

INFILTRATION

**Two boys, one family,
a world at war**

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A RELATIVE INVASION

BOOK 2

INFILTRATION

DEDICATION

For Alex,
a very special person
who railed against war

CHAPTER ONE

SEPTEMBER 7TH 1940

*The German air force unleashes a wave of heavy
bombing raids on London*

The cart came to a halt. The only noise here was from animals. Dogs were barking inside the house, chickens clucked somewhere to the left and the horse harrumphed beside him.

‘It’s this house,’ Jed the carter said. ‘Mr and Mrs Pawsey’s. You can jump down now.’

Billy clambered down slowly, for the horse was swishing his tail very near his face. He didn’t want to hurry. He needed to take in the place that was his billet before he went to meet his new foster parents.

Was it only this morning that he was standing on the station alongside Jill’s pushchair while the grown-ups discussed how to squeeze into the packed-full train? Was it only last night he was squashed in the cellar with all the terrifying whistling and crashing above?

He breathed in the country smells and turned to look at what was waiting for him. It was very different from last evacuation. This house was quite big. There was a lot of muddy garden in front and not far from a pig pen there were chicken houses. It might be nice, nicer than the vicarage where Mother was evacuated with baby Jill. He swallowed. He mustn’t be sad to be left behind.

‘Brave laddie. Chin up,’ Jed encouraged him as he looped the reins to keep the horse still and safe. ‘I s’pose it’s a bit hard to be here on your own, when your cousin and Aunty are billeted right near your ma and sister. But they’m not having animals, like here now.’

Billy nodded. ‘Yes and K-Kenneth hasn’t ever been evacuated before and I know this village from last time.’

‘That’s right. You’re nearly a local.’

That wasn’t really so – the locals had always called him a ‘vaccie’ – but he’d certainly be very welcome at one place. Perhaps he could soon visit the tiny cottage where he’d been billeted before.

Jed was already at the gate. ‘You still standing waiting? Come you on, Billy. I’s’ll make sure you’re all right.’

Billy followed him. The path was thin with flower bushes on either side, quite untidy. A dog barked again somewhere at the back of the building and hens clucked nearby. He peered around for them, ready to step away. Chickens might peck strangers. He didn’t know, he wasn’t used to them.

Jed pulled a rope with a rusty bell on it. It sounded a single dong.

A man opened the door but peered out as though he was looking beyond them focusing on the far distance. Two black dogs rushed forward, barking. The man shouted ‘Basket!’ and pushed them back. He had whiskers right down over his ears and coming out of them but not a lot of hair on his head. A few strips covered his topknot but veins showed through and there were great veins on the back of his hand when he held open the door. Billy peeped along the passage. There must be a lady somewhere.

The old man said, ‘Jed – where you been about? You brought the London lad?’ He smiled but he didn’t seem to be looking at Billy. He pointed out a wooden box ‘For your boots,’ but Billy wasn’t wearing boots so he left his shoes on.

The carter seemed to take charge. ‘Seth, how be you, then? This chappie here be Billy. His mother’m gone to her billet at the vicarage down over. I reckon as she’ll be visiting afore long to see he’s settled in o’right.’

‘I see, I see,’ said the old man.

But he didn’t see, for he was fumbling his way to the back room, touching the hall walls. It was dark except for a small lamp

with a parchment shade, an open book beside it. Mr Pawsey stood opposite it and opened his hands to the room with its large wooden table and heavy chairs.

‘Sit you down, lad, my Missus will brew up once she’s done with the hens. She has to shut them up carefully at night against they foxes.’

He pawed around in the air, bending over a little until his hands found the table and book. A pair of glasses were underneath it. He grasped them and put the wire handles over his ears. Now he peered straight at Billy through lenses as thick as the bottoms of bottles. His eyes were big pale blotches behind them. He looked quite different now. ‘Ah. So here you are, safe and sound.’

The carter put his hand on Billy’s head. ‘Nice lad, this’n, Seth. He’ll be able to spot your specs when you lose them.’ He gave a rumbling laugh and the old man joined in.

‘You’m right. That’ll be useful. Bane of my life, they glasses. Too heavy to wear all the time and can’t see without them.’

Jed gave Billy’s shoulder a friendly pat. ‘I’d better be off, you folk. My supper’ll be on the table. Billy, you’ll settle down with Mr and Mrs Pawsey afore you know. You’ll see my cart round and about these lanes and I’ll give you a wave.’ He winked, first at Billy, then at Mr Pawsey and stomped back to the front door.

It was now that Billy had that nasty fluttery feeling like months ago, the first time he’d been away from home. It was when he was walking round the village with the teacher trying to find him a billet, and he was the last child to be taken. Now the sight of friendly Jed going out of the door started the flutters again.

The old man sat down heavily in a chair whose leather was cracked all over, and kneaded the veins in his hands. ‘Billy, eh? Hmm.’ He peered at Billy. ‘You a useful boy?’

‘I think so, sir. I’ll t- try.’

There was loud cackling outside the window. The old man laughed. ‘One of they hen’s got out, and the Missus’ll be chasing it. They lead her a dance. Perhaps you’ll run fast enough to get ‘em in order, they hens.’

