

Billy Elliot

MELVIN BURGESS

Level 3

Retold by Karen Holmes

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Introduction

Dancing was the one good thing in my life. I wasn't clever or popular at school, but I could dance.

Jackie Elliot lives in a small coastal town in the north of England with his two sons, Tony and Billy. Life is hard for the family, Jackie and Tony are fighting their employers and they are not working. They have no money and Jackie is worried about the future. He is worried about Billy too ...

Eleven-year-old Billy Elliot is different from other boys. He is not very clever or good at sport. Then, one day, he discovers ballet dancing. Finally he has found something that he can do well. But everybody knows that ballet is for girls, not boys! Will Billy continue to dance? Or will Jackie and Tony stop him?

Billy Elliot is a film by Stephen Daldry, starring Jannie Bell as Billy, Gary Lewis as his father and Julie Walters as Mrs Wilkinson. The film was written by Lee Hall, and then rewritten as a book by Melvin Burgess.

The story begins in 1984, when many British workers were fighting the government. Margaret Thatcher's government wanted to close a lot of coal mines in England, Wales and Scotland. The miners wanted to keep their jobs. Some went on strike and refused to work. Other workers continued to do their jobs. The government had to send the police to protect them. The strike continued for a long time before everybody went back to work. But a few years later, nearly all the coal mines in the UK were closed and thousands of workers lost their jobs.

Billy Elliot was a very successful film in many countries across the world. It is now also a musical play, with songs by Sir Elton John.

Chapter 1 Billy's Story: Family Life

My brother Tony is stupid, but he likes good music. I listen to his records before school when he and my dad are out on the picket line. My grandmother – we call her Nan – likes the music too. I play the music and she sits in bed and sings. Sometimes we dance around the room. She's nearly eighty and she can't walk far. But she lifts her arms up in the air and tries to stand on one leg like a ballet dancer.

Dad and Tony don't like it when she dances. They think it's stupid. But I want her to dance and sing all day.

This morning I made her breakfast and danced into her room.

'Hey, Nan, it's the dancing waiter,' I said.

But she wasn't there!

I ran out of the door. My dad will kill me if I lose Nan. I raced up the road shouting, 'Nan! Nan!'

Where was she? Was she on her way down to the sea? You can see the sea from our house and she goes there sometimes. But little Alison, one of the neighbour's children, pointed up the street.

Suddenly I knew: Nan was in the field under the railway bridge. She often goes there. Nobody knows why. Maybe she played there when she was a child.

'Nan!' I shouted.

She turned and looked at me. I pushed through the long wet grass. Poor Nan, she was wet and frightened.

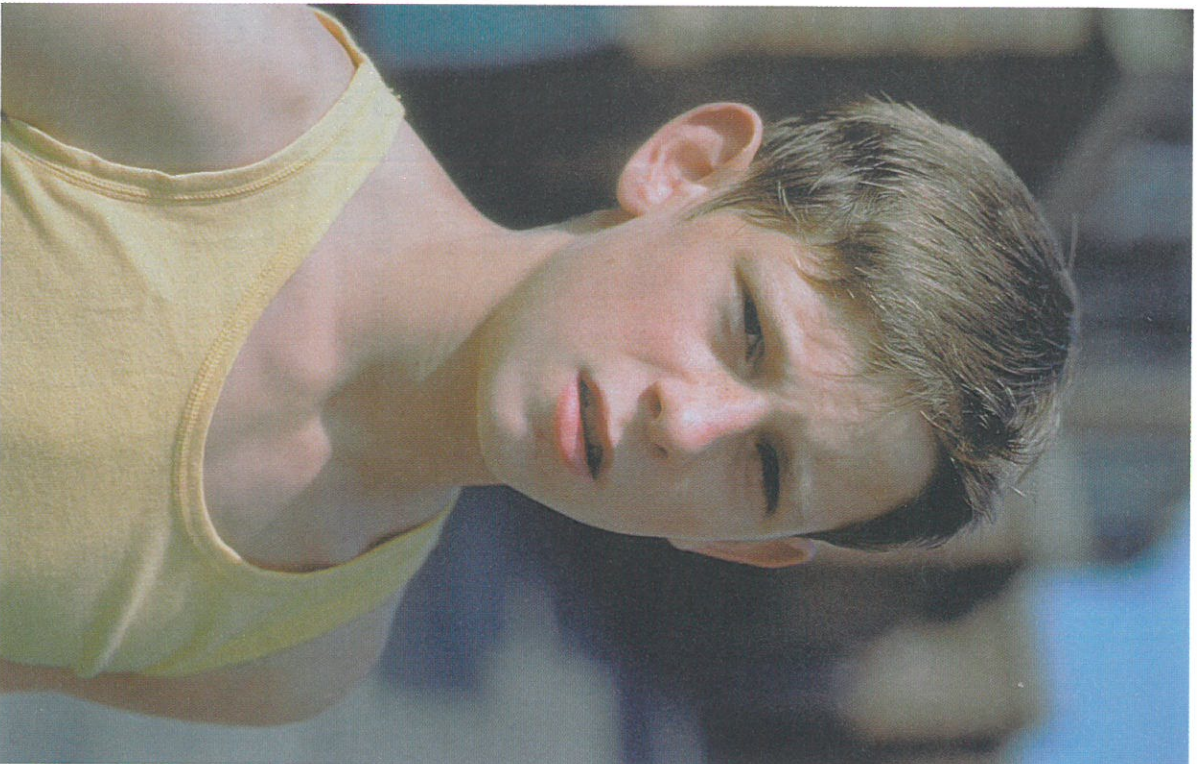
'I don't know where I am,' she said.

