The Air Raid Shelter

From “The Spitfire Club” play by Alfie James

*(CATHERINE, EILEEN, SID, NORMAN and GRANDMA ROSE sit inside an Air Raid Shelter. MR GREEN and MR PORTER stand slightly forward on either side of the shelter speaking directly to the audience)*

**MR GREEN:** The heavy and frequent bombing attacks of London, other cities and surrounding areas were known as The Blitz. Night after night German bombers attacking dropping some 5300 tonnes of bombs onto London. One third of London was destroyed.

The Super Cinema, The Clock Tower and Hippodrome were just a few examples of the casualties suffered by the bombings on Redbridge. Our local communities suffered considerable damage and hundreds of residents were killed and wounded during the bombing campaigns, both V1s, known as "doodlebugs" and the deadlier V2s - which were more silent and often not visible were used.

**MR PORTER:** When you hear the warning take cover at once. Remember that most of the injuries in an air raid are caused not by direct hits by bombs but by flying fragments of debris or by bits of shells. Stay under cover until you hear the sirens sounding continuously for two minutes on the same note which is the 'all clear.'

**EILEEN**: *(Steps forward)* People were asked to build small air raid shelters in their gardens. The most common was the Anderson shelter. Underground stations were also used. Some people hid in their basements or cupboards under the stairs. It was dreadfully frightening and often very cramped and dark in the shelters. It was almost impossible to get any sleep. It always shattered my nerves.

**MR PORTER:** Better than being blown to kingdom come.

**EILEEN:** Then there were the black outs...

**MR PORTER:** They were rigorously enforced. All lights should be turned out and dark sheets and blankets put across windows to make it difficult for the Germans to see where the towns were.

**EILEEN:** It still gave me panic attacks.

**CATHERINE:** Try to stay calm. It'll be over soon.

**MR GREEN:** Outside the darkness was interrupted by flashing of light followed by loud explosions and burning flames and the crumbling of buildings.

**SID:** That one was close!

**EILEEN:** Oh, please don't hit us.

**CATHERINE:** Hold my hand.

**NORMAN:** I really don't see why we can't sit out and watch it. I hate being stuck in here. I'm missing it all.

**SID:** Missing it all? It's not a flamin' film at the Super.

**EILEEN:** Watch your tongue Sidney Jones! I'll have no such language used.

**GRANDMA ROSE:** I blame that Hitler for all this.

**CATHERINE:** Don't we all.

**MR PORTER:** Another explosion was heard closer almost shaking the sides of the shelter.

**EILEEN:** That one was almost right on top of us.

**NORMAN:** They're getting closer! I think that must have hit Mr and Mrs Lamberts house.

**EILEEN:** We're not to survive this.

**GRANDMA ROSE:** Nonsense! We survived the First War; we can survive a second. What I'd do to the same room as that Adolph. I'd soon teach him a lesson or two!

**CATHERINE:** Not now, mother, please.

**NORMAN:** What would you do, Grandma? Do tell us.

**CATHERINE:** Don't encourage her, Norman.

**SID:** I really don't like this.

**GRANDMA ROSE:** There's nothing to worry about boy. It's all just excess air. Bad wind, that's all it is. That's what I'd tell him, too. You've got trapped wind. I'd tell him to stop acting like such a mad man and behave himself.

**NORMAN:** And if hr didn't...

**CATHERINE:** Norman!

**GRANDMA ROSE**: Then I'd box his heads and clobber him on the nose! He wouldn't know what hit him!

*(Everyone starts laughing)*

**CATHERINE:** Oh, Mother...really!

**NORMAN:** Grandma, you really are the best!

**GRANDMA ROSE:** Man needs to stop getting his knickers in such a twist and throwing his rattle out of the pram.

**NORMAN:** I'm going to become a pilot. Just like Father. Then I'm going to fly right over Germany and drop a bomb right on to his head.

**SID:** Germany's a big place.

**NORMAN:** I'll have spies there to tell me exactly where he is.

**SID:** Really?

**GRANDMA ROSE:** And if that doesn't work, you can just drop Grandma Rose on to him instead, eh? I'll give him my right foot right up his -

**MR GREEN:** A loud explosion echoed through the whole shelter shaking pieces of the ceiling onto their heads.

**EILEEN:** That must have been only a couple of doors up.

**CATHERINE:** I do hope Mrs Thorpe is in her shelter. You know how terribly fragile she is and she won't go anywhere without her Corgi.

**EILEEN:** Things she's the Queen, she does!

**NORMAN:** I bet she got flattened if it hit her house. Please, let me go see.

**CATHERINE:** Don't you even think about it, Norman.

**MR PORTER:** Outside two houses were in flames, crippled and crushed to the ground. The Fire brigade struggling to put the flames out. Smoke was pouring out and a ringing noise and shouting could be heard.

**EILEEN:** We’re going to be next.

**NORMAN:** I want to have a look.

**CATHERINE:** Don’t you dare! Sit back down, Norman at once.

**MR PORTER:** The explosions were getting closer and closer.

**CATHERINE**: Close your eyes Eileen and try not to think about it.

**EILEEN:** *(To SID)* I wish your father was here.

**MR GREEN:** Sid’s father worked with the Fire Brigade in London. He was too old to fight.

**GRANDMA ROSE:** *(Bursts out into song)*

It's a long way to Tipperary,

It's a long way to go,

It's a long way to Tipperary,

To the sweetest girl I know!

Goodbye Piccadilly!

Farewell Leicester Square!

It's a long, long way to Tipperary,

But my heart's right there!

*(The others all start to join in and sing the song again together)*

**GRANDMA ROSE:** That’s it my dears. Let’s show that Hitler the spirit. None of his little bombs are going to scare the likes of us!

*(They continue singing more loudly. The lights fade out)*