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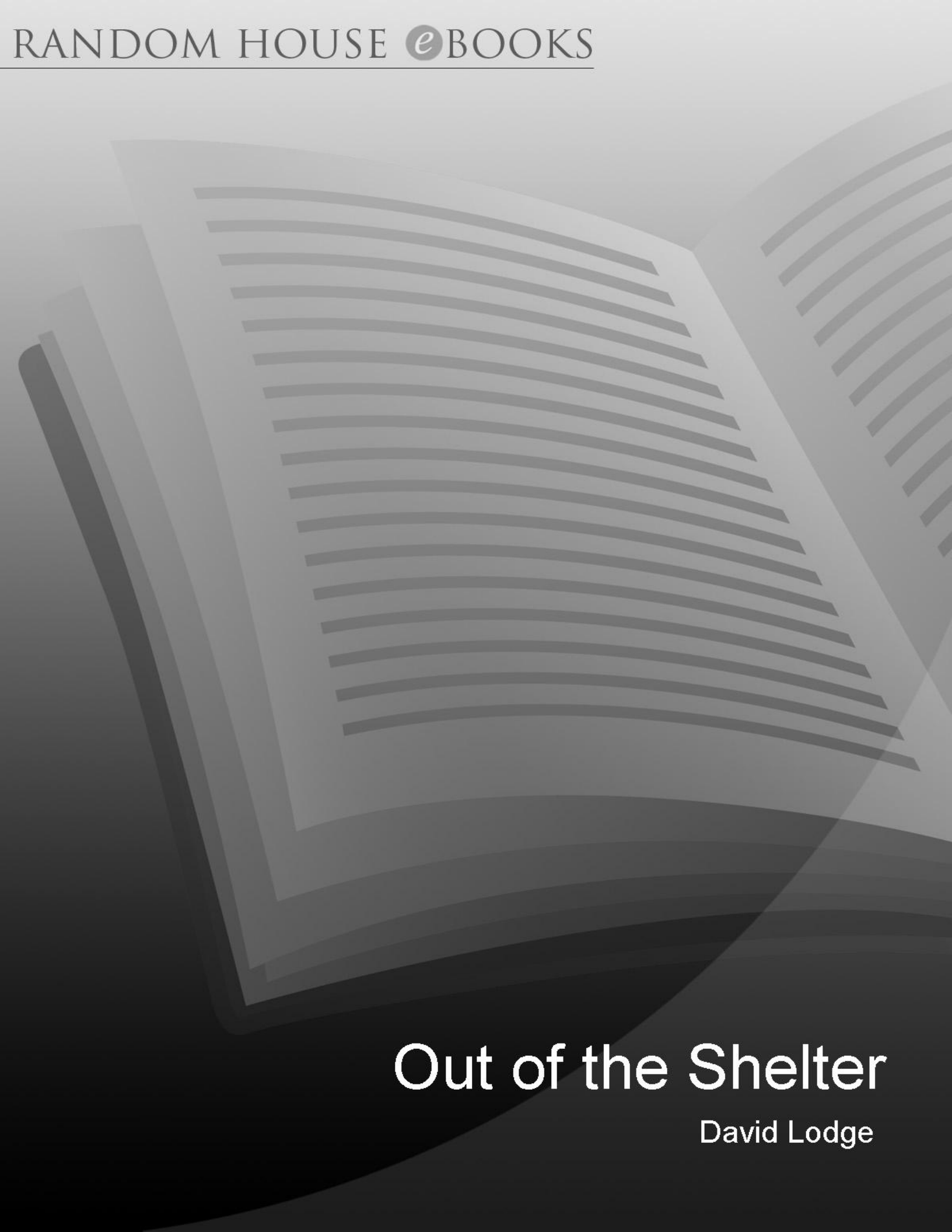

Out of the Shelter

David Lodge

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About the Book

The restrictions of a wartime childhood in London and ensuing post-war shortages have done little to enrich Timothy’s early youth.

But everything changes when his glamorous older sister, Kath, invites him to spend the summer in Heidelberg. Kath left home long ago to work for the American army, and introduces her sixteen-year-old brother to a deliriously fast, furious and extravagant lifestyle. Dazzled by the indulgence and glamour of their way of life, but at the same time sensitive to the broken spirits of ordinary Germans beneath this sparkling surface, Timothy will find that his summer holiday is in more ways than one an unforgettable rite of passage.