'Don't you want your eggs?' I said.

'You're new,' she said.

'Nan, it's Billy, Billy.'

Three vans stopped near the railway bridge and lots of policemen climbed out. They frightened me. Nan looked at them.



Billy Elliott

'What are they?' she said.

'Police, Nan. It's the police.'

'I hate them!' she shouted. She waved her arms at them.

Some of them looked at us, but they didn't come down.

'Have they come for us, Billy?' she whispered. She knows about the police. She knows that they're not on our side.

'Not us, Nan. They're not interested in us.'

'Is it Jackie? Is it Tony?' she asked.

I didn't answer. I took her arm and we walked home.

The next day, I was playing a song on the piano and thinking about Mum. Tony was eating and Dad was washing the dishes. Nan was sitting on her bed, singing.

Mum died two years ago. I don't think anyone remembers her except me. I miss her, I miss her every day. I miss her when I'm walking through the house. I miss her when I'm playing the piano.

I have a letter from my mum. She wrote it for my eighteenth birthday, but I opened it early.

'Dear Billy ...'

Can you hear? Can you hear my mum's voice?

Listen.

'Dear Billy, I didn't see you grow up. I missed you crying and laughing. I missed you shouting. But please know that I was always with you. I always will be. I am very proud of you. I am proud that you are my son. I love you very much.'

I keep the letter in a box under my bed. I read it when nobody is in the room. Tony and I sleep in the same bedroom, and one night I read the letter to him. I wanted him to remember my mum with me, me and him together. But he didn't want to.

'Don't you miss her?' I asked him.

'Oh be quiet,' he said angrily. Then he went to sleep.

I was playing the piano and thinking about Mum. She played the piano too. I can't really play. I'd like piano lessons but we haven't got enough money.

My dad and Tony don't have time to remember Mum. They're too busy on the picket line or down the mine. Fighting – always fighting. Fighting the government, fighting with the bosses. Fighting at home. Fighting me.

They were arguing again that morning.

'We must go, Dad! We'll be late!'

Tony pulled on his boots. But Dad wanted to make the house tidy. He doesn't like leaving Nan alone in the house.

'I have to make your nan's breakfast.'

'Billy can do it. It's time to go!'

'Wait a minute,' Dad said, and went outside. He came back in with some coal. 'We haven't got much coal now,' he said.

'The strike will end soon,' Tony said. 'We'll be back down the mine next month.'

'No we won't,' Dad said.

Tony looked angrily at him. 'You don't want to go on the picket line, do you?' he said. 'You want to stay in bed.'

'Tony ...' Dad began.

'I'm not waiting for you,' Tony said, and walked to the door.

'Tony! Tony, wait for me!' Dad shouted, but Tony was gone.

Dad didn't follow him. He stood and looked at the door. I played another song on the piano.

'Be quiet, Billy!' he shouted at me suddenly.

'Mum didn't mind,' I said.

He came up behind me and closed the piano suddenly. He nearly broke my fingers. Then he ran out of the door after Tony.

'I'll see you later at the club,' he said on the way out.

Oh no! I thought. Today I'm boxing. I hate it when he watches me.

'Listen. I boxed. My dad boxed. You box.' That's my dad. I box because he and his father boxed. Every Saturday morning I put the gloves round my neck and go to the club. Then I try to break someone's head.

Boxing is OK. But I have my own ideas about it and they don't like that. They think boxing is about hitting people hard. They think it's about your hands, but it's not. It's about your feet.

'Don't move!' George, my boxing teacher, shouts. 'Hit him! Hit him! Stop moving! Stop and fight!'

He doesn't understand. The other person gets tired if I dance round them. Then I can hit them. But George can't wait. Nobody can wait.

Chapter 2 Jackie's Story: The Boxing Club

I worry about Billy. I try to be a good father, but every boy needs a mother. And Billy's not an ordinary boy.

We're fighting now, for our future and for our town. It's a fight for my job and for Tony's job – but is it a fight for Billy? I know he's different. Our Billy will never go down the mine and bring up the coal.

Everything has changed. My dad was on strike in the 1930s, but then the miners were important. Everybody needed coal. Coal ran the factories, lit the streets and the houses, and drove ships across the water. Now people don't need coal because they've got oil and gas. And coal from Argentina is cheaper than English coal.

The government doesn't like us. The head of the government, Margaret Thatcher, wants to close the country down. She's already closed half the factories. Now she's closing the mines. At first, I thought we could stop her. Now I'm not sure.

Maybe Tony's right. Maybe I'm old and soft. I've lost almost everything. My lovely wife Sarah is dead. I've only got the boys and the strike. Life is hard, very, very hard. I stay on strike because of Tony. What will he do if the mines close? You can't be a miner without a mine. So here I am, fighting for Tony and for Billy. I've nothing to give them. No job. No mother. No future. Just me.

Every Saturday, I watch Billy box. I miss the beginning of the class because I'm on the picket line. It's hard out there. We watch

the scabs going into the mine in buses. Tony and some of the other young men want to hurt the scabs. They want blood. They shout it sometimes: 'BLOOD! BLOOD! BLOOD!'

I don't agree with them. I don't want to hurt anyone. But I know why Tony's angry. We're fighting for the future, and those scabs are hiding behind the police. They're men that I worked with. They're men that I went to school with. They're my friends – and they're riding into the mine behind the police. We *have* to fight the bosses. We don't want to fight our friends too.