Billy said nothing. He wasn't too sure that he wanted to get near the feathery, clucking things with their poky beaks. He sat still, hoping he wouldn't be asked to help right away. He fiddled with his suitcase wondering if Mother had put in a tin of food at the bottom or anything he should hand over.

The back door opened and the lady bustled in, brushing her hands on her muddy apron. She stopped short when she saw Billy, sitting on the edge of his chair.

'Our little lad, is it? I thought I heard the cart. Well, well, well. Now then. Welcome to your new home. That nasty bombing in London, we've got to get you out of that, eh. Got to get you a little nest, here, haven't we. A little nest.'

'Billy, his name is,' said the old man, and spat very accurately into a special bucket with brass straps sitting beside the fireplace.

'Billy, is it?' said Mrs Pawsey. Her sentences seemed to end in questions although she didn't have a questioning sort of face, more like a cushion with lines and dents pressed into it as well as two blackbird eyes. 'We'll soon make you at home, my dear. Stand yourself up, can't you, let's have a look at you.'

Billy sprang to attention, keeping his polished shoes smartly together.

'My goodness, what a fine lad, aren't you? Strong as well, I should think. Shouldn't you think, Seth?'

The old man leant forward and felt Billy's arms. 'We can put a bit more muscle on that, Missus'

'M-my uncle was trying to t-toughen me up before the bombing started. I had to do lots of r-runs and wrestling.'

Mrs Pawsey shook her head. 'Doesn't look like you enjoyed it, lovey?' She shook her head again. 'No, no.' Dry tresses of grey hair fell across her face. 'Leave him, Seth. We won't be getting you wrestling, don't you worry, my dear. You're quite tough enough for us. We shall be feeding you well and you'll be a help to us old folks, won't you just?'

Billy nodded. 'Yes.'

‘So it’s all fair and dandy.’ She smiled in a dimply way. ‘I spoke to your father on the phone. He said you’d been evacuated to this village afore.’

‘Yes, I was with Mrs Y-Youldon.’

‘Joan Youldon? I know her. Kitchen maid up at the Grange, straight from leaving school right up to having her first little one. She’s hardly grown up herself, poor girl.’

‘Hardly a woman size, she,’ added the old man.

‘And scarce enough room in her cott for a vaccie, I’d think.’

‘There were two of us. I made friends with him. Alan, he was called.’

‘Two vaccies! Well fancy be. Now how did Joan manage that in her place?’

‘She was nice, really nice. We p-played with her little children and did j-jobs. I made things for them.’ If only he could go over right now and see them. His voice came out quietly, ‘Is her house far from here, please?’

‘Bless you, no house is far from any house here, if you can call some of them houses,’ said Mrs Pawsey.

The old man looked at her and chuckled.

She beckoned Billy to the scullery where the two dogs lay. Their noses lifted eagerly, and one gave a rough bark. ‘Enough of that, Noah! Here, Billy, you’d better come and introduce yourself or there’ll be no peace once the master moves from his chair.’

They were quite big dogs. Billy put a hand towards the head of one. Immediately, they both leapt up, barking. He started back.

‘There’s no need to worry. It’s all noise. Not a nasty streak in either of ‘em. Just stand still a minute till they get used to you being here. Here’s Noah.’

One dog had a white slash across its right ear and a patch on its back. The other had a white muzzle and chest. ‘And this is Japhet.’

‘Are they for burglars?’

‘Burglars and all sorts of things, you’ll see. Working dogs, aren’t they.’

She took him through the house, which seemed full of big shabby furniture, and then up the wooden staircase where there was a proper bathroom and three bedrooms just like a London house, except that the landing floorboards weren't straight and creaked dreadfully.

'Now we sleep over the landing just there, and this bedroom's for you.' Mrs Pawsey opened a door and showed Billy inside.

There was a wardrobe for his clothes and he saw toy cars inside it. The bed was plenty big enough for two, if only Alan had been here. It had a dark blue coverlet and looked very comfortable. All he needed was some of his own special things to put in the wardrobe. He placed his suitcase in it.

'Where should I keep my gas mask?'

'On top of that wardrobe, lovey, but doubt if you'll need that here.'

'Have you had bombing?'

'No, bless you. Nothing like that for you to worry about, is there. Now, do you like your room?'

'It's really nice, Mrs Pawsey.' He looked at the cars in the wardrobe and then at her.

'Yes, I put those cars there specially for you and there's a pile of comics under the bed, so you'll be all right, you see.'

'Thank you ever so much.'

'Oh, a London toff, you are, no mistake. Shan't we get on fine?'

She took him down into the garden before it got too dark to see everything.

‘It’s dry now, but we shall have to find you some boots for outside.’

Luckily, she had got the chickens away, safe in their hutch. He’d expected that they would be rushing around inside it, pushing each other for space but they sat in a line pressed against each other in a friendly way, only making the quietest of clucks when Mrs Pawsey opened the door a crack for Billy to peer inside.

‘You might like giving them their grain. And there’ll be eggs to collect.’

