

Learn English Through Story

Billy Elliot

By Melvin Burgess
Retold by Karen Holmes

Level 3

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Chapter I Billy's Story: Family Life

My brother Tony is stupid, but he likes good music. I listen to his records before school when he and my dad are out on the picket line. My grandmother - we call her Nan — likes the music too. I play the music and she sits in bed and sings. Sometimes we dance around the room. She's nearly eighty and she can't walk far. But she lifts her arms up in the air and tries to stand on one leg like a ballet- dancer.

Dad and Tony don't like it when she dances. They think it's stupid. But I want her to dance and sing all day.

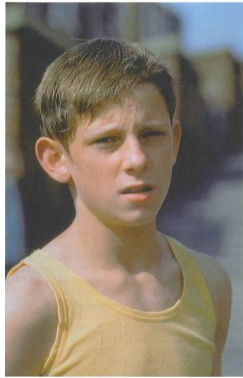
This morning I made her breakfast and danced into her room.

'Hey, Nan, it's the dancing waiter,' I said.

But she wasn't there!

I ran out of the door. My dad will kill me if I lose Nan. I raced up the road shouting, 'Nan! Nan!'

Where was she? Was she on her way down to the sea? You can see the sea from our house and she goes there sometimes. But little Alison, one of the neighbour's children, pointed up the street.



Billy Elliot

Suddenly I knew: Nan was in the field under the railway bridge. She often goes there. Nobody knows why. Maybe she played there when she was a child.

‘Nan!’ I shouted.

She turned and looked at me. I pushed through the long wet grass. Poor Nan, she was wet and frightened.

‘I don’t know where I am,’ she said.

‘Don’t you want your eggs?’ I said.

‘You’re new,’ she said.

‘Nan, it’s Billy. Billy.’

Three vans stopped near the railway bridge and lots of policemen climbed out. They frightened me. Nan looked at them.

‘What are they?’ she said.

‘Police, Nan. It’s the police.’

‘I hate them!’ she shouted. She waved her arms at them.

Some of them looked at us, but they didn’t come down.

‘Have they come for us, Billy?’ she whispered. She knows about the police. She knows that they’re not on our side.

‘Not us, Nan. They’re not interested in us.’

‘Is it Jackie? Is it Tony?’ she asked.

I didn’t answer. I took her arm and we walked home.

The next day, I was playing a song on the piano and thinking about Mum. Tony was eating and Dad was washing the dishes. Nan was sitting on her bed, singing.

Mum died two years ago. I don’t think anyone remembers her except me. I miss her, I miss her every day. I miss her when I’m walking through the house. I miss her when I’m playing the piano.

I have a letter from my mum. She wrote it for my eighteenth birthday, but I opened it early.

‘Dear Billy ...’

Can you hear? Can you hear my mum’s voice?

Listen.

‘Dear Billy, I didn’t see you grow up. I missed you crying and laughing. I missed you shouting. But please know that I was always with you. I always will be. I am very proud of you. I am proud that you are my son. I love you very much.’

I keep the letter in a box under my bed. I read it when nobody is in the room. Tony and I sleep in the same bedroom, and one night I read the letter to him. I wanted him to remember my mum with me, me and him together. But he didn’t want to.

‘Don’t you miss her?’ I asked him.

‘Oh be quiet,’ he said angrily. Then he went to sleep.

I was playing the piano and thinking about Mum. She played the piano too. I can’t really play. I’d like piano lessons but we haven’t got enough money.

My dad and Tony don’t have time to remember Mum. They’re too busy on the picket line or down the mine. Fighting — always fighting. Fighting the government, fighting with the bosses. Fighting at home. Fighting me.

They were arguing again that morning.

‘We must go. Dad! We’ll be late!’

Tony pulled on his boots. But Dad wanted to make the house tidy. He doesn’t like leaving Nan alone in the house.

‘I have to make your nan’s breakfast.’

‘Billy can do it. It’s time to go!’

‘Wait a minute,’ Dad said, and went outside. He came back in with some coal. ‘We haven’t got much coal now,’ he said.

‘The strike will end soon,’ Tony said. ‘We’ll be back down the mine next month.’

‘No we won’t,’ Dad said.

Tony looked angrily at him. ‘You don’t want to go on the picket line, do you?’ he said. ‘You want to stay in bed.’

‘Tony ...’ Dad began.

I’m not waiting for you,’ Tony said, and walked to the door.

‘Tony! Tony, wait for me!’ Dad shouted, but Tony was gone.

Dad didn’t follow him. He stood and looked at the door. I played another song on the piano.

‘Be quiet, Billy!’ he shouted at me suddenly.

‘Mum didn’t mind,’ I said.

He came up behind me and closed the piano suddenly. He nearly broke my fingers. Then he ran out of the door after Tony.

‘I’ll see you later at the club,’ he said on the way out.

Oh no! I thought. Today I’m boxing. I hate it when he watches me.

‘Listen. I boxed. My dad boxed. You box.’ That’s my dad. I box because he and his father boxed. Every Saturday morning I put the gloves round my neck and go to the club. Then I try to break someone’s head.

Boxing is OK. But I have my own ideas about it and they don’t like that. They think boxing is about hitting people hard. They think it’s about your hands, but it’s not. It’s about your feet.

‘Don’t move!’ George, my boxing teacher, shouts. ‘Hit him! Hit him! Stop moving! Stop and fight!’

He doesn’t understand. The other person gets tired if I dance round them. Then I can hit them. But George can’t wait. Nobody can wait.

Chapter 2

Jackie's Story: The Boxing Club

I worry about Billy. I try to be a good father, but every boy needs a mother. And Billy's not an ordinary boy.

We're fighting now, for our future and for our town. It's a fight for my job and for Tony's job - but is it a fight for Billy? I know it's different. Our Billy will never go down the mine and bring lip the coal.

Everything has changed. My dad was on strike in the 1930s, but then the miners were important. Everybody needed coal. Coal ran the factories, lit the streets and the houses, and drove ships across the water. Now people don't need coal because they've got oil and gas. And coal from Argentina is cheaper than English coal.

The government doesn't like us. The head of the government, Margaret Thatcher, wants to close the country down. She's already closed half the factories. Now she's closing the mines. At first, I thought we could stop her. Now I'm not sure.

Maybe Tony's right. Maybe I'm old and soft. I've lost almost everything. My lovely wife Sarah is dead. I've only got the boys and the strike. Life is hard, very, very hard. I stay on strike because of Tony. What will he do if the mines close? You can't be a miner without a mine. So here I am, fighting for Tony and for Billy. I've nothing to give them. No job. No mother. No future. Just me.

Every Saturday I watch Billy box. I miss the beginning of the class because I'm on the picket line. It's hard out there. We watch the scabs going into the mine in buses. Tony and some of the other young men want to hurt the scabs. They want blood. They shout it sometimes: 'BLOOD! BLOOD! BLOOD!'

I don't agree with them. I don't want to hurt anyone. But I know why Tony's angry. We're fighting for the future, and those scabs are hiding behind the police. They're men that I worked with. They're men that I went to school with. They're my friends — and they're riding into the mine behind the police. *We have to* fight the bosses. We don't want to fight our friends too.

I went to the club on Saturday to watch my boy at his boxing class. I boxed when I was a boy. My dad boxed and Tony boxed too. Now Billy has boxing lessons. I tell him, 'You must fight, boy. If you can't fight, people will hurt you.'

There was a ballet class in the hall. It was full of little girls in pink dresses jumping up and down, up and down.

'Bottoms out!' called the ballet teacher.

Ballet and boxing, in the same place. I laughed. Put the little girls in boxing gloves and the boys in those pink shoes, I thought. That will be funny!

Billy was in the boxing ring with another boy

'Hit him, Billy!' I shouted. Billy's getting better. He moves his feet well. 'You move well,' I said. 'But hit him too!'

The other boy was taller and stronger than Billy, but he was fat. Billy will win easily, I thought. Then they started to fight ...

What was Billy doing? He was dancing, turning in circles.

'Oh no,' George said. 'Not again. This isn't a tea party, it's a light. Hit him! Hit him!'

He looked at me and I shook my head.

Billy was dancing round and round the boxing ring. The other boy stood there, watching.