About the Author

David Lodge's novels include *Changing Places, Small World, Nice Work, Thinks . . . , Author, Author, Deaf Sentence* and, most recently, *A Man of Parts*. He has also written stage plays and screenplays, and several books of literary criticism, including *The Art of Fiction, Consciousness and the Novel* and *The Year of Henry James*.

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DAVID LODGE

Out of the Shelter

VINTAGE BOOKS
London

ONE

The Shelter

1

ALMOST THE FIRST thing he could remember was his mother standing on a stool in the kitchen, piling tins of food into the top cupboard. On the table there were more tins: pineapple, peaches, little oranges – you could tell by the pictures. He asked her:

– What are all those tins for?

The sun was shining through the bobbly kitchen window behind her head, and though he screwed up his eyes against the dazzle he couldn't see her face properly, but he remembered her looking down at him for what seemed a long time before she said:

– Because there's a war, dear.

– What's a war? he asked. But he could never remember what she answered.

Soon he found out that war was a Mickey Mouse gasmask that steamed up when you breathed and his father getting a tin hat and a whistle and Jill crying because her Dad was going away to join the Air Force and the wireless on all the time and black paper stuck over the front-door windows and sirens going and getting up in the middle of the night because of the raids. It was fun getting up in the middle of the night.

They didn't have their own shelter. He and his mother went up the road, to Jill's house, number 64, which had a shelter in the back garden. Jill's Dad had made it himself. His own Dad was usually on duty during an air raid, he was a Warden, making sure everybody was in a shelter, and not letting any lights show through their curtains. If the German planes saw a light shining through your curtains

they would know where you were and they would drop a bomb on you. Sometimes in the middle of a raid his father would call in at number 64 and come down to the shelter to see that they were all right. Or he would come and fetch them after the All Clear had sounded. Sometimes he would carry Timothy home asleep, and he would wake up in the morning in his own bed without having heard the All Clear. The All-Clear siren was all the same noise, but the Air-Raid siren was up and down, *uhhhERRR . . . uhhhERRR . . . uhhhERRR* . . . It was clever to have two different sirens that sounded like what they meant. The All Clear was a tired, safe sound, like you felt going home, yawning, after a raid, but the Air-Raid siren sounded frightened.

Not that Timothy was frightened. After a while he got so used to the Air-Raid sirens that his mother had to wake him to go up the road to Jill's before the German bombers came over. Jill was the same age as he was, five, but he was older because his birthday came first. Jill was pretty. He was going to marry her when they were grown up. His sister Kath was much older than he was, sixteen, almost grown up, but she wasn't living at home any more. She had gone away to the country, with her school, with the nuns. Kath's school had gone away because of the raids. The raids were because of the War. They were called the Blitz. His mother said that if the Blitz went on much longer she would take Timothy to live in the country too. They lived in London, which was the biggest city in the whole world. Timothy didn't want to go and live in the country. He had been there once and stung himself on some nettles and fell into a cow's business. But he didn't want the raids to stop either, because it was fun getting up in the middle of the night.

– Timothy! Timothy! Wake up, dear.

He whimpered, and snuggled deeper into the warm bed.

– Timothy, wake up, it's a raid.

A siren started up very near, *uhhhERRR . . . uhhhERRR . . . uhhhERRR* . . . and he opened his eyes. His mother's face was bent over him, white and creased, a scarf over her hair.

– Hurry up, dear. It's a raid.

– I know, he said, yawning.

He sat on the edge of the bed, listening to the sirens, while his mother pulled socks over his feet.

– That noise, she said. She wore trousers for the raids, and an old jacket of his father's with a zip at the front. He liked his mother in trousers.

– Here's your siren suit, it's warm from the tank.

He wore the siren suit over his pyjamas. It was a blue one. Winston Churchill had one just like it. He felt brave as soon as he put it on. Pyjamas and dressing gowns had slits and gaps and unprotected spaces, but his siren suit had tight elastic round the wrists and ankles, and a zip at the front. When he was zipped into his siren suit he felt nothing could hurt him.

His mother laced up his shoes, tying the bow tight.

– There, you'll do. Have you got your toys?

He picked up the cardboard box that held his shelter toys and followed his mother down the stairs to the hall. She took their gasmasks from the hook by the front door and hung Timothy's Mickey Mouse one round his neck by its string.

– Turn out the light first, he reminded her as she started to open the front door. You'll get Dad into trouble.

