

Soon, suitcase packed and his name on a label pinned to his jacket, clutching his precious badge in his pocket, Lenny joined a crowd of other children at the railway station. Mum was there to see him off.

Lenny felt the shape of the lion with his fingertips. He knew he was supposed to be brave. But when he saw so many strange faces he didn't know how to be.

'It'll be a lovely place in the country,' Mum told him. 'Flowers and rabbits and that.' But she was nearly crying.





Lenny only realised what was really happening when he was in a crowded railway carriage. He put his head out of the window and shouted: 'Don't leave me, Mum! You come with me!'

But the train had already started to move, very slowly at first, then fast gaining speed. 'I'll come to see you soon!' called Mum. 'Be a good boy.' She was a white face amongst all the others. She shouted something else but Lenny couldn't hear her. Then she was a tiny figure at the end of the platform, waving and waving.





It was so dark when at last Lenny arrived that he could not see the place. The windows were blacked out. Then all at once he was in a huge hall, so big that it seemed their whole house in London could have fitted into it easily.

There were no rabbits that Lenny could see. Just some tired grown-ups bustling about, and two girls bigger than him who were called Joyce and Patsy, with a little one called Winnie. They were evacuees. Lenny was one too.

A lady wearing a great many scarves and woolly cardigans said: 'I am Lady De Vass. You must be very tired. Nanny will give you your supper and show you where you are going to sleep.'

'We specially asked for girls,' Nanny complained, eyeing Lenny.

'I'm afraid it's too late now, Nanny,' said Lady De Vass. 'And he is not a very big boy,' she added kindly.





The evacuees were to sleep in a big attic room with dark beams overhead. It was chilly and had no electric light or carpets but there was a nice woody smell. A curtain hung down the middle. Joyce, Patsy and Winnie were together on one side and Lenny was alone on the other.

Nanny left a couple of little lamps burning when she said goodnight. Lenny got down under the blankets. He lay awake for a long time watching the shadows moving in the high roof. He could hear the girls whispering behind the curtain, then Winnie began to cry.

Lenny felt numb. The only thing that seemed real at that moment was the brass badge that Dad had given him underneath his pillow. He went to sleep clutching it.



Lenny woke very early while the girls were still asleep. He could hear faraway stirring noises in the house and faint echoing footsteps, but no one came. He got out of bed, pattered over to the window and pulled the blackout curtain aside.

His mouth fell open.

He looked out over a jumble of roofs and chimneys. Not the squat, blackened kind like they had in London but a fairground of barley-sugar shapes with grinning gargoyle waterspouts winking in the sun. Beyond that, still wrapped in haze, were gardens, outhouses, meadows with great spreading trees and a humped-up hill rising behind like a cut-out paper shape.

So this was the country! He had never seen anything like it.