'Watch him, Billy!' I shouted.

Too late. The other boy walked up to Billy and hit him. And there was Billy, on his back.

George was very angry. 'Billy Elliot, you're the worst boxer in this club! Bring me fifty pence for the lesson.'

I couldn't look at Billy. I was so angry. What can I do for that boy? If he can't fight a fat boy, what *can* he do?

Chapter 3

Billy's Story: The Ballet Class

'Hit it! You'll stay here until you do hit it, Billy Elliot.'

I hit the practice bag. I imagined it was George's face.

'Keep your feet on the ground, Elliot! Don't be stupid! Hit it!'

'Bottoms in. feel the music. And - one and two and three and four. Lift your arms. Feel the music!'

Across the hall, a woman was teaching her ballet class. An old man was playing the piano. One and two and three and four ...

I started hitting to the sound of the music, then I laughed. George won't like this, I thought.

'That's better. Why don't you do that to somebody's head one day?' George took some keys from his pocket and threw them to me. 'Give those to Mrs Wilkinson when you finish. I'll see you next week.'

He went out of the hall. Good. This bag is Georges head, I thought. I hit it harder.

I don't like boxing. My friend Michael is right — it's stupid.

'Why do you want to hit people? It's stupid,' he asked.

'You must fight people. If you don't, they'll hit you.'

'I run away,' Michael said.

The music changed.

'And hold,' the teacher said. 'Don't look at me, Susan, look in front of you. Lift your arms up ... and down. Good. Eyes front, Debbie. And five and six ...'

I took off the gloves and walked across the hall. The girls were pretty in their pink dresses, but I felt a bit uncomfortable.

'Miss, the keys ... the keys, Miss!' I said.

She didn't look at me. 'Not now,' she said. 'Three, four. And five, and six ...'

The music started again and the girls danced. They were clever. They all lifted their arms at the same time and they turned round. Then they lifted their legs and

pointed their feet. It was interesting - but it was easy. I can do that, I thought. I lifted my foot. See? Easy!

'Why don't you try?' a girl said to me.

It was Debbie Wilkinson. She's in my class at school.

'No,' I said. Can you imagine me in a ballet class!

'It's not easy,' she said. 'You can't do it.'

'I can!'

She lifted her leg up and pointed her toes.

'Do that,' she said.

I put my leg out and pointed my foot.

'See?' she said.

It was true. Her foot was more pointed than mine.

'I'm wearing my boots,' I said.

'Your leg's shaking,' she said. She was laughing at me but she was right. Her leg wasn't shaking, but mine was.

My nan wanted to be a dancer. Mum could dance too. Nan took Mum to ballet lessons when she was a girl. I thought about Nan and Mum dancing. Not everybody in our family boxes.

I moved with the girls, but it was very difficult. Up and down and one and two and three and four ...

'Take your boots off!'

'Ow!'

Miss was standing on my foot.

'How big are your feet? Two, three! Boots off! Four, five. And six and seven.'

Take off my boots? Why? I didn't know, but I took them off. Then she dropped a big pair of ballet shoes in front of me.

'Put them on,' she said. 'You can't dance in those boots.'

So I put on the shoes. Nobody saw me except the girls. And, do you know something? I think they liked me in their ballet class.

Mrs. Wilkinson was a good teacher. We moved up and down, up and down. We pointed our arms in front and our legs behind us and she looked at me.

‘Nice straight leg,’ she said.

It was easier with the shoes, but not *very* easy. You try it — stand for a minute on one leg with your arms in front of you. You’ll see. It’s hard.

She didn’t say anything. But she thought I was good.

Later, when I was walking home, she stopped her car next to me. Debbie was in the back seat. I didn’t know she was Miss’s daughter.

‘Give me fifty pence,’ Miss said.

‘Why?’

‘For the ballet class. Bring it next week.’

‘I have to go to boxing, Miss.’

‘But you’re no good at boxing,’ Debbie said.

‘Be quiet, Debbie.’ Mrs. Wilkinson looked at me. ‘Didn’t you enjoy the ballet class?’

I didn’t say anything.

‘OK,’ she said and drove away. Debbie made a funny face through the back window.

She was right — I enjoyed the class. I ran and jumped down the road. The music filled my head. Next day, every part of my body hurt.

I thought about ballet every day. One and two and up and down. It’s interesting, but it’s stupid too. My dad and Tony will laugh at me. You can’t dance in a coal mine.

Not everyone thinks ballet is stupid. Some of the girls say I was brave. But then they told the boys and the boys laughed at me. It’s not important. The boys at school always laugh at me.



I ran and jumped down the road.

One day, Debbie followed me home after school.

‘Lots of boys dance ballet,’ she said.

‘Only gay boys,’ I told her.

‘Not all of them are gay,’ she said.

We were at the top of the hill. We could see the mine with a lot of miners and policemen around it. There were thousands of people. A police van drove past us and I saw the faces of the police inside.

‘I go boxing on Saturdays,’ I said.

‘OK,’ she said, and turned away.

She lives on the other side of the town. Big houses, big gardens, posh people.

She walked away. I looked down at the mine where the miners were shouting at the police. It was a war.

Earlier today, I told Michael about the ballet and showed him some of the moves. All the boys were running across the school field during the sports lesson. Michael and I hate running, so we went down to the railway line. We hid there sometimes. We sat and talked for ten minutes, then I showed him some ballet moves.

‘Put your leg out,’ I said. ‘Arm out, one, two!’

He looked at me and smiled.

‘Eyes to the front,’ I told him.

I showed him all the moves. Do you know something? I’m much better than him.

‘You’ve had lessons,’ he said.

‘One lesson,’ I told him.

‘Will you go to the class again?’

‘No.’

‘But you’re good at ballet.’

‘It’s for girls.’

‘I don’t think so,’ Michael said. ‘You look ... like a man. Strong.’

When next Saturday came, Dad and Tony went to the picket line. I took my fifty pence and gloves and went to the hall. But when I got there, I heard George. He was shouting. I didn’t want to go into the boxing class. Michael’s right, boxing is stupid. I hid in the changing room until the other boys left. Then I went to the ballet class.

At first the class was boring. I didn’t know the ballet moves. The girls danced on the left of the room and I danced on the right.

‘What are you doing?’ Miss asked.

‘I don’t know what to do, Miss.’

‘Follow the others. Go to the back of the room and watch — two, three, one two three ...’

I tried but it wasn’t much fun. I wanted to leave. Then Miss showed me the spin.

I’ve seen people spin on TV. They move very fast, then they suddenly stop. If you don’t do it well, you fall on your back. I wasn’t any good at the spin.

‘Billy, you’re not a girl! Try harder! Spin!’

I did - and I fell onto the floor. The girls looked at me, but they didn’t laugh. People don’t laugh in Miss’s class.

‘Do it again at home,’ she said.

Then we did some slower ballet moves. That was easier.

At the end of the class I was very tired, but I felt good.

‘I can do that spin,’ I thought.

Debbie was waiting for me. ‘The spin’s hard,’ she said. She practised it in front of me.

‘I’m faster than you,’ I told her.

‘You can’t do it,’ she laughed.

I stood up. I did a slow spin first and it was good. But when I turned faster, I fell again.

Mrs Wilkinson walked across the room to us.

‘Go away’ she said to Debbie.

Debbie walked away and Miss looked down at me.

‘Are you going to come to the class next week?’

‘I don’t know. I feel stupid,’ I said.

‘Then give me your ballet shoes.’

I stopped. I didn’t like ballet much. But that spin — I wanted to do it.

‘No, it’s OK,’ I said.

‘Good,’ she said.

She walked away. She didn’t say goodbye.

I danced through the streets to my home. Ballet was different and exciting. Then suddenly, I was in the kitchen with the ballet shoes in my hand and the boxing

gloves around my neck. What am I doing? I thought. Dad will kill me if he sees these shoes.

Nan was waiting for me.

‘Oh, ballet shoes,’ she said. ‘I was a dancer.’

‘Don’t tell anybody, Nan,’ I said.

Then I ran upstairs and hid the shoes.