He might, if the chickens weren’t looking. Eggs were good for exchange and who knows what they might get in return. He looked at the feathery things doubtfully. Their beaks were poky and their eyes rather mean. The ones with closed eyes looked better.

‘Oh you’re having a good look, aren’t you, love, but now let’s go over here.’

There were two pigs in a sty with a small, small yard and a low brick wall round it. They looked a lot bigger than he’d expected pigs to be. They were as big as him only their bodies were sideways on. They walked like ladies on high heels but with two points at the front of the foot instead of one and their bottoms were the size of a fat man’s. The taller pig was snuffling up towards Mrs Pawsey.

‘Both boy pigs,’ Mrs Pawsey said proudly. ‘The fattest one’s Hardy. Two years old. Look at him, he knows I’m talking about him. He’s smart.’

The pig lifted its snout and fixed its tiny pale eyes on Billy. They looked dangerous.

‘Tell him I’m eight and he’s only two. If he’s smart.’

Mrs Pawsey checked the pen’s door catch. ‘They won’t hurt, but they can get nasty if they don’t get what they want.’

‘Like camels?’ He remembered Dad saying that camels could turn nasty, ages ago. That was at the zoo where they’d gone on his fifth birthday.

‘My goodness me,’ she shook with laughter. ‘That’ll be the day when I have camels to look after.’

‘Don’t under-estimate pigs,’ Mr Pawsey advised, coming up behind them. ‘They can’t talk but they can think. It’s thinking that counts. Look at old Laurel.’

The pig with the black blob on its back was pulling the peelings dish towards himself with his snout, and away from Hardy.

‘See. He’s worked out how to get one up on Hardy, although he’s smaller.’

Billy watched. Laurel was like Cousin Kenneth, smaller than Billy but smarter at getting his own way. He put his hands on the pigs’ wall, but jumped back as Laurel snorted and Hardy put his snout up high. It was time to look somewhere else.

In the field nearby was a dun brown horse with a ring of fluff round its hooves, surely the same size as a camel. Mrs Pawsey followed him as he went over to it.

‘Do people ride the horse?’

‘Only Mr Sinclair. That’s his horse. He just uses our field. We used to have cows when we were younger, you see. Too much for us now.’ She sighed and patted a squashy part of her front, which might

have been tummy or bosoms, he wasn't sure. The horse looked really strong. He screwed up his eyes, trying to imagine riding it, waving Mr Durban's Cossack sabre. It would be a wondrous way of escaping Hitler, or even turning on him, scaring him to death so he couldn't do anymore bombing.

'Come on. Up this way.' Mrs Pawsey led the way between the field and the side of the house. Behind, there was a small patch of garden with two wooden chairs beside some rose bushes. Then a large patch with green things growing upwards, and some more brown patches with ridges along them.

'They's our vegetables, over there, so you won't go hungry with what we grow. As long as I can keep those slugs off it all, and the rabbits. Wish we could put a wall round it to keep the blighters out.'

'My Granddad grows v-vegetables. I used to help him weed the carrots.'

'Well now you can help with ours.'

Billy felt a bit more cheerful, although the carrots reminded him of that shocking time: Uncle Ted like a scarecrow shuffling towards home after the rescue at Dunkirk. Where was Uncle now? He'd be doing more fighting somewhere foreign and not having baths or dinners or bedtimes. Billy crossed his fingers on both hands that Uncle would get home safely again. He thought of his stripy spinning top Uncle had sent him from France. If only there'd been room in his suitcase for it.

An ominous rumbling in the sky stopped the tour. It was like in London but there hadn't been an air raid warning! He spotted the formation and pointed to the

sky. ‘They’re German, they’re German. Where’s the shelter?’ He looked around but there was no mound with an Anderson underneath. He wanted to pull Mrs Pawsey to the cellar. She didn’t seem to know she was in danger. ‘We must run, Mrs Pawsey,’ and he took her hand, pulling her towards the front door.

Mr Pawsey had come out. He put binoculars up to the sky. ‘That’s reconnaissance, that is. Wretches. Looking for the lie of the land while it’s just light enough.’

He looked down at Billy. ‘Not bombers, my lad. Don’t you worry. There be nothing to bomb hereabouts. They’s getting information, that’s all what it is.’

By then the noise was louder. He crouched behind Mr Pawsey, he couldn’t help it. It was too like the times at home in the cellar, and any minute the ground would shake and the house fall down.

Mr Pawsey hauled him up to his feet and took him indoors again. As the planes flew over he said, ‘You’m not in London now. You’m safe here, that’s as why they’ve sent you. We haven’t a shipping port here, no big factories. Those are the sorts of thing they want to bomb, they Jerries, not pigs and chickens.’

Billy took a deep breath. He must believe Mr Pawsey knew right. Dad wouldn’t have evacuated him again, if not. He stood in the hall, waiting until the plane sounds had gone.

Mrs Pawsey took her hand back where Billy had been holding it, perhaps a bit too tightly. ‘See it’s all right now. No bombs. You pop upstairs and unpack your case. Then you’ll feel properly at home, lovey,

won't you? You wash your hands after, and I'll get the food on the table, won't I?