misses the ball and crashes into one of the milk churns. It falls over and the top comes off. The others cheer. Joyce and Rita come running back.)

Joyce: Whatever was that noise?

Rita: Oh, Billy! Look what you've done!

Vera: It's spilling all over the place.

Young Billy: Well, don't just stand there, you lot. Give me a hand to get the top back on.

(They start to fiddle with the lid.)

Mike: It won't go, Billy.

Vera: You've dented it.

Young Billy: Don't blame me. You kicked the ball.

Jack: Yes, but you hit the milk churn.

(An argument breaks out. Mr Roberts arrives.)

Mr Roberts: Now what are you lot up to? *(He suddenly sees the spilt milk.)* Don't you lot realise there's a war going on?

Vera: It was an accident, Mr Roberts. We didn't mean to—

Mr Roberts: Accident, be blowed! There's been nothing but trouble since the day you townies arrived!

Mike: We were only playing football, Mr Roberts.

Young Billy *(To Mike)*: Big mouth!

Mr Roberts: Football, is it? *(To Young Billy)* I thought I told you there was to be no more football in my farmyard. And I suppose you got the ball from my study. Thieving, that is, Billy Brady!

Young Billy: It's my football!

Mr Roberts: And don't you answer me back!

Vera: We didn't mean no harm, Mr Roberts. Honest.

Mr Roberts: You can tell that to your headmaster up at the school, young lady. First thing tomorrow. I've had enough of you. In fact, the whole village has had enough of you. As far as I'm concerned they can send you back home tomorrow and drop a bomb on the whole blessed lot of you!

(He snatches the football and storms off.)

Young Billy: Charming!

Jack: That's torn it, Billy.

Vera: You heard what he said about going to Mr Blackwell.

Mike: And you know what Inky Blackwell said he'd do if he gets another complaint.

Young Billy: I don't care. I've had enough.

Mike: Me too!

Vera: We all have.

Joyce: But we've no choice, have we?

Young Billy: Haven't we?

Jack: What do you mean, Billy?

Young Billy: Let's go home!

Joyce: But it's not dinner-time yet.

Young Billy: I don't mean home *here*. I mean *home* home.

Jack: London?

Young Billy: Yes.

Joyce: Blimey, Billy. How are we going to do that?

Young Billy: On the train.

Jack: We haven't got any money.

Young Billy: We'll just have to dodge the ticket collector, then.

Vera: We can do it easy. The trains are so full these days that no one will notice us.

Rita: But what do you want to go back to London for? There are bombs there.

Mike: To see our mums and dads.

Vera: Get away from all this.

Young Billy: See if everything's OK.

Jack: My mum will clobber me if I turn up on the doorstep.

Vera: No, she won't.

Joyce: It wouldn't be the first time if she did, would it?

Mike: They can only send us back again.

Rita: Yes, to face Mr Blackwell!

Vera: We don't lose anything by trying.

Young Billy: Come on, you lot. It'll be a right lark. What do you say?

Jack: I don't know, Billy.

Vera (To Joyce and Rita): What about you two?

Joyce: I'll come if Rita does.

Rita: Try and stop me!

Joyce: So will I, then.

Mike: Come on, Jack. You don't want to be left on your own.

Jack: All right then.

Vera: When are we leaving?

Young Billy: As soon as we can. Tonight!

Jack: Tonight?

Young Billy: Yes. Unless you want to stay and face Inky Blackwell at school tomorrow.

Jack: No thanks!

Young Billy: Right then. Tonight it is!

Joyce: How will we get on the train without being seen?

Rita: Yes. What about the station-master?

Young Billy: There's no one on duty at night. Only the guard on the train. While he's loading the mail bags, we can nip across the platform.

Vera: Supposing he sees us?

Young Billy: It'll be dark. He'll only have a torch. The blackout will have started. As long as we don't slam the doors or do anything stupid, nobody will even know we're there.

Rita: What about the other passengers? Won't they be suspicious?

Young Billy: Not if we split up and go in different carriages. Girls in one. Boys in another.

Vera: What if people start asking questions?

Jack: And what about the ticket collector? What do we tell him?

Young Billy: You'll have to spin him a yarn.

Jack: Like what?

Young Billy: Think of something!

Rita: I've heard you tell enough tales to Mr Blackwell.