I went to the club on Saturday to watch my boy at his boxing class. I boxed when I was a boy. My dad boxed and Tony boxed too. Now Billy has boxing lessons. I tell him, 'You must fight, boy. If you can't fight, people will hurt you.'

There was a ballet class in the hall. It was full of little girls in pink dresses jumping up and down, up and down.

'Bottoms out!' called the ballet teacher.

Ballet and boxing, in the same place. I laughed. Put the little girls in boxing gloves and the boys in those pink shoes, I thought. That will be funny!

Billy was in the boxing ring with another boy.

'Hit him, Billy!' I shouted. Billy's getting better. He moves his feet well. 'You move well,' I said. 'But hit him too!'

The other boy was taller and stronger than Billy, but he was fat. Billy will win easily, I thought. Then they started to fight ...

What was Billy doing? He was dancing, turning in circles.

'Oh no,' George said. 'Not again. This isn't a tea party, it's a fight. Hit him! Hit him!'

He looked at me and I shook my head.

Billy was dancing round and round the boxing ring. The other boy stood there, watching.

'Watch him, Billy!' I shouted.

Too late. The other boy walked up to Billy and hit him. And there was Billy, on his back.

George was very angry. 'Billy Elliot, you're the worst boxer in this club! Bring me fifty pence for the lesson.'

I couldn't look at Billy. I was so angry. What can I do for that boy? If he can't fight a fat boy, what *can* he do?

Chapter 3 Billy's Story: The Ballet Class

'Hit it! You'll stay here until you do hit it, Billy Elliot.'

I hit the practice bag. I imagined it was George's face.

'Keep your feet on the ground, Elliot! Don't be stupid! Hit it!'

'Bottoms in. Feel the music. And – one and two and three and four. Lift your arms. Feel the music!'

Across the hall, a woman was teaching her ballet class. An old man was playing the piano. One and two and three and four ...

I started hitting to the sound of the music, then I laughed. George won't like this, I thought.

'That's better. Why don't you do that to somebody's head one day?' George took some keys from his pocket and threw them to me. 'Give those to Mrs Wilkinson when you finish. I'll see you next week.'

He went out of the hall. Good. This bag is George's head, I thought. I hit it harder.

I don't like boxing. My friend Michael is right – it's stupid.

'Why do you want to hit people? It's stupid,' he asked.

'You must fight people. If you don't, they'll hit you.'

'I run away,' Michael said.

The music changed.

'And hold,' the teacher said. 'Don't look at me, Susan, look in front of you. Lift your arms up ... and down. Good. Eyes front, Debbie. And five and six ...'

I took off the gloves and walked across the hall. The girls were pretty in their pink dresses, but I felt a bit uncomfortable.

'Miss, the keys ... the keys, Miss!' I said. She didn't look at me. 'Not now,' she said. 'Three, four. And five, and six ...'

The music started again and the girls danced. They were clever. They all lifted their arms at the same time and they turned round. Then they lifted their legs and pointed their feet. It was interesting – but it was easy. I can do that, I thought. I lifted my foot. See? Easy!

'Why don't you try?' a girl said to me.

It was Debbie Wilkinson. She's in my class at school.

'No,' I said. Can you imagine me in a ballet class!

'It's not easy,' she said. 'You can't do it.'

'I can!'

She lifted her leg up and pointed her toes.

'Do that,' she said.

I put my leg out and pointed my foot.

'See?' she said.

It was true. Her foot was more pointed than mine.

'I'm wearing my boots,' I said.

'Your leg's shaking,' she said. She was laughing at me but she was right. Her leg wasn't shaking, but mine was.

My nan wanted to be a dancer. Munn could dance too. Nan

took Munn to ballet lessons when she was a girl. I thought about

Nan and Munn dancing. Not everybody in our family boxes.

I moved with the girls, but it was very difficult. Up and down

and one and two and three and four ...

'Take your boots off!'

'Ow!'

Miss was standing on my foot.

'How big are your feet? Two, three! Boots off! Four, five. And

six and seven.'

Take off my boots? Why? I didn't know, but I took them off.

Then she dropped a big pair of ballet shoes in front of me.

'Put them on,' she said. 'You can't dance in those boots.'

So I put on the shoes. Nobody saw me except the girls. And, do you know something? I think they liked me in their ballet class.

Mrs Wilkinson was a good teacher. We moved up and down, up and down. We pointed our arms in front and our legs behind us and she looked at me.

'Nice straight leg,' she said.

It was easier with the shoes, but not *very* easy. You try it — stand for a minute on one leg with your arms in front of you. You'll see. It's hard.

She didn't say anything. But she thought I was good.

Later, when I was walking home, she stopped her car next to me. Debbie was in the back seat. I didn't know she was Miss's daughter.

'Give me fifty pence,' Miss said.

'Why?'

'For the ballet class. Bring it next week.'

'I have to go to boxing, Miss.'

'But you're no good at boxing,' Debbie said.

'Be quiet, Debbie.' Mrs Wilkinson looked at me. 'Didn't you enjoy the ballet class?'

I didn't say anything.

'OK,' she said and drove away. Debbie made a funny face through the back window.

She was right — I enjoyed the class. I ran and jumped down the road. The music filled my head. Next day, every part of my body hurt.

I thought about ballet every day. One and two and up and down. It's interesting, but it's stupid too. My dad and Tony will laugh at me. You can't dance in a coal mine.

