

HEADS OR TAILS

by

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LIST OF CHARACTERS

THE CHILDREN

Jeannie Smyth
Wilfred Peake ['Pickle'] 8 year olds - pupils at Steward Street School
Len Badsey

THE ADULTS

David Fox Headmaster of Steward Street
Dorothy Little Teacher/Former teacher
Mr Badsey Len's father, a local shopkeeper

Heads or Tails was commissioned by Big Brum Theatre-in-Education Company, and originally performed in schools and community venues in Birmingham April-June 1992. The cast was as follows:

Dorothy/Jeannie TERINA TALBOT
Len/Mr Fox MALCOLM JENNINGS
Pickle/Mr Badsey BOBBY COLVILL

DIRECTOR ROB MARSTON
DESIGNER JANE JOYCE

Heads or Tails is based on the true story of Steward Street School, Ladywood, Birmingham, and all the education theory, teaching methods and content are as close as possible to the letter and spirit of the truth. The characters and story, however, are fictitious, and no real names are used, although much that happens is drawn directly from the experiences of the many real pupils, staff and local residents that were interviewed in the course of research for the play.

The Steward Street 'experiment' lasted from 1941-1951, under the guidance of two successive head teachers, Peter Stone and Ken Scott. It had the support of Birmingham Education Committee throughout, and was regarded as a model of good practice by the Ministry of Education, to such an extent that it published a book, **The Story of a School**, written by Mr Stone. When Ken Scott left to move into a secondary school, the school gradually reverted to more traditional methods, and was closed finally in the 1960s. The building is now a private employment training centre.

The research for this project has been both fascinating and uplifting, and I am extremely grateful to a great many people. In particular to; John Somers, Jane Round, Ken and Cath Grinsell, Harry Watkins, Kathleen Fensome, Carl Chinn, Margaret Reed, The Department of Education and Science, J Arthur Rank Ltd, Birmingham Education Department, Des Workman and Patrick Baird, Birmingham Central Library Department of Local Studies, The Cross Keys, Steward Street, Kit Roberts, Andy McCallum, John Mitchell, Gill Nock, John Allcock, Ken Selvester, Alicia Foxall, Derek Sheppard, Gordon Gill, William Curr, Clive Chandler, Ali Belbin, and Fred. Most of all I am grateful to Peter Stone, and to the staff and pupils of Steward Street School.

Peter Wynne-Willson Spring 1992

SCENE 1 [THE STREETS OF LADYWOOD, BIRMINGHAM. AUTUMN 1942. THREE CHILDREN ARE PLAYING]

[PICKLE IS WALKING SLOWLY ALONG, WARY OF ATTACK]

Pickle: [COMING ON] Germany calling, Germany calling, Germany calling...

[JEANNIE AND LEN JUMP OUT. LEN IS A SOLDIER, JEANNIE IS AN AEROPLANE]

Jeannie: Angels one-five. Stay in formation. Scramble, scramble.

Len: Uh uh uh uh uh [MACHINE GUN NOISE]

Jeannie: Tff-tff-tff-tff-tff-tff [DIFFERENT MACHINE-GUN NOISE]

[THEY CIRCLE HIM]

Len: Uh uh uh. Take that Haw-Haw, you cowardly swine. See how you like it. Finish him off, Sergeant.

Jeannie: I'm not a sergeant, I'm a Spitfire. Tff-tff-tff.

Len: Eat the dirt, German scum. Eat it, squarehead.

Pickle: Germany dying, Germany dying.

[HE LIES DOWN NEATLY ON HIS BACK, ARMS CROSSED]

Len: Die properly, Pickle.

Pickle: I am.

Len: Don't be soft. Die properly.

Pickle: I'm dead

Len: No, do it properly. You've got to die properly if you're going to play with us, not like that. Jeannie, kill me.

Jeannie: Can I dive bomb you ?

Len: No, shoot me, I'm going to show Pickle.

Jeannie: Machine gun ?

Len: Yes. Bren Gun - no, a Browning. You've got me trapped against a wall, and you kill me when I run across.

[JEANNIE SHOOTS LEN AND PICKLE WATCHES FROM THE GROUND. LEN DIES DRAMATICALLY BUT GRAPHICALLY.]

Len: Aah, you win this time Britisher bastard-pig. Aah. Like that. Come on.

[PICKLE GETS UP]

Jeannie: Let's torture him this time, Len.

Len: Yeah, interrogation.

[THEY GRAB PICKLE AND 'STRAP' HIM TO AN IMAGINARY CHAIR]

Pickle: Am I still Lord Haw-Haw ?

Len: Yes.

Jeannie: [POKING HIM] So then, you've got to answer my questions. And no tricks. Right. Where do you live ?

Pickle: Shakespeare Road.

Jeannie: No, you're supposed to be Lord Haw-Haw still. Where do you live Haw-Haw ?

[PICKLE WONDERS ABOUT IT]

Pickle: Broadcasting House.

Jeannie: You don't, you live in Germany, you balm-pot.

Pickle: Yes, Germany calling, Germany calling.

Jeannie: Tell us what you know, all right ?

Pickle: Germany calling...

Len: So that's the way you want it...

Jeannie: Len, go and get the torture machine. It's up the entry.

[Len goes off]

You'd better tell us everything you know, all right, or you won't be laughing again.

Pickle: I don't know nothing, don't torture me.

Jeannie: That's better. He says he don't know anything, Major.

[LEN RETURNS WITH A LARGE PRAM]

Len: We'll have to make him tell us then won't we ? I'll line up the secret weapon.

[HE POINTS THE PRAM AT PICKLE]

Jeannie: Watch out for the baby, Len.

Len: Yeah, he eats them doesn't he ?

Pickle: Yes, I eat babies raw. I don't even need my hands. I could eat him from here. I just suck in. I'll suck him out of the carriage and swallow him whole.

Len: Quiet or we'll shoot you.

Pickle: You can't. I'm already dead. Bullets go straight through me. They'll bounce off the wall and come back and kill you both and the baby.

Len: It ain't a baby, it's a torture pra..it's the torture machine.

Jeannie: Search the prisoner !

Len: Empty your pockets.

Pickle: You'll have to untie me.

Len: No, I can just empty them.

Jeannie: What's he got ?

Len: Shrapnel sir. A mouth organ.

Jeannie: That'll be for sending coded messages.

Len: A swede. I'll take that.

Jeannie: You can't do that.

Pickle: No it's alright, you can have it.

[LEN STARTS TO EAT THE SWEDE]

Jeannie: So what was you doing today, your lordship ?

Pickle: Today I bombed 17 cities, mostly with incendiaries, but I did drop twenty million high explosives on a Midlands City, killing everybody except for three people.

Len: He's got a penny, sir. It fell out.

Jeannie: So, you admit being a traitor then.

Pickle: And I now have a new bomb. My own special invention which lands and breaks up into families of giant rats that can spit blood and eat people. And they're trained specially.....

Len: His penny.

Pickle: Specially trained to take over the whole of London, I mean the whole of Birmingham...

Jeannie: Shut up. Right. We'll toss the penny to see if he lives or dies.

Len: We can decide if Pickle gets to come up the bonk with us.

Jeannie: Yes. Not just the bonk. He's starting at Steward Street, remember. The penny can decide what it'll be like for you at your new school.

Pickle: I hate school, I ain't coming.

Jeannie: You are, you're going into Len's class, ain't he Len ? Heads or tails ?

Pickle: Tails for rat tails.

[JEANNIE TOSSES COIN]

Len: Tails. Lucky.

Jeannie: Lucky.

Len: Again !

[AIR RAID SIREN]

Lucky again.

Jeannie: Let's go up the BSA shelter. You coming Pickle ?

Pickle: No, I've got to go home. I'll see you.

[HE RUNS OFF]

Jeannie: Len ?

Len: I'm going to stay here and watch the raid. It's going to be a big one.

Jeannie: What about your Grandad ?

Len: He won't miss me will he ? I'll see you later.

