

Huntley Haverstock

The Reluctant Spy

By Freddy King

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Chapter 1

Freddy Goodchild was born in the north eastern industrial town of Middlesbrough, in the middle of the Second World War. He was an only child. His world was Park Lane and the surrounding streets and near a park opened and championed by Prince Albert husband of Queen Victoria. The houses were built in the nineteenth century for workers in the local industries. At his young age everything seemed vast including the park which had areas where places appeared mysterious. From his bedroom window he could see over the high wall opposite his house into the maternity hospital. The gardens were beautifully kept by the resident gardener and beyond he could see the trees and open spaces of Albert Park. He spend many happy hours playing with the local boys on the hill called Bell's Hill in the park, probably named after the bell that had been placed at the top of the hill.

He was quite small for his age but he was very popular with the local children. His home was nearly always deserted as his family members were frequently absent, which is why he spent so much time away from his house. In those times it was not

unusual for children to be left alone as very few came to mishap. The house was an old, rented, Victorian, corner, town house built during the early establishment of the industrial environment in the North East of England. The Steel Works were a major employer in Middlesbrough. The property was a 'two up, two down' building but with a totally abandoned second floor that at some time had been a bathroom and a bedroom that was under the sloping roof of the house but was now in a sad state of repair. The upper house had been abandoned for some time and was just bare dusty boards on the floor and no furniture of any sort.

At the junction outside of the house was a large re-enforced concrete community bomb shelter and in the front garden was an Anderson bomb shelter. As well as the bomb shelters the house and back yard were excellent places to play without interruption or observation from adult intervention. His father was never known by him and the mother never lived down the shame of an unmarried pregnancy but the shame was purely in his mother's mind. Many of the local girls had been left alone with a child for a variety of reasons. War time was like that.

Without a father and a mother who would not speak of any father or any mentor from family or

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friends, he grew up self reliant and street wise. The home was only a place to sleep or play when empty and his education was acquired from his peer group and the related groups of down town urchins. The war left the town scarred through the frequent attempts by the German air force to bomb the steel and chemical works that provided the main employment and income for the town. The industry provided a massive contribution to the British war effort. All the metal garden gates and railings had been smelted down for arms and bullets at the local iron and steel works. The bomb damage to the local area was a perfect play ground for the youngsters. Even the town centre had been heavily bombed and many of the main stores were just open cellars after the rubble had been cleared.

The air raid shelters were used as dens and the bombed houses were great for hide and seek. Freddy Goodchild, as a very young child, spent his days in the local nursery where many of his happier memories were located. His mother earned a meager living as a 'Clippy' on the buses. The varied shifts of the work pattern meant that his mother was very rarely at home for significant periods of time. When she was at home the number of 'uncles' that visited the house were beyond the understanding of young Freddy but the gifts that he received from uncles,

given to 'go and play', were very welcome and Freddy was only too pleased to oblige. One 'uncle Freddy' gave him a heavy overcoat and in the pocket was a half crown. In those days half a crown was a fortune. On that occasion he was, of course, told to leave the house and go and show all of his friends his new coat. He was surprised at the number of family members that came to visit and he was surprised at the large family to which he appeared to be a part. Strangely he never saw the associated Aunties.

His time at nursery school was a joy for him. Nurse Pallister was one of the nursery staff and she became a substitute mother figure for him. The nursery was located at the end of Park Lane through the only gate in the high wall that stretched the length of the lane. It was a very private and beautifully appointed nursey for children from all backgrounds but restricted to only twenty in number. Those were his memorable happy days of that time of his life. In later years he frequently visited the elderly Nurse Pallister who was always very interested in Freddy's activities and progress.

Freddy left the nursery school and moved on to the local primary school at Victoria Road. and his education on the subject of girls blossomed. The school was built by the Victorians and it was a solid

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old building with a playground within high brick walls. The upper school was privileged with a steel posted fence that gave a view through the bars to Victoria Road and the outside world. The school rooms had windows well above the height of any occupant in the building, ensuring that there was no distraction by the outside world. Celia was just one of the attractive girls who seemed fascinated by the difference between the sexes and Freddy learned that his genitals were not just for physical comfort. Celia seemed to get great pleasure from handling Freddy's parts under the desk whilst the teacher attempted to impart knowledge at the blackboard. This activity did, in fact, cause some distraction from the teaching. Billy went to school with Freddy and they frequently met at Billy's house. The house was about fifty yards and around the corner from Freddy's house in Granville Road.

His parents like Freddy's were always working until late at one of the local hostelrys. They worked at the Westminster Pub on Parliament Road and Billy had the run of the house just about every evening. His older brothers had girl friends around on a regular basis, all in party mood and Celia was a guest of Freddy's on many occasions. That was the time that Freddy realized what was happening at his house after hearing and seeing the upstairs activities and the

knowledge made him feel even more isolated.

When his mother married, it was to a very new 'uncle' called Peter who was a bus driver at the bus depot where she worked. Peter was a dour soul and he had a very limited sense of humour, I suppose that one could call him a typical simple yorkshireman, simple being the operative word. Peter was from a quite large family with relations all over the County of Yorkshire. His uncle Jack was the head reader at the Yorkshire Post newspaper. Jack lived directly opposite the Headingley cricket ground and matches could be seen and followed from the upstairs front room. In his teenage years many a happy time was spent there watching Yorkshire cricketers take on the best teams in the country.

The wedding was paid for by the groom's parents and they insisted on a church wedding. It was all very grand but Freddy was not invited. He was an embarrassment for his mother as she was being wed in white. This fact was vehemently referred to by Freddy's grandmother to all persons that she encountered. It was only years later that Freddy found out that his grandmother had never been married. The wedding was obviously not a love match as the number of visiting uncles did not diminish and there was obvious resentment from

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Peter towards another man's child in his marriage. Arguments frequently occurred at home and Freddy's parents did not talk to each other for weeks on end. They communicated through terse notes left for each other to find. The atmosphere at home was quite toxic for a lot of the time. Freddy became the ball to be kicked to and fro during the frantic discussions.

Freddy spent most of his time outside of the home playing in bomb damaged buildings and the Anderson and Communal air raid shelters that still remained after the war. They were usually in poor condition, with a foot of water in the bases of the Anderson shelters and varied refuse left after the many activities that occurred in the Communal shelters. Life changed radically when they left his grandfather's rented house in Park Lane and moved into a brand new house on a council estate at Beechwood.

The house was on the south side of the estate and facing open countryside. The fields, trees and streams were a revelation to Freddy. He had never seen greenery outside of the local park which, to him, was real countryside, as it was surrounded by railings, even though it was sternly patrolled by a very grumpy and intolerant Park Keeper. The

window from his bedroom gave views, not of high walls and fences but of distant hills and farm lands, cows, sheep and horses. The horses astounded him. He had seen the local coal man on his cart delivering his loads of coal but the horses from his window were sleek, powerful animals which were totally different from the heavy, tired, lumbering beasts of burden that he was used to seeing. The Lamp Lighter no longer came round the roads riding his bicycle with his long pole to turn on the gas and light the gas filament with the flame at the end of his pole. The electric lights came on as if by magic. It was a wild and massive new playground which afforded every opportunity to spend lots of time away from the house and the discord atmosphere in there.