

# HIDE AND SEEK



A BLETCHLEY PARK  
MYSTERY

RHIAN TRACEY

## Prologue

‘How am I supposed to contact you?’ his father hissed through gritted teeth. ‘You don’t even know where you’re going to live! You’re making a show of me. People will talk.’

Ned had walked in on another argument between his parents. Arguing was all they seemed to do since the war broke out and his mother had started working, much against his father’s wishes.

‘I’ll write as soon as Miriam’s found us digs,’ his mother replied calmly, though her cracking voice betrayed her. ‘I’ll send our forwarding address. And you can post anything to us via the National Gallery, of course.’

What was she talking about? Ned closed the kitchen door behind him and sat down at the table. His mother smiled at him and automatically began slicing bread, even though he hadn’t washed his hands yet.

‘Digs! Hark at her. Digs!’ his father said to Ned, as if it was the most ridiculous thing he’d ever heard.

Of course, he knew better than to respond. His father wasn’t looking for an opinion.



‘And who’s this Miriam when she’s at home?’ his father snapped, crashing his teacup onto its saucer.

Ned had never heard his mother speak about a Miriam before. In fact, he realised, his mother didn’t really have any friends. His father didn’t like strangers in the house. Didn’t much like them outside the house either.

‘A friend who works for the Foreign Office,’ his mother replied. ‘She’s arranged our travel passes. You needn’t worry.’

‘Worry! Of course I’m worried. You’re talking about swanning off to another country. You’re my wife! You’ve responsibilities here, Helen. I’m putting my foot down!’

Ned gasped. Another country? Where could they possibly be going?

‘I’ve signed the Official Secrets Act; you know I have,’ his mother said. Clearly it wasn’t the first time she’d reminded him of this. ‘I really can’t tell you any more than I already have.’

Ned knew from experience that the penalty for breaking the Official Secrets Act was prison – or worse, death by firing squad! Even if you were a child. You kept your mouth shut and got the job done. Or else.

‘That business at the brickyard’s gone to your head. I said it was a mistake, didn’t I? Getting ideas above your station. Working for the National Gallery indeed!’ His father was referring to the top-secret work Ned and his friends Robyn and Mary had uncovered at Bletchley Park. Top-secret work that it turned out his mother had been involved in! She had been working at Bletchley brickyard, helping to keep artwork out of enemy hands by taking it out of London to

an unknown location. And now it seemed they wanted her to get even more involved.

‘I’m sure they can find someone else to fetch their cups of tea,’ his father ranted on. ‘You’ve turned the boy’s head too, with all this war-effort talk. Bad enough that he’s prancing about the gardens, planting flowers like a girl, instead of working with me in the funeral parlour.’

His father said ‘girl’ as if it was a bad thing; the girls Ned knew were just as good as any boy. And he was proud to be an apprentice gardener at Bletchley Park, although he had to admit that Mary and Robyn’s new roles were more exciting. Life had become a whole lot more interesting since he’d first made friends with those two. Robyn had worked with the carrier pigeons up in the lofts and Mary had been a bicycle messenger, roaming all over the park to deliver top-secret mail. Between them they’d kept a close eye on the thousands of adults working at Bletchley – especially a mysterious man they’d nicknamed the Heron. But then Mary was sent away somewhere to learn a new language and Robyn had started spending more time with the motorcycle dispatch riders.

‘Ned will be a real help to me. He’s a big strong lad now, and there’ll be lots to do. And, when we come home . . .’ his mother tried to negotiate.

Ned nodded enthusiastically but one dark look from his father made him stop.

‘Mark my words, you’ll both be home before the end of the week. You don’t even speak the language. And don’t you dare come crying to me when you’ve made fools of yourselves and it’s all gone wrong! Which it will, as anyone

# THE BLETCHLEY PARK MYSTERIES

*I Spy*  
*Hide and Seek*

HIDE AND SEEK  
A BLETCHLEY PARK  
MYSTERY



RHIAN TRACEY

Piccadilly  
PRESS



can see.' His father stormed out of the house without so much as a goodbye, slamming the kitchen door behind him.

Ned's mother turned to him and gave an encouraging smile. 'It won't go wrong. I'm not leaving you behind, Ned. Now, look sharp, love, the train's waiting.'

His mother gestured to two small cases sitting under the kitchen table. If this train was taking him on an adventure, away from the gloomy funeral parlour and his even gloomier father, he'd follow his mother to the ends of the earth!



1

## *February 1942*

Ned nervously watched the Cadbury's delivery truck reverse carefully down the mountain path. There were large signs everywhere: *Keep Away! Danger!* The driver had told them in no uncertain terms that he didn't have time to hang about or wait for someone to meet them. So, he was just leaving them in the middle of nowhere.

The truck's engine cut out and it began to slide in the snow, sending gravel and stones skittering down the mountain. Ned's mother clutched his arm, digging her nails in. The driver revved the engine and began to descend again, cautiously. Ned peeled his mother's hand from his arm and held it, giving it a reassuring squeeze, running his thumb over the dent on her finger where her wedding ring used to be. Up until then he hadn't realised she'd taken it off.

Ned kept his eyes fixed on the distinctive writing on the side of the truck as it backed away from them, remembering the last time he had a bar of Cadbury's chocolate. When it was first announced that sweets were to be rationed, almost

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*For all the refugees and émigrés who have had to  
leave their homes. May you always be faced with  
open doors and open hearts.*



two years ago, he'd run to the shop to stock up. But when he got there, the Dairy Milk bars had already disappeared. The shopkeeper had replaced them with a pale imitation, which made Ned's teeth itch when he bit into it.

Ned shook himself slightly; it was freezing up on the slopes in the bitter wind. He couldn't believe that they'd finally arrived, after their long and complicated train journeys. But now they were here, in this wild, remote landscape, and without a clear idea of what was to happen next.

Ned's stomach growled. They'd not stopped to eat anything on the way to Wales and he was, as usual, absolutely starving. Since the cup of tea and a few slices of bread and jam before they'd left the house, the only things he'd eaten were the Spam sandwiches his mother had packed. The journey had seemed to go on forever, the train had stopped and started so many times. They'd waited for what felt like hours while a troop train had been moved. But no one complained, no one asked any questions. It was simply accepted that the government had taken control of all the railways, ports and roads and would do with them as they wished.

Ned had stared out of the window to distract himself. He'd counted all the cars he could see abandoned by the side of the railway lines following the rationing of petrol. Railway sleepers haphazardly crisscrossed fields to stop parachutists from landing. Roadblocks were here, there and everywhere. Shop names were scrubbed out ready for enemy invasion, which was all anyone could talk about on the wireless. He'd stared out onto anonymous station

platforms, realising he could be anywhere. Having never really travelled far from Bletchley, Ned had expected to feel rattled. But he was brimming with excitement. He was escaping! It was his turn for an adventure, and he was more than ready for it.