(The girls giggle.)

Jack: Ha! Ha! Very funny, I'm sure.

Young Billy: Listen. If we're leaving tonight, we'd better go and pack a few things. Get some food too, if you can.

Mike: From Mrs Parry? You must be joking. She's got a padlock on the pantry door.

(Everyone but Young Billy laughs.)

Young Billy: Be serious!

Vera: How do we get out of the house?

Young Billy: Make up an excuse to go to bed early. And creep out the back way.

Mike: I don't need an excuse. I get *sent* to bed early.

Young Billy: We'll meet up again in London in the morning. On Paddington Station. Platform 9. Five minutes after the train arrives. Right?

(Everyone agrees.)

And whatever you do, act normal. Don't do or say anything to make people suspicious. Right! Let's go!

(They exit in different directions whistling self-consciously. Bill Brady, the narrator, turns back to the audience.)

Bill Brady: Believe it or not, my crazy scheme worked.

Thanks to the blackout, we managed to get on the train without being seen. We didn't have to worry about telling tales to the other passengers either. Most of them slept all the way to London. So did the ticket collector, I reckon. There was no sign of him at all. When the train pulled into Paddington station next morning, it was still dark. We were a bit worse for wear, but we'd made it just as I planned.

3 Back to the Smoke (Paddington Station early next morning)

Bill Brady turns upstage as the children enter – looking very sorry for themselves.

Jack: It's really cold, Billy.

Young Billy: Don't blame me for the weather.

Vera: You'll be blaming him for starting the war next!

Jack: I was only saying, Vera.

Young Billy: You'll soon warm up once we start walking.

Others: Walking?

Young Billy: We haven't got any money for our bus fares. So we've no choice.

Mike: But it's miles!

Vera: You'll be nice and warm when you get there, then!

Joyce: I'm starving.

Rita: So am I.

(The tea-lady appears. She opens up the tea-stall and starts to get things ready. Young Billy is the only one to notice.)

Young Billy: How about a cup of tea and a couple of slices of toast?

Boys: Not half!

Rita: Don't be stupid!

Young Billy: I'm not. Look!

(He indicates the tea-stall. No one is impressed.)

Joyce: So?

Young Billy: Let's go and get something to eat and drink.

Mike: And what do we use for money?

Young Billy: We won't need money.

Jack (Horried): You mean steal it?

Vera: We're in enough bother for running away!

Rita: Yes! And I don't intend getting into any more trouble on your account, Billy Brady!

Joyce: Me neither!

Mike: They're right, Billy. We can't start thieving just because we're hungry.

Young Billy: Who said anything about thieving?

Vera: You said we've no money!

Jack: If we can't pay for it and don't steal it, what other way is there?

Young Billy: We can *persuade* her to take pity on us.

Vera: There's a war on, Billy Brady, or hadn't you noticed? Food's rationed. You're not going to get someone to give away half a dozen cups of tea and a loaf of bread!

Young Billy: We can try!

Joyce: *You* can! I'm not.

Rita: I'd rather wait till I get home.

(The others agree.)

Young Billy: Please yourselves!

(Billy heads for the tea-stall. He puts on a false, cheery smile.)

Good morning!

(The tea-lady ignores him and continues her work. Young Billy stands about self-consciously. The others begin to giggle.)

Nice morning!

Tea-lady: It might be for you, my boy. You haven't been up since four o'clock.

Young Billy: No. I've been up all night.

(The tea-lady stops abruptly and looks at him. The others look on attentively.)

Tea-lady: All night? At your age. Just off the train, are you?

Young Billy: Yes, the overnight from Wales. I didn't sleep a wink.

Tea-lady: Evacuated there, were you?

Young Billy: That's right.

Tea-lady *(Sympathetically)*: You must be tired out.

Young Billy: Not so much tired as hungry and thirsty.

Tea-lady: Fancy sending a kid your age all that way on his own in the middle of the night. Whatever next? *(Suddenly suspicious)* You haven't run away, have you?

Young Billy *(Laughing falsely)*: Run away? No! Of course not!

Tea-lady: 'Cos if I thought you'd run away, I'd have to report you to the authorities.

Young Billy *(Desperately trying to think up an excuse)*: I'm just coming home for the weekend.