She turned out the light and it was pitch dark in the hall. Outside the only light came from the searchlights that swept across the sky like great fingers wagging to and fro. Timothy dawdled going up the street, partly to show he wasn't afraid, and partly in the hope of seeing a German plane caught in the searchlights. Once he had seen one, a tiny silver cross it looked like in the bright beam, but it disappeared into a cloud before the guns could shoot it

down. He could hear some guns now, thudding in the distance. His mother stumbled over the kerb.

– Sst! Can't see anything in this blessed blackout.

It was easier to see when you were coming back from the shelter after the All Clear, because of the fires. The fires were down at the Docks and they lit up the sky in a great red glow like a huge bonfire.

Suddenly there was a big bang from behind the houses in their street that made them both jump. His mother tightened her grip on his hand and began to run, tugging him behind her.

– Stop, you're hurting, he complained, it's only the railway gun.

– Come *on*, Timothy!

The railway gun went up and down the line behind the houses on Jill's side. You could see the railway from the end of Jill's garden, but only green electric trains went past in the daytime. His father went to work on the train. He worked in an office.

His mother had a key to the front door of Jill's house, but as she was fitting it into the lock the door opened and Uncle Jack was standing there.

– 'Allo, 'allo! he said. Just in time for the party.

– Why Jack! You gave me quite a turn, said his mother. What are you doing at home?

Uncle Jack closed the door behind them and switched on the light.

– Wangled a thirty-six. Thought I'd nip home and see how everybody was getting on.

Jill's Dad was wearing his blue Air Force uniform with the wings. He was big and strong and cheerful and Timothy loved him. He called him Uncle Jack, though he wasn't his real uncle. He wished his father had a proper uniform instead of just a tin hat and a band round his arm. His father couldn't join the Air Force because he was too old, which his mother said was very lucky because he wouldn't

have to go away from home like Uncle Jack. Timothy was glad his father wasn't going away, but he thought it was better to be an airman than a warden.

– How's Tiny Tim, then? said Uncle Jack, ruffling Timothy's hair. Uncle Jack always called him that, or sometimes just Tiny. It was a joke between them. Timothy pretended not to like it. He clenched his fists and squared up to Uncle Jack like a boxer.

– Not now, Tiny, he said, you'd better go straight down to the shelter.

He led them through the hall and into the kitchen. Jill's house was just like his own, and yet it was different. All the rooms were the same size and in the same places, but they had different things in them and they smelled different, especially the kitchen. In the kitchen Uncle Jack picked up a torch that had a piece of paper stuck across half of the part where the light shone. That was to stop the light shining up in the air and showing the German bombers where you were. Uncle Jack turned out the kitchen light and opened the back door into the garden. He shone his torch out on to the path.

– Mind your step.

As he spoke a plane flew over the house, quite low. Timothy's mother shrank back into the house.

– It's all right, said Uncle Jack. One of ours. You can tell by the engine.

Timothy turned his face up in quiet worship of the man who could tell by the engine.

The shelter was at the bottom of the garden, which wasn't very far from the house. It was called an Anderson, and it was just a big hole in the ground, really, with cement walls and a curved iron roof. The roof was covered with earth and in the daytime it looked just like a little hill. Uncle Jack had planted some grass and flowers on top of it. Steps led down to a little door and inside there were some

wooden steps. Uncle Jack called down and Auntie Nora opened the little door.

– Come along, my dears, she said, I was beginning to wonder where you'd got to.

– Can I stay and watch? Timothy asked, as he always did.

– Of course you can't, said his mother, come on down this minute, and mind you hold on to the rail.

Timothy went down slowly, staring up at the sky till the last moment. If only he could see just one German plane shot down, just one. But the bombers hadn't come over yet.

– There we are, said Auntie Nora, as they clambered into the shelter. She was knitting as usual.

It was cosy and warm in the shelter. Uncle Jack had fixed up an electric light and there was an oil-stove that smelled and a little stove called a Primus for making cocoa or tea. There were two bunks and some old chairs and boxes with cushions on them. There was an old carpet on the floor, all muddy and worn.

Jill was sitting on one of the bunks. Timothy went and sat next to her, carrying his box of shelter toys. Jill was dressing her doll, Susan, the black one. The other dolls were sitting up beside her. Timothy opened his box. In it he had One-Ear Rabbit, some coloured marbles, five toy soldiers, the fire engine with a ladder, and a toy gun on wheels that fired matchsticks. One-Ear Rabbit took up most of the room in the box, but he couldn't leave him at home with a raid going on.

– Susan is being naughty, said Jill, I had to smack her.

– The railway gun went bang just as we came, said Timothy, but I wasn't frightened.

– She won't sit still.

– I wanted to stay outside and watch with your Dad, but my Mum won't let me.

