

**Pink Task:** While you are reading, make a note of the key events that happen between William and his Mum. How does she treat him? Is she excited to see him? What does she say to him? How does he feel?

### **Extract from Goodnight Mister Tom, Chapter 15: Home**

*William has travelled on the train back to London to visit his mother because she is unwell. He has just arrived at the station and is looking for his mum.*

"Mum!" he cried. "Mum!"

"Go away," she said sternly. "You won't get no money from me."

"Mum" he repeated, "it's me."

She glanced down and was about to tell him to clear off when she recognized him. Yes. It was Willie, but he had altered so much. She had been looking for a thin little boy dressed in grey. Here stood an upright, well-fleshed boy in sturdy ankle boots, thick woollen socks, a green rolled-top jersey and a navy-blue coat and balaclava. His hair stuck out in a shiny mass above his forehead and his cheeks were round and pink. It was a great shock to her.

"I'm awfully pleased to see you, Mum. I've such a lot to tell you and there's me pictures, like."

She was startled at his peculiar mixture of accents. She had expected him to be more subservient, but even his voice sounded louder.

"I'm sorry," she said. "I'm not very well, you see, and I'm a bit tired. I wasn't expectin' such a change in you."

Willie was puzzled.

He thought that it was his mother who had changed. He had learned new things, that was true, but he was still him. He studied her face. She was very pale, almost yellow in colour, and her lips were so blue that it seemed as if every ounce of blood had been drained from them. The lines by her thin mouth curved downwards. He glanced at her body. She was wearing a long black coat, fawn stockings and smart lace-up heeled shoes. A small shopping bag was now leaning against her leg.

He touched her arm gently. "I'll carry that for you, Mum," he said, picking it up.

She spun round and gave his hand a sharp slap. "I'll tell you what I wants when I wants, and you know I don't approve of touching."

"Sorry," he muttered.

They stood silently and awkwardly as the large noisy station roared around them. Willie felt his heart sinking, and the spark of hope that he had held was fast dissolving. He remembered how kind and jolly Mrs. Fletcher was. He stopped. Mister Tom had said that they would feel awkward at first and that it would take time to get used to each other.

Mrs. Beech, meanwhile, surveyed her small son, her mind racing. She'd be lenient with him for the moment. After all, it was his first evening back and he had a lot to learn before accepting his manly responsibilities.

"Let's go for a cup of tea," she said at last. "You can take my bag."

"Thanks, Mum." And he smiled. She stepped sharply backwards, horrified. She couldn't remember ever having seen him smile before. She had hoped that he had remained a serious child. The smile frightened her. It threatened her authority. She swallowed her feelings and stepped forward again, handing him her bag.

Everything was going to be fine, thought Willie. He followed her down a tiny back alley to a small cafe. They sat near the door.

"You look more filled out," said his mother. "Fed you well, did he, that Mr. Oakley?"

Willie sipped his tea. It wasn't as good as Mister Tom's, but it was hot and that was what mattered. "Yes, he did."

She pointed to his rucksack on the floor. "Where'd you get that from?"

"Mister Tom."

"Oh, and who's he?"

"Mr. Oakley. He gave it me to carry the presents."

One of her hands was outstretched across the table. He went to touch it but quickly changed his mind.

"There's a present for you too."

"I don't need charity, thank you," she said, pursing her lips. "You know that."

"It ent charity. It's for you gettin' well. Mrs. Thatcher made you some bed socks. Pink they are. Real soft. And Lucy's mum and dad put in eggs and butter."

"Butter?"

"Yeh. And Mrs. Fletcher made a fruit cake. She ses she knows you might not feel like eatin' it now but it'll keep for when you do." He was talking an awful lot, she thought. She'd never seen him like this before. Too cheeky by far. She'd soon discipline it out of him.

"And Aunt Nance, Mrs. Little, has sent a bottle of tonic wine."

Mrs. Beech turned puce. "Wine!" she said angrily. She checked herself and lowered her voice. "Wine!" she repeated.

"Haven't I told you about the evils of drink? Have you been drinkin then? Who is this debauched woman?"

"It ent like what you buy in a pub, Mum. I asked. She ses it's got iron in it. It'll help you git your strength back. Mr. Little's a real doctor, Mum, and she's his wife."

"What kind of doctor?" she asked suspiciously.

He shrugged.

"One who helps people git better. I was scared of him at first but I ent now."

"Then he can't be a real doctor."

"He is, Mum."

Mrs. Beech was stunned. Her son had answered her back. He had actually disagreed with her.

"Are you arguing with me?"

"No, Mum, I wuz jes' . . ."

"Stop puttin' on that way of talking."

"What way, Mum?"

"And wipe that innocent look off yer face."

"I don't understand . . ." he started.

"You haven't changed, have you? I thought that man would frighten some goodness into you, but it seems he hasn't."

She suddenly grew anxious and a cold panic flooded her limbs.

"He *was* a church man, wasn't he?"

"Yes, Mum. He took care of it, and the graveyard. I told you in my letters."

"Oh, yes. Your letters. Now Willie, I thought you'd grown out of lying."

"But I ent lyin'!"

"Stop talking like that."

He felt bewildered. Like what? he thought.

"That writing was not yours. I know that. That's why I didn't bother to answer."

"But I learned at the school and Mister Tom and Miss Thorne helped me."

"My, you do seem to have taken up a lot of people's time. They must be glad to see the back of you."

"No, Mum, they ent. They . . ." He hesitated. "They . . ."

"They what?"

"They like me." It felt so good to say that.

"That's show, Willie. You're an evacuee and they were just being polite."

"No, Mum!"

"You are committing the sin of pride, Willie, and you know what happens to people who commit the sin of pride."

Willie was growing more and more confused. It was as if he was drifting into some bad dream.

Mrs. Beech tapped the table gently.

"That's enough for now, Willie. We don't want to quarrel on our first night, do we?"

He shook his head.

Willie? That was the other thing that felt strange to him. Nobody had called him that for six months. "Will" felt comfortable and his full name, William, sounded fine, although he had always felt like a Willie inside. Suddenly, now, when his mother referred to him as Willie it was as though she was talking to someone else. He felt like two people. He knew she wouldn't accept the Will side of him, only the Willie, and he didn't feel real when she called him that. She leaned towards him.

"There's something I've been meaning to tell you, Willie," and she forced a smile which, for some reason, alarmed him, seeing the shape of it under those dead, colorless eyes.

"It's a little surprise, only," she added, "we have to creep into the house. No one must see you. It's—" She hesitated.

"It's like a game," and she immediately felt relieved at having thought of the idea.

"No one must see me?"

"No."

"Why?"

She frowned and then put on the smile again. "You'll see. It's a surprise. It'll be spoiled if I tell you."

He nodded. He didn't really feel sick in his stomach. He was just imagining it, wasn't he? It was her that was ill, not him.

"And then you can show me your cake and presents."

"Yeh," he said, visibly brightening. "I can show you me pictures."

She waved him to stop. She didn't want him talking again.

"Yes, of course, but right now I've got a headache. It can wait, can't it?"

They left the cafe and caught a bus. The windows of the bus were covered with what looked like chicken netting.

"Why is that there?" he asked.

"It's rude to ask questions and it's rude to point. Behave yourself," his mother whispered.