Tea-lady: For the weekend? On a Monday! You *have* run away, haven't you?

Young Billy *(Suddenly and falsely)*: Look! There's my mates. They must have come to meet me.

(He rejoins the others quickly. The tea-lady gets on with her work, but eyes them suspiciously. She is clearly not convinced.)

Young Billy: I think she's twigged!

Vera: Any more bright ideas, Billy Brady?

Young Billy: Well, I *tried*, didn't I?

Mike: Come on, let's go before she calls a copper!

(As they leave, Bill Brady, the narrator, turns downstage again.)

Bill Brady: It was getting light when we left Paddington Station. In case the tea-lady *had* reported us, we decided to play safe and use the back streets. We walked and walked for miles all day long. Although we'd heard a bit about the air raids from the wireless and our mums' and dads' letters, none of us expected things to be as bad as they were. At times, we could hardly believe our eyes at what we saw.

4 Danger! (Somewhere in London late that afternoon)

Bill Brady turns upstage. The children wander on slowly, looking all around in amazement and horror.

Vera: Oh, it's terrible. Everything's in ruins.

Mike: You didn't say it would be as bad as this, Billy.

Young Billy: Well, I didn't know, did I?

Jack: I wish I hadn't left Wales.

(The others agree.)

Joyce: I feel sick.

Rita: What if we find our homes bombed out?

Young Billy: Look, there's no point being upset. We've got this far. We might as well carry on.

Vera: He's right. We can't go back now.

Jack: At least let's find somewhere to spend the night. It's getting dark.

Joyce: Yes, Billy. I'm tired out.

Mike: And it's starting to rain.

Young Billy: Into that old warehouse, then.

Rita: Will it be safe?

Young Billy: How do I know?

Mike: At least it'll be dry.

(They cross to the warehouse. There are upturned tables and chairs and several empty packing cases.)

Jack: Cor, what a shambles!

Rita: Looks like a bomb's hit it.

Vera: It probably has!

Mike: It's a right mess.

Young Billy: Well, what did you expect? Buckingham Palace?

Vera: Let's tidy up a bit and make ourselves somewhere to sit.

Mike: Over there! There's not so much rubbish.

(They begin to tidy the tables and chairs. As they do so, a distant air-raid siren begins.)

Joyce: What's that noise?

Rita: What noise?

Joyce: Listen!

(Everybody stops. Mike suddenly looks scared.)

Mike: Blimey! It's the air-raid siren!

Jack: I'm scared, Billy.

Vera: So am I!

Rita (Beginning to cry): What are we going to do?

Young Billy: Shelter, that's what!

Joyce: Where?

Young Billy: Here!

Vera: How?

Mike: There might be a cellar. We can go down there.

Jack: The tables!

Young Billy: What?

Jack: The tables! My nan says you've got to get under a table if there's nowhere else to go.

Young Billy: Right! Let's get moving – fast!

(Under Billy's directions, they start to turn over the upturned tables and put them together against a wall. In the distance the bombing begins. It gets closer throughout the following dialogue.)

Jack: Don't put them there, Billy!

Young Billy: Why not?

Jack: My nan says—

Young Billy: You and your nan! *(Jack starts crying too.)*

Vera: Listen to him, Billy.

Mike: I bet his nan knows better than you!

Jack (Sobbing): Not up against the wall! In case it collapses!

Rita (Hysterical): Listen! The bombs! They've started!

(They move the tables away from the wall. The bombing is now much closer. Everyone is beginning to get hysterical. Jack, Mike, Rita and Joyce are crying. A low-flying aircraft passes overhead. A sudden, deafening bang is heard! The children dive for cover under the tables. The air-raid builds to a climax before it fades away. The children are still and silent)

throughout. They have all been very frightened by the experience. Rita, Joyce, Mike and Jack are sobbing quietly. The all-clear sounds.)

Vera: That's the all-clear. It must be over.

Young Billy: Come on, you lot, put a brave face on it.

Jack (*Trying not to cry*): I'm not speaking to you, Billy Brady, ever again.

Rita: Me neither. And when I get home—

Mike: *If you get home!*

(Rita, Joyce and Jack cry more loudly.)

Vera: Don't say that! You'll only make them worse. (*To Rita, Joyce and Jack*) Come on, put a brave face on it, as Billy says. You'll be home soon enough. You'll see.