Before they got on the train his mother had recommended that he only take small sips from their flask of Bovril. This had paid off because there were no corridors on the train, which meant no toilets. One man had pushed down a window and peed out of it, to the collective horror of the carriage.

'Desperate times, desperate measures!' he said with a deep laugh.

Ned got a gentle prod in the ribs from his mother's knitting needle, for smirking.

'Why don't you look out of the *other* window,' she'd quietly suggested.

Her needles clacked and clicked in time with the other women in their carriage. Everyone was knitting something or other. Two old nosy Noras sitting opposite knitted scarves while scanning the carriage. They didn't look down once at their stitches; it was, he'd had to admit, impressive. No doubt they'd felt they were keeping up morale by making clothes for the troops. He'd fixed his stare on a Ribena advertisement. But of course, this didn't help his bladder and so his mind had wandered back to his favourite topic: food.

His mother had promised him a hot meal once they arrived at Manod – but here they were, and the only signs of life they'd spotted on their way up the wide Welsh valley were sheep, goats and a farm or two. Birds of prey had been

I knew who I was this morning, but I've  
changed a few times since then.

*Alice in Wonderland*, Lewis Carroll



circling menacingly, their hunting spoilt by the snow. The lorry driver said he'd seen an eagle. Or possibly an osprey. Ned thought he must have been joking.

On the mountain – which was called Manod Mawr, according to the driver – the steep slate path was framed with tall white grasses and fans of green ferns clumped with snow. Water ran down the mountain in streams as the afternoon sun melted the snow and ice. And there wasn't a barrage balloon in sight, Ned noticed; there wasn't much need to force enemy aircraft to greater heights, he supposed, not out here in the wilderness of Wales. He wondered if the enemy had even heard of Wales.

At the top of the mountain were two rusty bronze gates, standing upright. Another lay across the top. Several bolts and padlocks held them firmly shut.

Ned left his mother's side and ran up to the gates. As he peered through into the tunnel leading into the mountain he was slapped by a bitter blast of air. He tried to see into the gloom, but it was raven black. He looked around him, turning in a complete circle. He'd got used to the blackout, which had started before the war was even declared. But the cavernous darkness in the quarry beyond wasn't like the blackout; it was deep, layered and mysterious.

It felt like the place was deserted. He pressed his face to the cold bronze gates and sniffed deeply, like a dog catching a scent. The air was damp with his disappointment.

'Is someone supposed to meet us? Should I call out?' he asked his mother.

She was shivering and he worried that she'd catch a cold if they stood there in front of the gates much longer.

'They know we're coming. I expect they're busy in there. What do you think, love?' She stared into the void.

'I don't know.' He shrugged, trying to keep the panic out of his voice.

He wasn't used to adults asking what he thought. He rattled the gates, half-heartedly, sending a skinny brown rat scuttling across his feet.

'Ugh!' he cried out, kicking at it. Unsuccessfully, as the rat was far too quick for him.

His scream broke the tension but, rather than being embarrassed, he felt pleased to have made his mum laugh. And the sound seemed to have alerted someone at last. They listened to footsteps coming closer, although they still couldn't see anyone. Ned longed for a torch – he hadn't thought to pack one – but it was too late to worry now.

Map



out on the mountain. Probably just kids, but you never know. Can't take any risks, not with what's inside. Careless talk costs lives and all that. You've both signed the act?' he checked, giving Ned a stern look.

They nodded and he pushed the gates open. Ned pulled his mum back, just in time to prevent a shower of water tipping down on her from a wall of glossy ivy that was hanging over the top section of the gates.

'Good lad! Quick on your feet! Mind yourselves. It's rained – as it sometimes likes to do in Manod!' Mr Rees laughed.

Ned shivered. If it was always as cold as this he'd have to wear long trousers if it. His mother said she'd packed some of Joseph's old trousers for him, but he'd have to find something to hold them up with, as she'd no more clothing coupons for belts. And he wouldn't mind a waistcoat, or a flat cap, like the one Mr Rees was wearing. This was his chance to reinvent himself. No one here would call him coffin kid or the grim reaper. He'd tell no one that his father was an undertaker, absolutely no one at all.

'Watch your step, it's slippery if you're not used to it. That's sorbo rubber, absorbs the shock.' Mr Rees pointed to the sheeting covering the tracks. 'And don't worry about your eyes, my boy, they'll soon adjust. You'll have miner's vision in no time,' the man chattered on.

Ned nodded confidently and strode out in front of his mother. He was more than ready to tackle whatever lurked in the coal-black underground cavern. His mother had explained to him that artwork from the galleries and

museums in London was being hidden in the quarry, where no one would ever think to look for it.

'Follow me,' Mr Rees said. 'We're glad you've arrived, Mrs Letton. There's a tidy pile of work waiting for you now your project's been approved. It's the talk of the quarry.'

They walked into the mine along what felt like a very narrow railway track. Ned's first instinct was to look around in panic for a train, but then he chided himself. *Of course, a train couldn't fit through a mine!* Mr Rees raised his hand in greeting as they walked past a shed full of men cleaning a canvas, each working on a tiny section with magnifying glasses. His mother said they were in a national crisis, and they were working right on the front: the Heritage Front. It didn't sound anywhere near as exciting as what his brothers were up to, out there on the real front. He hoped Rob and Joe wouldn't be ashamed of him, when they asked him what he'd done to help the war effort.

'Come on, Ned, keep up, we don't want to lose our way,' his mother said, walking briskly to catch up with Mr Rees.

'Welcome to the *Cathedral*,' Mr Rees said grandly. 'We don't let just anyone into the most secret Aladdin's cave in the world, mind!'

They stepped off the track into an imposing cavern, splendidly lit by overhead electric lights hanging from cables and powered by whirring generators. Ned had pictured people wearing old fashioned miners' headlamps working in the dark, but this was far more impressive. It was clear even to Ned's inexperienced eye that the pictures piled up



here were worth an absolute fortune. He recognised one of them from a project on Leonardo da Vinci they'd done at school. It was one of his funny drawings of the insides of people's bodies. Ned had always quite liked those drawings, though it didn't do to say so aloud. His favourite fact about da Vinci was that he had solved the mystery of earthshine, when the Earth and the Moon reflect sunlight at the same time.