Chapter 4

Jackie’s Story: The Miners’ Strike ’

Something strange is happening. Billy is my son and I love him. But he’s different from other boys and he does strange things. When he was ten, he sat in a box all day. Then it was football. He wasn’t very good at the game, but he practised all the time. Now he’s spinning round in circles, in the kitchen, in the- hall, in his bedroom. He holds out his arms and he spins and he falls on the floor. Then he starts again.

‘What are you doing?’ Tony asked him.

‘I’m practising a spin. It’s a boxing move,’ he said.

I’ve never seen that boxing move before!

‘Stop it!’ I shouted at him, but he didn’t.

Every day, he stood with his arms out and tried again. Then one day I came home from the shop and he was outside the house. He was looking at the wall, arms out — then he spun round two or three times. He went really fast.

‘Yes! Yes, yes, I did it, I did it!’

He was very excited and I smiled.

‘You did it,’ I said.

He jumped. ‘Dad, you frightened me! I didn’t see you.’

‘Have you tried this move at the boxing club?’

‘No, not yet. I want to get it right every time.’

‘Did George teach you this spin, Billy? What does he think about it?’

‘George? No. He doesn’t say anything.’

‘You’ll surprise him next Saturday.’

Billy didn’t say anything, but he looked at the ground.

A few days later, he started to jump. High, big, long jumps with his hands over his head. What’s he doing? Does he think he’s a ballet dancer?

‘Is that another boxing move?’ I asked.

‘Yes.’

I don’t understand. Is George teaching him these strange moves? When the fat boy knocked Billy down, I stopped going to the club. I have too many problems. I haven’t got time to watch Billy at the boxing club. It’s the fourth month of the strike and I haven’t got any money. The strike won’t end soon. And one day the mine will close down.

Tony is angry. I understand why he’s angry. But he’s crazy too and he’s looking for a fight. I’m afraid that he’s going to do something stupid.

We were in the supermarket yesterday and we saw Gary Stewart. He had a bag full of food.

‘Look at him,’ Tony said. Tony and Gary went to school together. They were friends before the strike.

‘Be careful,’ I whispered.

One day Tony will hit somebody and the police will throw him in prison.

‘Are you OK, scab?’ called Tony. We knew Gary was a scab. Strikers can’t buy big bags of food. ‘Have you got enough food? What are you doing? We can’t win this strike if our people cross the picket line.’

‘We won’t win the strike, my friend,’ Gary said.

‘I’m not your friend. Not now. You and the other scabs - you’ll make us lose!’ Tony shouted. He was getting more and more angry.

Gary threw down his bag and walked away.

Is Tony going to follow him? I thought. Will he hit him? But Tony didn’t move. He’ll hit somebody soon. I hope it’s not a policeman.

On Friday morning the picket line was bigger. There are a lot of new pickets - students, teachers on holiday, people from across the world. And half the policemen in Great Britain are standing between the pickets and the scabs.

On Friday, the pickets were throwing eggs and stones. I was standing next to George, holding his arm. The crowd pushed forward and the police pushed us back.

‘Listen Jackie,’ George said. ‘Don’t worry about the fifty pence. I don’t need it. The money isn’t important.’

‘What are you talking about?’ I asked.

‘The boxing. I haven’t seen Billy for months.’

‘What? But he’s always practising.’ I didn’t tell him about the spins and the jumps.

‘Send him to my house and I’ll talk to him,’ George said.

Then the police pushed forward again. Someone threw a rock into the side of a bus full of scabs.

‘SCAB! SCAB! SCAB!’

We pushed forward hard and I was lifted almost off my feet. You didn’t want to fall down in the middle of this.

Was Billy keeping the fifty pences? I’m going to kill him, I thought.

Next morning, Billy ran quickly downstairs. He was hiding something under his coat.

‘Billy! Billy!’ I shouted but he ran out of the house.

What’s he doing now? I thought.

Chapter 5

Billy's Story: Mrs. Wilkinson's Plan

I jump higher than all the little girls in the class, and I feel good. Miss says I'm good. She spends half the lesson with me.

'Is it our turn now?' the girls ask. 'You're always with Billy.'

'Be quiet, Debbie. I'm busy.'

I love the class. I think about it all the time. I practise a lot and I'm stronger now. I can dance for hours.

Michael was worried. 'Your dad will find out about the ballet classes,' he said. 'What will you do?'

But I didn't want to think about Dad. Just this week. Just one more lesson, I thought.

Then Dad walked into the ballet class. I was lifting my leg. I looked up and Dad was standing in the door. I stopped. He's going to kill me, I thought.

Miss was still teaching. 'Up two three. Like a princess, Debbie. One two three ... why aren't you dancing?' she asked me.

The music stopped and she saw Dad. His face was red.

'You! Out! Now!' he shouted at me. •

I watched Miss out of the corner of my eye. She's going to fight him, I thought. I don't want a fight.

'Please, Miss. Don't,' I whispered.

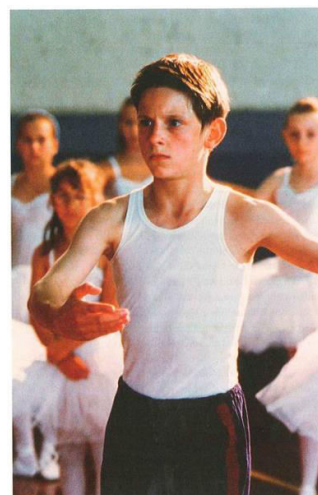
Then I went out of the hall. I wanted to hide. Dad followed me out. He took my arm and pulled me home. He didn't say anything and I was very frightened.

In the kitchen he pointed at a chair next to the table, then he sat down opposite me. He didn't speak for a long time.

'Ballet,' he said finally

'What's wrong with ballet?' I said. 'It's OK.'

'How can it be OK?'



I love the class. I think about it all the time.

I was frightened. He was angry and his face was white now.

'I went to ballet classes,' Nan said.

She was sitting near the window, watching us.

'It's OK for your nan. For girls, Billy, not for boys. Boys play football or they box.'

'What's wrong with dancing?' I asked again.

But I knew. Ballet isn't for boys and strong, hard men. Ballet isn't for miners who strike for their friends. People in our town don't dance ballet. Well, maybe I don't want to be a miner. Maybe I'm different.

'Forget about ballet, son, and forget about boxing,' Dad said. 'I've worked hard for those fifty pences. You can stay at home with Nan.'

'I wanted to be a dancer,' Nan said.

'Be quiet!' Dad shouted at her.

I jumped up.

'I hate you!' I screamed at him.

Then I ran out of the room. He shouted at me, but I didn't stop. Tears were running down my face. I want to dance, I thought. It's the only thing I can do well. And Dad wants to stop me.

I ran down to the beach. It was a windy day. I listened to the sea and I felt calmer. I was on the posh side of town now. Rich people live there - people who are better than us. Miss lives there.

I went to her house and knocked on the door. The door opened and Miss stood in front of me.

'Oh, it's you,' she said.

I said, 'He doesn't know I'm here. He'll kill me.'

'Has he stopped you coming to classes?'

'He doesn't understand, Miss,' I said.

I didn't want to say anything bad about my dad to her. She didn't like him — but he was my dad.

She turned back into the house. 'Debbie!' she shouted. 'It's Billy.'

Come and talk to him.'

I followed her into the sitting room and sat in a chair. Debbie came in and sat next to me. Her dad was sitting in another chair, drinking beer.

'So you're the ballet dancer,' he said. 'I've heard about you. Your dad works down the mine, doesn't he?'

'Yes.'

'Is he on strike?'

'Of course.'

'The strike will end soon. The miners can't win. The mines don't make any money, so they'll close.' He looked at me angrily.

'Tom, be quiet!' said Mrs. Wilkinson.

Why is he so angry? I thought. He isn't on strike.

'What's your job, Mr. Wilkinson?' I asked.

'He lost his job,' Debbie said. 'The company doesn't need him.'

'Did you strike to save your job?' I said.

Mr. Wilkinson's face went red, but he didn't say another word.

I ate dinner at the Wilkinsons' house. Later, up in Debbie's room, she told me about her mum and dad.

'My dad drinks too much and he has girlfriends. He and Mum aren't happy,' she said. 'Do you miss your mum?'