Young Billy: It's only a couple of miles.

Jack: Let's go then – now!

(They get up, dust themselves down and make for the door. Mike suddenly notices that it's blocked with fallen rubble.)

Mike: Look! The doorway's blocked. We can't get out!

Joyce: What about the windows?

Young Billy: They've got bars on them, stupid!

Rita: All right, Mr Clever! What are we going to do, then?

Young Billy: Clear the rubble out of the way!

Vera: That'll take hours.

(Jack, Joyce, Rita and Mike start crying again.)

Jack: I mean it, Billy. I'm never going to speak to you again. Never!

(All but Vera agree with him.)

Vera: You can't blame Billy. You didn't *have* to come. Nobody made you.

Mike: That's as may be! But what are we going to do now?

Young Billy: There's a bit of a gap up at the top there. I'll climb up and see if it's big enough to get through.

(He does so. The others look on. Suddenly Billy freezes. Vera senses that something is wrong.)

Vera (*Quietly*): Your face, Billy. Whatever's the matter?

(The others notice. They are now scared too.)

Mike: Billy, are you all right?

Young Billy (*Pretending to be very frightened*): It's . . . it's a . . . a U.X.B.

Joyce: A what?

Rita: What's that?

Vera: Blimey! An unexploded bomb!

(The others start to cry again.)

Now just stop it, you lot! It's Billy who's stuck up there.

(There is silence for a while. Everyone is watching Billy. Then suddenly he bursts out laughing.)

Young Billy: I was pulling your leg! There's nothing – nothing at all! Except for a hole big enough to get through. Come on!

(He dashes off. The others start to scramble up the pile of rubble after him. They are angry, even Vera. The following dialogue takes place as they leave the stage. Everyone is talking at once.)

Vera: You just wait till I get hold of you, Billy Brady! I'll knock your block off!

Jack: That really does it. Now I'm really not ever going to speak to him again.

Joyce: I don't call that funny, Billy. And nor will my mum when she finds out. You just wait!

Mike: Some friend you are, scaring us stupid like that. You wait till I get hold of you!

Rita: That's about the daftest thing you've ever done, Billy Brady. Wait till Mr Blackwell hears about this! You'll be for it!

(As the last of the children leaves the stage, Bill Brady turns to the audience once more.)

Bill Brady: It was a terrible trick to play, especially after what we'd just been through. But I learnt my lesson. The others wouldn't speak to me at all. Not even Vera and Mike. They'd had enough. To be honest, I'd had enough myself. I was cold, tired and hungry. I just wanted to get home. When I finally did though, I didn't get quite the reception I'd expected.

5 Home at last (late that night)

He turns upstage. Mum and Dad enter. Dad sits down with a newspaper. Mum looks anxiously out of the window.

Dad: Come and sit down, love. He won't get here any sooner with you watching for him.

(Mum sits down.)

Mum: I do hope he's all right.

Dad: Our Billy? Tough as old boots. He'll be fine, you'll see.

(A sudden knock at the door. Mum springs to her feet and makes for the front door.)

Mum: That'll be him now.

Dad (Calling out to Mum): Don't you go being soft on him.

He's done a stupid thing and he's got to be made to see just *how* stupid.

(Mum opens the door. Billy grins broadly. He gets no response from his mum.)

Young Billy: Hello, Mum!

Mum: We've been expecting you, young man!

(She goes into the living room. Billy follows her.)

Young Billy: How come?

Dad: They phoned me at work from Wales to say you'd disappeared. That's how!

Young Billy: Dad, I'm sorry. We didn't mean to worry you.

Mum: Well, you did. We've all been worried sick, Billy.

Young Billy: I just wanted to come home. To see you.

Mum: It's not safe here, Billy. We've had air-raids nearly every night for a week. That's why you were all sent away in the first place.

Dad: You think this is all a bit of a lark, don't you? Well, it's not. You haven't given a thought to other people. You've put yourself in danger and worried the life out of your mother and me!

Young Billy: We didn't want to cause trouble, Mum. Can I stay?

Dad: No – of course you can't.

Young Billy: Please. Mum

Mum: You heard what your father said. No! We can't look after you properly. Not with things as they are. Play fair, eh? We're sorry you've been homesick.