Not everyone thinks ballet is stupid. Some of the girls say I was brave. But then they told the boys and the boys laughed at me. It's not important. The boys at school always laugh at me.



I ran and jumped down the road.

One day, Debbie followed me home after school.

'Lots of boys dance ballet,' she said.

'Only gay boys,' I told her.

'Not all of them are gay,' she said.

We were at the top of the hill. We could see the mine with a lot of miners and policemen around it. There were thousands of people. A police van drove past us and I saw the faces of the police inside.

'I go boxing on Saturdays,' I said.

'OK,' she said, and turned away.

She lives on the other side of the town. Big houses, big gardens, posh people.

She walked away. I looked down at the mine where the miners were shouting at the police. It was a war.

Earlier today, I told Michael about the ballet and showed him some of the moves. All the boys were running across the school field during the sports lesson. Michael and I hate running, so we went down to the railway line. We hide there sometimes. We sat and talked for ten minutes, then I showed him some ballet moves.

'Put your leg out,' I said. 'Arm out, one, two!'

He looked at me and smiled.

'Eyes to the front,' I told him.

I showed him all the moves. Do you know something? I'm much better than him.

'You've had lessons,' he said.

'One lesson,' I told him.

'Will you go to the class again?'

'No.'

'But you're good at ballet.'

'It's for girls.'

'I don't think so,' Michael said. 'You look ... like a man. Strong.' When next Saturday came, Dad and Tony went to the picket line. I took my fifty pence and gloves and went to the hall. But when I got

there, I heard George. He was shouting. I didn't want to go into the boxing class. Michael's right, boxing is stupid. I hid in the changing room until the other boys left. Then I went to the ballet class.

At first the class was boring. I didn't know the ballet moves. The girls danced on the left of the room and I danced on the right.

'What are you doing?' Miss asked.

'I don't know what to do, Miss.'

'Follow the others. Go to the back of the room and watch – two, three, one two three ...'

I tried but it wasn't much fun. I wanted to leave. Then Miss showed me the spin.

I've seen people spin on TV. They move very fast, then they suddenly stop. If you don't do it well, you fall on your back. I wasn't any good at the spin.

'Billy, you're not a girl! Try harder! Spin!'

I did – and I fell onto the floor. The girls looked at me, but they didn't laugh. People don't laugh in Miss's class.

'Do it again at home,' she said.

Then we did some slower ballet moves. That was easier.

At the end of the class I was very tired, but I felt good.

'I can do that spin,' I thought.

Debbie was waiting for me. 'The spin's hard,' she said. She practised it in front of me.

'I'm faster than you,' I told her.

'You can't do it,' she laughed.

I stood up. I did a slow spin first and it was good. But when I turned faster, I fell again.

Mrs Wilkinson walked across the room to us.

'Go away,' she said to Debbie.

Debbie walked away and Miss looked down at me.

'Are you going to come to the class next week?'

'I don't know. I feel stupid,' I said.

'Then give me your ballet shoes,'
I stopped. I didn't like ballet much. But that spin – I wanted to do it.

'No, it's OK,' I said.

'Good,' she said.

She walked away. She didn't say goodbye.

I danced through the streets to my home. Ballet was different and exciting. Then suddenly, I was in the kitchen with the ballet shoes in my hand and the boxing gloves around my neck. What am I doing? I thought. Dad will kill me if he sees these shoes.

Nan was waiting for me.

'Oh, ballet shoes,' she said. 'I was a dancer.'

'Don't tell anybody, Nan,' I said.

Then I ran upstairs and hid the shoes.

Chapter 4 Jackie's Story: The Miners' Strike

Something strange is happening. Billy is my son and I love him. But he's different from other boys and he does strange things. When he was ten, he sat in a box all day. Then it was football. He wasn't very good at the game, but he practised all the time. Now he's spinning round in circles, in the kitchen, in the hall, in his bedroom. He holds out his arms and he spins and he falls on the floor. Then he starts again.

'What are you doing?' Tony asked him.

'I'm practising a spin. It's a boxing move,' he said.

I've never seen that boxing move before!

'Stop it!' I shouted at him, but he didn't.

Every day, he stood with his arms out and tried again. Then one day I came home from the shop and he was outside the house. He was looking at the wall, arms out – then he spun round two or three times. He went really fast.

'Yes! Yes, yes, I did it, I did it!'

He was very excited and I smiled.

'You did it,' I said.

He jumped. 'Dad, you frightened me! I didn't see you.'

'Have you tried this move at the boxing club?'

'No, not yet. I want to get it right every time.'

'Did George teach you this spin, Billy? What does he think about it?'

'George? No. He doesn't say anything.'

'You'll surprise him next Saturday.'

Billy didn't say anything, but he looked at the ground.

A few days later, he started to jump. High, big, long jumps with his hands over his head. What's he doing? Does he think he's a ballet dancer?

'Is that another boxing move?' I asked.

'Yes.'

I don't understand. Is George teaching him these strange moves? When the fat boy knocked Billy down, I stopped going to the club. I have too many problems. I haven't got time to watch Billy at the boxing club. It's the fourth month of the strike and I haven't got any money. The strike won't end soon. And one day the mine will close down.

Tony is angry. I understand why he's angry. But he's crazy too and he's looking for a fight. I'm afraid that he's going to do something stupid.

We were in the supermarket yesterday and we saw Gary Stewart. He had a bag full of food.

'Look at him,' Tony said. Tony and Gary went to school together. They were friends before the strike.

'Be careful,' I whispered.