I didn't want to talk about my mum. I don't think about her a lot. Sometimes I forget she's dead. I think she's at the shops, or in the other room with Nan. But she never comes back.

Debbie moved closer to me on the bed and I hit her. I didn't hit her hard. She's only a girl. We were fighting and playing. Suddenly I touched her on her chest and I felt strange. She touched my face. It was nice but ...

I stood up.

I heard Miss's voice. 'Debbie, Billy has to go home. I'll take him in the car,' she called up the stairs.

'I'll see you later,' I said to Debbie.

'Bye, Billy.'

She sat on the bed and didn't look at me.

Miss took me to the street next to my home and we sat in the car.

'I was thinking about the auditions for the Royal Ballet School,' she said.

'You're a bit old for the auditions, Miss,' I said.

She laughed. 'Not me, Billy. You. There are auditions in Newcastle.'

Ballet school? Me? Ballet is only a game, isn't it?

‘Can I do ballet as a job, Miss?’

‘Of course you can.’

‘Dad won’t let me,’ I told her.

‘I’ll talk to him.’

‘No!’ I almost jumped out of the seat. ‘Miss! Don’t!’

She was quiet for a minute, then she spoke again. ‘I’ll teach you.’

‘I haven’t got any money. And Dad wants me to box.’

‘I’m not doing it for the money. This is important, Billy!’ She spoke angrily.

‘All right, all right. Keep your hair on!’ I said. She looked at me and we both laughed.

Can I do this? I thought. Dance in secret? Be a ballet dancer?

I’m a boy ... I *can* do this, I thought. I *can* dance. I smiled at her and she smiled back at me.

‘I’ll see you on Monday,’ she said. ‘Six o’clock at the hall.’

I didn’t say yes or no. I just opened the car door and got out.

‘And bring something with you,’ she continued. ‘Something that’s important to you. It will give us ideas for the dance.’

‘What dance?’

‘Your audition dance, stupid.’

I shut the car door and she drove away. What am I doing, I asked myself.

Chapter 6

Michael’s Story: My Best Friend Billy

Somebody knocked at the door and I looked out of the bedroom window. I was wearing a purple dress, my mum’s red shoes and my sister’s jacket.

I won’t go to the door, I thought. Then I saw Billy standing outside. He can’t say anything. He’s a ballet dancer! I ran downstairs and opened the door. Billy pushed me inside.

‘Somebody will see you!’ he said. ‘What are you doing?’

‘Nothing,’ I said.

‘Whose dress is that?’

‘My sister’s. Are you coming upstairs?’

He followed me up to my mum’s bedroom.

‘Did your sister give that dress to you?’ Billy asked.

‘She doesn’t know. It’s OK - it’s only a bit of fun. You dance around in a ballet dress and I wear my sister’s clothes.’

‘I don’t wear a ballet dress, I wear my sports clothes. I dance, but I’m not gay.’

‘I wear my sister’s clothes, but I’m not gay,’ I said.

I don’t *think* I’m gay. I like wearing my sister’s clothes. It’s fun, nothing more. But ... I like Billy. I like to watch him dance. *Am* I gay?

I started to put on my mum’s lipstick.

‘What are you doing now?’ Billy asked.

‘Playing.’ I smiled at him in the mirror and he smiled back at me.

‘Come here, you.’

I jumped up and pushed him onto the bed. I put some lipstick on him. He looked good. He has nice lips.

Billy stood up, looked in the mirror and kissed it. There was the shape of his lips on the glass.

‘Girls’ and boys’ lips are the same shape,’ I told him.

I looked at the kiss. I wanted to kiss it.

‘Will we get into trouble?’ Billy asked.

‘No. My dad wears women’s clothes all the time.’

Well, not *all* the time. But he wears my mum’s clothes when the house is empty.

Billy looked at himself in the mirror.

‘Michael,’ he said, ‘in two weeks I’m going to an audition for ballet school in Newcastle.’

‘Ballet school in Newcastle?’

‘The school’s in London,’ Billy said.

‘Can’t you be a ballet dancer here?’

‘Don’t be stupid.’

When he started the ballet class, Billy asked me: ‘Why don’t you dance too?’

‘No,’ I said. ‘The other boys at school will laugh at us.’

Billy wasn’t frightened of a fight, but I am. I want to be the same as the other boys, but I’m not. My dad says, ‘Be proud that you’re different.’ But up here in Everington it’s hard to be different. The other boys and girls hate you.

But Billy’s a good friend, and he’s different too. And now he wants to be a ballet dancer in London.

‘What does your dad say?’ I asked.

‘He doesn’t know.’

‘Are you going to tell him?’

‘No. He’ll be angry.’

I went to the cupboard and looked at the dresses. I didn’t look at Billy. I was unhappy. I didn’t want him to leave me. Who will I talk to when Billy goes away?

I think Billy understood.

‘I’ll show you,’ he said. He pushed back a chair and started to dance. ‘You do it too. Lift your legs.’

He showed me the ballet moves and I copied him. He closed his eyes and he forgot about me and my dress. He was lost in his own little world. Then he jumped up and did a spin.

‘Wow,’ I said, and he smiled.

‘That’s dancing,’ he said.

Chapter 7

Billy's Story: Dad and Tony's Fight

There were only two weeks until the audition and we worked hard. Miss told me to find something personal for my dance. I took my mum's letter and a music cassette that she liked.

I met Miss at the club on Monday. She picked up Mum's letter and read it. At the end, she was crying.

'She was a very special woman, Billy,' she said.

'No, she was just my mum,' I said.

She asked me questions about Mum, What made her happy? What made her sad?

'Mum liked music,' I said. 'She played the piano.'

I put the cassette on and played the loud, fast music.

'Did your mum like this song?' Miss asked. 'Then this is the music for our dance.'

We had fun. We jumped and ran round in circles. We were laughing and playing and dancing.

'Dance for your mum, Billy,' Miss said. 'At the end, do the biggest, fastest, highest spin. Imagine that she's watching you.'

Miss is clever. It worked. I thought about Mum and I danced.

◆

Things were bad at home. The town was full of police and miners from other towns.

'We're going to destroy the government!' Tony said.

But we had no money. People broke up their furniture and burned it on the fire. We didn't have much food. I was getting tired of eating bread. They were keeping us hungry.

The government used the police to frighten us. The police on horseback were the worst. The horses were so big and the policemen carried long sticks. They rode up

behind the pickets and hit them on their backs and heads. There was blood then. I saw it with my own eyes.

Tony and I were both arguing with Dad. I was angry because I couldn't dance. Tony was angry because Dad was weak. He was always shouting at him. I felt sorry for Dad, but Tony was right. Dad was a silly old man, and he couldn't move out of the past.

A week before the audition, I woke up in the middle of the night. Tony was getting out of bed.

'What are you doing? What time is it?' I asked.

'Be quiet,' he told me. 'Go back to sleep.'

I looked at the clock - it was four o'clock in the morning. He walked quietly out of the bedroom. A few minutes later, the shouting started downstairs. I got up to have a look.

Dad was standing in front of the back door. Tony was in front of him, white as a sheet. He had a big hammer in his hand.

'Get out of my way. Open the door,' Tony said. He was very angry. 'Put the hammer down.'

'Get out of my way!'

Tony suddenly ran up to Dad and waved the hammer. Is he going to hit him? I thought.

'No!' I shouted, but they didn't even look at me.

'You don't want to fight,' Tony shouted. 'That's your problem. You're finished, aren't you? Mum died and now you're a stupid old man. Get out of my way!'

He tried to push Dad away from the door, but Dad suddenly hit Tony on the side of the face. Tony fell down onto the floor. 'Stop it! Stop it!' I screamed.

Dad looked at me. His face was white and his eyes were wet with tears.

'What are *you* looking at?' he shouted.

He was very angry and I was frightened. Tony stood up. He pushed Dad away and ran out of the door.

◆

'You're not trying, Billy! Do it again!'

Miss was shouting at me. I was dancing but thinking about Dad and Tony.

'I can't!'

'Do it again! Do it again, now!'

Her face was close to mine.

'No.'

'What?' She stepped back. 'What did you say?'

'No,' I said again.

