

Letter To an Evacuee by Vicky Birch



117 Shroff Lane
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SE12 SHR

14th October 1940

Dear Lucy,

You'll never believe what happened here in London last night! I knew I had to write to you immediately because I thought you might be concerned about us. Truth be told, I was concerned about us. There had been immense apprehension surrounding last night's events...but it's over (for now) so we can endeavour to relax. Anyway, let me explain...

It was about 9 o'clock in the evening and I remember looking out of the bedroom window and observing the evening sky. It was an ominous, murky-grey colour, with clouds which loomed over the street like they were waiting to pounce on those underneath. If I were wiser, I would have seen the sky's menacing threat as a sign of things to come. Mum, who was irritable as always, had already scolded Benny and I for not going to sleep as we should. This is a regular occurrence these days; she's been tense ever since Chamberlain declared the announcement of war.

Anyway, we were up playing with his train set when all of a sudden this ghastly noise sounded. It began somewhat inaudibly, then grew louder...and louder...and louder until we were certain it wasn't a drill. Earlier that day, we had been informed on the wireless that this might happen, but we didn't think it actually would! Apparently, it's a new system they have which helps us to recognise when the Germans are approaching...we knew from the sound that the bombing was imminent.

Immediately, Benny began to cry. Not your typical three-year-old type of cry but a real piercing, shriek of a cry. His screams infiltrated my ears like my eardrums had been stabbed and his fear soon seeped into my own skin, making me fearful too of what was going to befall us. He was petrified and it was understandable. Inside, I now felt terrified too but I couldn't let him see that. Despite an overwhelming feeling of panic that rose within me, I seized his hand and dragged him as rapidly as I could down the stairs, out the back door and straight into the Anderson Shelter at the end of the garden.

The Anderson Shelter isn't much to look at. From the outside it appears to be purely copious mounds of scrappy and fraying sandbags piled tightly one on top of the other. Along the top, runs a streak of grass aimed to camouflage our lowly hideout. Underneath this, there lies sheets of steel plates and the entrance is also guarded by a metal shield which rattles and clatters every time a bomb is dropped within a nearby radius.

Do they have Anderson Shelter's where you've been evacuated to? Have you had to stay inside one yet? Well, if not, I can tell you it is NOT a pleasant experience. It was rather the opposite - more like a night of terrors in an inescapable dream. The four of us (Benny, Mum, Dad and I) were squashed inside this cramped, damp, cave-like shelter for what seemed like eternity but that wasn't the worst of it. Within a matter of minutes, the noise of the siren's subsided as the bombs began to descend and detonate all around us.

Lucy, I can't even begin to describe the sound of the bombs. It created a deafening BOOM which echoed in my ears so loudly I thought I'd never hear again! Eventually, as the sun began to rise in the early hours of the morning, the sound of the bombs began to subside. I felt so relieved and elated that this harrowing experience had finally concluded. However, upon departing from our shelter, we surfaced to see devastation and destruction all around us, as the house at the end of the street had been demolished by an immense blast. I sure hope they were in their Anderson Shelter when that bomb dropped...war has well and truly come to London.

I must be off as Mum has just called saying tea is ready. Do you think they'll come back again tonight? I don't know if I can bear to sit through another night like the last. I'm so glad you're safe and well, far away from any of this nonsense.

Love your dear friend, Olivia.