

*It is still getting light. He passes people getting ready for their day. Postmen, milkmen, two miners coming off the night shift. From here to BILLY's arrival at school the stage is populated with people going about the morning rituals which start the day. The action flows continuously.*

*We hear a car passing. A shop doorbell rings. We're in MR PORTER's paper shop.*

MR PORTER (*arranging newspapers on his counter*). I thought you weren't coming.

BILLY. Why, I'm not late am I?

MR PORTER (*taking out his watch and considering it*). Very near.

BILLY. I nearly was though.

MR PORTER. What do you mean?

BILLY. Late. Our Jud went to pit on me bike.

MR PORTER (*handing BILLY newspapers*). What are you going to do then?

BILLY. Walk it.

MR PORTER. Walk it! How long do you think that's going to take you?

BILLY. It'll not take me long.

MR PORTER. Some folks like to read their papers the day they come out.

BILLY. It's not my fault. I didn't ask him to take my bike, did I?

MR PORTER. No and I didn't ask for any cheek from you! Do you hear?

BILLY (*quietly*). Yes.

MR PORTER (*sighing*). There's a waiting list a mile long for your job you know. Grand lads and all, some of 'em. Lads from up Firs Hill and round there.

*BILLY is warming his backside on a heater while MR PORTER continues arranging papers.*

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**BILLY.** What's up? It'll not take me that much longer. I've done it before. I know some short cuts.

**MR PORTER.** Well don't be short cutting over people's property.

**BILLY.** No, across some fields. It cuts miles off.

**MR PORTER.** Well be sure the farmer doesn't see you, else you might have a barrel of shot spread up your arse.

**BILLY.** I haven't let you down yet, have I?

*A CUSTOMER comes into the shop and MR PORTER gives him his paper.*

**MR PORTER.** Morning, sir, not very promising again. Looks like rain.

**CUSTOMER.** And twenty Players tipped please.

**MR PORTER.** Right, sir. I've not got twenty. Will two tens do you?

**CUSTOMER.** Aye.

*While MR PORTER gets the cigarettes and the CUSTOMER is leafing through his paper, Billy lifts two bars of chocolate from a display at the side of the counter. He drops them into his newspaper bag as MR PORTER turns round to hand over the cigarettes and put the money in the till. This stealing ritual is commonplace for BILLY.*

**MR PORTER.** I thank you. Good morning, sir.

*The CUSTOMER leaves. MR PORTER climbs a ladder to stack shelves. BILLY steals more chocolate during the following.*

Next thing you'll be wanting me to deliver 'em for you! You know what they said when I took you on, don't you. They said you'll have to keep your eyes open now, you know, 'cos they're all alike off that estate, up there. They'll steal your breath, if you're not careful.

**BILLY.** I've never stole nowt of yours, have I?

**MR PORTER.** I've not given you a chance that's why.

**BILLY.** You don't have to, I haven't been nicking for ages. I've stopped getting into trouble now.

BILLY *squeezes past MR PORTER on a ladder and shakes it on purpose.*

Look out, Mr Porter! Careful!

MR PORTER *sways and loses his balance.*

You're all right. I've got hold of you.

MR PORTER. You clumsy young bugger. What are you trying to do, kill me?

BILLY. I lost me balance, Mr Porter. I must have tripped. I was trying to catch you.

MR PORTER. I wouldn't put it past you either.

BILLY. You wanna watch that ladder, Mr Porter.

MR PORTER *descends the ladder feeling his heart.*

MR PORTER. I fair felt me heart go then.

BILLY. Just sit down here a couple of minutes. Are you all right now, Mr Porter?

MR PORTER *(sitting and looking at his pocket watch).* All right? Aye, I'm bloody champion.

BILLY. You're all right. I wouldn't let you fall.

MR PORTER. Are you going to stand there all day, then? I don't know. I'll have everybody ringin' me up and asking why I can't deliver on time.

BILLY. What time is it?

MR PORTER. Time you were at school.

BILLY. Is it that late?

MR PORTER. Them poor teachers. I wouldn't like to try and learn you owt, for all the coal in Barnsley.

BILLY. I'll be off then.

BILLY *runs from the shop.*

MR PORTER. And don't be late for tonight's!

BILLY *begins to deliver papers, eating the chocolate he stole from the shop. We see more people starting their day,*

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