I hated her because she was shouting at me. I ran into the changing room. She thought ballet was so important - but it wasn't! I thought about the fight again. That hammer. Tony almost hit my dad with a hammer! And Dad, hitting Tony in the face. I wanted my mum. She could stop Dad and Tony fighting, I thought. When she died everything went wrong.

The door to the changing room opened.

'Billy? I know you're here,' Miss said. I'm sorry.'

Sorry, she says. What good is that? I'm finished with her. I jumped out at her.

'It's OK for you. You're not going to the audition.'

'I know,' she said.

She looked frightened. I was bigger than her.

You don't know anything,' I said. 'You want me to dance. Why? Because people think you're a good teacher. You don't have a real dancing school, just a group of children in this old hall. You shout at me because your life's no good ...'

She hit me hard across the face. It hurt and I was surprised. I put my hand up to my face. Then she held her arms out to me.

'Billy, love,' she said.

I wanted to run out of the door. But ... I wanted to dance too. It was the best thing in my life. I couldn't leave. I started to cry. Miss took another step towards me and I put my head on her shoulder.

'I'm sorry, Billy' she said.

I cried and cried for about five minutes.

'OK,' she said. 'Have you finished crying?'

'Yes, miss. Sorry,' I said.

She pushed up my head and dried my tears on my T-shirt.

'Good boy,' she said. 'We'll start dancing again.'

Do you know something? She never asked, 'Why are you crying?' Dancing was the one good thing in my life. I wasn't clever or popular at school, but I could dance.

The audition was getting closer and I was nervous. What will I do if I get into ballet school? I thought. Dad will kill me. He won't give me permission to live in London. What's ballet school going to cost? But I won't get in, so Dad won't know about the audition ...

'I won't get in,' I said to Miss.

'Yes you will, Billy Elliot. You'll be the best dancer at the audition.'

Who can I talk to? I thought. I miss my mum. But she's not here, she's dead. She can't hear anything and she can't tell me anything.

Then something happened. On the Thursday before the audition, Miss and I couldn't use the hall. We drove to a school and used its hall. On the way home in the car, I played a music cassette. The music wasn't modern, but I liked it. It was beautiful.

'It's good, isn't it?' I said. 'What is it? I've heard it before.'

'It's ballet music,' Miss said. 'Now, get out of the car. It's time for you to go home.'

It was dark and cold in the house. There was no more coal to make a fire. Dad and Tony were out. Nan was in and I went into her room and said hello to her. She didn't know me - it was one of her bad days.

I went back into the kitchen and took some milk out of the fridge.

'Hello, son.'

I turned around. It was Mum. She was drying a dish with a cloth.

'What have I told you, Billy?' she said. 'Don't drink out of the milk bottle.'

‘Sorry, Mum,’ I said.

I took a glass and poured some milk into it. Then I put the bottle on top of the fridge.

‘Put the bottle inside the fridge,’ she said.

I picked up the bottle and opened the fridge door. Then I thought, That was Mum. She was here. The dish and the cloth were on the table. I touched them and they were warm. Her hands touched them, I thought. I wasn’t frightened.

The door opened and Nan came in. She walked to the cupboard.

‘It’s in here,’ she said.

‘What is, Nan?’

‘The record.’ She took a record out of the cupboard. She went into the sitting room and put the record on the record player. ‘Listen,’ she said.

The music started. It’s the same music, I thought, the music from Miss’s car. That’s why I knew it. It was one of Mum’s old records.

‘Did you see her too, Nan?’ I asked.

But Nan was dancing around the room. I held her arms and we did some ballet moves together. She was slow, but she was good.

Then the door opened quickly. Tony was standing there with Dad behind him.

‘You’re using my record player,’ Tony said.

‘It’s not yours, it’s Mum’s,’ I shouted.

Tony went to the record player and turned it off.

‘Be careful,’ Dad shouted at Tony. ‘Don’t break the record.’

He took it away from Tony and cleaned it carefully. Then he turned to me.

‘Who told you to play this?’

‘Sorry,’ I whispered.

Dad walked out of the room and shut the door noisily. Dad and Tony are always making a noise in the house — I hate it. But it wasn’t important. You see, now I understood. Muni wanted me to dance in the audition. It wasn’t a stupid dream. Maybe I will get into the ballet school, I thought.

The audition was on Saturday at half past ten. I wanted to succeed - for me and for Mum. On Friday, I went for the final practice and I danced perfectly. Nobody can stop me, I thought.

Then the trouble started.

Chapter 8

Tony’s Story: Trouble with the Police

It was me. I attacked the police horse.

Some of the police are very unkind. One policeman is really bad. His horse kicks us when we’re on the picket line. He doesn’t stop it. So we decided to fight him.

It was Friday afternoon and I was in the town centre with my friends. There was a small crowd of people around the policeman and his horse. I had some petrol in a bottle and I threw it on the horse’s tail. Then I lit a match.

WHOOMPH! The horse was frightened and the policeman nearly fell off its back. Somebody hit the horse and it spun round. The policeman couldn’t stop it.

We were laughing and then we heard horses behind us. A lot more police arrived and we started to run.

We ran up the street and met more policemen. They were waiting for us and they were very, very angry. My friend, Simon James, fell down and the policemen hit him with their sticks.

I ran through Jeff and Alice Thomson’s house and into the street at the back. It was washing day and the street was full of washing lines. There were wet clothes and sheets hanging from them. I was near my house, but the police were everywhere.

I saw Billy standing on a wall. He was shouting something.

Then hundreds of police and horses came towards me.

‘Tony! Tony! Not that way!’ Billy shouted.

I tried to run, but there was a wet sheet in front of me. I stopped for a second and then I fell. I heard the police coming ...

They hit me. One, two, three, four, then I didn’t feel anything more. When I woke up, I was in the police station.

They kept me there overnight and I went to court at ten o’clock on Saturday morning. In the night the police hit me again and I couldn’t walk.

‘The police horse kicked him,’ a policeman told the judge.

The judge believed him. He told me to pay one hundred pounds to the court. Where will I find a hundred pounds?

Dad and Billy came to court. Dad was angry but didn’t say anything. I wanted to go to bed and cry.

When we got home, a woman was waiting for us. I didn’t know her, but she knew Billy.

‘Where were you, Billy?’ she asked.

‘Please, Miss, don’t,’ he whispered. ‘My brother Tony was in court. I tried to telephone you. You weren’t there.’

‘Who are you?’ I asked. I looked at Dad.

‘Come inside the house,’ he said.

I looked at Billy. Was he in trouble?

We went into the sitting room and turned, to look at the woman. She crossed her arms.

‘I know this is difficult for you,’ she began. ‘But Billy missed an important audition today.’

‘What?’ I said. ‘Audition? For what?’

‘For the Royal Ballet School.’

Was she serious? The police hit me and the court wants one hundred pounds. And she was angry because Billy missed an audition for the Royal Ballet School!

‘Are you joking?’ I said.

‘I’m very serious.’

I looked at Billy. ‘Ballet?’ I turned to the woman. ‘Do you know what’s happening to us? And you’re talking about ballet? You stupid woman. My brother isn’t going to be a ballet dancer.’

I wanted to hit her.

‘I want to be a ballet dancer,’ Billy said. He was crying.

I took hold of his arm. The woman tried to stop me. I pushed her away and put Billy on the table.

‘You want to dance? OK - dance!’

‘This is stupid,’ the woman said.

‘Oh yes? I want to see you dance, Billy!’

‘No, Billy,’ she said. ‘Don’t!’

I turned to her. ‘You don’t want him to dance? So go away and leave us. He’s not going to dance again. And if you come near him, I’ll hit you! Understand?’

‘You stupid man,’ she said quietly. ‘You say Billy’s important to you? He came to me every night for two weeks and you didn’t notice. I’ll see you soon, Billy.’

She walked out of the room.

‘I hate you!’ Billy shouted at me.

Then he turned and ran out of the house. I wanted to follow him, but Dad stopped me. I pushed him away.

‘I’m going to the pub,’ I said. ‘I’ll see you later.’

I don’t understand my family. I’m fighting the police and the bosses for them. Why don’t they help me? If Billy dances again, I’ll hit him. And if she goes near him, I’ll hit her too.