– My Dad's come home.

– I know.

– He’s going to stay at home always.

Auntie Nora stopped knitting.

– Jill, you know Daddy’s got to go back tomorrow. But he’ll soon be home again. Her hands flicked at the red wool and the needles clicked again.

– He does very well for leaves, considering, she said to Timothy’s mother.

– Said he was going to stay at home always, Jill sulked. She gnawed at one of her dark ringlets. Timothy pulled her ringlets sometimes, but he liked them really.

– He said no such thing. You mustn’t tell fibs, Jill. Of course he would *like* to stay at home with us, but he has to go back to the station.

– Doesn’t have to. Jill’s lip trembled.

– She doesn’t understand, said Auntie Nora to Timothy’s mother.

– How can they, at their age? said his mother. I had a letter from Kath this morning.

– Did you? How is she? What about a cup of cocoa? said Auntie Nora.

– Would you like a cup of cocoa, Jill? Timothy?

– No, said Jill.

– No *thank you, Mummy*. What about a biscuit?

Jill hesitated.

– Can I have a cream one?

The biscuits were like sandwiches, with sweet yellow cream inside. Timothy nibbled all round the edges of his, first, where there wasn’t much cream; then he had a smaller biscuit, richly packed with cream. Jill took the top off her biscuit, licked off the cream inside, put the two bits together again, and took one bite. Then she dropped the biscuit on the floor. Auntie Nora hadn’t seen. She was bent over the little stove, heating milk for the cocoa, knitting still.

– How’s Kath, then? How does she like Wales?

Timothy pretended to be busy with his biscuit, but he was listening to the talk about Kath. He was interested in his big sister. It seemed a long time since she went away. He found it difficult to remember what she looked like, except that she was fat and wore glasses, like his father.

– She's all right, said his mother. Well, so she says. Misses home, of course, and she says the food's terrible.

– Sst! Still, she's better off there.

– Oh, yes. And between you, me and the gatepost, I hope it'll teach her to appreciate home. She was getting too much for me. Couldn't do anything with her.

– It's the age, isn't it. How old is she?

– Sixteen. We thought we'd keep her at the convent till she's taken her School Certificate. Though the fees . . .

– It must be a drain.

– Mind you, she'll never pass. She's scatterbrained, and what with the school being evacuated . . . Timothy's another kettle of fish, we think he's going to be brainy.

– I wouldn't be surprised. Auntie Nora glanced across at him, and saw the biscuit on the floor.

– Jill! Why did you take the biscuit if you didn't want it?

– It's for Susan. Jill picked up the biscuit and pretended to feed her doll.

– You'd better not waste it, that's the last packet and there's no more at Shepherd's.

– Shopping's getting worse, isn't it? said Timothy's mother.

– Oh, shocking, I queued for three-quarters of an hour at Shepherd's this morning . . .

Timothy's attention wandered as the two mothers talked about food and rationing. Planes were droning overhead now, lots of planes together, German planes. The guns were banging loudly. Timothy aimed his gun up through the roof of the shelter.

– *Bang*, he went. *Bang! Bang! Bang!* Jill covered her ears.

– Timothy, there’s enough noise without you, said his mother.

– Don’t they sound near, said Auntie Nora, knitting faster, I think Jack ought to come down. It’s silly risking it up there. She opened the shelter door a little and called up:

– Come down, Jack, it’s silly to risk it up there. I’m making some cocoa.

Uncle Jack came heavily down the stairs. He was a big man and couldn’t stand up straight inside the shelter. He sat on one of the boxes with a cushion on top. Jill ran to him and he sat her on his knee.

– Well, they’ve copped it all right down the Docks, he said. Sky’s all red over there.

– Have they shot any German planes down? Timothy asked.

– ’Spect so, Tiny. They’re throwing up enough flak, anyway.

– Did you see any shot down? he asked. But Auntie Nora was giving Uncle Jack his cocoa and he didn’t hear.

While they were all drinking the cocoa, Timothy’s father came into the shelter. He wasn’t as tall as Uncle Jack, and he could stand up inside the shelter without bending. He took off his tin hat and wiped his forehead with a handkerchief. There was a red mark on his forehead where the tin hat had been. The top of his head hadn’t got much hair on it. He wore an old raincoat with an armband that had letters on it, A.R.P. He said he would get a proper uniform soon, but it wouldn’t have wings on it.

– They’re copping it down at the Docks tonight, he said.

– I thought so, said Uncle Jack.