[JEANNIE GOES OFF]

[MUSIC: GET IN YOUR SHELTER - ARTHUR ASKEY]

SCENE 2

[NIGHTINGALES AND BOMBERS]

[DOROTHY IS A SPRIGHTLY SEVENTY-YEAR OLD. SHE HAS WITH HER A BOX FROM WHICH SHE BRINGS VARIOUS OBJECTS. SHE IS SORTING THROUGH. ADDRESSES THE AUDIENCE]

Dorothy: You'll have to bear with me. I want to get everything organised. I'm very glad you are all here. I am anxious, if truth be told, that you should hear this story. I have been thinking about it a lot recently. The story of Steward Street School.

Here we are. A tram ticket from Rotton Park Road to Five Ways. 1942. It might even be the very first. I must explain that I went to college in Dudley, so when I started teaching at Steward Street, it was not the beginning of my time in the area, but it was the first time I'd been to Ladywood. As well as my first real job. I remember my mother wrote to me, " So you are to start teaching in Ladywood, what a pretty sound there is to it" I remember too the two faces of my landlady. The one on hearing I was a teacher, the other on the mention of Ladywood. They might have belonged to different women.

1942, two years before the 1944 Education Act, in the middle of the Second World War. I'm sorry. Fifty years of teaching eight to eleven year olds, you know...

SCENE 3 MR BADSEY'S HOUSE

[LEN IS POLISHING THE GRATE. HE SWITCHES ON THE RADIO - GENERAL MONTGOMERY DESCRIBING THE PLAN FOR ALAMEIN. HIS IMAGINATION IS CAUGHT. MR BADSEY COMES IN. HE WALKS WITH A STICK. DOESN'T ACKNOWLEDGE LEN. SWITCHES OFF THE RADIO]

Len: Jeannie's brother Stephen is in Africa.

[PAUSE]

Mr Badsey: Have you done it ?

Len: Almost.

[MR BADSEY GOES TO GET DRINK FROM KEG. THE ATMOSPHERE IS TENSE AND OPPRESSIVE. HE GETS DRINK. LEN IS POLISHING FURIOUSLY. MR BADSEY PUTS DOWN HIS DRINK AND HITS HIM ACROSS THE HEAD. SAYS NOTHING. LEN SAYS NOTHING]

Mr Badsey: You'll take the accumulator set up to Spring Hill this afternoon, lad. Fill it up. And you'll not use it again. Stand to the table and tell me.

[LEN STANDS BY THE TABLE]

Len: I won't use the wireless again.

[MR BADSEY HITS HIM AGAIN. HE GETS HIS STICK AND GOES OUT INTO THE SHOP. LEN IS LEFT STANDING]

SCENE 4

Dorothy: I started keeping this book at college. Little wise words, mostly about schools and teaching. I haven't really put all that much in it. It had words from David Fox in it, my Headmaster at Steward Street, even before I went to work there, taken from a talk I'd heard him give. We hadn't actually met. I suppose that may sound strange, but with the war and everything, and the shortage of teachers...he'd talked to my college tutor about me, I think.

Mr Fox was something of a celebrity - in the field. The experiment he was undertaking at Steward Street was new, it had been going for less than a year, but it was known about,

talked about, and certainly it had already impressed me. In fact I was more than a little alarmed at the thought of working there. Where's that quote, ah.... David Fox.

"The child must feel when he enters the school, that it is his rightful place. There is no adult domination. Any adults that happen to be present are there only to help the child's inspiration. It will be a place for things to grow, where there are tools for experiment and space for natural activities: above all it must be a place of happiness."

[IN THE HALL, MR FOX IS IN THE LAST STAGES OF A MOVEMENT CLASS OF SOME KIND. THE CHILDREN ARE IN BARE FEET OR SOCKS]

Mr Fox: [CLAPS] Stretching for the sun. We're trying to get as close to it as we can, every one of us, a little closer. Reaching out for the horizon, now. How far can we get without moving our feet? [CLAP] Slowly now, into wooden soldiers. Toy wooden soldiers. Proud but wooden. That's it. Happy but wooden. Wooden but sad. Beautiful. [CLAP] And ragdolls now. Nothing hard in your whole body. Walking. Ragdolls walking raggily. Round the tree in the middle. There's something in the doorway, look. What is it? Something frightening. We're frightened of it. What is it? [CLAP] Good. Hold it. Shoes on. [TO DOROTHY] Miss Little, I presume. Excellent. Excellent to see you here. [TO CLASS] This is Miss Little, she will be taking Class 1.

Right. Remember this week's little task then everyone. I want to see you all looking carefully through the week, every nook and cranny. We'll see what we can find shall we? Ocky! Off, now. Wilfred Peake come here. [TO DOROTHY] Well met Miss Little, welcome to Steward Street.

[THEY SHAKE HANDS]

[TO PICKLE] Wilfred Peake. Well done, Wilfred. How do you feel? How do you feel?

Pickle: Tiggerty boo, Sir.

[MR FOX LAUGHS]

Mr Fox: Tiggerty boo? Well I can't say fairer than that. Off you go, Wilfred. Back to your own class now. [TO DOROTHY] A fellow newcomer, Miss Little.

[HE LEADS HER AWAY]

So, what do you think?

Dorothy: I think the school seems ... happy. You have quite an atmosphere here.

Mr Fox: Yes well, it isn't always like this. Not always 'tiggerty-boo', I don't suppose. I'm glad to hear you say it, anyway. Atmosphere is everything.

Dorothy: It must be difficult, I expect. I mean not everyone ... I could see one or two boys not really joining in....

[MR FOX STOPS IN SOME SURPRISE]

Dorothy: I'm sorry.

Mr Fox: Lord, no. Don't be sorry. I'm only smiling because it's evident that you have not been warned about me, that's all. Raise a question of ways of teaching around here, and you might not escape for some time.

Dorothy: I expect I can hold my own, when it comes to talking about teaching, Mr Fox.

Mr Fox: David. I am very sure of it.

[HE STARTS PINNING UP PICTURES, AND IS VERY ACTIVE THROUGHOUT THE CONVERSATION]

Have you had a look round ?

Dorothy: A brief one. I already know a fair amount about Steward Street, of course.

Mr Fox: What do you know ?

Dorothy: I know it is a small junior school, with a staff of five. I know that your curriculum is unusual, that you place great emphasis on the arts, and in particular on movement and drama. I know you have the children grouped by age, not ability, and that you have no corporal punishment here.

Mr Fox: And are you happy with all that ?

Dorothy: Yes. Yes, very. I mean, I hope I will be able to do justice to it, not being experienced, you know. My parents are both teachers. In the village school, where I come from.

Wales.

Mr Fox: Yes. Well your parents would probably find us strange here. I am told it is because we have not grown up properly. We hold on to the ideals with which we left college. So perhaps you will be a little closer than some, Miss Little.

Dorothy: Dorothy.

Mr Fox: Are your parents good teachers, Dorothy ?

Dorothy: Yes, I think so, very good.

Mr Fox: I am sorry, I'm making this seem like an interview.

Dorothy: I read the letter you sent to me, and your document - the plan of education.

Mr Fox: Ah yes.

There are just two theories of education, Dorothy. The one that says children are basically bad until taught otherwise, and need their empty heads filling, need telling what to think and how to behave, and need telling off for behaving wrong, and the one that says children are basically good, all of them. That is our ruling theory here, over and above that document. There are no bad children here. Plenty of damaged souls, plenty of fears and sadnesses, plenty of mistakes by teachers, and by head masters, but no bad children.

Dorothy: I shall try to remember.

Mr Fox: As to the boys "not joining in", I would not want to sound too certain, because most of what we do is more or less a leap into the dark, but to me what you see there is the remains of a fear of freedom. They are only a little step into a long process. If you have been kicked and shouted down all your young life to the age of eight, you may not relish freedom in quite the way one might imagine.

Dorothy: A boy standing still when the others are dancing is afraid of freedom ?

Mr Fox: There is no right or wrong way to dance. His is a standing-still dance, just as yours is now, and we can look and see just as much in the standing-still dance, or the too tough to dance, as in the dead spit ragdoll dance, just as you did, didn't you ? But you are right of course, and we shall be hoping that he will be a ragdoll himself in his time, however long that is. Or perhaps he will conquer his fear in a painting, or a clay model. I never stop being surprised by the children here, I hope I never shall.