Chapter 9 Billy’s Story: Discoveries

‘It was a bad Christmas,’ I said to Michael. ‘We didn’t have any wood for the fire, so Dad broke the piano into small pieces. Tony gave me some football boots. He hasn’t got any money — maybe he stole them. Dad was unhappy because Mum wasn’t there. He

started to cry. I can’t remember a worse Christmas.’

‘Run away from home,’ Michael said. ‘Join a dance group.’

‘Don’t be stupid.’

We didn’t have anything to do. The piano was gone and the house was cold. So we went outside and built a snowman. I didn’t have any gloves.

‘My hands hurt! They’re so cold.’

‘Give me your hands,’ Michael said.

He put them under his jacket. I touched his skin. It was warm but...

Michael was looking at me.

‘What are you doing?’ I said.

‘Nothing. I’m warming your hands.’

‘Are my hands cold on your skin?’ I asked him.

‘I like it.’

I thought for a minute. ‘Are you gay?’ I asked him.

Suddenly we both laughed. Of course he’s gay! It was funny. He kissed me, very quickly.

‘I like ballet, but I’m not gay,’ I said.

‘You won’t tell anyone, will you?’

‘No,’ I said.

We stood there for another minute. I like Michael, he’s my best friend. Suddenly, I had an idea.

‘Come with me,’ I said.

I took his arm and pulled him towards the hall.

Inside, I found one of the ballet skirts that the girls wear. I gave it to Michael.

‘You’re the girl,’ I said to him.

‘No I’m not,’ he said. ‘I’m gay, but I’m not a girl!’

‘For the dance,’ I said.

We stood in the boxing ring and I showed him some ballet moves.

‘Second and down. And one and two. You’re not bad - for a gay boy.’

I danced away from him. My eyes were closed and I was in another world. Michael couldn’t follow me there. I was dancing alone and I was really happy.

Then, finally, I stopped. I stood opposite Michael and held his hands. He looked into my eyes. It was part of the dance. It wasn’t important. Then I heard a noise and ...

It was my dad.

Michael was frightened. He knows my dad is a hard man. And Michael was wearing a dress and I was holding his hands ...

I climbed out of the ring and went up to my dad.

‘Dad?’ I said.

He covered his face with his hands. But I stood in front of him and I danced. I spun and jumped and danced for five minutes. Then I stopped and looked at Dad. Is he going to hit me? I thought.

‘That was wonderful!’ Michael said.

Dad turned and walked out of the hall. I ran after him.

‘Dad!’ I shouted.

‘Go home, son!’ he replied.

He didn’t stop walking.

Chapter 10 Jackie’s Story: The Search for Money

I ran down the road. I wanted to cry, but I couldn’t. My life is so difficult. There’s the strike. My wife is dead. Tony wants to fight everyone. My wife’s mother lives with us and she’s going crazy. And Billy. What can I say about Billy? He’s different.

And he’s good at something.

I don’t know anything about ballet, but I’ve seen dancers on TV. And now I know Billy is a good dancer too. Maybe his teacher is right ...

I’m Billy’s dad, so I have to help him. Oh Sarah, what shall I do? Shall I send that teacher away? Shall I stop Billy dancing? Help me decide, please.



I stood in front of him and I danced.

Suddenly I knew what to do. I smiled. Then I ran home and telephoned George.

‘Where does that dance teacher live?’ I asked him.

He told me and I went to her house.

‘How much will the ballet school audition cost?’ I asked.

‘Billy missed the audition in Newcastle and the next one is in London. You’ll have to go to London and stay in a hotel. I can lend you some money.’

‘I don’t want your money!’ I said angrily.

‘Oh, don’t be stupid! Do you want a drink?’ She was trying to be friendly.

‘No,’ I said. ‘Is Billy a good dancer?’

‘I can’t promise anything. But I think he’s a great dancer.’

I left her house and went home. The boys were in bed. I went into the bedroom and looked at Billy. A great dancer? I thought. Our Billy? I sat on the bed next to him and he woke up. I put my hand on his shoulder.

‘Go to sleep, son,’ I told him.

He’s my son, I thought. He’s Billy Elliot. But maybe ... maybe he’s really good at something. How can I help him? Where will I find the money? I can’t ask the other miners. Nobody has any money for food or coal or clothes. They’re hungry. I can’t ask for money so Billy can dance!

I went upstairs to my bedroom and found Sarah’s wedding ring. I’m going to sell this, I thought. If I get a hundred pounds, I can take Billy to London. I don’t want to sell Sarah’s ring, but I have to. I know Sarah wants me to help Billy.

The next day I went to sell the ring. The shop was full of wedding rings. We’re all poor. We’re selling the most important things that we own.

I showed the ring to the man in the shop.

‘How much?’ I asked.

‘I’ll give you twenty-five pounds.’

‘What? That’s my wife’s ring.’

‘I’m sorry.’ He looked sad. ‘I know this ring is important to you. But I can’t give you any more money.’

I took the twenty-five pounds. Sarah was gone and now her ring was gone too. And I needed more money.

The strike will end soon, I thought. The government is going to win. In two or three months we’ll go back to work, but it will be too late for Billy. I need to work for one week, then I can take Billy to the audition.

I went to the place near the mine where the workers met. Gary Stewart was there and he laughed at me. I didn’t say anything.

The bosses were rude to us when they put us on the bus. Nobody likes a scab - and now I was a scab. Some of the miners hid their faces, but I didn’t. I wanted everyone to see me.

I was frightened. There were crowds of people near the mine. They were shouting and throwing stones at the bus. We moved slowly. There were faces and noise all around us. The glass in one of the bus windows broke and the bus stopped. What will happen next? I thought. Will the pickets turn the bus over?

I turned my head and looked out of the window next to me. Who was there, looking at me? Tony. He looked into my eyes, then the bus moved again. I hated myself and I wanted to die.

Chapter 11

Tony’s Story: The Meeting

‘Dad, Dad!’ I shouted.

His face was so sad. I wanted to help him. I knew he was in trouble.

The bus moved through the mine gates and I ran after it. The scabs climbed out of the bus and the bosses pushed them towards the entrance to the mine.

‘Dad!’ I shouted again.

He heard me and looked at me. He moved towards me, but a policeman stopped him. Dad tried to hit him, then he walked back to the gate. He was crying. I never saw Dad cry before. I wanted to put my arms around him.

‘It’s for little Billy,’ he said. Tears were running down his face.

‘You can’t go back to work now!’ I said.

‘Look at us! What can we give Billy?’

His face was covered in tears and I was crying too.

‘Please, Dad!’

‘We’re finished, son. I want to give Billy a future.’

‘He’s only twelve years old. What about my future? You can’t do this. We’ll find some money for him. Just come out of the mine, Dad. Please!’

Some men ran up behind us.

‘What’s your dad doing?’ Robert Martin asked.

‘It’s OK, he’s coming out. Aren’t you, Dad?’

Dad rested his head against the gate. ‘I’m sorry, I’m sorry,’ he said.

‘Get him out!’ Martin said.

I got Dad out of the mine. The bosses saw that he was ill. They let him out through the back gate and I took him home. Later, he tried to explain to me.

‘Your mum - she wants Billy to dance. She didn’t worry about other people, just her family.’

You always think your father is the boss. You think he can do anything. But now my dad needs my help.

OK, I thought, I’ll help. But where will we find the money for Billy’s ballet dancing?



He was crying. I never saw Dad cry before.

The next day we went to see George.

‘Ballet?’ he said.

‘Ballet,’ I said.

‘You’ve helped boys before,’ Dad said.

‘Yes, for boxing or sport. But ballet?’

‘Why not ballet? Billy is a good dancer.’

‘Is lie?’ George asked. ‘Who says he’s good?’

‘I went to see his teacher,’ Dad said. ‘He’s the best dancer she’s ever seen. I believe her.’

George looked at me.

‘We have to try,’ I said. ‘It’s important for Dad and the family.’

‘It won’t be easy’ George said. ‘Nobody has any money.’

‘I know,’ I said. ‘This isn’t easy for me, George. But we want to help Billy. Our mum’s not here so we want to do something for him.’ ‘OK,’ George said. ‘We’ll try. We’ll get some money for Billy’s audition.’

