

STILL WATER

CHRIS PRIESTLEY

Contents

1	Leaving London	1
2	Bitten	12
3	The Girl in the Water	21
4	The Witches' Pond	31
5	At the Pond	38
6	Not You	45
7	Bad Dreams	56
8	Sunday	62
9	A Walk Round the Village	68
10	Talk of Ghosts	81
11	Mrs Taylor Confesses	89
12	Vera	99
13	Back to London	104

First published in 2018 in Great Britain by
Barrington Stoke Ltd
18 Walker Street, Edinburgh, EH3 7LP
www.barringtonstoke.co.uk

Text & Illustrations © 2018 Chris Priestley

The moral right of Chris Priestley to be identified as the author
and illustrator of this work has been asserted in accordance
with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be
reproduced in whole or in any part in any form without the
written permission of the publisher

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available
from the British Library upon request

ISBN: 978-1-78112-833-6

Printed in China by Leo



Chapter 1

Leaving London

Rosie was finding it hard to listen to what her mother was saying. There was so much happening. There were too many thoughts in her head.

“But I don’t want to go,” Rosie said quietly as her mother hugged her.

“Now don’t start all that again, Rosie,” said her mother. “You have to go. It’s all sorted.

Besides, what sort of a mother would I be if I didn't send you off to safety?"

"But—"

"You won't want to be here when the bombs start falling. You'll have wished you'd gone then, won't you?" her mother told her.

"But what about you?" Rosie said. "You hate loud noises more than me."

"I do," her mother agreed. "I do hate loud noises. I'm terrified at the thought of explosions, but we all have to be brave, don't we, and do what's best? We can't be selfish, can we? What would Dad say when he comes home? We all have to pull together till it's over. Now come on, give us a hug. You'll be back in no time."

Rosie stared at the label round her neck and her little suitcase and the box with the gas mask in, all done up with string as if it was a

present. She hated the idea of leaving home, but her whole school was being evacuated to the countryside to protect them from the war that was about to come.

"Look – all your friends are there," said her mother. She pointed to the other children standing by the school gates.

But they weren't Rosie's friends. Not real friends. Rosie didn't mix that well at school. Just as her mum didn't mix that well with the other mothers. It didn't bother either of them that much. They liked their own company, that was all.

Rosie only really had one proper friend – Lucy Peters – and Lucy had already left London to go and stay with her aunt in Devon. But Rosie could see that her mother wanted to think everything was fine, so she said nothing. *Look after your mum for me*, her father had said as he left.

“Ready?” said a voice beside them. They both turned to see who it was and Rosie smiled when she saw it was Miss Baxter, her teacher.

“We’re ready, aren’t we, Rosie?” said her mother, and Rosie nodded.

Miss Baxter held out her hand and Rosie took it.

“Aren’t the mothers going to the station?” said Rosie’s mother, and her voice shook a little. Rosie hoped her mum wouldn’t cry. She couldn’t bear to see that.

“We thought it best if you said your goodbyes here at the school gate,” Miss Baxter said. “Better for the children. Better for everyone.”

Rosie could see her mother wasn’t at all sure it was for the best. But she nodded, swallowed back a sob and gave Rosie one last hug.

“There’s writing paper in your case,” she said. “Don’t you forget to write.”

“I won’t, Mum,” said Rosie. “I promise,” and she didn’t cry until she got to the end of the street.

They walked all together to the station. It was a long way. They’d hardly been allowed to take anything, but Rosie’s case already felt heavy and the stupid gas-mask box kept banging into her leg.

“Are you coming with us, miss?” one of the boys asked Miss Baxter, and Rosie was glad when the teacher answered that, yes, she was.

“Of course I’m coming too,” Miss Baxter said. “Otherwise all the learning will leak out of your silly heads and you’ll be like animals by the time you come back.”

Rosie smiled. She liked Miss Baxter. At least there would be one friendly face.

People stared and pointed as Rosie and the others lined up on the platform to catch the train. There were children from other schools there too. Everyone was very excited about the train journey and even Rosie forgot some of her worries as they climbed the steps and edged into the packed carriages.

Rosie was lucky. She managed to squeeze through and get a seat next to the window. Lots of children had to stand in the corridor. The noise was deafening and a great cheer went up as the train pulled out of the station with a gasp of steam.

Rosie rested her head against the cold glass and tuned out the rest of the jabbering noise in the carriage. She watched the houses and offices and factories of London clatter by and give way to fields and rivers and open countryside. So many trees. She had never seen so many trees.

After what seemed an age, a lot of children were told they were to get off the train at the next station, but Miss Baxter came into Rosie's carriage to say that it wasn't their stop yet and she would tell them when it was.

As it turned out, they were the last to leave and the train was almost empty when Rosie finally stepped onto the platform along with the rest of the children from her school.

The teachers who had come with them made the children line up and then counted them to make sure they were all there, asking their names and checking them against a list they held in their hands.

There was a little group of women from the village on the platform to meet the children. They smiled at the teachers. But Rosie noticed they looked a little less sure of the children who had now come to live among them.

Then the teachers led the children away, out of the station and up a long road that led to the centre of the village, where there was a village green, a little stream, a cluster of houses, a shop, a pub and a gold cockerel weather vane shining at the top of the church tower. *It's like a picture from a children's story*, thought Rosie.

They were taken to the village hall, where they stood at one end and a group of women stood at the other end, whispering and pointing. In the middle of the hall, there was a desk with two women and a girl sitting at it.

“Shall we get started then?” said a woman who seemed to be in charge. “These youngsters have had a long day. Let's not keep them standing about.”

Another woman stepped forward and, after looking from face to face, chose a girl to Rosie's left.

“Come with me,” said the woman with a smile. “I won't bite.”

“But I can't go without Frank!” the girl cried.

“Who's Frank?” asked the woman.

“He's my brother,” said the girl. “I can't go without him. He's only little.”

“Well ...” said the woman. She looked doubtful.

“Come on, Gwen,” said the woman in charge. “You've got the room.”

“All right,” Gwen said. “We have to do our bit, don't we?”

“Indeed we do!” said the woman. “Now come on, everyone – let's speed this up a bit, shall we?”

After a moment or two the women moved forward and picked the child – or children –

they wanted to take home. But no one picked Rosie. She worried that no one was going to choose her, when a friendly looking woman tapped her on the arm. It was the woman who had been in charge. She was standing with the girl Rosie had seen earlier sitting at the desk.

“Here we are, my dear,” she said. “Did you think we’d forgotten you? My name is Mrs Taylor.”

“Hello. It’s very kind of you to take me in,” said Rosie, remembering the words her mother had told her to say.

Mrs Taylor stopped and smiled down at her.

“Well, you’re very welcome, I’m sure,” she said. “I’m sure your mother would do the same for my Mary if things were the other way round.”

“Oh, she would,” agreed Rosie. “My mum’s very kind. Everyone says so.”

“I’m sure she is, darling,” said Mrs Taylor.

But Rosie noticed that a strange little look passed across Mary’s face.