– Biggest raid yet, they reckon. Jerry’s lost a packet of planes, they say. But they just keep on coming over in waves.

– Oh dear, I wish we didn’t live so near the river, said Auntie Nora.

– We’re all right here, ducks, said Uncle Jack. Must be three miles away, those fires.

– Well, I just hope we don’t have any up this way tonight, said Timothy’s father, because I reckon every fire-engine in South-East London’s down at the Docks.

– Mine isn’t! said Timothy, holding up his fire-engine with a ladder, and all the grown-ups laughed.

– ’Attaboy, Tiny, said Uncle Jack. He took out a packet of cigarettes and offered them round. Timothy’s mother shook her head, but Auntie Nora took one.

– I don’t usually, she said, but these raids . . .

The cigarette smoke hung in the air in curly shapes. Its smell mixed with the smell of the oil stove and the smell of cocoa. Timothy yawned.

– Time these children had a nap, said Timothy’s mother. Looks as if we might be here all night.

– I’m not tired, said Timothy.

– And I’m not tired, said Jill, putting her arms round her father’s neck.

– I’d better be off, said Timothy’s father. You be a good boy now, Tim. I’ll come back and fetch you when the All Clear’s gone. He put on his tin hat and buttoned up his raincoat.

– I’ll see you out, Geoff, said Uncle Jack. He got up holding Jill in his arms and carried her across to the bunk where Timothy was.

– You and Timothy have a nice sleep now, love. I’ll see you in the morning.

– You’re not going away tomorrow, are you Daddy? said Jill, keeping her arms round his neck so he couldn’t stand up straight.

– Not straightaway, no, my precious.

– Not ever?

– You have a nice sleep now, my pet, or you’ll be too tired to play with me in the morning.

– Can Timothy sleep in my bunk?

– We usually let them, said Auntie Nora.

– I suppose it’s all right if he’s going to marry you, said Uncle Jack, and the grown-ups laughed.

– Can’t I go outside for just a little look? Timothy pleaded, as the two men were getting ready to go out.

– No, said his mother. Now get into bed, and let’s have no more nonsense.

– Why can’t I?

– Because you might get killed, that’s why.

– What about Dad, then?

– Dad is grown up and he has a tin hat.

– Uncle Jack hasn’t got a tin hat.

– And Uncle Jack ought to have more sense, said Auntie Nora, only he’s not much more grown up than you are, Timothy.

– He is, he is grown up! He’s brave, Jill said.

– Fact is, said Uncle Jack with a grin, you’d hardly know there was a war on at the station. I have to come home to see a bit of action.

– You’re welcome to it, said Timothy’s father, as they disappeared up the steps. Sixth night running, this is.

– Blimey, just look at that sky! they heard Uncle Jack say, as Auntie Nora closed the door behind them.

– Now, she said, let’s get you two comfy.

His mother took off his siren suit and Auntie Nora took off Jill’s dressing-gown. Then Auntie Nora tucked them in tight under the blankets. She put a shade over the light so that it didn’t shine in their eyes. His mother gave him One-Ear Rabbit to hug and Jill had Susan. He looked up at the curved roof of the shelter and felt warm and safe. The two mothers sat over the oil-stove, talking in low voices. They were talking about Kath again. He couldn’t hear properly, and he couldn’t understand what he did hear.

– Wants to join the W.A.A.F.s as soon as she can but Geoff won’t hear of . . .

– Don’t blame you, Jack says the morals . . .

– Keep her at home if we can, plenty of useful . . .

– Wedding practically every week, Jack says, and mostly because they. . .

– That Roberts girl up the road . . .

The heads came closer together, the voices whispered, Auntie Nora's knitting needles went clicketty-click, clicketty-click. Shadows shifted on the roof of the shelter with the quick movements of her hands. The guns sounded faint now, a long way off. He pulled down his pyjama trousers and Jill wriggled beside him as she pulled up the skirt of her nightie. Then he felt her cool soft fingers on his thing and with his own finger he felt for the little crease between her legs. He was warm and safe and sleepy. He hoped there would be another raid the next night.

A big bang woke him. There was a buzzing in his ears, and although Jill was still in bed beside him it was as if she was crying a long way away. The first thing he did was to pull up his pyjama trousers. Some dirt had fallen on his head. The electric light was swinging in the air, throwing wild shadows over the walls and roof. The two mothers were standing at the bottom of the steps.

– Jack, Auntie Nora was shouting, are you all right Jack? Jack? Oh my God! She went up the steps, tripped, and crawled out of the shelter, calling Jack.