Dorothy: When will you want me to start ?

Mr Fox: I'm sorry, it didn't take me long to show you the dangers of embarking on a discussion, did it ?

I shall want you to start tomorrow morning. I can keep the class to myself until then, give you a chance to look around and meet everyone, get the hang. Ask as many questions as you like, we are all learning here. The one real object of education is to have a man in the condition of..

Dorothy: ..continually asking questions.' Yes.

Mr Fox: [BUSY AGAIN] I am extremely glad that you are joining us, Dorothy. I had to fight for you, you may know - I am told that you will be just what I need. You shall have the first year class. We shall want you to do movement and drama with them, music if you can, and art, modelling they can do with me. We're trying out a new approach to number through movement which I shall want to talk to you about, and the reading and writing side of things is more or less up to you, though we have found some particular ideas which seem effective over the last year. This week I asked them to look for beauty. Let it mean what they like.

Dorothy: I think my parents would like that.

Mr Fox: I expect there is more obvious beauty around their village school than there is here. I look forward to being surprised again. Tomorrow morning I shall ring the bell straight after the air raid drill, and your charges will arrive in your room. Welcome to Steward Street, Dorothy.

Dorothy: Thank you, Mr ... David. I am pleased to be here.

[MUSIC]

SCENE 5 DOROTHY'S CLASSROOM

[SCHOOL HAND BELL RINGS]

Dorothy: Quiet. Quickly please, get yourselves settled down. Quickly. Good morning to you all. My name, as you heard Mr Fox say this morning, is Miss Little. That is what you can call me, all of you. Miss Little. You will be in my class for the remainder of this year, and probably beyond. You shall be with me for most of your lessons, including those which the Headmaster has taken you for until now. Is that clear to everybody ?

Good. As you know, we are this week looking for things of beauty. Mr Fox has asked you, has asked us, to think about beauty, and so I thought we would start off straight away with a poem. Who would like to read this poem to the class ?

[NOBODY]

Right then. You. What is your name ?

Len: Len Badsey.

Dorothy: Well, Len Badsey. Read this out nice and slowly, will you, so that everyone can hear.

[LEN GETS INTO POSITION AND SAYS NOTHING]

Come on, Len, nothing to worry about. They won't bite you. Will you ?

[NOTHING]

What is it ? Can you not read ? It doesn't matter if

Len: I can read, Miss, it's just...

Dorothy: Well never mind. You sit back down, Len. Anyone... no, I'll read it myself shall I ? It isn't anything complicated. I'll simply... Listen carefully all of you. Home Thoughts from Abroad, by Robert Browning.

O to be in England
Now that April's there,
And whoever wakes in England
Sees some morning, unaware,
That the lowest boughs and the brushwood sheaf
Round the elm-tree bole are in tiny leaf,
While the chaffinch sings on the orchard bough
In England - now !

[SHE IS LOSING CONFIDENCE]

I think that will do for now. Yes. So what is the poem about ? What pictures does it bring up into your head ? Anyone ? If we look at those pictures perhaps we can talk about them. Close your eyes for a minute and just think hard about the pictures that come into your head. Everybody, eyes closed. What is it ? Then keep them open if you like.

[IT IS NOT WORKING]

Well. What if I simply write the poem up on the board here, and you can.. we can... you can simply copy it down in your books. Every word nice and clear and neat, so you can

read it back later. Open your books, take your pencils. If you're not very good at copying then it doesn't matter. In silence please !

[PAUSE]

[BELL]

[MUSIC]

SCENE 6 - OLD DOROTHY AND THE LETTERS

Dorothy: I wrote this to my mother in that first week of teaching:

"I lie awake each night. There is so much to absorb. The school is in a terrible place, surrounded on all sides by great tall factories, with houses squashed between them and families squeezed into these. It is a small haven in the middle of this industry and in all the stupid destruction of the war.

David Fox is a genius I think, or pretty close to it. He seems to understand everything, and he can get the children to do almost anything. It all revolves around abolishing fear, he says. Perhaps a child is afraid of the dark, or afraid of death, but with those we are all so familiar now. The enemies here are fear of punishment, fear of failure, and fear of freedom.

But I worry every night that I cannot do it. The children are awkward with me, shy and sullen. Many cannot read when they arrive, and I seem entirely unable to get the kind of concentrated happiness that Mr Fox has at the drop of a hat. I walk a narrow path between delight and despair. All the despair is directed at myself and my own abilities, which seem so pitiful."

My mother's reply, from further away than I think I realised.

"We cannot expect children in these times to be children, when the world expects different. They must grow up quickly, and cope with death or with bringing up younger brothers and sisters. You will be an excellent teacher, Dorothy, because you will always care. Even you, or your Mr Fox cannot change the world we live in, however. Remember the limits of your position and you will fill it with distinction. Your loving mother, and father."

Always remember your limits, Dorothy.

[FILM MUSIC]

SCENE 7 STREET/ON THE BONK

[PICKLE AND LEN ENTER. THEY ARE ON THEIR WAY BACK FROM PICTURES - ANGELS WITH DIRTY FACES]

Pickle: Did Rocky die like they said, like a yellow rat ?

Len: Yes, son, he died like they said. Now, let's go and say a prayer for a boy who couldn't run as fast as I could....

[PICKLE HUMS ROUSING FILM MUSIC AND GOES INTO FULL CAGNEY IMITATION]

Pickle: No, don't kill me, I don't want to die, I didn't mean to do anything I swear, don't kill me no, no, no !

Len: That's good, that, Pickle.

Pickle: Yes, I ought to be a film star.

Len: No, but you could work as the chucker-outer at the pictures. They'd give you one of them poles with a boxing-glove on the end.

[THEY HAVE A BIT OF A BOXING BOUT]

Pickle: I ain't working at the pictures. Did you hear Scammo saying what happened to his brother up at the Crown ?

Len: No.

Pickle: He was taking tickets the night they got hit. He says that after the raid there was this old man still sitting, watching the film, except the film wasn't on of course, but he was sitting staring, sitting up, and Scammo's brother went over to get him to go home, but he realised he was dead.

Len: Sitting up ?

Pickle: Yes. Bolt up. And then he goes to tap him on the shoulder to check that he really is, you know, gone home, and his head falls right off into the aisle, and his eyes was still open except one of them winked, he says.

Len: Shut it Pickle. You can't wink if your head's fallen off. Anyway, they've never got hit at the Crown.

Pickle: They have.

Len: You got anything to eat ?

Pickle: I got an apple left.

Len: Do you want it ?

Pickle: No, you have it.

Shall we get some of the others - play Relievo ?

Len: No. Let's stay up on the bonk. We can go back up the roof.

Pickle: If the coppers come again you'll be up Kenyon Road.

[JEANNIE COMES ON WITH PRAM]

Len: I ain't bothered, are you ?

Jeannie: You two coming down the yard ? We're doing a show in the brewhouse.

Len: Who is ?

Jeannie: Lily, Jojo and me.

Pickle: Who's watching it ?

Jeannie: I don't know. Most of the yard I think, except his granddad of course.

Len: What you doing it in there for, you'll never fit everyone in.

Jeannie: It's warmer. We can go in the yard if its too many. Anyway, are you coming ?

Len: What to do ?

Jeannie: Pickle can do his film things.

[PICKLE STARTS PRACTISING]

Len: We're fine up here. We're going to play relieveo.

Pickle: Are we ?

[LEN IS FLICKING CIGARETTE CARDS]

Jeannie: I'm doing falling in love.

Pickle: I'll do it with you.

Jeannie: I'm singing. You're doing films.

Pickle: Falling in love is a film. Blue Angel, 1930.

Jeannie: No, I mean Humphrey Bogart and things - gangsters.

Pickle: I'll do Bogart singing with you.

Jeannie: Soft beggar. You be the orchestra.

Pickle: How does it go ?

[JEANNIE BEGINS TO SING. PICKLE IS THE ORCHESTRA]

Come on Len.

