

## Carrie's War

*Carrie and her brother Nick are evacuated from London to Wales during the Second World War.*

*They arrive and nervously wait to be 'chosen' by a family.*



**S**urely you can take two, Miss Evans?" "Two girls, perhaps. Not a boy and a girl, I'm afraid. I've only the one room, see, and my brother's particular."

Particular about what, Carrie wondered. But Miss Evans looked nice; a little like a red squirrel Carrie had once seen, peering round a tree in a park. Reddish brown hair and bright button eyes, and a shy, quivering look.

Carrie said, "Nick sleeps in my room at home because he has bad dreams sometimes. I always look after him and he's no trouble at all."

Miss Evans looked doubtful. "Well, I don't know what my brother will say. Perhaps I can chance it." She smiled at Carrie. "There's pretty eyes you have, girl! Like green glass!"

Carrie smiled back. People didn't often notice her when Nick was around. His eyes were dark blue, like their mother's. She said, "Oh, Nick's the pretty one, really."

Miss Evans walked fast. She was a little woman, not much taller than Carrie, but she seemed strong as a railway porter, carrying their cases as if they weighed nothing. Out of the hall, down the street. They stopped outside a grocery shop with the name Samuel Isaac Evans above the door and Miss Evans took a key from her bag. She said, "There's a back way and you'll use that, of course, but we'll go through the front for the once, as my brother's not here."

The shop was dim and smelled mustily pleasant. Candles and tarred kindling, and spices, Carrie thought wrinkling her nose. A door at the back led into a small room with a huge desk almost filling it. "My brother's office," Miss Evans said in a hushed voice and hurried them through into a narrow, dark hall with closed doors and a stair rising up. It was darker here than the shop and there was a strong smell of polish.

Polished linoleum, a shining, glass sea, with rugs scattered like islands. Not a speck of dust anywhere. Miss Evans looked down at their feet. "Better change into your slippers before we go up to your bedroom."

"We haven't got any," Carrie said. She meant to explain that there hadn't been room in their cases but before she could speak Miss Evans turned bright red and said quickly, "Oh, I'm so sorry, how silly of me, why should you? Never mind, as long as you're careful and tread on the drugget."

A strip of white cloth covered the middle of the stair carpet. They trod on this as they climbed; looking back from the top, Carrie saw the marks of their rubber-soled shoes and felt guilty, though it wasn't her fault. Nick whispered, "She thinks we're poor children, too poor to have slippers," and giggled.

*Nina Bawden*