One day Tony will hit somebody and the police will throw him in prison.

'Are you OK, scab?' called Tony. We knew Gary was a scab. Strikers

can't buy big bags of food. 'Have you got enough food? What are you doing? We can't win this strike if our people cross the picket line.'

'We won't win the strike, my friend,' Gary said.

'I'm not your friend. Not now. You and the other scabs – you'll make us lose!' Tony shouted. He was getting more and more angry.

Gary threw down his bag and walked away.

Is Tony going to follow him? I thought. Will he hit him? But Tony didn't move. He'll hit somebody soon. I hope it's not a policeman.

On Friday morning the picket line was bigger. There are a lot of new pickets – students, teachers on holiday, people from across the world. And half the policemen in Great Britain are standing between the pickets and the scabs.

On Friday, the pickets were throwing eggs and stones. I was standing next to George, holding his arm. The crowd pushed forward and the police pushed us back.

'Listen Jackie,' George said. 'Don't worry about the fifty pence. I don't need it. The money isn't important.'

'What are you talking about?' I asked.

'The boxing. I haven't seen Billy for months.'

'What? But he's always practising.' I didn't tell him about the spins and the jumps.

'Send him to my house and I'll talk to him,' George said.

Then the police pushed forward again. Someone threw a rock into the side of a bus full of scabs.

'SCAB! SCAB! SCAB!'

We pushed forward hard and I was lifted almost off my feet. You didn't want to fall down in the middle of this.

Was Billy keeping the fifty pences? I'm going to kill him, I thought.

Next morning, Billy ran quickly downstairs. He was hiding something under his coat.

'Billy! Billy!' I shouted but he ran out of the house.
What's he doing now? I thought.

Chapter 5 Billy's Story: Mrs Wilkinson's Plan

I jump higher than all the little girls in the class, and I feel good. Miss says I'm good. She spends half the lesson with me.

'Is it our turn now?' the girls ask. 'You're always with Billy.'

'Be quiet, Debbie. I'm busy.'

I love the class. I think about it all the time. I practise a lot and I'm stronger now. I can dance for hours.

Michael was worried. 'Your dad will find out about the ballet classes,' he said. 'What will you do?'

But I didn't want to think about Dad. Just this week, just one more lesson, I thought.

Then Dad walked into the ballet class. I was lifting my leg. I looked up and Dad was standing in the door. I stopped. He's going to kill me, I thought.

Miss was still teaching. 'Up two three. Like a princess, Debbie. One two three ... why aren't you dancing?' she asked me.

The music stopped and she saw Dad. His face was red.

'You! Out! Now!' he shouted at me.

I watched Miss out of the corner of my eye. She's going to fight him, I thought. I don't want a fight.

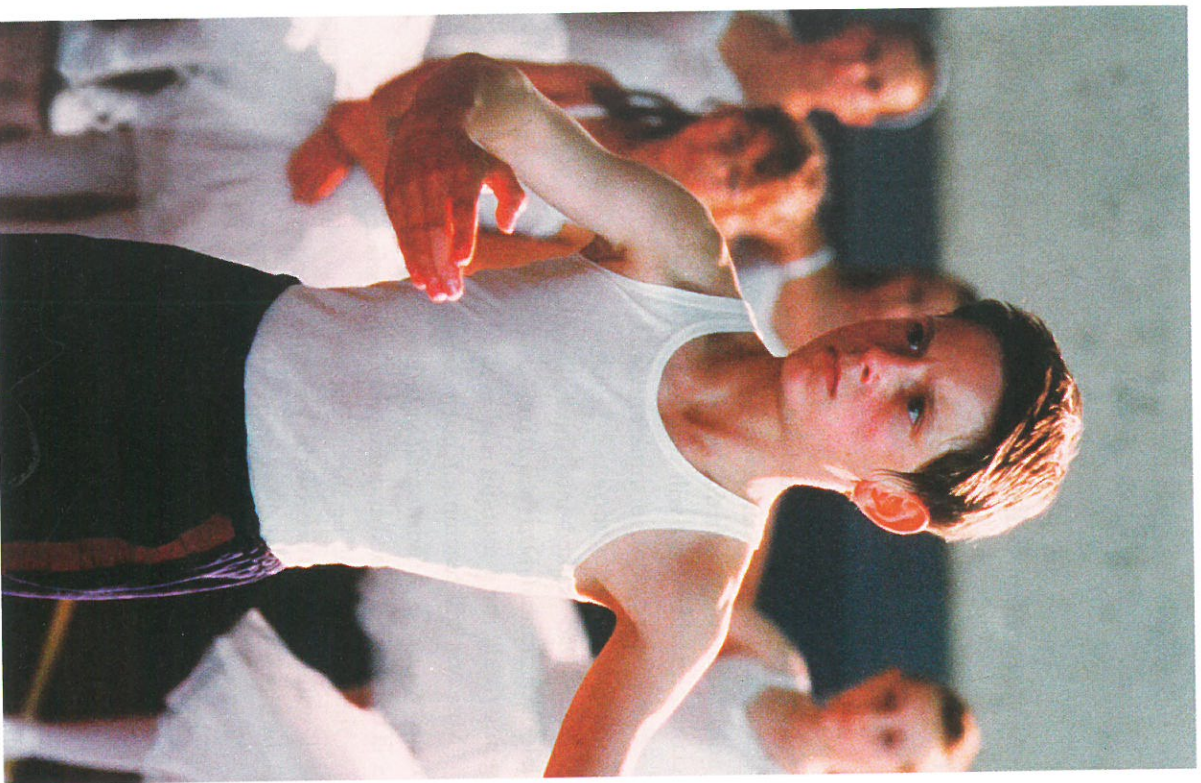
'Please, Miss. Don't,' I whispered.