Dad: But I'm putting you straight back on the train to Wales first thing in the morning.

Young Billy: Oh, Dad!

Dad: And I don't want to hear another word about it!

Mum: It's for your own good, Billy. Now upstairs to your bed. I'll bring some supper up to you.

Young Billy: Can't I just stay down here for just five minutes?

Mum: Up to bed – now!

Dad: Just for once, Billy, do as you're told!

(Reluctantly, Billy goes to the door. He stops in the doorway and turns to his mum and dad. There are tears in his eyes.)

Young Billy (Quietly): I am sorry for all the trouble I've caused. Honest. I promise you I'll never do anything like it again. I've learnt my lesson.

Dad: I believe you have, son.

Mum: You're safer in the country, Billy. And the war won't last forever. You'll see.

Young Billy: Compared to what's happening in London, living with strangers doesn't seem too bad after all.

(Mum and Dad follow Billy out of the room. Bill Brady, the narrator walks over to where they were standing, speaking to the audience as he goes.)

Bill Brady: Well, that's it. That's my story. Next morning back to Wales we went. I got a bit of a row from the others at first, but we were all friends again by the time the train arrived. Even Inky . . . er . . . Mr Blackwell wasn't that cross. We got a bit of a telling-off, but he was quite good about it really. He even did what he could to cheer things up for us – arranged trips to the seaside, outings to the pictures, things like that. We ended up enjoying ourselves and, when the time came to leave Wales, we didn't want to go home! Like I said to my mum that night before I went to bed, compared to what was happening in London, living with strangers didn't seem so bad after all!

(He turns to the door and walks off stage.)

Follow-up work

- 1 Work with a small group. One of you is a billeting officer, responsible for finding homes for children from the city. The others in the group are a country family, perhaps living on a farm. The billeting officer has just called to tell the family that they must accept two children into their home. How will the family react? Will they have different attitudes to the arrival of the city children?
- 2 Many evacuees had never been to the country before, and were homesick, frightened or bored. Work in a small group and show a scene which happens when some city children get into trouble because they do not understand country ways.
- 3 Work with a partner. One of you is Mr Blackwell, headmaster of the village school. The other is the farmer whose milk churns were knocked over, and who has come to the school to complain. What is the headmaster's attitude? Has the farmer any other complaints to make?
- 4 During the bombing of London, many people were trapped in the ruins of buildings. Work in a small group. Working in movement show how an injured person might have been rescued from a bombed building.
- 5 Work with a partner. One of you is an evacuee trying to make your way back to your family. The other is a railway guard or an adult who is puzzled by your presence on the train. What reasons can you think of to explain your journey convincingly?
- 6 Work with a partner. Imagine that one of you is one of the children in the play, only now you are grown-up and the war is long over. The other is one of the children whose home you were evacuated to during the war. What can you both remember about those days? What incidents are really clear in your minds? Share some of the things that have happened to you both since then.
- 7 Imagine that you are Billy Brady or one of the other children in the play. Once a week Mr Blackwell makes you write a postcard home, *which he reads before posting for you*. What kinds of things will you say about where you are staying and the school, and the people you are billeted with?
When you have written the postcard, write a secret letter which you

- will post yourself, saying what you really think and feel about being away from home.
- 8 You can see from the photograph how little the evacuees were able to take with them. What things will you choose to take with you in your small suitcase? Would you take things to remind you of home, things to help you pass the time, or practical things?
 - 9 Imagine that you could write a letter to the family you are going to stay with. Introduce yourself to them and try to tell them as much as possible about yourself and your likes and dislikes.
 - 10 Imagine that, like the children in the play, you are running away to London. Write a note which you will leave for the family you are staying with. Try to put their minds at rest without giving away exactly what your plans are and where you are going.
 - 11 Draw or paint a picture of what London might have looked like after being bombed. Remember that many buildings were destroyed by fire. What kind of buildings would be most likely to remain standing?
 - 12 Make up an exciting newspaper headline about the disappearance of a group of evacuees. Write the newspaper story that follows the headline, perhaps including an interview with local people or the headmaster of the school.
 - 13 Find out if anyone you know – perhaps a friend or relation, or one of your teachers – was evacuated. Interview them about their memories, and make a collection of these stories in a book.