The bright lights cast shadows around the large chamber. Everywhere Ned looked were men in suits, just like at Bletchley, but here they were surrounded by frames, canvases and pictures, rather than studying maps and typing letters into strange-looking machines. Works of art of all shapes and sizes were hanging from racks, lined up against brick sheds, being carried out of containers, stacked against one another, crammed together closely, waiting. The subterranean cavern seemed to stretch on for miles, and he couldn't see where the subterranean cavern ended. Ned craned his neck heavenwards trying to find the roof; it was like looking into the depths of space. He heard his mother inhale sharply as she did the same, taking in the unexpected grandness and scale of the cave.

'No turning back now you've seen where *all* our treasures are hidden, Mrs Letton!' Mr Rees said, scooping up a lean ginger cat.

'Who's this?' Ned's mother held her hand out to the cat, which lifted its chin for a scratch.

'This is Martini. She's one of our best ratters,' Mr Rees said, setting Martini back on the ground. He smiled at Ned's

mother as she spotted someone and strode off to hug her, Martini dashing out of her way.

'And you, Ted, keep your mouth shut and your eyes open and you'll do well.' Mr Rees turned to him, without smiling, as the great big gates slammed shut behind them.



### 3

His mother shooed him away to *get used to his new surroundings* as she waltzed off with her friend Miriam. They were going to meet Kaye, who sounded like she ran the place. He'd have been happy to wait for his mother in the warm, but Mr Rees escorted him back to the entrance, like a guest who had overstayed his welcome.

'Here you are, then, Ted. Do your mother a favour, find your digs and get settled in.'

'It's actually Ned, sir,' he said, as politely as he could.

'And stay out of trouble, mind. Follow the white stone markers on Quarryman's Path if you get lost.' Mr Rees passed him a folded-up piece of paper. Martini wound herself around Mr Rees's leg as Ned opened it. Written in a scrawling hand was what looked like an address, but it was in a language he couldn't read. Welsh, he guessed. But Ned didn't want to ask Mr Rees for help reading it, as he didn't have the measure of him yet. He turned around to say thank you, but Mr Rees was already walking along the track back into the quarry, whistling as he went.

Ned stood at the top of Manod mountain, edging close

to the dangerous precipice, and looked down the valley to the thin line of grey houses nestled in the bottom. It seemed like quite a trek down the track but as he didn't have anything better to do, Ned set off at as swift a pace as he could manage while carrying his case.

The snow and gravel scraped and slid under his boots and he stopped for a second to steady himself. When he looked up at the heavy sky, he thought about the solar system once more. He'd spent his time on the train drawing. He had started with the Sun, then Mercury, followed by Venus, Earth and so on, until he got to Neptune. Each time he increased the size and changed colours to separate them.

He visualised them separately orbiting around the Sun, which was the one thing linking them. Himself, Robyn and Mary were not so different. On different paths but all with Bletchley Park at their core.

As soon as he stepped down off the mountain path and onto the hilly street, it was clear to Ned that Manod was a very different place to Bletchley. The blue-grey slate houses here were arranged in neat rows, opposite one another, like a mirror. Two-up, two-down. There was a shop, a post office and a butcher with a blue-and-white-striped canopy over the door. And a pub, Y Manod, next to a church or chapel. It was a big grey building, which looked like a face. The large brown door was a mouth. The wide arched windows either side were the eyes. And a circular glass pane, like a ship's porthole, sat in the middle, like a nose. He could see a group of boys chasing a ball down an alleyway and hesitated, wondering if he could gather the



courage to approach them. But if he opened his mouth, he'd give himself away with his English accent. He stopped and cleared some snow off the bench outside the post office. Perching on the edge, Ned tried to avoid getting his shorts wet and took out the piece of paper Mr Rees had given him.

'You'll have to queue in the post office. I'll watch your case if you want?' a girl offered, taking a seat on the bench next to him.

She looked a few years younger than him. Her dark brown curly hair was held back by slides, keeping it out of her eyes, which were also dark brown. He spotted one or two missing teeth when she smiled. She was about nine, maybe ten at the most. She was wearing a big brown coat with a maroon velvet collar. It didn't look like it was hers, probably a hand-me-down – hardly a surprise when a coat cost nearly twenty clothing coupons.

She swung her bare legs back and forth, waiting for him to reply. Ned looked down at his case, which was being investigated by a huge sandy-coloured dog whose fur was crimped and crinkled. The dog blinked the light snow flurry out of its eyes.

'This is Kip. He's having a rest from work. Don't be scared of him, he's a gentle giant.' She looked over her shoulder then whispered, 'Aren't you, lieblich?'

*She spoke German!* At least he thought it was German; he'd never met a German before. He looked about to see if anyone had heard her.

The dog, Kip, was nosing the opening to Ned's case, nudging it wider, while looking up at the girl to see if she

was admiring his progress. Kip was broad, with a dignified look about him.

'Nothing in there for you.' Ned gently pushed the dog's damp black nose away and closed his case back up.

'How old are you? Where did you come from? Are you on your own?' the girl asked, looking around curiously.

'Um . . .' Ned wasn't sure what he was allowed to reveal. What was it that Mr Rees had said? *Careless talk costs lives*. Ned got up and tucked the paper away in his pocket. He picked up his case and mumbled a quick *bye*, before marching away from the girl and her dog. He walked past an abandoned red-and-green quarry locomotive next to two rusty wagons and stopped to look back at her. She was still watching him go, as if *he* was the suspicious one, rather than the other way round! He wasn't the one going about speaking German!





4

From what he could decipher of the address on the piece of paper Mr Rees had given him, Ned was looking for Ty Ysgol. But was that the name of a road? Or a business? *Ysgol* sounded like *skull*. Could it be a church? Maybe they were going to stay with a vicar? That didn't sound like fun. Not more blinking dead people.

'What are you on about?' A boy on a bicycle said, as he skidded to a stop, flicking up snow sludge onto Ned's bare legs.

'Huh?' Ned said in confusion.

'What about dead people?' the boy continued.

'Nothing. No one.' Ned scolded himself inwardly. He must have been thinking aloud again.

'Where you from, then?' the boy asked. 'Another evacuee? Bringing your germs and lice and disease with you, is it?' He positioned his bicycle across the path so that Ned would have to walk around to get past.

'Um . . .' Ned said uncertainly. 'I don't have lice.'

'Hello there!' came a familiar voice. Ned turned to see his mother appear as if from thin air and sweep up the

path. 'We're staying in Manod while I do some work for the War Office. This is my son,' she added, laying her hand on his shoulder.

'Oh, right. See you after,' the boy said, hopping on his bicycle and pedalling off in the other direction.

Ned turned to his mother and gave her a smile. 'Not sure I want to see him after,' he said. 'He didn't seem that friendly.'

She gave his hand a squeeze. 'He looks about your age. Maybe you'll be pals soon. Shall we go and find the schoolhouse?' she added, looking up and down the street.