['FALLING IN LOVE AGAIN' - JEANNIE BEING A SORT OF MARLENE DIETRICH,
PICKLE ALTERNATING BETWEEN ORCHESTRA NOISES AND BOGART

ECHOES OF LINES. LEN JOINS IN AS PERCUSSION, AFTER SOME PERSUASION]

Jeannie: That'll be good.

[SHE STARTS TO GO OFF]

Jeannie: [TO PICKLE] Bring the carriage.

[PICKLE GOES TO GET THE PRAM]

Pickle: What's your little sister's name ?

Jeannie: She ain't my sister, she's my half sister.

Len: Why, what happened to her ?

Jeannie: No. I mean.... me step-dad's her dad.

Len: I know that.

Jeannie: Come on then.

Len: No, I'm going back up on the roof.

[LEN GOES OFF]

Jeannie: Oh Len.

Pickle: Don't worry, I'll be his bits too.

[THEY GO OFF - PRACTISING THE SHOW]

[MUSIC - FALLING IN LOVE AGAIN]

SCENE 8 DOROTHY'S CLASSROOM

Dorothy: I'll start when you're completely quiet.

[PAUSE]

Close your eyes. Remember what we did last time, with moving to the music ? This time, exactly the same, except sit still where you are - and all that will move will be your hands. No other rules. Keep your eyes closed for as long as you like.

[SHE PUTS ON A RECORD (CLASSICAL) THEY MOVE THEIR HANDS TO THE MUSIC. PICKLE VERY EXPRESSIVELY, LEN MORE STILTEDLY]

Beautiful. Stay where you are. When I change the music, we'll be searchers, remember that, all of us. I don't want to say what we are looking for, you can all decide, but let's have a very good look for it, and see how long it takes us to find it. Searching. Seeking, looking for something.

[ANOTHER RECORD..... LOW MUSIC. THEY SEARCH, SILENTLY AND EARNESTLY. "A TENSION BEGINS TO GLOW". A CHILD SUDDENLY POINTS TO A CORNER - THEY ALL SEE WHAT THEY ARE LOOKING FOR]

Still !

[THEY HOLD THE POSITION. DIFFERENT REACTIONS TO WHAT THEY FIND. LEN STARTS COUGHING]

SCENE 9 ON THE BONK

[PICKLE IS PRETENDING TO BE A TEACHER. HE HAS A MORNING COAT AND BIG TOP HAT ON, AND HAS A CANE]

Pickle: Boys stand.

[LEN STANDS]

Girls stand.

[JEANNIE STANDS]

And sit. Now ! What do you say ?

Jeannie/Len: [LAUGHING] Good morning Mr Peake.

Pickle: Laughing at me. What's so funny, eh, young man ?

Len: Nothing.

Pickle: Nothing what, Badsmell ?

Len: Nothing, Sir.

Pickle: Tables. TABLES !

[THEY START ON RECITING THEIR TABLES]

Properly, in time with my stick. Exactly in time. Standing up straight. Don't change notes without asking. [SLIGHTLY OUT OF CHARACTER] No good, it's got to be like this. [MONOTONE] One times one is one, two times one is two.

Len: We got it right.

Pickle: Right, Badsmell. The cane for you. Come here.

Len: No.

[PICKLE TRIES TO GRAB HIM, AND THEY CHASE EACH OTHER AROUND. JEANNIE GRABS PICKLE'S HAT]

Jeannie: Can I have this ?

Pickle: No, I've got to put it back. It's me dad's.

Jeannie: What's he got this for ?

Pickle: His job.

Jeannie: I thought he was a carpenter.

Len: Yes but he makes coffins, doesn't he Pick, and he does undertaking too doesn't he ?

Pickle: Yes. He says it's one thing people will always need. When they've stopped wanting cupboards they'll need coffins.

Jeannie: Why will they stop wanting cupboards ?

Pickle: I don't know.

Len: In the future, anything could happen, couldn't it, after the war?

Jeannie: Yes, but there'll still be cupboards.

Pickle: It's just something he says. Here, give us the hat back, Jeannie, I've got to get it back before afternoon school.

Len: Was your teacher really like that, Pickle ?

Pickle: Yes, they was all of them like that.

Honest, they used to belt us and everything. There was fights and all. If you couldn't do something, you was in trouble. You would've been in trouble all the time, Bads.

[GOES BACK INTO ROLE AS HE GOES OFF]

I'll want to hear YOU. Have it learned in five minutes. Five minutes.

[PICKLE GOES OFF]

Len: What do you think you'll be in the future then, Jeannie ?

Jeannie: Our Stephen's going to buy me a shop.

Len: What do you want one of them for ?

Jeannie: Not like your granddad's. A big shop in town, with clothes and everything. So I can have anything I choose. I won't have no rationing or nothing.

Len: Your Stephen ain't rich.

Jeannie: Yes, but he says if we win the war it'll be him and our mum at the BSA that's won it, and everyone will know, and they'll go on fighting 'til they've got everything they want.

Len: They'll have to give the guns back.

Jeannie: No, he don't mean like that. It's just the world won't be the same again. We ain't going to be poor cos no-one will. They know that.

Len: Who does ?

[PAUSE]

Jeannie: I might not have a shop anyway. I might be a reporter, for a newspaper. A magazine.

Len: A war correspondent ? On the radio. "This is the news and this is Alvar Lidell reading it - reports from the ministry give fuller details of the massive air attack on Berlin..."

Jeannie: We'll have won the war, that's the point.

Len: Yes.

Jeannie: I will be a radio announcer, though, but not like that.

What about you ?

Len: I'm going to be dead.

Jeannie: Stupid.

Len: No, it's true. I don't want to be an old man.

[PAUSE]

Jeannie: Pickle's left his cane.

Len: Give it here.

Jeannie: No, I'll give it back to him later.

[POSES WITH IT. AN IMITATION OF PICKLE, BUT SHADES OF MR BADSEY]

Len: I don't want to hear you, I don't want to see you, I don't even want to smell you. I have to go down to Watty Green's, so just make sure I don't see you. If I see you move, you'll answer for it. Oh it hurts, it hurts.

[THEY GO OFF, LEN CONTINUING TO IMITATE HIS GRANDFATHER, HOBBLING]

SCENE 10 THE BADSEY'S HOUSE

[MORNING. LEN COMES 'DOWN' TO BREAKFAST. BREAD AND SCRAPE, STANDING TO THE TABLE. MR BADSEY COMES IN FROM SHOP. THERE IS SOME TIME PREPARING THE BREAKFAST]

[PAUSE]

Len: What happened in the night ?

Mr Badsey: What do you mean ?

Len: I heard noises

[PAUSE]

You been out ?

Mr Badsey: Yes. I've been to the hospital.

[PAUSE. HE TRIES TO SAY SOMETHING TO LEN BUT FAILS]

Go and fetch your uncle. He's taking you to school.

[LEN GOES]

[MUSIC: 'THUMBS UP, AND SAY IT'S TIGGERTY-BOO']

SCENE 11 OUTSIDE THE SCHOOL HALL

[THE LESSON HAS STARTED, PICKLE AND LEN ARE ARRIVING LATE]

Dorothy: Come on, in the hall with the others. Shoes off, lie down and listen to the music.

Len: Toilet, Miss.

[HE GOES OFF TO TOILET]

Dorothy: Wilfred, is something the matter ?

Pickle: Miss his dad's died. He just heard, Miss.

Dorothy: Oh, no.

I thought he lived with his grandfather. Was his father away fighting ?

Pickle: No Miss Little. He had TB. He's been in hospital for ages. He was caught in a raid up Small Heath last year and broke his neck, I think. He hasn't been around much since then.

Dorothy: I see. Thank you Wilfred. You'd better go and join in with the others. Make sure they're concentrating on the music will you ?

[PICKLE GOES INTO HALL. DOROTHY WAITS FOR LEN. HE COMES BACK OUT]

Are you alright Len ?

Len: Yes Miss.

Dorothy: You wouldn't rather go home ?

Len: No Miss.

Dorothy: Have you got a note or anything for me ?

Len: No Miss.

Dorothy: Is your grandfather alright, Len ?

[NO REPLY]

[PAUSE]

[SHE HOLDS HIM BY THE SHOULDERS]

Dorothy: You cry just as much as you want to, Len. Stay close to me.

