



LIGHTS OUT IN LONDON

December 1, 1939

Dear Ruth,

Today marks two months of walking home from school without you. And what a miserable walk it was! It was a cold and blustery day, and dark at half past four. Miss Reed follows blackout regulations to the letter, so she switched off the lights and sent us all home. We will finish our maths lesson tomorrow.

In some ways, not much has changed since you were evacuated from the city. I walk the same route that we always did. But though the journey is unchanged, it takes me twice as long now that the blackout has begun. Every lamppost light is extinguished after dark. Businesses and homes must dim all their lights and draw their blackout curtains. Even the church no longer puts candles in the windows. Out on the street, you can barely see your two feet in front of you.

Today, just past the café, I saw two men hanging an air-raid siren. How they were working in the dark, I do not know! But we are all preparing for the bombings that are sure to come. Last week my father painted over the headlamps on the entire fleet of taxicabs. If he and the other drivers must work at night, the beams of light won't be seen from the sky. I do worry for him, but the curbs have been painted black and white to guide drivers through the darkness. He says he'll be all right.

Everyone is telling us to keep calm, and Mum says the sirens will let us know when to take shelter. But what happens if they go off while I am walking home from school? Where do I go? What if I cannot find a shelter in the dark?

I miss you, Ruth. I am glad to know that you are safe, but I wish we could still walk home together. I hope you will write soon and tell me all about the countryside.

Oh! That reminds me: can you see lots of stars? Tonight, just before I reached home, the clouds cleared. When I looked up, I saw more stars than I have ever seen before! So the blackout is not all bad, I suppose. Who knew the London skies could be so beautiful?

With love, your friend,

Evelyn



It seems as if the whole city has been painted black and white. They say that white bumpers help drivers spot one another in the dark.



This family built bunks in their Anderson shelter. I'd hate to think of spending a whole night sleeping there!



Those who can't fight help out here in London. This warden enjoys a hard-earned cuppa tea.



We practice air-raid drills at school these days. Even the younger students are learning them.

World War II in Britain

World War II began on September 1, 1939. As Nazi Germany overran Europe, Great Britain feared that it would be invaded next. Determined to fight back, the country prepared for an air war that would be waged above both countries, putting civilians at risk. British citizens were encouraged to help with the war effort, which included volunteering for the Air Raid Precautions service. ARP wardens, as members were called, were trained to handle the aftermath of bombings. They also enforced "blackout" rules at night to prevent German bombers from spotting targets from the sky.



German bomber during WWII



London blackout poster



London smolders after a nighttime bombing spree.