Ned groaned. 'I thought I was going to work with you, not go to school!' He did *not* want to go back to school. He hated reading: the words wriggled on the page, and no one could read his spidery writing. Even he sometimes struggled to decipher it.

'Don't worry. No one's going to make you go to school! The schoolhouse is where we're staying – *our digs*.' She grinned.

'Oh! That's all right, then,' Ned said in relief. *Ysgol* was *school*, then, he realised. Why couldn't Mr Rees have just told him that?

They turned the corner of what seemed to be the main road, lined with rows of grey slate and brick houses on both sides. Every now and then there was a gap between the houses leading to an alleyway. Ned spotted lines of washing stretched across them, shirt sleeves waving in the wind. And there in the distance, standing on its own, slightly raised on a grassy hill, was the school. The long, low grey-brick building had an enormous bell in front of it, and a chimney.



'Now, where's the door to Mrs Thomas's quarters, do you think?'

'Quarters?' Ned teased.

'Sorry. Everyone in the quarry talks like that.' His mother grinned.

He followed his mother through an uneven schoolyard. Hopscotch was drawn on the ground in chalk and a football pitch was marked by wooden goalposts at each end. Behind the building the craggy mountain range rose and fell, changing in colour from brown and grey to green and yellow, in contrast to the neat and measured lines of the schoolhouse.

'This must be the door to the *cottage*.' Ned's mother called the place a cottage, rather than quarters this time, and nudged him, emphasising the word.

The cottage was a modest two-storey building tucked away behind the school. Next to it was a coal shed and a privy or a washhouse. Ned wondered how they were supposed to fit inside the cottage and who they'd be living with. But he was here on important war work, he reminded himself. If this was where they were to stay, then he'd make the best of it. It wouldn't do to start worrying about how he was going to get from the cottage to the quarry. Or if his mother would share their new address with his father. Or if his father would find them and insist they come straight back home . . . He counted the planets on his fingers to slow the worries that were crowding his thoughts.

'Shall I knock?' His mother now looked less sure of herself.

'I'll do it,' Ned volunteered.

He stepped forward, rapping confidently on the green door. Peeling paint strips fell as the door shook and immediately a dog started barking, followed by shouts and footsteps. They stood back and looked at each other nervously.

'Are you sure this is the right place?' he checked. 'I don't think they're expecting us.'

Then the door opened and the boy from before was standing there looking sullenly at Ned. 'Lost again, are you?'

'Is Mrs Thomas here?' his mother said with a smile, cutting the boy off.

'Yeah,' the boy said, pushing a dog back from the door. The dog shoved its head through the boy's legs.

'Ah, you're lovely, aren't you! Hello there!' His mother bent down to fuss the honey-coloured dog whose silky ears went back as its dark eyes widened in happiness.

'It's Kip, isn't it?' Ned asked the boy, gesturing to the dog.

'How do you know that?' the boy asked suspiciously.

'I think I met your sister, earlier,' he added, scratching behind the dog's ears.

'She's *not* my sister. Anni has to stay with us. She's a refugee. Wait . . . ! Are you Mrs Letton?' The boy suddenly stood up straighter.

'Yes. We're going to be lodging with you, while I do some War Office work.' His mother held out her hand to the boy, but he didn't take it.

The tension was broken by the appearance of a girl, who pushed past and said brightly, 'Hello again. Are you a refugee too? I told you, Harri!'



'Shut up, Anni! S'pose you'd better come in,' the boy said grudgingly. 'Mam's out in the yard, in the horsebox.'

'You have horses?' Ned asked.

'No,' the boy said, looking at Ned like he was stupid.

'Why's your mum got a horsebox, then?' Ned asked.

'It's where she plays the piano,' Harri sneered, as if the answer were obvious.

Anni began to explain. 'There's not enough room to swing a cat in here, Auntie Merryn says. She's always getting interrupted by people knocking on the door. She keeps the piano in the horsebox. But it's a secret, so no one will bother her. Isn't that clever!' Anni said in admiration.

'Well, if you could run and get her?' Ned's mum smiled at Harri, who hesitated.

'Go on, Anni, you go.' Harri pushed her gently in the direction of the field.

Anni ran off and Kip crashed into Harri in the narrow doorway in his eagerness to chase her.

'*Big buffoon!*' Harri shouted at the dog, as Ned's mother stepped into the cottage. 'Are you going to hang around like a bad smell?' Harri said to Ned, who was hesitating in the doorway.

'Are you always this welcoming?' Ned asked.

'Only to you, English. Only to you,' the boy replied, marching back into the cottage and leaving Ned to close the door behind him.



5

'Hello, welcome! Sorry I wasn't here to greet you. I was practising a new piece for choir.' Mrs Thomas came bustling into the cottage.

They'd been sitting on chairs arranged around the fire in oppressive silence and looked up in relief as Mrs Thomas took off her heavy damp coat. She draped it over a chair in front of the fire, where it began to steam, then unwound the green scarf from her neck and peeled off her green bobble hat and matching gloves. She set these on hooks around the hearth, to dry. Ned noticed that she wore a patch over one eye; even that was green. As she put the kettle on the hob, Kip stayed by her side and gently nudged her with his large head.

'He's not allowed in the horsebox with me when I'm practising because there's no room. He's always a bit clingy when I come out,' she explained, walking across the kitchen with the teacups, Kip weaving in and out of her legs, tail swishing from side to side with happiness.

Mrs Thomas passed everyone a teacup and then briefly rested her hand on Anni's brown curls and stroked her hair. 'Anni, get the cakes, cariad.'



Merryn Thomas was a tall woman, strong, neat and tidy. Even her hair, which was long and almost pure white, was straight as a rod. Ned thought she looked about the same age as his mother, although he had never seen such white hair on someone who wasn't old.

'Thanks for taking us in,' his mother said. 'Can I help?' She gestured at the teapot.

'No. Anni's on the case. You must be shattered after your journey. I doubt it was straightforward. We hear on the news that the roads and railways are difficult.'

'It was challenging,' his mother agreed.

'Has Harri shown you your rooms? Harri sleeps up in the attic now, and I thought the boys could—' Mrs Thomas started.

'No!' Harri interrupted before Mrs Thomas could finish her sentence. 'No way, Mam!'

Silence fell again, possibly even more awkward than before. Ned kept his head down and his eyes on the table. Mrs Thomas poured tea and milk and passed cakes around, as if everything was perfectly fine.

'You two could share Anni's old room?' Mrs Thomas blushed but she didn't tell Harri off for being rude.

'It's not Anni's old room, it's my room! At least it was until you shoved me up in the attic, with the bats. And probably rats too. And now you're giving it to them?' Harri muttered.