Len: Yes Miss.

[THEY GO INTO THE HALL. LEN LIES DOWN. AS THE MUSIC FINISHES, DOROTHY GIVES OUT PAPER, PENCILS AND PAINTS]

Dorothy: I want you to start painting or drawing. It doesn't matter what it is - whatever you think the music shows. Straight away please ! Animals, people, houses, trees, cars, happy or sad, think about the colours, the shapes. Sad, happy cruel ...what you like.

[THE CLASS CONTINUES PAINTING AS SHE GOES INTO LETTER HOME....]

Dorothy: It isn't enough just to put things in front of the children and leave them free. There is no magic in the painting, the drama, the dance alone. The joy seems to be in creating the structure, the enjoyment, the rituals in which they feel safe, and through which they become truly creative. But when their lives are really showing in what they create, their thoughts, their feelings - then there is also pain to deal with, cruel pain for children so young. Perhaps if they sat in silence and learned by rote, we wouldn't have to encounter that pain. But it would still be there. I do feel sure, mother, that if you were to come and watch us, you would see real value in our explorations. It does not, despite your reservations, and father's, feel as if we are wasting time and energy with our experiment here...

[LEN HAS DONE A PAINTING AND PUTS IT UP ON THE WALL - IT IS RECOGNISABLY AN AIR-RAID IMAGE]

SCENE 12 [CARRIES STRAIGHT ON]

[THE FOLLOWING BUILDS IN A WAY THAT MAKES CLEAR THE GROWING RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DOROTHY AND HER CLASS, THEIR DEVELOPING CONFIDENCE, HERS, AND THE PASSAGE OF TIME]

Councillor: They are playing. This is not schooling. Very pretty, very great fun I am sure, but what are you teaching ?

Dorothy: Pandora !

[MUSIC. A CHILD MIMES THE OPENING OF A BOX, WHILE THE OTHERS TRY AND PERSUADE HER NOT TO. THEY SCREAM. FALL FLAT ON THEIR FACES. WHATEVER WAS IN THE BOX FLIES AROUND. THEY FOLLOW IT]

Councillor: If the craze for these fancy subjects and methods continues, I prophesy that we will never regain the previous high standards of the twenties.

Child: I've made a chinese hat, Miss, like they wear in the rice fields.

Child: It's a model of an igloo, like the one in the story.

Child: What would his face look like, Miss, if he's got the plague ?

Councillor: A huge number of children are coming out of schools illiterate, and unable to do simple reckoning. I blame the modern trends entirely.

Dorothy: Pace forward seven, and back two. Which position ?

Child: Five.

Dorothy: One of you stay half-way.

Child: Two and a half.

Dorothy: Over the other side.

Child: A triangle, Miss.

Councillor: The three Rs. The three Rs. The three Rs.

Child: I am Sir Lancelot, and I challenge you to a duel.

Child: Diary of the Pied Piper of Hamelin, page one.

Child: Can we do the indian dancing again ?

Councillor: Discipline. Discipline. Discipline.

[THE ACTIVITIES BUILD INTO A FREE-FORM DANCE TO CLIMAXING MUSIC, WITH A GREATER LEVEL OF ABSORPTION STILL, ENDING WITH A FREEZE]

[DOROTHY TAKES LEN TO THE GATES OF THE SCHOOL. HE IS "MET" BY MR BADSEY. HE AND DOROTHY EXCHANGE LOOKS BEFORE THEY GO OFF]

[INTERVAL]

SCENE 13 AT SCHOOL AFTER HOURS

[MUSIC/FX LINK TO STRESS PASSAGE OF TIME. IT IS 1946]

[LEN AND JEANNIE WITH PICKLE CONCEALED IN MAKESHIFT PRAM. THEY ARE PLAY-ACTING]

Jeannie: Watch where you go, Mr Foster. Keep the babby out of the horse-road !

Len: Will you stop mithering. You're always going on, you. Don't tell me what to do. I won the war for you. I don't need no advice from you. Go round to your uncle's, get my dinner, and it had better not be cold when you get back !

[JEANNIE GRIMACES, THIS ISN'T WHAT HE'S SUPPOSED TO SAY. SHE DECIDES TO PERSEVERE]

Jeannie: I didn't have to wait for you in the war, you know, Mr Foster. I had offers. There was hundreds of yankee soldiers would've been happy enough to take me back there with them.

Len: They can have you, if there's any soft enough. I'll swap you for chewing gum.

Jeannie: And who would look after the bab ?

[THE BABY STARTS CRYING]

Len: Shut up, you.

Jeannie: You don't shout at them like that.

Len: [ROCKING THE PRAM] There, there.

Jeannie: Sing something.

Len: [LULLABY] Go to sleep, go to sleep, go to sleep little baby..

[CRYING GETS WORSE]

Len: Alright, you can do it.

[THE CRYING STOPS]

There, you see. I done it.

Pickle: Isn't he going to hit me ?

[PICKLE POPS UP IN PRAM]

I thought he was supposed to hit me ?

Len: Yes alright.

Jeannie: No, don't hit him. Just rock him and sing, but sing something else.

Len: This is boring.

Pickle: Could we change it. So I'm not a baby, I turn out to be a spy.

Jeannie: No. We could make it that you're a Roman soldier, a centurion, not just an ordinary one, and you've been in Egypt, fighting.

Len: Who are you then ?

Jeannie: A Roman wife.

Pickle: And I'm the baby Jesus. And he hits me, and I turn him into a lump of salt.

Len: If my baby looked like him, I'd go straight off.

Pickle: Mum, he's making me cry.

Len: You cry as much as you want to.

[PAUSE]

Jeannie: Shall we go through it again ?

Len: No, let's go back up the bonk.

Pickle: I've got to go home.

Jeannie: You always have to go home, don't you Pickle ?

Pickle: It's only because my mum worries. I don't have to. Sometime I won't go back at all.

Len: What'll you do ?

Pickle: Dunno. Go to Southport.

Jeannie: Where's that ?

Pickle: Near Liverpool. My cousin went there. He said they have banana boats and everything there, so I could get on one of them.

Len: Yes - go round the Horn to India, like in that book. Stow away. Would you seriously ?

Pickle: Yes of course.

Len: Would you Jeannie ?

Jeannie: Seriously ?

Len: Yes.

Jeannie: No.

Len: Why not ?

Jeannie: Our Stephen will be back next week, for good. He got his papers. I don't want to miss that.

[PAUSE]

Len: Let's do it then.

Pickle: Alright then.

Jeannie: Don't be soft.

Pickle: What's the plan Len ?

Len: We'll go this friday, then it'll be easy...difficult to catch us. If we just go out to play football they won't look for us for ages. We can meet up the bonk and go down to the cut, sneak on one of them barges. Once we're far enough away, we can change direction if we have to, to get to Liverpool or where you said.

Pickle: Southport.

Len: Yes.

Pickle: How do we get there ?

Len: Train, bus, anything. I can get the takings from me granddad.

Jeannie: You can't do that, he'll murder you.

Len: He'll never catch me, will he ? He won't come out to India. He wouldn't go after me even if I just ran away to Hockley.

Jeannie: He would if you'd took his money.

Len: He won't know where we are. Can you nick any money from your dad ?

Pickle: Yes, course I can. And I can get oil lamps, too. He has them for his funerals.

Len: You definitely not coming, Jeannie ?

Jeannie: No.

Len: Well, let's shake on it, then. Spit and shake.

[THEY SPIT AND SHAKE]

You've got to swear, too. That you won't tell nobody.

Jeannie: I swear. You won't do it any road.

Pickle: We've shook and spat on it.

Len: Yes.

[PAUSE]

Bring food, too, right - anything you can get. [TO JEANNIE] You'll bring us some food won't you ?

[LEN GOES OFF]

Jeannie: Where you going, Len ?

You're mad, Pickle. His granddad will murder you and all.

Pickle: I ain't scared of him. I'll nick his stick, and he'll never get us.

Jeannie: What about the coppers ? He'll send them after you.

[NOISES]

It's Foxy. Come to turf us out.