For the next two days we put notes through the neighbours’ doors. We wanted them to meet us at the hall. We’ve found money before for children who needed help. But this was different. We’ve never sent anybody to the Royal Ballet School.

A few of the neighbours came to the hall. Dad and George sat at the front of the room but I stayed at the back.

George started to speak. ‘We’ve helped children to become boxers and footballers. This time it’s Billy Elliot. He wants to be a ballet dancer.’ The neighbours were laughing. ‘I’ll give all the fifty pences from the boxing class,’ George said. ‘Mrs Wilkinson is giving the fifty pences from the ballet class. We’re selling some raffle tickets, too. You haven’t much money we know that, but please help us. This is important.’

A few people stood up. They want to leave, I thought. So I stood up too.

‘You all know me,’ I said. ‘For a long time I didn’t want Billy to dance. But I want to say this.’ I looked at my dad. ‘The miners’ strike is about the future. My future, your future, your children’s future. Billy’s future, too. Not everyone will go down the mine, but they will have a future. Billy’s dance teacher says that he’s an excellent dancer. Excellent. You know that our mum is dead. But site wants him to dance. We need your help.’

I looked at Dad. His eyes were wet with tears.

‘George showed you the raffle tickets,’ I said to the crowd. ‘You can’t leave here without buying one. If you do, I’ll fight you outside the hall!’

Everybody laughed. Then they walked to the front of the room and bought their raffle tickets from George.

Dad pushed through the crowd and walked up to me. He looked at me and smiled. Then he put his arms round me and we stood in the middle of the room. We were both crying.

A strike can destroy some families. It can bring other families together. Can you believe it? Dad and I are friends because of ballet dancing!

Chapter 12

Billy’s Story: The Audition

One minute everybody thought I was strange. Then they wanted to give me money. Dad was looking for things to sell. Even Tony was selling raffle tickets. We needed money for bus tickets to London, for food and a hotel.

Then we were on the bus to London. It was very exciting.

‘Is London a nice place, Dad?’ I asked.

‘I don’t know. I’ve never been there.’

‘You’ve never been to London? But it’s the capital city.’

‘There are no mines in London,’ he said. -

‘Don’t you think about anything except mines?’

I thought my dad knew everything. But he doesn’t. I’m only twelve years old and I’m going to London. He’s forty-five and he’s never travelled south of Durham!

The journey took a long time. At first I didn’t like London. There were lots of houses, bigger than the houses in Everington, more and more streets, and bigger and bigger buildings ...

Our hotel wasn’t very good. Dad didn’t like our breakfast. I couldn’t eat any food because I was so frightened.

‘Aren’t you going to eat your egg?’ Dad asked me. ‘You must eat something. You need food in your stomach today.’

‘I can’t,’ I said. But I ate some bread.

We went on the bus to the ballet school. I stood at the bottom of the steps and looked up at the big, old building. I felt sick.

‘Look at this place!’ Dad said. ‘You want to go here? How much money will it cost?’

We walked up the steps into the school. Do you know something? I hated it.

We’ve made a mistake, I thought. I want to dance. But this place is full of posh people, it’s not for me.

The changing rooms were full of boys and girls. Their voices were posh and they didn’t understand me.

‘Is this your first audition?’ a boy asked me. ‘It’s my second. I’m Simon. What’s your name.’

‘Billy Elliot, from Everington near Durham.’

‘Durham? Isn’t there a big church in Durham?’

‘I don’t know. I haven’t visited Durham.’

‘Sorry,’ he said. ‘I don’t understand you. You talk strangely.’

‘Oh be quiet,’ I said.

I hated it. I ran out of the changing room and found Dad at the top of the stairs.

‘Dad, Dad. I don’t want to do the audition. Please ...’

I didn’t finish the sentence. Dad took my shoulder and spun me round.

‘Go back in there!’ he shouted.

He pushed me back into the changing room and closed the door. Soon after that the audition started. There were five teachers silting at the front of the room.

‘And you are ...?’

‘Billy Elliot. From Everington.’

‘Ah, yes. Now, Billy, please start dancing.’

They watched me and talked quietly. They didn’t speak to me again. I felt stupid. You can’t dance when you feel stupid. At home, in front of Miss, I can dance. But not here, in this room. These people didn’t want me.

Then it was time for the audition dance. The music started and I knew it was the wrong music for the ballet school. It was too modern, too fast. I stood in front of the teachers and didn’t move.

Then I heard Miss’s voice in my ear.

‘Dance, Billy! You’re in front of these people-so dance!’

So I danced. There wasn’t much time because the music was finishing. But I danced. Then I looked up at the teachers.

‘Thank you, Billy. You can go now.’

I ran out of the room. I was very frightened. Dad found all that money, and I couldn’t dance.

I wanted to cry. I went into the changing room and saw that boy – Simon.

“Are you OK?” He came up to me. “Don’t cry. It’s only an audition. You can come back next year.”

Then the stupid boy came and sat next to me. He put his arm round my shoulder.

“Go away!” I shouted.

“You’ll be OK...”

I hit him in the mouth and he fell on the floor. George will be proud of me, I thought.

The teachers ran into the changing room. Blood was coming out of Simon’s nose and mouth. They won’t let me into the school now, I thought.

They called Dad and me into the room and talked to us.

“Mr. Elliot, the students in this school do not fight,” one of the teachers said. “Do you understand?”

“Yes,” Dad and I said at the same time.

“This fight is very serious. Does anyone want to say anything?”

He looked at the other teachers.

“I have a few questions,” one man said. “Billy, why are you interested in ballet?”

“I don’t know,” I said.

“What do you like best about ballet?”

“The dancing.”

“He dances all the time,” Dad said “Every night after scholl.”

“Do you like ballet, Mr. Elliot? Another teacher asked.

“I don’t know a lot about it,” Dad said.

“Students at this school work very hard, both in their dancing and their school work. Do you want Billy to dance?”

Dad looked at me, then at the teachers.

“Oh, yes,” he said. “Oh, yes.”

And that was almost the end of the audition.

“How do you feel when you dance?” they asked me.

How can I explain to them? I thought. They come from a different world from my dad and me.

“I don’t know,” I said. “When I dance, my body is full of fire. I forget everything.”

Then Dad and I went home.

Chapter 13

Jackie’s Story: The Letter

The trip to London was bad, from beginning to end.

It cost a lot of money. Everybody tried to help, but they couldn’t give enough. Ten pences and fifty pences and two pences-nothing more.

One day somebody knocked at the door. Tony wasn’t at home. I opened the door and saw Gary Stewart, Tony’s old friend from school. The man we saw in the supermarket. The scab.

I took him into the sitting room. He didn’t sit down but stood in the middle of the floor.



“How do you feel when you dance?”

‘I want to help Billy,’ he said. He took an envelope out of his pocket and put it on the table. ‘There’s the money,’ he said. ‘Billy needs a future.’

I looked at the envelope.

‘I can’t accept that, Gary,’ I said.

‘It’s not for you, it’s for Billy,’ he said. ‘Accept it for him.’

He turned and quickly left the room. I heard him open the front door. Then he stopped and came back into the room.

‘Nobody knows about the money, Jackie,’ he said. ‘I won’t tell anyone. I won’t tell my wife. You don’t need to tell anyone.’

He left the house and I sat down. I looked at the envelope. Then I opened it and counted the money. Fifty pounds.

I can’t hide this money from Tony, I thought. He won’t want it. I’ll call it scab money, dirty money. But I’m going to accept it.

So Billy and I went to London. Poor little Billy. The audition was bad. The other children at the school had everything — rich parents, good homes, good schools. Billy didn’t have anything. Then he hit that boy.

When we got home, I felt angry and sad. I tried to go back into the mine during the strike. I took Gary’s money and I sold my wife’s wedding ring. And then we went to London with its big houses and posh people. In Everington, we’ve got our jobs in I lie mines and a hard life. And now the government is taking our jobs away from us. We’ve got nothing.

Tony and Nan were waiting at home.

‘We did OK,’ I told them, but they saw Billy’s face.

They knew he was unhappy.

‘I’ll make some dinner,’ I said.