'Harri! Don't be rude, please.' Mrs Thomas tutted.

'Why can't *they* go up in the attic?' Harri continued.

'Unfortunately, the cottage was designed for a headmaster,

back in 1871, rather than a headmistress with children!' Mrs Thomas carried on smoothly.

'A child. Not children.' Harri sniffed. 'And not three children!'

'Hush, now! That's enough, Harri,' Mrs Thomas snapped, her patience finally running out.

Ned shifted uncomfortably, taking in this strange place full of secrets and silences.

'I don't know if you'd want to, Ned, but there is the nook?' Mrs Thomas suggested.

'With the dog?' Harri burst out laughing, but it wasn't a nice sound.

'Well, yes. It's an idea, isn't it?' Mrs Thomas looked to Ned's mum.

'Why don't we sort it out later? Ned and I are starving, and these cakes look delicious.' She pointed at the squashed currant buns. 'I've always wished I was a better baker,' she confided.

Anni and Harri reached forward and loaded their plates, so Ned did the same.

'These are Welsh cakes; we made them in class today, didn't we, Anni? Now let's have a nice cup of tea and get to know each other, will we?' Mrs Thomas smiled, but her face fell as Harri scraped his chair back.

'See you after.' Harri shovelled one cake into his mouth and rammed another into his pocket, while crashing out of the door. 'Got to go!'

As the door slammed shut behind Harri, it felt like someone had burst a balloon relieving the tension. Anni grinned at Ned and broke the brief silence with a question.



'If you're not a refugee, what are you?' she asked, all reserve gone. 'Are you an evacuee?'

'Um. No,' Ned said, turning to his mother. 'I was an appr—'

'We're here on war work. Ned's going to be working with me,' his mother replied smoothly. She smiled at Anni over her teacup.

'Why don't you go and show Ned around Manod, Anni, while there's still a bit of light left? Is that all right with you, Mrs Letton?' Mrs Thomas suggested.

'Yes, of course, Mrs Thomas.' His mother nodded.

'Anni, take Kip with you too and throw a stick about for him in the park, there's a good girl. He's due some fun now he's finished work for the day.' Mrs Thomas fixed a simple lead to Kip's collar and scooted them both out of the door. 'And stay out of Harri's way, cariad,' she added quietly to Anni.

'Yes, Auntie Merryn. Come on, Ned. I know all the good spots in Manod. I'll introduce you to the best people. There's one or two who we'll avoid but I'll save Mr and Mrs Evans-next-door for tomorrow. You can meet all their animals. My favourite is their donkey, Myfanwy. We'll go down to the shop now and see who's about; there's always someone to chat to in the shop. How fast can you run? I was the fastest girl in my last school! I'm A1 fit. Race you!' Anni shoved Ned and sprinted out into the schoolyard, with Kip barking in excitement.



'This is Mrs Davies' shop. Your mother will have to give Mrs Thomas your ration book. Mrs Davies marks down everything in the back, so you won't get any extras. And mind your p's and q's with Mrs Davies. She stares. At least she always stares at *me*,' Anni said with a shrug as she hung Kip's lead on the hook right outside the shop.

'Who's this, then?' A grey-haired woman wearing an apron appeared, accompanied by a cat.

She peered closely at Ned through dark-rimmed spectacles balanced on the tip of her thin nose. To avoid her gaze, he took in the small shop. It must have been someone's front room once, except there was now sawdust on the floor. The shop was on two levels. The top had a counter, weighing scales, a till and shelves of supplies. The lower part, down some steps, was slightly darker, and frying smells wafted up from it.

'This is Ned, Mrs Davies. He's staying with us for . . . How long *are* you and your mother here for, Ned?' Anni asked turning to him.

'I don't know.' Ned shrugged.



Anni picked up the stick that Kip had dropped at her feet. Ned was surprised to see Kip almost bow to Anni, with the front half of his body on the ground and his bottom in the air. His tail wagged madly until Anni threw the stick, and he bounded off again.

'Some people call them Seeing-eye Dogs, but we call him a Guide Dog. I've never lived with an animal before. We're not allowed them in our apartment in London, but my parents had two cats in Vienna. Gustav and Ernst, brothers. I don't know what happened to them. I suppose Jude, that's my best friend, might have taken them in. He always liked our cats and was kind to animals. I thought I would be a cat person, like Mama and Papa, and Jude, but now I think I might be a dog person. What about you?' Anni asked as she threw Kip's stick again.

'I've always wanted a dog, but I wouldn't mind a cat either. Maybe I could be both a dog and a cat person?' he said.

'I don't know. I think that's against the rules,' Anni said seriously.

'So, you and your family are from Vienna?' he asked.

Kip had dropped the stick by Ned's feet and was barking impatiently at him, so he threw it as far as he could.

'Yes. But now Mama is working in London and Papa is in Glenbranter camp in a place called Argyll, which is in Scotland, but he'll be joining us just as soon as he can.

'What kind of camp?' Ned asked.

'An internment camp. They came at four o'clock in the morning and rounded the men up. They took Papa away with them in a Black Mariah.' Anni shuddered, remembering.

'What's a Mariah?' Ned asked.

He was realising, since travelling to Wales, just how many things he didn't know.

'It's a horrible police wagon used for prisoners, but my papa isn't a prisoner. He hasn't done anything wrong. They took them off to Kempston Park Racecourse and made them sleep in the empty horse stalls. But the last laugh was on them because the racecourse had forgotten to switch the heating off. Papa was very funny in his letter – he's allowed to send two a week – about how comfortable he and our neighbours, Mr Kaplan and Mr Simons all were in their stall. He even drew a picture.'

'Why did they put them in horse stalls?' Ned asked.

'Nowhere else to put them?' Anni rubbed her eyes, warding off tears. 'They called him an alien,' she said, before throwing the stick for Kip as far as she could.

'Who?' Ned's face crumpled in confusion.

'Papa and our neighbours. But they're not aliens . . . They're Jewish.' She paused.

Ned felt Anni's eyes on him, weighing his reaction before she carefully continued. He nodded supportively.

'Mama and Papa were persecuted because they are Jews. Papa was beaten rather badly, Mama told me, right outside their university in Vienna. We were forced to flee the country and emigrate to England before the Anschluss.'

'What was that?' Ned didn't attempt to say the word.

'The Anschluss? Austria, where we lived, was invaded, and taken over by the Germans. I was only little so don't remember much. Papa was given a work permit through his job at the



library and Mama was given a different type of permit to work by . . . someone else. And until I'm sixteen, I'm safe in Britain. I'll be ten in a few months, but the war will be over before I turn sixteen. Won't it?' Anni sounded frightened.