Pickle: We're just doing our play. The Foster Family. We made them up. Jeannie's written all the words out, too. Practising it for Miss Little. We're showing the class tomorrow.

Mr Fox: Good, that's good. Wilfred Peake as a baby, is it ? I'll look forward to seeing that. But, I am afraid I am going to have to ask you to put the finishing touches to it at home. You'll have to wheel the 'baby' out, Jean. It's after six o'clock.

[THEY GO]

SCENE 14

[FX: Radio announcement. "An experiment in educational methods, which has been carried on in a Birmingham School for the last five years, has been praised by the Ministry of Education, which is to recommend it to other education authorities. There is only one rule in the school - you may do exactly as you like, so long as you don't interfere with the happiness of anyone else. A Birmingham Mail reporter this week spent a day there, observing the new methods in practice....."]

[DOROTHY HAS AN "INDIAN" PEACE-PIPE]

Dorothy: Peace pipe. From 1946, peace time. I don't remember if we ever danced in the streets of Ladywood. There was a new government, a new Education Act. Those of us that sat around chattering dreamed of a new world. For the Steward Street children I don't suppose much changed, less death, perhaps less excitement. The street was as dark and dirty.

And inside the school, Hiawatha. Not a school play, but a whole term's work, studying history and geography, reading the story, the poem, making models of totem poles, pictures of wigwams, clay pipes. And making up a whole, happy shambles of a performance. Showing it to the infants, to parents, to councillors.

We had the council, the ministry, the experts all behind us. Times have changed. And even the chatterers have stopped dreaming properly. That's why I wanted you to see this story.

[FX: "Reading, writing, general intelligence and arithmetic are all better than in the traditional school that we examined, in a similar slum setting. The conclusion of the University Report is therefore that all the available evidence indicates that the Steward Street experiment is working."]

[DOROTHY AND MR FOX ARE IN THE STAFF ROOM]

Mr Fox: How !

How's the magnum opus going ?

Dorothy: Oh. Not too bad. Len Badsey is coming along well, I think. I mean, when I think of how boxed up and difficult he was, you know, this might just be the making of him. No, my difficulty is in getting some of the other boys to think of any aspects other than the bows and arrows.

Mr Fox: You could talk to them a bit about scalping !

[PAUSE]

Dorothy: Have you read this ?

Mr Fox: What is it ?

Dorothy: There's a letter in tonight's Mail. In response to that article. It's outrageous.

Mr Fox: Oh. Read it out will you ?

Dorothy: Dear Sir. I read with interest and growing alarm your reporter's account of his day spent at the "do-as-you-please" school in Ladywood. Is there no end to the folly of the educationists, who seem bent on destroying the youth of Britain and creating a breed of spoiled, soft, illiterates. What work does the headmaster of this school believe his pupils will be fit for. Are the great factories, shops and offices of Birmingham to be filled with dancers and painters without letter or number or knowledge of real work. What was so wrong with the proper schooling of the past, which equipped this nation well enough to build an Empire and to win two wars. Yours etc Mr J Capstan, Handsworth Wood.

Mr Fox: I don't suppose we can be surprised after the picture the article painted, Dorothy. It was a substantial travesty of the facts if you remember.

Dorothy: But doesn't it make your blood boil ? What part does he think our pupils would play in building an Empire and winning wars, anyway ? They'd be the cannon fodder.

[PAUSE]

How do you argue with this ?

Mr Fox: Well, I'll tell you what I do. First and foremost, I argue with it on its own terms. If he wants the three Rs taught well, he's got them, hasn't he. Without any punishment, with everything he probably hates. We can wave the university's report at him, or ask him to ask the authority or the Ministry. They are with us, Dorothy, and they couldn't all be wrong, could they ? Where necessary, I'm not above making everything we're doing here out as a means of improving basic education.

Dorothy: But it's so much more.

Mr Fox: That's a heck of a lot more dangerous an argument though. You don't have to persuade me. But try Mr Capstan on imagination, on freedom, on exploration, on asking questions.

Dorothy: And he would be frightened, because he wouldn't want the children of Ladywood equipped to ask questions, they might just question the way the world treats them.

Mr Fox: Fighting talk.

Dorothy: It just happens to be true, doesn't it ? That's what I would argue, always.

Mr Fox: Perhaps you're made of sterner stuff then.

Dorothy: If I could just have Mr Capstan in my room for a day.

Mr Fox: Well, I'm surprised at that particular reaction !

Dorothy: No, I simply mean I am sure if he actually looked, it is common sense...I mean this morning, well, you know what Lily Kelloway is like, was like ? All the problems of the world in one little girl.

Mr Fox: I'm hardly likely to forget that, am I ? I had to clean her up almost every day for a year.

Dorothy: Yes well exactly. This morning she listened to that scratchy old record of Nimrod, with the rest of the class, head on the desk, eyes closed, and then she wrote a passage which she stood on a chair and read out. All about tall ships, coming round a line of cliffs. Perfect tall ships clear as crystal, coming magically around, and I don't suppose she's ever seen a ship. It waswell I just mean if Mr bloody Capstan had watched her for three years, what's happened to her...

Mr Fox: [SORT OF PRETENDING TO BE A LAWYER] Ah but what did this Lilian character learn, Miss Little ?

Dorothy: She learned that what she felt mattered. Self-belief, confidence.

Mr Fox: I put it to you, however, Miss Little, that she learned nothing of value to her. What facts did she learn ? What skills ? Will this Miss Kelloway ever sail in a tall ship, is she destined indeed to conduct a symphony orchestra ? I think not.

Dorothy: Why the hell not ? And that isn't it, anyway. Why do we have to accept everything as it is ?

Mr Fox: Oh for goodness sake, Dorothy. You should learn to cut off.

Dorothy: So suddenly you have become entirely dispassionate have you ?

Mr Fox: There is a limit to our functions.

Dorothy: What limit ?

You're finally 'growing up' enough to lose your ideals?

Mr Fox: It doesn't help to get upset about things which we really cannot affect.

Dorothy: You sound like my mother. 'Your job ends at the school gate'.

Mr Fox: Well it has to end somewhere.

Dorothy: But this school is not set apart from the world. We can't protect them from their lives.

Mr Fox: Nor can we possess them.

Dorothy: Who is doing that ?

Mr Fox: Well, they must make their own way, and without us, exactly because we are not the whole world. If the conclusions they come to are different from ours, they must still be allowed them.

Dorothy: Of course. What are you implying ?

Mr Fox: Dorothy, Dorothy, there is no greater admirer of your teaching than me. But you are fiercely close to your pupils, and there is a danger therein. You have twenty times the power of the tyrant teacher, because your young admirers will catch hold of any hint of your feelings and clasp them to themselves. You have the power to make them think things.

Dorothy: And...

Mr Fox: And you can raise expectations which will surely be dashed.

Dorothy: So I should lie ?

Mr Fox: In the war, did you tell your class what you felt ?

Dorothy: When directly asked I did, and you will not find me apologising for that.

Mr Fox: No.

Dorothy: You can be very smug sometimes David. I simply feel we have a responsibility to the truth, about the world they do and will live in. What's the point of teaching them anything at all, if...

Mr Fox: I wish to God my responsibilities did go beyond here. I wish that the Education Act had done away with the great divide at the age of eleven, because I have seen children destroyed by the shock of their discoveries when they leave here. But it will come, believe me, if you just wait. I have my ideals intact, and they are winning, Dorothy, that's the thing. In ten years, or twenty years or whenever, we will really be teaching our youngsters to feel, to explore, to live. There will not be schools which run on terror and fear of failure. Schools will be built on trust and encouragement. Because people can see the way we are doing things working.

Dorothy: I'm sorry I accused you of being grown up !

[PAUSE]

Mr Fox: Won't your indians be getting restless ?

Dorothy: You and I know, Mr Fox, that they will be altogether too thoroughly and usefully absorbed to be restless. But I will go to them, so that I can plan the next stages of the revolution with them.

[THE ARGUMENT HAS NOT BEEN ENTIRELY RESOLVED. DOROTHY GOES]

SCENE 15 ON THE BONK

[LEN WITH TORCH AND PACKAGE. HE LOOKS AROUND. SETTLES HIMSELF IN A CORNER.]