– Nora, don't, be careful, his mother said. He saw her make the sign of the cross and her lips moving silently as she closed her eyes tight.

– Mummy! Daddy! Jill wailed, hugging her doll. Where's my Daddy?

Timothy started to cry too, not knowing why. Jill jumped out of bed and ran to the steps. His mother opened her eyes.

– Jill! Come back!

But Jill was already through the door at the top of the steps. His mother scrambled after her. Timothy was

frightened. He would be left on his own.

– Mum! he shrieked.

She stopped and turned round, saying something, but he couldn't hear. There was a loud whistling noise and a flash and a roar and just before the light went out his mother seemed to be flying across the shelter towards him. He felt her body fall across his and cried out because she had hurt him but he couldn't hear his own voice because of the buzzing in his ears. A lot more dirt had fallen on the bed. It was pitch dark and he was very frightened. Then he felt his mother move and her arms tighten around him. She was saying something but he couldn't hear properly. Then he could hear as if she was a long way away. She was saying:

– Timothy, are you all right, Timothy? She was crying.

After a little while he could see things. The oil stove, surprisingly, was still alight, and there was a dim red glow from the little window at the bottom and some yellow light coming through the holes at the top. The doorway of the shelter was blocked up with earth and stones, and some had fallen into the shelter. There seemed to be grass and even flowers in the dirt. And there were two eyes that shone in the dim light of the stove. He couldn't see any face, just the two eyes, very close together, and they frightened him. His mother tried to get up, but he wouldn't let go of her. She said:

– Timothy, if you let go of me I could light a candle and then we won't be in the dark.

So he let go of her, and she stumbled slowly round the shelter looking for a candle. She found one and lit it. Then he saw that the eyes belonged to Jill's Susan.

– Look, he said, pointing. Susan.

His mother picked the doll from the dirt and began to cry. There was a hole in Susan's cheek and one arm and one leg were missing and her dress was all torn and dirty. His mother went over to the doorway and began to dig at

the dirt with her hands. More dirt and stones fell into the shelter. A brick fell on her foot and she gave a cry of pain.

– It’s no use, she said, we’ll have to wait here until they dig us out. Daddy will come soon and dig us out. She limped over to the bed and sat down, putting her arms around him.

– I don’t want to go out, he said, I don’t want to go up there.

– Daddy will come soon. It’ll be all right.

They used three candles before the men dug them out. His father wasn’t one of them. But his Dad was all right, they said. It had been a shock, that was all. He was resting at home, waiting for them.

– Come on, son, your Dad’s waiting for you, they said.

But Timothy didn’t want to leave the shelter. In the end, one of the men had to carry him, kicking and screaming, out of the shelter, into the open air.

2

THERE WERE NO more nights of getting up and going up the road to Jill's house. Jill's house wasn't there any more, and Jill had gone to heaven and so had her Mummy, and her Daddy had gone back to the Air Force. Timothy and his mother went to live in the country where they didn't have air raids. They lived in a place called Blyfield, in a dark narrow house near the gasworks. The house belonged to Mrs. Tonks, who was fat and smelled funny. They had the front room that was full of hard shiny furniture, and a bedroom upstairs. His mother shared Mrs. Tonks' kitchen, which was a drawback.

There were a lot of drawbacks at Mrs. Tonks, his mother used to say. There was no electric light in the house, and they had to light the gas when it got dark. His mother held a spill to the white lacy bit and it lit with a little pop and turned blue and red and then yellowy-white and burned with a faint hiss. You could make it brighter or dimmer by pulling on a little chain. Mrs. Tonks wouldn't have a gaslight burning on the stairs because it was a waste, so when his mother took him up to bed she held a candle in a candlestick, and she used to leave the candle burning on the bedroom mantelpiece because he didn't like the dark now. If the candle went out before he fell asleep, he called out and she came and lit another candle. It was cold in the winter and when you woke up in the morning there was ice on the inside of the window. He scratched it off with his fingernail, and looked through the holes he had made, at the gasworks. Behind the gasworks there was a field with some cows in it. One day his mother wanted to take a short-

cut through the field, but as they started across the field one of the cows looked at them and he was frightened and they went round by the road. In the mornings they washed in a basin in the bedroom. His mother brought the hot water upstairs in a jug from the kitchen. Mrs. Tonks' house didn't have a bathroom. His mother bathed him in a tin bath in front of the fire in the front room. It was nice having a bath in front of the fire, especially getting dried afterwards, but he wasn't allowed to splash; and when his father brought him his boats from home there wasn't really room for them in the tin bath. His father was still working at the office in London, but he came to see them at weekends.