Then I went out of the hall. I wanted to hide. Dad followed me out. He took my arm and pulled me home. He didn't say anything and I was very frightened.

In the kitchen he pointed at a chair next to the table, then he sat down opposite me. He didn't speak for a long time.

'Ballet,' he said finally.

'What's wrong with ballet?' I said. 'It's OK.'



I love the class. I think about it all the time.

'How can it be OK?'

I was frightened. He was angry and his face was white now.

'I went to ballet classes,' Nan said.

She was sitting near the window, watching us.

'It's OK for your nan. For girls, Billy, not for boys. Boys play football or they box.'

'What's wrong with dancing?' I asked again.

But I knew. Ballet isn't for boys and strong, hard men. Ballet isn't for miners who strike for their friends. People in our town don't dance ballet. Well, maybe I don't want to be a miner. Maybe I'm different.

'Forget about ballet, son, and forget about boxing,' Dad said.

'I've worked hard for those fifty pences. You can stay at home with Nan.'

'I wanted to be a dancer,' Nan said.

'Be quiet!' Dad shouted at her.

I jumped up.

'I hate you!' I screamed at him.

Then I ran out of the room. He shouted at me, but I didn't stop. Tears were running down my face. I want to dance, I thought. It's the only thing I can do well. And Dad wants to stop me.

I ran down to the beach. It was a windy day. I listened to the sea and I felt calmer. I was on the posh side of town now. Rich people live there – people who are better than us. Miss lives there.

I went to her house and knocked on the door. The door opened and Miss stood in front of me.

'Oh, it's you,' she said.

I said, 'He doesn't know I'm here. He'll kill me.'

'Has he stopped you coming to classes?'

'He doesn't understand, Miss,' I said.

I didn't want to say anything bad about my dad to her. She didn't like him – but he *was* my dad.

She turned back into the house. 'Debbie!' she shouted. 'It's Billy.'

Come and talk to him.'

I followed her into the sitting room and sat in a chair. Debbie came in and sat next to me. Her dad was sitting in another chair, drinking beer.

'So you're the ballet dancer,' he said. 'I've heard about you. Your dad works down the mine, doesn't he?'

'Yes.'

'Is he on strike?'

'Of course.'

'The strike will end soon. The miners can't win. The mines don't make any money, so they'll close.' He looked at me angrily.

'Tom, be quiet!' said Mrs Wilkinson.

Why is he so angry? I thought. He isn't on strike.

'What's your job, Mr Wilkinson?' I asked.

'He lost his job,' Debbie said. 'The company doesn't need him.'

'Did you strike to save your job?' I said.

Mr Wilkinson's face went red, but he didn't say another word.

I ate dinner at the Wilkinsons' house. Later, up in Debbie's room, she told me about her mum and dad.

'My dad drinks too much and he has girlfriends. He and Mum aren't happy,' she said. 'Do you miss your mum?'

I didn't want to talk about my mum. I don't think about her a lot. Sometimes I forget she's dead. I think she's at the shops, or in the other room with Nan. But she never comes back.

Debbie moved closer to me on the bed and I hit her. I didn't hit her hard. She's only a girl. We were fighting and playing. Suddenly I touched her on her chest and I felt strange. She touched my face. It was nice but ...

I stood up.

I heard Miss's voice. 'Debbie, Billy has to go home. I'll take him in the car,' she called up the stairs.

'I'll see you later,' I said to Debbie.

'Bye, Billy.'

She sat on the bed and didn't look at me.

Miss took me to the street next to my home and we sat in the car.

'I was thinking about the auditions for the Royal Ballet School,' she said.

'You're a bit old for the auditions, Miss,' I said.

She laughed. 'Not me, Billy. You. There are auditions in Newcastle.'

Ballet school? Me? Ballet is only a game, isn't it?

'Can I do ballet as a job, Miss?'

'Of course you can.'

'Dad won't let me,' I told her.

'I'll talk to him.'

'No!' I almost jumped out of the seat. 'Miss! Don't!'

She was quiet for a minute, then she spoke again. 'I'll teach you.'

'I haven't got any money. And Dad wants me to box.'

'I'm not doing it for the money. This is important, Billy!' She spoke angrily.

'All right, all right. Keep your hair on!' I said. She looked at me and we both laughed.

Can I do this? I thought. Dance in secret? Be a ballet dancer? I'm a boy ... I *can* do this, I thought. I *can* dance. I smiled at her and she smiled back at me.

'I'll see you on Monday,' she said. 'Six o'clock at the hall.'

I didn't say yes or no. I just opened the car door and got out.

'And bring something with you,' she continued. 'Something that's important to you. It will give us ideas for the dance.'

'What dance?'

'Your audition dance, stupid.'

I shut the car door and she drove away. What am I doing, I asked myself.

Chapter 6 Michael's Story: My Best Friend Billy

Somebody knocked at the door and I looked out of the bedroom window. I was wearing a purple dress, my mum's red shoes and my sister's jacket.

I won't go to the door, I thought. Then I saw Billy standing outside. He can't say anything. He's a ballet dancer! I ran downstairs and opened the door. Billy pushed me inside.

'Somebody will see you!' he said. 'What are you doing?'

'Nothing,' I said.

'Whose dress is that?'