[TIME PASSES]

[JEANNIE ARRIVES. LEN SHRINKS OUT OF SIGHT]

Jeannie: [WHISPER] Len. Len. It's Jeannie. Come on out. Are you there ?

[LEN EMERGES]

Len: You changed your mind, you going to come ?

Jeannie: No.

Len: You can, I don't mind. Pick won't.

Jeannie: He isn't coming, Len

Len: Did he say that ?

Jeannie: No, but it's obvious.

Len: Of course he's coming, we shook.

Jeannie: I know, but he didn't think you were serious, did he ?

Len: He must've done.

Jeannie: Look, Len, they've started looking for you, they'll be up here for definite.

Len: You tell them anything ?

Jeannie: No, but everyone knows you come up here, don't they ?

Len: I can't wait that much longer, then. Come on Pick, where are you ?

Jeannie: He isn't coming.

Len: He is.

Jeannie: I don't see why you're surprised. He's always talking stories, isn't he ? He wasn't ever going to run away to sea.

Len: We're going on the canal.

[PAUSE]

He promised.

Jeannie: Oh look. He should have said. He probably didn't think you meant it

Len: I'll just have to go alone then.

Jeannie: Don't be stupid. You can't.

Look, you shouldn't, we don't want you to go. I don't. You don't want to leave me alone, do you ?

Len: I got the money, look.

[HE OPENS BAG]

And all this.

Jeannie: Oh God, Len. He'll kill you.

Len: That's why I've got to go. With or without Pickle.

[SEARCHING TYPE NOISES]

It ain't fair. Why didn't Pickle come. He promised. He said he'd come with me.

Don't say nothing. Tell them I'm not here.

[CHASE AND FIGHT. MR BADSEY CATCHES HIM]

Mr Badsey: You little bugger. You'll not learn, will you ? That won't be the last you'll hear about this.

Jeannie: He was just playing around, Mr Badsey. We were pretending.

Len: I wasn't. Don't take no notice of her. I'm going for good, and you'll not stop me.

Mr Badsey: Will I not ? We shall see. shan't we ?

Len: You can belt me as much as you like.

Mr Badsey: I know I can. Not here. You can go back home too now, young lady.

[SHE GOES]

Len: What are you going to do ?

[MR BADSEY DOESN'T REPLY]

[HE TAKES LEN OFF]

SCENE 16 SCHOOL

[MUSIC: NUTCRACKER]

[PICKLE IS PRACTISING A BIT OF HIAWATHA ON HIS OWN. HE IS PLAYING A WISE ELDER, WHICH INVOLVES A CLOAK AND BARE FEET. THERE IS MUCH ACTION BETWEEN WORDS]

Pickle: Manito has spoken.

[DOROTHY ENTERS AND WATCHES UNOBSERVED]

The land is being torn apart by war. We must make peace.

Have a puff on the pipe of peace. Come on mate, Manito says. Puff puff.

Dorothy: You make everything funny, don't you ?

Pickle: I'm practising.

[PAUSE]

Dorothy: Have you got to go off quickly ?

Pickle: No Miss.

Dorothy: Perhaps you can help me with this then.

[SHE HAS A HEADDRESS FOR THE PLAY WHICH HE HELPS HER WITH]

Pickle: Miss, why don't we do proper plays from books ?

Dorothy: Oh well, we could, of course, Wilfred. But when I just let you decide the words from the story, it always seems much more real.

Pickle: But it isn't supposed to be real, it's supposed to be a play.

Dorothy: Yes, well.

[PAUSE]

You are quite a friend of Len Badsey's, aren't you, Wilfred ?

Pickle: Yes Miss.

Dorothy: He hasn't been at school for a while, has he ? Do you know why.

Pickle: It's his granddad Miss. Mr Badsmell.

Dorothy: Oh yes ?

Pickle: He's keeping him at home. It's his punishment.

Dorothy: For what ?

Pickle: For running away ?

Dorothy: Running away ?

Pickle: Yes. He nicked his takings from the shop, and ran away to the canal.

[PAUSE]

He was going up to Southport, to get on a ship.

Dorothy: A ship ?

Pickle: Yes, Miss.

[PAUSE]

Who's going to be Hiawatha if Badsmell don't let him back, Miss?

Dorothy: You shouldn't call him that Wilfred.

I don't know, but you're so good at being Manito, it couldn't be you.

Pickle: Yes I know Miss.

Dorothy: We'll just have to hope he comes back, won't we ?

Pickle: Yes Miss.

[THE HEADDRESS IS COMPLETE]

Dorothy: How's that then ?

[HE TRIES ON THE HEADDRESS, MOVES AROUND. DANCES. SHE DRUMS FOR HIM]

[MR FOX COMES IN WITH GRAMOPHONE. PUTS IT DOWN, JOINS IN THE DANCE]

SCENE 17 LEN'S HOUSE

[LEN IS SCRUBBING FLOOR. KNOCK AT DOOR. LETS IN DOROTHY]

Len: What you come here for Miss ?

Dorothy: To see how you were.

Len: I'm alright.

Dorothy: Are you ?

Len: Yes.

[SHE LOOKS AROUND, VISIBLY TAKEN ABACK BY HOUSE]

Dorothy: The shop's through there is it ?

Len: Yes Miss.

Dorothy: And you live in this part of the house.

Len: Sleep upstairs Miss.

[HE NEARLY CRIES. DOROTHY MOVES TO COMFORT HIM. MR BADSEY COMES IN]

Mr Badsey: Good morning, Miss.

Dorothy: Oh, Mr Badsey. I beg your pardon. Len let me in.

Mr Badsey: Did he now ?

Dorothy: I'm Dorothy Little. I'm Len's teacher...from school. I don't believe we've met, have we ? You've not been down to the school.

Mr Badsey: I know who you are, Miss Little.

[HE WIPES HIS HAND AND OFFERS IT. THEY SHAKE HANDS]

What you crying about Len ? Stand up and make yourself smart for your teacher.

[LEN STANDS UP]

Dorothy: I've seen you outside the school, I think....I just called round because we were concerned about Len.

Mr Badsey: Well you'd no need. There's nothing wrong with him. He's being punished, that's all.

Dorothy: Yes. For running away.

Mr Badsey: For running away, and for thieving. Perhaps you should spend more time up there teaching right and wrong.

Dorothy: Perhaps, yes.

[PAUSE]

We could do with him back, Mr Badsey. He's playing an important part for us in our...well, in Hiawatha.

Mr Badsey: The play-acting. I've told him no.

I didn't ask to look after him, Miss Little, but now I am, I will do it properly. He knows he has to serve his punishment. When I was at school, teachers understood that.

Dorothy: I should warn you that you have a legal duty, Mr Badsey. We would be within our rights to involve the police, or I'm sorry. How long is his....punishment to last.

Mr Badsey: You'd bring in the police, would you ? Well. It ain't so easy to know you are right if you have no schooling, Miss Little.

[PAUSE]

You see, I didn't ask to look after him. He is the punishment for my sins. But I know how to bring him up right. You can have him at school, when I choose. Do what you will to him there. While he is here, he is my concern. Do you understand ?

Dorothy: All we are trying to do is help, Mr Badsey, believe me. The idea of the school is based on....

Mr Badsey: I know all about your ideas.

Dorothy: You haven't been to the school once in three years.

Mr Badsey: I can talk to other men. I know schools. I know teachers. I went to a school. Do you believe stealing is wrong ?

Dorothy: Why did Len steal, Mr Badsey ?

Mr Badsey: I believe stealing is wrong. I was taught.

Dorothy: What do you want, then ?

Mr Badsey: I want him better behaved. I want him to learn. To respect, to believe. What's his play-acting to him ? What will it help him in a job, in the army. I don't know, do you ?

Dorothy: Well, you don't know anything about it. Everything we do there is for him. His confidence, his belief, his senses, abilities, not just reading and writing, but thinking, feeling, dreaming, exploring. You must have noticed the difference in Len. He was so shy, so frightened.

Mr Badsey: He is my grandson.