He went to school at a convent near the village. He liked his teacher, Sister Teresa, she had a nice smile and rosy cheeks, but he was frightened of Sister Scholastica who had a big pimple on her chin with hairs growing out of it. Sister Scholastica taught the big girls, but sometimes she was in the playground. Her name was hard to say and once he called her Sister Elastica and the little girls laughed and Sister Scholastica looked cross. On Sundays he and his mother went to mass in the convent chapel. The priest came on a bicycle. The mass was very long because the nuns sang a lot. Sister Teresa sang the best and Sister Scholastica sang the worst.

There was a song they often sang on the wireless called *There'll Be Bluebirds Over The White Cliffs of Dover*.

There'll be bluebirds over
The white cliffs of Dover,
Tomorrow, just you wait and see.
There'll be love and laughter,
And peace ever after,
Tomorrow, when the world is free.

Nearly at the end of the song were the words:

And Jimmy will go to sleep
In his own little room again.

When he came to those words he always thought of his own little room in London.

One day they had a concert at the school and everybody had to sing a song or recite a poem. He sang *The White Cliffs of Dover* and Sister Teresa cried and gave him a kiss afterwards. Dover was a seaside place with tall white cliffs. He thought it would be nice to go there after the war was over and see the bluebirds.

One day his mother came to school with him to see Mother Superior, to ask if he could be a boarder. He didn't want to be a boarder, but his mother said she had to go back to London to work and it was too dangerous for him to go with her. Mother Superior said he would like it, the boarders had lots of fun, and she took a bag of toffees out of a drawer and offered him one. He took the toffee but he didn't eat it. On the way back to Mrs Tonks's he threw it into a ditch. His mother saw but she didn't say anything.

The next day she took him to the school with a suitcase with his clothes in it, but no toys except One-Ear Rabbit. Boarders weren't allowed to have their own toys, but Mother Superior said he could keep One-Ear Rabbit. His mother kissed him goodbye and told him to be a good boy. She was crying and he couldn't understand why she was leaving him all on his own. He didn't cry but he was frightened and unhappy. The boarding part of the school was cold and dark, with wooden stairs and passages that had no carpets and creaked when you trod on them. There was stew for supper with bits of white fat in it and watery gravy that made the potatoes all mushy. He didn't eat any of it, but he was frightened in case Sister Scholastica noticed. After supper they went into the chapel and sang hymns and said long prayers which he didn't know. He opened and closed his mouth soundlessly to pretend that he

was singing and praying with the others. Then it was time to go to bed. His bed was in a big room with some other little boys. There was a place to wash, but only cold water. There was only lino on the floor and it was cold under his feet when he took off his shoes and socks, so he got in bed quickly. The Sister who was in charge asked him if he had said his night prayers and he said his mother let him say them in bed if it was cold and the other boys giggled. The Sister said next time he must kneel down beside his bed to say them like the other boys. She turned out the lights, except for a little one at the end of the room where she sat, saying her rosary. The rosary beads clicked as she fingered them. It reminded him of Auntie Nora's knitting needles in the shelter. He wished he was back in the shelter before the bomb fell. He didn't like being a boarder at the convent. He felt like crying, but the other boys would hear him and it wouldn't be any use. When his mother came to see him he would cry a lot and ask her to take him away. He pictured himself crying and saying to his mother *Take me away, take me away, take me away*, and she took him away. It was a nice picture. Thinking of it, he fell asleep.

The next morning a bell woke him when it was still dark. Someone had put his arms outside the blankets in the night and they were cold. He pulled the blankets over his head and tried to think of the picture of his mother taking him away, but it was no use. He couldn't believe in it, with the sounds of the other boys getting up and water running and shoes clattering on the wooden stairs. He got out of bed, shivering in the cold air, and put on his clothes. But he wasn't used to dressing on his own, and he couldn't manage the buttons on his shirtsleeves or his shoe-laces. He stood beside the bed with his shoe-laces trailing and his shirt cuffs hanging open until the Sister came to help him. She took off his shirt and told him to go and wash. When he came back she looked at his ears to see if they were clean. For breakfast there was porridge, but not nice porridge like

his mother made. It was runny and there wasn't enough sugar to taste.

After breakfast they went to the cloakrooms to clean their shoes. A Sister in a blue apron gave him a tin of black shoe polish and a brush. He looked at them helplessly. Suddenly he began to cry, hopeless, useless tears, tears he had planned to save for his mother when she came to visit him, now wasted on the indifferent boys and girls around him, tears unheard, unseen in the dark, noisy cloakroom, smelling of boot polish.