'My sister's. Are you coming upstairs?'

He followed me up to my mum's bedroom.

'Did your sister give that dress to you?' Billy asked.

'She doesn't know. It's OK – it's only a bit of fun. You dance around in a ballet dress and I wear my sister's clothes.'

'I don't wear a ballet dress, I wear my sports clothes. I dance, but I'm not gay.'

'I wear my sister's clothes, but I'm not gay,' I said.

I don't *think* I'm gay. I like wearing my sister's clothes. It's fun, nothing more. But ... I like Billy. I like to watch him dance. *Am* I gay?

I started to put on my mum's lipstick.

'What are you doing now?' Billy asked.

'Playing.' I smiled at him in the mirror and he smiled back at me.

'Come here, you.'

I jumped up and pushed him onto the bed. I put some lipstick on him. He looked good. He has nice lips.

Billy stood up, looked in the mirror and kissed it. There was the shape of his lips on the glass.

'Girls' and boys' lips are the same shape,' I told him.

I looked at the kiss. I wanted to kiss it.

'Will we get into trouble?' Billy asked.

'No. My dad wears women's clothes all the time.'

Well, not *all* the time. But he wears my mum's clothes when the house is empty.

Billy looked at himself in the mirror.

'Michael,' he said, 'in two weeks I'm going to an audition for ballet school in Newcastle.'

'Ballet school in Newcastle?'

'The school's in London,' Billy said.

'Can't you be a ballet dancer here?'

'Don't be stupid!'

When he started the ballet class, Billy asked me: 'Why don't you dance too?'

'No,' I said. 'The other boys at school will laugh at us.'

Billy wasn't frightened of a fight, but I am. I want to be the same as the other boys, but I'm not. My dad says, 'Be proud that you're different.' But up here in Everington it's hard to be different. The other boys and girls hate you.

But Billy's a good friend, and he's different too. And now he wants to be a ballet dancer in London.

'What does your dad say?' I asked.

'He doesn't know.'

'Are you going to tell him?'

'No. He'll be angry.'

I went to the cupboard and looked at the dresses. I didn't look at Billy. I was unhappy. I didn't want him to leave me. Who will I talk to when Billy goes away?

I think Billy understood.

'I'll show you,' he said. He pushed back a chair and started to dance. 'You do it too. Lift your legs.'

He showed me the ballet moves and I copied him. He closed his eyes and he forgot about me and my dress. He was lost in his own little world. Then he jumped up and did a spin.

'Wow,' I said, and he smiled.

'That's dancing,' he said.

Chapter 7 Billy's Story: Dad and Tony's Fight

There were only two weeks until the audition and we worked hard. Miss told me to find something personal for my dance. I took my mum's letter and a music cassette that she liked.

I met Miss at the club on Monday. She picked up Mum's letter and read it. At the end, she was crying.

'She was a very special woman, Billy,' she said.

'No, she was just my mum,' I said.

She asked me questions about Mum. What made her happy?

What made her sad?

'Mum liked music,' I said. 'She played the piano.'

I put the cassette on and played the loud, fast music.

'Did your mum like this song?' Miss asked. 'Then this is the music for our dance.'

We had fun. We jumped and ran round in circles. We were laughing and playing and dancing.

'Dance for your mum, Billy,' Miss said. 'At the end, do the biggest, fastest, highest spin. Imagine that she's watching you.'

Miss is clever. It worked. I thought about Mum and I danced.



Things were bad at home. The town was full of police and miners from other towns.

'We're going to destroy the government!' Tony said.

But we had no money. People broke up their furniture and burned it on the fire. We didn't have much food. I was getting tired of eating bread. They were keeping us hungry.

The government used the police to frighten us. The police on horseback were the worst. The horses were so big and the policemen carried long sticks. They rode up behind the pickets and hit them on their backs and heads. There was blood then. I saw it with my own eyes.

Tony and I were both arguing with Dad. I was angry because I couldn't dance. Tony was angry because Dad was weak. He was always shouting at him. I felt sorry for Dad, but Tony was right. Dad was a silly old man, and he couldn't move out of the past.

A week before the audition, I woke up in the middle of the night. Tony was getting out of bed.

'What are you doing? What time is it?' I asked.

'Be quiet,' he told me. 'Go back to sleep.'

I looked at the clock – it was four o'clock in the morning. He walked quietly out of the bedroom. A few minutes later, the shouting started downstairs. I got up to have a look.

Dad was standing in front of the back door. Tony was in front of him, white as a sheet. He had a big hammer in his hand.

'Get out of my way. Open the door,' Tony said. He was very angry.

'Put the hammer down.'

'Get out of my way!'

Tony suddenly ran up to Dad and waved the hammer. Is he going to hit him? I thought.

'No!' I shouted, but they didn't even look at me.

'You don't want to fight,' Tony shouted. 'That's your problem. You're finished, aren't you? Mum died and now you're a stupid old man. Get out of my way!'

He tried to push Dad away from the door, but Dad suddenly hit Tony on the side of the face. Tony fell down onto the floor.

'Stop it! Stop it!' I screamed.

Dad looked at me. His face was white and his eyes were wet with tears.

'What are *you* looking at?' he shouted.

He was very angry and I was frightened. Tony stood up. He pushed Dad away and ran out of the door.



'You're not trying, Billy! Do it again!'

Miss was shouting at me. I was dancing but thinking about Dad and Tony.

'I can't!'

'Do it again! Do it again, now!'

Her face was close to mine.

'No!'