'But if your dad worked in the library and had a permit why did they . . . ?' Ned hesitated.

'Because he is Jewish and seen as a threat. Papa's friend, Arthur, was exempt from internment because his job was doing useful work as a BBC announcer. But no matter what job you do, *some* people in the government just don't want to let Jewish people into Britain. Not even Jewish children.' She stopped again before continuing, 'Like me.' She trailed off, clipping Kip's lead back on, and much to Kip's disappointment, she turned, heading back towards the main road.

'What's your father's name?' Ned tried, wanting to make things better.

'Otto. When we get home, I'll show you a picture of him that Mama keeps in a frame. She gave it to me when Papa was taken,' Anni explained. 'Mama brought a folder of photos when we fled Vienna and I have two of them here with me. The other one is of my grandmama Hilde. Anyway it's time for tea. If we're lucky, there'll be cawl!' She licked her lips. 'Auntie Merryn's cawl is almost as good as Mama's chicken soup. Let's go home.' She held out Kip's lead to Ned.

He didn't know what cawl was, but he did know that he'd answered enough questions to be given Anni's stamp of approval. If only Harri was as easy to win over, he thought, as he followed Anni along the winding streets back to the schoolhouse which was, for now, home.



When they returned to the cottage, Ned followed his nose to the kitchen where steaming bowls of peppery stew waited for them. He spotted carrots, swede and two more vegetables, possibly parsnips and peas.

'This is cawl,' Anni said happily, sitting down at the table. 'We made it yesterday, especially for you. With real Welsh sea salt from Anglesey. That's an island in case you didn't know. And did you know, Ned, that Manod is 1,750 feet above sea level?'

'I've made you up a bed in the nook, Ned, cariad,' Mrs Thomas said, passing him a slab of bread and a small chunk of crumbly cheese.

'Thank you,' Ned said, before filling his mouth with food. Real food. Hot food. Proper food.

He noticed Harri was back but still sullen and silent, apart from scraping his spoon around his bowl.

'There's no lamb in it, Mam,' he complained.

'Sorry, no. Not today.' His mother shrugged.

'Then it's not cawl, is it!' Harri moaned.

Mrs Thomas tutted at Harri. After his complaint, they



didn't seem to have much to say to one another. Anni did most of the talking. Ned and his mother joined in with the odd question or carefully selected bit of information about their lives back home. Neither of them mentioned Bletchley Park or his mother's work at the brickyard.

People knocked at the door regularly throughout the evening with questions for Mrs Thomas about school or asking for the new sheet music for choir. Ned thought of his friend Robyn back in Bletchley. He could just imagine her saying that it was as busy as Piccadilly Circus, not that she'd been there. Nor had he, to be fair. He couldn't imagine what it must have been like for Anni, moving to a big city like London and then having to move again to Manod. The two places must be like chalk and cheese.

Harri sighed dramatically each time he or Anni got up to answer the door.

'Is it always like this?' Ned asked Anni quietly as she sat back down at the table.

'Yeah. We never get any peace,' Harri said, throwing another log on the fire.

'Our apartment in Vienna was very quiet but when we fled to London, a friend of Mama's found us an apartment and we had wonderful neighbours: Mr Kaplan and his family, and Mr and Mrs Simons. The doorbell was always ringing, and music playing and people singing, just like here. I like it busy and chatty.' Anni wriggled with pleasure in front of the fire.

'Well, I don't. People turn up at all hours, outstaying their welcome,' Harri carried on pointedly. 'Just like you, English,' he added under his breath.

'Do you want to play cards, kids?' Mrs Thomas placed a deck of cards on the table but misjudged the edge and they fell to the floor, spilling everywhere. 'Oh, drat!'

'I've got it, Mam.' Harri jumped up to retrieve the cards.

He gathered them into an untidy heap and slammed them on the table, then scowled at both Ned and Anni, as if it were their fault. Mrs Thomas didn't say anything but felt the edge of the table with her hand then patted it, as if to remember where it was. Kip nosed her hand and butted her until she rested it on his head. He then steered her back to the door as someone knocked, again.

'I'll deal!' Anni said, but Harri simply got up and left, clattering heavily up the stairs.

'He's a cheat anyway. And a sore loser,' Anni whispered as she split the pack. 'I only know snap, but I'm very good at it.'

As they played, Ned tried to tune in to the adults' conversation. Mrs Thomas told his mother about her husband in the Army, and his mother spoke about his brothers and their roles in the RAF, never once mentioning her role at either Bletchley Park or down the quarry at Manod. Anni questioned him constantly, while winning at snap. Before too long Ned gave up trying to eavesdrop on the mothers. He knew his mum would never let anything slip. She was an expert at talking around a subject, he realised. Back home in Bletchley, she'd perfected the skill of presenting an image to the outside world, never truly revealing what went on behind closed doors.

'I think I'll go to bed, Mum,' said Ned. 'Is that all right with you, Mrs Thomas?'



He still had no idea where or what the nook was. It could well be that room outside, which he'd assumed was a privy. Kip, sensing something good was going to happen, circled the room in anticipation. His eyes moved back and forth, deciding who his best option was.

'Follow Kip, if you like, cariad. He's ready for bed too and he'll show you the way.' Mrs Thomas smiled.

She patted Kip's head affectionately, whispering some words to him in Welsh. Ned followed the dog, who padded through the kitchen before pushing through floral curtains-which hid an area that Ned had assumed was a scullery. Beyond the curtains was a tiny room, big enough to lay a mattress on the floor while leaving space for the long narrow desk running the length of the wall. There was no window, but Ned spotted a small skylight. And best of all, he realised in surprise, were the pencil drawings and sketches of constellations and the night sky that covered the desk and the wall next to it. Astronomy books lined the small, uneven shelf, with dusty fossils and sea glass scattered between them.

'Ah, you've found Mr Parry's collection, have you?' Mrs Thomas poked her head through the curtains. 'He was a bit of a sky gazer. Lovely man, the headmaster. This cottage is his.' Mrs Thomas smiled fondly.

'Oh, I thought this was your house.' Ned began to understand why Harri was so annoyed at being shifted from room to room.

'No, we lived in the old bakery, that's the house I grew up in, with my father, until he died. When my husband and Mr Parry went off to war, they asked me to be headmistress. I used to teach here before I got married. It made sense to

move into the schoolhouse rather than trek up and down the hill all day, especially with my eyes! We call this space the nook, but I think Mr Parry probably called it a study or something grander. I haven't had the time to move his books or sort through his things, now he's not coming back . . .'

She tailed off uncomfortably.

Ned thought about asking why the old headmaster wasn't coming back, although he could guess the answer. But at that moment, his mum poked her head through the doorway. There wasn't room for the three of them to stand in there.