‘It’s OK, Dad,’ Billy said. ‘I’m tired. I’ll go upstairs and lie on the bed.’

Later, I heard him. The sad little boy was crying. He can’t win against all those posh people.

That evening, I thought about Billy again. We’re not going to slop, I thought. He’ll try the audition again next year. If he wants to go to ballet school, then he will. I thought about the teachers at the audition. When Billy talked about dancing, they listened to him. His words were important. Maybe the teachers weren’t bad people. When we left, one of them spoke to me.

‘Good luck with the strike, Mr. Elliot,’ he said. ‘I hope you win.’

Even in a posh ballet school, some people want to help us.

It was a long time before we heard from the ballet school. We waited one week, then another week. And then the letter came.

Nan took it from the postman.

‘Post!’ she shouted.

She knew the letter was from the ballet school. She gave it to me.

‘Open it now,’ said Tony.

‘I can’t,’ I said. ‘It’s Billy’s letter. He’ll open it when he gets back from school.’

I put the letter on the table and it stayed there all day. I picked it up and put it down again. Later, Nan and Tony picked it up.. Then our neighbours came into the kitchen and looked at the letter. George arrived to look at the letter. It was getting dirty, so Nan put it in her pocket. Then she forgot about it.

‘Where’s the letter?’ I shouted, and we searched the kitchen.

Half an hour later, Nan found it. It was very dirty because she keeps bits of bread and butter in her pocket.

Billy came home from school at four o’clock. Tony, Nan and I were waiting for him. This was an important day for the family.

The door opened and there was Billy. I looked at him and then at the letter. He walked to the table and picked it up. Nobody spoke. We were all uncomfortable. Then Billy went into Nan’s room and closed the door.

We heard Billy open the letter and take it out of the envelope. And then we heard nothing. Nothing.

Tony jumped up. I pushed in front of him and opened the bedroom door. Billy was sitting in the chair by Nan’s bed. He looked up. He was crying. Oh Billy, I thought.

‘I got into the school,’ he said quietly.

‘YEEEEEEEEEEESS!’ Tony and I shouted. I took the letter and read it. YEEEEEEEEES!

‘He got in!’ I shouted.

The neighbours ran into the house. Nan was kissing everybody. Tony put Billy on the table.

‘Dance!’ he said, and Billy danced.

I gave him a big kiss and ran down the road. I wanted to tell my friends. Billy’s got into the ballet school!

I ran quickly down the road to the pub. I opened the door and ...

‘HE’S IN! HE DID IT!’

The men in the pub were silent.

‘Don’t you know, Jackie?’ somebody said. ‘The strike has ended. We’re going back to work on Monday. The bosses won.’

We didn’t have a big party for Billy. Everybody was thinking about the end of the strike. We lost. I can work again now. I can pay for the ballet school, I thought.

That happened a few years ago. We lost and the government won. And slowly, the mines closed. Here in Everington we were quite lucky. Our mine stayed open longer than most of the other mines. But it’s closed now.

Our lives continue in the town, but everything is different. I’m an old man. I’m happy to stop working down the mine. But Tony can’t find another job.

We lost the mines. We lost that future, but we won another future - for Billy. And that’s important, isn’t it?

Chapter 14

Billy's Story: Goodbye to Everington

‘One and two and three and four and up. And hold.’

Miss saw me and walked across the room.

‘Billy.’

‘I’m going to London today Miss.’

‘I know. Debbie told me.’

‘I’ll miss you, Miss.’

‘No, you won’t.’

‘I will, Miss.’

‘Go and find out about life, Billy,’ she said. ‘Forge! about me and ... this place. Good luck, Billy.’

She gave me a tired smile and turned back to the girls.

‘OK, Heads up. Bottoms out.’

I don’t understand, I thought. She taught me for a long time. Isn’t she pleased for me? I don’t know. I’ll never understand Miss.

I’ve said goodbye to a lot of people: At school, all the pupils met in the hall and the head teacher made a speech.

‘We’re very proud of Billy. Were happy that the school helped him ...’

Helped me? Nobody at school helped me to dance. It was my family and Miss Wilkinson, and the neighbours who found the money for me. They helped me.

I went to the church with Dad. I wanted to say goodbye to Mum.

‘Your mum is very proud of you,’ Dad said. ‘I listened to her and I changed my mind about the dancing.’

I thought about the time I saw Mum in the kitchen. Did Dad see her too?

‘I asked her to help me. And then I knew that I was wrong. She wanted you to dance. She’s still watching over you, She’ll watch over you in London, too.’

Maybe it was true. Maybe she's with me all the time. That's why I saw her. I'm still here,' she was telling me.

'I'm frightened. Dad.' I said,

'That's OK, son,' Dad said. 'We're all frightened sometimes. You'll be OK.'

Now, the bus to London was waiting.

I went home. Dad And Tony picked up my bags. Nan was sitting at the table, watching me. How much does she understand? I asked myself. I don't know. I kissed her and she put her arms round me.

'We'll miss the bus,' Dad said.

Nan put something in my hand - it was a five-pound note.

'Nan!' I said. 'You haven't got much money ...'

'It's her money,' Dad said. 'She wants you to take it.'

I kissed her again and she pushed me out of the door. We walked down the street and I heard somebody call to me.

'Hey! Dancing boy!' It was Michael. I ran back to him.

'We're going to miss the bus!' dad shouted.

'I'll see you soon.' I said to Michael.

He didn't say anything, he just looked at me. I moved closer to him and kissed him.

'Stop it!' he said. 'People will see. You're going away but I live here!'

I laughed and went back to Dad. We ran to the bus. The driver jumped out and took my bag. I got on the bus and sat at the back. Dad and Tony stood in the street outside. Tony came close to the window.

'What?' I said.

'I'll miss you,' he slid. He didn't want the bus passengers to hear him.

'What?' I said again. 'I can't hear you.'

The bus started to move.

'I'll miss you!' Tony shouted loudly.

Everybody on the bus heard him and started to laugh. Tony laughed too.

'I'll kill you!' he shouted.

The people on the bus were laughing. Dad was laughing and Tony was laughing and I was laughing. Then the bus went round the corner ... and they were gone.

Chapter 15 Jackie's Story: Billy Elliot, Dancer

I'm sitting in a big theatre in London. Tony is here. He's wearing an old jacket and jeans.

'I'm a miner,' he says. 'I want everyone to know.'

These theatre seats cost more than a hundred pounds, but we didn't pay any money. Outside, above the entrance to the theatre, there is a big sign. It says: 'The Royal Ballet Company. Billy Elliot.'

I speak to one of the workers in the theatre.

'Please tell Billy Elliot that his family are here.'

I always tell Billy that were here. Tonight is very important. This is Billy's first time as the main dancer in the Royal Ballet Company. Mrs. Wilkinson was right about him.

'Look,' Tony whispers.

He points at the man sitting next to him. The man is wearing a purple hat and lipstick.

'What?' I asked.

'Dad. It's Michael Caffrey. Remember?'

'Michael? Is that you? What are you doing here?'

'I can't miss this ballet!' Michael says.

'He's gay,' Tony whispers. 'I always knew he was gay.'

Michael reaches over and shakes my hand.

'Are you very proud of Billy, Mr. Elliot?' he asks. He speaks like a Londoner now.

'I am.'

'You put Billy here in this theatre,' says Michael.

That's true. I took a lot of coal out of the ground so Billy can dance. My father and his father and their work in the mines built this theatre. Coal helped to build everything in this country. The coal is still there, in the ground. But the mines are gone.

The theatre lights go down and the music starts. A minute later Billy is on the stage. He runs on, stops ... and he jumps. Everybody in the theatre is watching him. He jumps very high and he stays in the air.

He's not going to come down, I think. Then he lands and looks into the theatre. He smiles at us.

Hey, Billy Elliot!' Michael shouts loudly.

You don't shout in theatres! People turn round. Some of them are angry but others are smiling.

'Good luck, our Billy!' Tony shouts. He is standing up. Everyone is looking at him and smiling. I stand up too.

Billy! Billy Elliot! Our Billy!' I shout very loudly.

And Billy smiles at us. Then he jumps again, just for Tony and me.

— THE END —

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