'What?' She stepped back. 'What did you say?'

'No, I said again.'

I hated her because she was shouting at me. I ran into the changing room. She thought ballet was so important – but it wasn't! I thought about the fight again. That hammer. Tony almost hit my dad with a hammer! And Dad, hitting Tony in the face. I wanted my mum. She could stop Dad and Tony fighting, I thought. When she died everything went wrong.

The door to the changing room opened.

'Billy? I know you're here,' Miss said. 'I'm sorry.'

Sorry, she says. What good is that? I'm finished with her. I jumped out at her.

'It's OK for you. You're not going to the audition.'

'I know,' she said.

She looked frightened. I was bigger than her.

'You don't know anything,' I said. 'You want me to dance. Why? Because people think you're a good teacher. You don't have a real dancing school, just a group of children in this old hall. You shout at me because your life's no good ...'

She hit me hard across the face. It hurt and I was surprised. I put my hand up to my face. Then she held her arms out to me.

'Billy, love,' she said.

I wanted to run out of the door. But ... I wanted to dance too. It was the best thing in my life. I couldn't leave. I started to cry. Miss took another step towards me and I put my head on her shoulder.

'I'm sorry, Billy,' she said.

I cried and cried for about five minutes.

'OK,' she said. 'Have you finished crying?'

'Yes, miss. Sorry,' I said.

She pushed up my head and dried my tears on my T-shirt.

'Good boy,' she said. 'We'll start dancing again.'

Do you know something? She never asked, 'Why are you crying?' Dancing was the one good thing in my life. I wasn't clever or popular at school, but I could dance.

The audition was getting closer and I was nervous. What will I do if I get into ballet school? I thought. Dad will kill me. He won't give me permission to live in London. What's ballet school going to cost? But I won't get in, so Dad won't know about the audition ...

'I won't get in,' I said to Miss.

'Yes you will, Billy Elliot. You'll be the best dancer at the audition.'

Who can I talk to? I thought. I miss my mum. But she's not here, she's dead. She can't hear anything and she can't tell me anything.

Then something happened. On the Thursday before the audition, Miss and I couldn't use the hall. We drove to a school and used its hall. On the way home in the car, I played a music cassette. The music wasn't modern, but I liked it. It was beautiful.

'It's good, isn't it?' I said. 'What is it? I've heard it before.'

'It's ballet music,' Miss said. 'Now, get out of the car. It's time for you to go home.'

It was dark and cold in the house. There was no more coal to make a fire. Dad and Tony were out. Nan was in and I went into her room and said hello to her. She didn't know me – it was one of her bad days.

I went back into the kitchen and took some milk out of the fridge.

'Hello, son.'

I turned around. It was Mumm. She was drying a dish with a cloth. 'What have I told you, Billy?' she said. 'Don't drink out of the milk bottle.'

'Sorry, Mumm,' I said.

I took a glass and poured some milk into it. Then I put the bottle on top of the fridge.

'Put the bottle inside the fridge,' she said.

I picked up the bottle and opened the fridge door. Then I thought, 'That was Mumm. She was here. The dish and the cloth were on the table. I touched them and they were warm. Her hands touched them, I thought. I wasn't frightened.'

The door opened and Nan came in. She walked to the cupboard.

'It's in here,' she said.

'What is, Nan?'

'The record! She took a record out of the cupboard. She went into the sitting room and put the record on the record player. 'Listen,' she said.

The music started. It's the same music, I thought, the music from Miss's car. That's why I knew it. It was one of Mumm's old records.

'Did you see her too, Nan?' I asked.

But Nan was dancing around the room. I held her arms and we did some ballet moves together. She was slow, but she was good.

Then the door opened quickly. Tony was standing there with Dad behind him.

'You're using my record player,' Tony said.

'It's not yours, it's Mumm's,' I shouted.

Tony went to the record player and turned it off.

'Be careful,' Dad shouted at Tony. 'Don't break the record!'

He took it away from Tony and cleaned it carefully. Then he turned to me.

'Who told you to play this?'

'Sorry,' I whispered.

Dad walked out of the room and shut the door noisily. Dad

and Tony are always making a noise in the house – I hate it. But it wasn't important. You see, now I understood. Mumm wanted me to dance in the audition. It wasn't a stupid dream. Maybe I will get into the ballet school, I thought.

The audition was on Saturday at half past ten. I wanted to succeed – for me and for Mumm. On Friday, I went for the final practice and I danced perfectly. Nobody can stop me, I thought.

Then the trouble started.

Chapter 8 Tony's Story: Trouble with the Police

It was me. I attacked the police horse.

Some of the police are very unkind. One policeman is really bad. His horse kicks us when we're on the picket line. He doesn't stop it. So we decided to fight him.

It was Friday afternoon and I was in the town centre with my friends. There was a small crowd of people around the policeman and his horse. I had some petrol in a bottle and I threw it on the horse's tail. Then I lit a match.

WHOOOMPH! The horse was frightened and the policeman nearly fell off its back. Somebody hit the horse and it spun round. The policeman couldn't stop it.

We were laughing and then we heard horses behind us. A lot more police arrived and we started to run.

We ran up the street and met more policemen. They were waiting for us and they were very, very angry. My friend, Simon James, fell down and the policemen hit him with their sticks.

I ran through Jeff and Alice Thomson's house and into the street at the back. It was washing day and the street was full of washing lines. There were wet clothes and sheets hanging from them. I was near my house, but the police were everywhere.

I saw Billy standing on a wall. He was shouting something.