– What's the matter, Timothy? Big boys mustn't cry.

He turned to look up at the Sister. He wiped his eyes with the back of his hand and sniffed.

– Don't know how to do it.

– Well, now, that's nothing to cry about. Here, I'll show you.

The Sister bent down over his shoes, brushing vigorously. Some of the other children sniggered and stared. Timothy was ashamed and looked away, through the barred window that faced the main gate, and suddenly saw his mother coming up the drive, carrying his Wellington boots. Without thinking he ran from the cloakroom and down the passage. A nun saw him coming and threw up her hands to stop him. Running in the corridors was not allowed. She was smiling, but he felt in his heart that if she stopped him he would not see his mother and he would be a boarder for ever and ever. He ducked under the nun's arm, felt her hand catch at his sleeve, wriggled free of her grasp and stumbled to the door. Another Sister had just opened it and his mother stood on the threshold. He threw himself into her arms.

It was lovely to be back home again. For days he went about the house in a trance of delight, scarcely daring to speak or play in case it would break the spell and send him back to the convent. But his mother promised him he

wouldn’t have to go back. There were not many raids in London now, and they had a shelter of their own. It wasn’t in their garden, like Jill’s; it was in the front room, and it was like a big iron table. You slept underneath the top, on mattresses. The shelter was called a Morrison, and it nearly filled their front room. His father said it wouldn’t save you from a direct hit, but nothing much would. Anyway, Timothy felt safe as soon as he had crawled into the shelter. It was lined with mattresses and cushions and the sides were joined with wire mesh so you could breathe, but if the ceiling fell on top of you you wouldn’t be hurt. Timothy slept in the Morrison every night, and if there was a raid his mother came downstairs and crawled in beside him.

Uncle Jack sometimes stayed with them when he was on leave, because he hadn’t got a house any more. Where Jill’s house had been, and the houses on each side of it, there was just a big space and piles of bricks and twisted pipes. Grass and weeds had grown over them while Timothy had been away. One day he saw Uncle Jack standing on the bomb-site with his hands in his pockets, staring at the ground. Timothy nearly called out to him, but decided not to. When he got home he told his mother, and later he heard her telling his father. His mother said it was only natural but he shouldn’t brood. His father said Jack blamed himself but what was the use. From their talk he found out what had happened on the last night in the shelter. When the first bomb fell in the next street, the one that had woken him up, Uncle Jack ran off to help. He shouted first to Auntie Nora, but she didn’t hear him. When she came out of the shelter to look for him, with Jill behind her, their own house was hit by a second bomb and they were killed in the garden. Killed meant you were dead and buried in the ground, but your soul went to heaven. You were happy in heaven but the people you left behind were sad, like

Uncle Jack. Timothy missed playing with Jill, but he wasn't as sad as he had been boarding at the convent.

There were lots of bomb-sites in the streets around. You weren't supposed to go on them, though the big boys did. There might be unexploded bombs and if you trod on one it would go off and kill you. The big boys went on the bomb-sites looking for shrapnel. Timothy found a piece of shrapnel one morning on the way to school. It was lying in the gutter and when he picked it up it was still warm. It was heavy in his hand and rough to the touch, like the pumice stone in the bath when it was dry. Jean Collins tried to make him throw the piece of shrapnel away, but he kept it even though she pinched him. The piece of metal, warm and rough and heavy in his hand, excited him strangely: a piece of the war that had fallen out of the sky. He began to collect shrapnel. You were supposed to collect it to give to the Government, to make new shells; but Timothy kept the pieces he found, in a cardboard box under his bed.

He went to the parish school. He was a bit frightened at first – some of the boys were rough and the teachers shouted and hit the naughty children – but it was better than being a boarder at the convent. Gradually he came to feel at ease in the violent, overcrowded playground. The thing he disliked most was being bossed about by Jean Collins. She took him to school and brought him back and was supposed to look after him because his mother was working on the ration books. Sometimes when she was cross she would say that Hitler would catch him one day and do horrible things to him. He didn't believe her but he didn't like her to say it. Hitler was the head of the Germans. He had started the war. He was a nasty man with a black moustache. Another name for Germans was Nazis, which sounded like Nasties, so it was a good name.

One day Timothy went with his mother and father to see a film about Hitler. It was supposed to be a funny film, making fun of Hitler. The man strutted about and shouted