'Will you be all right in here, cariad? I'm sorry about Harri,' Mrs Thomas began. 'He's not been himself since his dad left. We haven't had a letter in a while, see.'

'Don't worry, Mrs Thomas,' his mother said.

'Please call me Merryn. If we're going to be living together, I think we should drop the formalities, Helen. And you can call me Auntie Merryn, Ned. That's what Anni calls me, even though we're not related. We don't stand on ceremony in Manod, we're all auntie and uncle someone or other round here.'

'Ned'll be fine, won't you, love. Look, you've got a friend for life there!' Ned's mum burst out laughing.

Kip was sprawled across the mattress with his head on the pillow like a human.

'Oh, he's a one! He knows he's not allowed on the beds.' Mrs Thomas tried to sound cross. 'Don't you!'

Kip had closed his eyes, as if asleep, although his wagging tail gave him away.

'I don't mind,' Ned said, feeling pleased at the idea of a bit of company on his first night in this strange little place.



'Kick him off when you're ready to sleep, if you can shift him, and don't forget to turn off the torch, cariad. There's a skylight you might like to look out of. Your mam says you're an astronomer.'

All of a sudden, Ned felt like he might cry. Both women backed out of the room, but his mother paused between the curtains and reached back in to give Ned a kiss and a hug.

'If you need me, I'm upstairs, the little room at the back. I could leave my door open?' she offered.

'No. I'll see you in the morning,' he said. His voice sounded strange and croaky.

If she stayed one more minute, he'd end up crying in her arms and he was far too old for that kind of carry-on.

'Tomorrow will be a better day,' she promised, just as she always did at home.

He listened for her footsteps retreating across the large slate slabs that tiled the kitchen floor, then lay down in the small space Kip had left on the mattress. He buried his face in Kip's warm, soft side. His coat was rich and thick and a variety of golden shades in the torchlight. Kip sighed dramatically, lifted his heavy head, and opened his eyes to look at Ned, as if reluctantly agreeing to share the bed. Deal negotiated, Kip flumped back down contentedly, tail wagging gently. Kip was snoring noisily within minutes, his ribcage rising and falling deeply.

Despite the comfort Kip offered, and the stars shining through the skylight, Ned turned off the torch and cried himself to sleep.



## 8

Ned was relieved they managed to arrive at the quarry on time the next morning, and glad to have escaped the schoolhouse. His father had drilled all three of his boys in matters of punctuality, with military determination. If you weren't fifteen minutes early for everything, then you were late. And to be late was unforgivable. It wasn't a bad habit, Ned had to admit. He was keen to know what job he would be doing and to have a purpose again.

As soon as they walked into the Cathedral, Miriam linked arms with his mother and marched her off somewhere. Ned stood alone, looking up at the slate roof. There was so much to get used to again, just like when he had started working with his father at Bletchley Park.

'We had to blast the ceiling with explosives to make way for the artwork from the NG,' Mr Rees said, appearing at his shoulder. He was swiftly joined by Martini, the cat. 'One of the pieces, *The Equestrian Portrait of Charles I*, almost didn't fit under the bridge on the road to the quarry! Not surprising, standing at twelve foot in its elephant case.'

NG must be the National Gallery, Ned thought, trying to



*Jump?* Robyn mouthed. Ned gathered Kip's lead then slipped his bag onto his shoulders. He checked the harness and jacket were locked in place. He nodded to Robyn as the van pulled away and gathered speed.

'Just a few more minutes and we'll be there,' the driver promised, accelerating. 'You two sure you're OK? Bit quiet, aren't you? Cat got your tongue?' he joked as the van rapidly picked up speed.

'Fine,' Ned said. 'We're fine.'

Kip could hear it in Ned's voice, the worry and the tension, and got to his feet slowly. Ned patted him and held onto him, making sure he wasn't going to slide about in the back of the van.

'Nearly there now.' The driver didn't sound quite so cheerful any more.

He was driving too fast. They could all feel it. Kip was such a clever dog: he seemed to know, without being told that something was very wrong. He was ready. The three of them were in sync, waiting, watching, poised for the right moment.

'Get out of the road!' the driver shouted, waving his arms uselessly as he slammed the brakes on. 'Home Front! Patrol somewhere else. Bleeding menace, they are,' he muttered to himself as he revved the engine menacingly. 'Last thing I need right now!'

Ned didn't know what the holdup was, nor did he care, but he didn't want the driver to speed up. This was their chance. He mouthed *one, two, three* and wrenched open the back doors of the van. He and Robyn jumped out and

Kip followed them. Robyn spun round and dragged the long bag out and Ned heaved it awkwardly onto her back.

'Oi! What are you doing?' the driver called through the open doors.

Then they ran. But the van driver was quick. He switched off the engine and jumped down from his seat.

'Oi! Get back here!' he roared, leaving the driver's door wide open before breaking into a run after them.

'*Oh no!* He's chasing us!' Robyn cried, looking over her shoulder.

'Get back here! What the hell are you doing?' the driver snarled, thundering up the road after them at speed.

'You can't leave your van in the road!' the Home Guard shouted after him.

But the driver ignored the shouts and the beeping horns of the other cars and pounded down the road after them. Ned dared to look over his shoulder quickly; the driver was gaining on them.

'You've got the wrong idea! Where are you going?' the driver yelled at them.

'Don't stop!' Robyn panted to Ned who nodded, breathless and fighting a stitch.

'Come back! Get back here!' the driver continued to bark at them.

'Get off the road,' Ned gasped to Robyn, pointing to a path. 'We need to get away from him.'

'Just stop!' the driver ordered. '*Stop!*'

He stood in the middle of the road and the traffic, hands on his thighs.



'Please! Don't be scared,' the driver called, changing tack, pleading with them.

They didn't look back.

'You've got nothing to be frightened of. *STOP!*'

There was no way they were going to stop. As they ran, Ned was aware of a police officer arriving on the scene. The officer grabbed the driver while he argued back, pointing to Ned and Robyn. Ned focused on the road ahead and didn't stop running. Kip's pink tongue was lolling out of his mouth as he galloped along the road. Ned tightened the lead, taking care not to slow down or trip. Robyn was holding onto the straps of the bag either side of her shoulders. She looked like she might topple over at any point. Ned glanced over his shoulder and saw that the driver wasn't chasing them any more. He was running back to the van.

'He's going to come after us in the van instead. We need to hide,' Robyn cried out.

'That way, down there. I can see a park.' Ned gasped in pain, pointing down a grassy verge, although he couldn't see what was on the other side of it.

'OK.' Robyn was struggling.