Dorothy: Yes, and don't you want better for him ? Perhaps better than you had. Or do you just want to trample him down, keep him down. He wants to run away from this place, Mr Badsey, when if you let him he could grow out of here. In spite of the way you are to him, not because of it. He can be more than fuel for these factories or fodder for cannons.

Mr Badsey: You've said enough. I know about living here, in this house, in this street, so does Len. And I know about cannons and all.

[PAUSE]

Dorothy: Yes. Of course you do. I will see you at school, then, Len, I hope.

Len: Yes Miss.

[SHE HOLDS HIS SHOULDERS]

Mr Badsey: Don't touch him.

[SHE GOES OUT]

Thank you for visiting us, Miss Little.

SCENE 18 MONOLOGUE

[DOROTHY IS LOOKING FOR HER RECORD]

Dorothy: There are no bad children. Damaged souls and mistakes by teachers. No bad children. Ah.

This record is the real sound of an air raid, over Mannheim, in Germany. I have no idea how I came to possess it. With the drone of bombers and the song of nightingales. If I want to be reminded of things I listen to this. Not for nightingales and bombers, shelters and bomb sites, but for Steward Street and the school. There are still small voices - bustling, playful noises against a great relentless mechanical depression. On some days the rumbling stupidity is louder, on others the birds sing above it. On these days, good days, I can listen and believe that the birdsong will continue to be heard.....

SCENE 19 DOROTHY'S ROOM

[LEN COMES IN]

Dorothy: Hello Len. Good, you're back just in time.

Len: Miss.

Dorothy: Have you hurt your ear ?

Len: Yes Miss.

Dorothy: Did someone hit you ?

Len: No Miss. I was playing football.

Dorothy: Let's have a look.

[SHE LOOKS AT SOME BRUISES ON LEN'S FACE]

I'm sorry I came to your house, Len. I don't think I helped, did I ?

Len: You did your best, Miss.

Dorothy: Thank you.

Len: You just ain't used to him, that's all. My mum used to shout at him, too.

[PAUSE]

Dorothy: Why did you run away, Len ?

[PAUSE]

Len: Because I hate him, Miss.

[PAUSE]

Dorothy: Do you think about your mum much ?

Len: Yes Miss.

Dorothy: What do you think ?

Len: I think about her lying on the carpet, with dust in her eyes.

It's the last time I saw her.

Dorothy: I know a little about that, Len, but it would be good if you wanted to tell me more.

[LEN GETS INTO POSITION AT THE FRONT OF THE CLASS. HE BEGINS THE STORY AS IF DECLAIMING IT. THIS IS NOT IRONIC, IT IS HIS WAY OF DOING IT]

Len: The day the bomb dropped. By Len Badsey. Small Heath 1940. When the siren went, we was going to get under the table, in the kitchen, the strengthened table, but there wasn't enough room, so Dad says we should go in the pantry, between the kitchen and the front room. We was all in there, with my mum with the bab and her sister, my aunt Audrey, and my sister Sal and then there was dad, and my brother Gordon and me on this side, sitting. We could hear the bombers and that, and there were explosions across the street, which you could hear, and then our mum says "The next one's for us, Jack", and he says "Shut your bloody mouth"

Then like they say I woke up and there was dust and dirt, and my sister was on top of me, with her head all opened up, my half sister.... and my brother was talking sort of thing. And we were there until the morning when they dug us out, and took me across to this house, and brought me mum in, and covered her up, with me aunt and me sister, on the settee and on the floor under it. And my brother had the bab, who me mum had been holding, and the babby wasn't dead. But she died later. Three more weeks.

I knew my mum was dead because there was dust in her eyes. All clogged up with dust, but open. Dad never knew because he was in hospital. First he knew was when my uncle told him he'd gone to her grave. But I don't remember that for myself. What I do remember is the pantry. Mum, the babby, Audrey, Sal, Gordon, Dad.

[LEN IS ON FLOOR. FREEZES]

[DOROTHY HAS A PENNY]

Dorothy: I got my job at Steward Street School on the toss of a coin. Mr Fox and another headmaster tossed for me, and he won, or he tells me he was the winner. Winners and losers.

At Steward Street we had sick pupils pretending to be well, so they could come to school. They invented, talked and created, grew in confidence, blossomed in the most barren of all places. They looked at the world, and even at themselves, and we knew that what we had was special. For a while I was certain I could affect the toss of the coin. But every time you get certain about something, you should know that you are in danger.

When you listen to Len Badsey telling his story, you get hit hard and frozen by a sense of just how big and ugly the world is, and how little you are doing even with all of that. So now I am not so certain, but I do know that it is right to keep trying to affect the toss of the coin.

[AS SHE SAYS THIS, SHE GATHERS TOGETHER THE OBJECTS THAT SHE HAS PRODUCED, AND PUTS THEM CAREFULLY IN DIFFERENT PLACES AROUND THE SET: TICKET, BOOK, PEACE PIPE, LETTERS, RECORD. LEAVES THE PENNY ON THE DESK WITH LEN'S PAINTING.]

SCENE 20

[MUSIC - NUTCRACKER. JEANNIE AND PICKLE COME IN AS CHARACTERS FROM HIAWATHA. IT IS A PERFORMANCE]

Jeannie: Where is Hiawatha ? Why hasn't he come back ?

Pickle: He will return soon, Minihaha.

Jeannie: He will be too late Manito, won't he ? We are all starving and some of the children are getting very poorly. How will he save us ?

Pickle: He is our friend, and he is hungrier than all of us, but he will come back. Hiawatha's voyage has been long and difficult. Over lakes and mountains, through minefields, past snakes and wolves he has travelled, fighting off giant rats, to take the secret of peace from the great bear Mish-makwa.

Jeannie: Look, he comes. Hiawatha's canoe has been battered and broken by storms, and he has learned to fight, to come back to us now.

[MUSIC. LEN RISES AS HIAWATHA, AND ARRIVES, IN A CANOE, PADDLING. THE MOVEMENTS ARE ACCURATE, CAREFUL AND FORMAL, AS HE GETS OUT OF THE CANOE, AND COMES FORWARD. PICKLE GREETES HIM]

Pickle: It's good to see you, Hiawatha. We were getting worried about you.

Len: I bring good news. I have searched and found the great bear Mish-makwa, and taken from him this pouch.

Pickle: You have done well.

Jeannie: How's this pouch going to help us ? Our people are hungry and the wigwam city is destroyed by the war.

[HE TAKES THE POUCH AND EMPTIES SEEDS]

Seeds. You went all this way for seeds.

Pickle: Of course, seeds. How better to end a famine, than to plant again. I'll get them planted.

[THEY PLANT THE SEEDS]

Len: Whoever wakes in a wigwam knows that we have ended the famine, and the war is over. For now we are safe. But we must stay strong together, as we go into a future with unknown enemies. We cannot know what fate is waiting for us, we can only make sure we are ready together. Let's smoke the pipe of peace, eat and dance.

[DRUMS. THEIR MOVEMENTS DEVELOP INTO A PROCESSION AND DANCE, WHICH DEVELOPS, ENDING WITH A PROCESSION OUT OF THE SCHOOL]

SCENE 21

[NIGHTINGALES AND BOMBERS]

[THE THREE CHILDREN COME INTO THE SCHOOL AREA TOGETHER. IT IS THEIR LAST DAY. THEY ARE GATHERING THINGS]

[JEANNIE STOPS IN DOORWAY, CLOSES HER EYES]

Len: What're you doing ?

Jeannie: I'm saying goodbye to the room.

Pickle: [RUNNING ROUND "KISSING" THINGS] Yes, me, I'm saying goodbye to the floor, the wall, the staircase, to the lightbulb. Bye bye window, tara gramophone.....

Jeannie: Shut it Pickle.

[SHE CHASES HIM AROUND]

Pickle: I'm going up the bonk. You coming ?

Jeannie: Yes

Len: Alright.

[JEANNIE AND PICKLE GO OUT. JEANNIE FINDS DOROTHY'S BOOK. PICKLE FINDS THE PEACE PIPE. LEN LEAVES A CARD ON DOROTHY'S DESK AND PICKS UP THE PENNY AND THE PAINTING. HE TOSSES THE COIN]