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Opening extract from

Street Corner Dad

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To Maisie Long, for the loan of her life

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Chapter 1
Iron

It never crossed my mind that we would ever be apart. Even when the bombs started to fall on Liverpool, I didn't think they would change anything for my family.

I was born in 1930 and I was nine when the war started. I lived with my family in Bond Street, just off Scotland Road. There were five of us and we lived in a flat with three bedrooms. We were lucky – the people on the other side of the stair only had two. And we



had a hot-water tap and a bath. All they had was the cold-water tap.

My nan ran the house with a rod of iron. Kathleen, her name was, and everybody was in fear of her. She had a face like a hawk and a taste for Guinness.

Nan had the good bedroom and Mam and Dad had the second bedroom. Me and Molly made do with the box room. Molly was five. She was always whining and her nose ran non-stop.

Dad was often away on his ship. He was a seaman, and he was part of the Battle of the Atlantic. Since the start of the war the Nazis had been trying to keep our ships from crossing the sea to bring us the things we needed. Dad's ship protected merchant ships so Britain could get through the dark days of the war.

Nan never liked Dad, with his "rough sailor ways," as she called them. She didn't think he was good enough for my mum – Nan's daughter.

We were happy, though most people today would wonder what we had to be happy about. It was bread and dripping for tea every day and not much in the way of toys for me and

Molly. There were no fitted carpets or central heating, no cars or TVs or phones. Most nights, the air-raid siren would wail through the mist and we would take ourselves off to the shelter in the Swings.



The Swings was a kind of small, tatty park, with a worn lawn, some maypoles, a bandstand and two kinds of shelter. One shelter was dug into the ground and one was above ground and made of brick. One time,

an unexploded land mine was found in the Swings. The houses near by had to be cleared for three days, and we all slept in St Martin's Hall.

The funny thing is, we kids took it in our stride. We ran wild, too. The streets and alleys in our bit of the city belonged to us, even when the Germans started to bomb the docks and it wasn't safe to play out or even sleep at home. Lots of the other kids got sent to North Wales, but Nan said we weren't going, in spite of the damage to the buildings and the roads.

"If it happens, it happens," she said. "At least we'll all go together."

That was that. Anything Nan said was gospel – no one could say any different. Mam found it hard to stand up to her. The only time she did was when she married my dad. And Dad loved Mam, so he didn't stand up to Nan either.

And so that's how we ended up sticking it out at home. For months there wasn't even any school. There just weren't enough kids to keep it running. When school did start again, it was in somebody's front room. You went for a morning, but you didn't learn much. Not that me or Molly cared. We just wanted to go about our business. Like I said, we were happy.