

The Siege

Adrian Mitchell

First published in 1996, this play was commissioned by the National Playwright Commissioning Group especially for performance in schools.

The Swados family - Eduardo, an office clerk married to Sally, a hospital nurse; and their children, Mike, twins Arlo and Betsy, Lucy, Karl and Elli - live in the peaceful town of Arden, a town much like any town in England. War breaks out and they are under siege by the forces of the province of Dower. The government is toppling and is taken over by a plausible racist gangster called Doctor Jameson.

In this scene the people of the town have been queuing up for bread. A young friend of Betsy's - GABY - steps forward and talks directly to the audience, describing what life is like living in an air raid shelter.

GABY

I dunno if you've ever been in an air raid. Just in case you get caught in one, I'll tell you what to do. First, stick yourself down a shelter. Best thing is to be in a cellar near home with friends and some family. Winter you go for months on end without ever taking off all your clothes. You never see your own body. You know it's turning into something skinny and horrible. You want to forget about it. But it itches and it aches, just to remind you it's there. And of course, it smells. But you get used to your own smell and the smell of your friends and family. Smell a stranger a mile off. *(Sniffs, laughs)* There's a lot of boredom in air raids. You read a book, if you can get near enough the lamp. Maybe you play cards for a tin of sardines. And there's always somebody saying the same old stupid things ... *(All Clear sounds)* Then the All Clear sounds. And there's always the same old argument: Do you pack up the blankets and the kids and go upstairs? Or stop in the cellar and wait for the next raid? Look, sometimes it's real fun down the shelter. Yeah. And we all sing old Beatles songs and stuff. Right? But sometimes there's a kid missing and there's screaming outside and it feels like you're stuck down in hell and you know that hell is a cold dark place where little children die. *(Turns and walks away)*