Ned pulled Kip up onto a path skirting the dark edge of what looked like a river or a lake. Robyn followed clumsily. They needed to share the load of that bag. Or get rid of it, he thought, just as Robyn overbalanced. She slid down the grassy bank, screaming and Kip tore after her, taking Ned with him. They plummeted to the bottom of the hill, stopping in front of a lake.

He and Robyn were soaked and caked in mud and fallen

leaves, but Kip was as dry as a bone. Ned rolled over and lay on his front, wincing in pain, and looked up at the road where the car lights were coming from. Robyn was stuck on her front, unable to turn over with the weight of the Welbike pinning her to the ground. He helped ease her out of the straps and she came and lay next to him, gasping for breath. Kip belly-crawled next to Ned. The dog licked him then checked his face, sniffing and assessing him.

'Sshhh. Down, Kip, down,' Ned whispered the command.

Kip lay low on his front, panting softly and looked up at the road, his nose snuffling. The three of them watched and waited. They couldn't hear anyone calling them, not that the driver knew their names, nor they his. How had he not even asked Sadie the name of the van driver? They could hear vehicles, but they were passing rather than stopping and searching.

'We need to move,' Ned said regretfully. 'If we stay, there's more chance he'll find us.'

'Got an idea,' Robyn said, patting the Welbike bag.

'It's not going to work! We can't all get on there and I'm not leaving Kip.'

'Of course, you're not leaving Kip! I'm not stupid, Ned. I know you've got something in his jacket – documents, maps or blueprints and you need to deliver it to someone or somewhere. It's all right, you don't have to say anything. Official Secrets Act? Am I right.'

Ned nodded.

'Look, I'll get on the bike and find help,' she suggested.

'Don't go! You stay, I'll go,' he offered. 'Although I don't know how to put the bike together, let alone drive it.'



'You don't drive a motorbike, Ned. I keep telling you – you *rrrrride* a motorbike. Anyway, Kip needs you here. I'll flag down a vehicle or commandeer one. I'm Sadie Squires, after all,' she said, flashing him a dispatch rider's pass. 'Sadie's pass allows me to stop any vehicle and seize it.'

'Robyn, you're a thief!'

'And a genius.'

'This might actually work.'

'Aren't you glad you let me come, now?'

'Erm, I think you invited yourself.' He laughed weakly.

'Maybe. Anyway, are you going to lie there all night? Or are you going to help me assemble this bike?' She stood up, hands on hips, looking at him expectantly.



40

'I've found a milk train,' Robyn said, returning later on the Welbike.

'A milk train.' Ned stood up, looking around him, bleary eyed. He might have fallen asleep for a minute or two; he was completely exhausted. 'What's that?'

'A train that delivers milk, Ned, obviously,' Robyn said sharply as she kicked out the Welbike stand. 'The LNER. It'll get us to Kensington.'

'London?'

'Yes, Ned. London. That's where you're headed, isn't it?'

His legs were cramping, and his arm was numb from Kip resting his head there while he slept but his ribs were feeling less battered.

'Yes.'

'Right. Come on, then, it won't wait forever. I showed them the pass and they agreed to take us.'

'All of us?' Ned checked, clipping Kip's harness back on and adjusting the jacket to make sure it wasn't too tight.

'All three. We're a package deal, aren't we? A team.'

It was properly dark now. Everything sounded louder

and became less clear in the night and what he couldn't see was far more frightening than what he could. He liked to be able to assess things around him.

'I flashed Sadie's dispatch rider pass. He would have said yes to anything. Keen as mustard to do his bit for the war effort. Do you know, I'll be glad not to hear another word about the blinkin' war effort. I'm sick to the back teeth of it,' Robyn admitted.

It took Ned by surprise to hear that. He'd thought she found the whole thing quite the adventure, especially now she knew how to ride a motorbike. Even sparky people like Robyn got tired and fed up, he supposed.

'We'll take the Welbike with us. You never know, it might come in handy again. Good old Sadie,' Robyn said.

If Ned had less to worry about, he could easily become quite jealous of super Sadie.

'Do you want me to carry it this time?' Ned offered. 'Let's swap. You take my bag and Kip and I'll have the bike.'

'Nah. I've got muscles now!' she laughed. 'Probably bigger than yours! And you barely look fit to carry yourself. I'm taking you straight to hospital once you've found your mum.'

'If we find my mum.'

'Ned! Don't! Of course we'll find her. We won't stop until we do. Someone in London will know something, I'm sure of it.'

'All right, then, Captain Confident. Now, where's this milk float?' Ned asked as they reached the exit from the park.

'What is going on with your accent? You sound funny. And it's a milk train, Ned. Were you listening?' Robyn rolled her eyes. 'You never listen properly, do you?.'

'I do listen, I just can't always remember what I've heard.'

'You'll love this: the porter said milk comes all the way from Fishguard. That's in Wales, isn't it?'

He knew Robyn had no idea about Manod and what was hidden there, but she was a sharp as a pin. She knew something. But he mustn't give anything away, not even to her.

'That's a long way to travel,' he said nonchalantly.

'Look! There's the train line. The porter was showing off about the express engine, apparently, it's top of the range, high speed and all that jazz. We might have to run the rest of the way. I don't know how long they're willing to wait. Ready?' She tightened her straps, adjusted the weight of the Welbike, and started running towards the railway line.

'Let's catch that train!' Ned said.

He gripped Kip's harness and ran as best he could towards the milk wagons.





41

*April 1942*

'Shall we start walking and hope we're heading in the right direction?'

He knew the concert didn't start until midday, which should give him and Kip enough time to deliver the picture.

'Why don't we ask someone rather than relying on hope? I don't think it's safe to just start walking around. Look at the state of the place.' Robyn gestured around them.

Melted stubs of railings lined a street dotted with sandbags. They walked past a collection of shovels and wheelbarrows, some abandoned, some filled with debris. A row of houses had been halved and the remains of a garage looked like a collection of pencil shavings, piled up with lumps of lead sticking out of softer materials, torn to shreds and ribbons. There were no cars, bicycles or buses; in fact, there was no one at all on this stretch of street. Perhaps they'd been evacuated, Ned thought.

'Look at the state of us! We don't want to draw attention to ourselves, not that there's anyone about to ask.' He felt

as dreadful as he looked around. 'And you need to ditch that Welbike, Robyn.' He nodded at the massive bag on her back.

'You're right. Look, we could hide it in there.' Robyn pointed to what looked like an old ambulance station at the end of the street.

'Good idea,' Ned agreed. 'And I promise we'll come back for it.'

'Hello, love. Can I help you? Oooh, I can see the problem from here.' A woman in a white medical coat, with a red cross on it, came out of a storage hut next to the station.

She was carrying a bucket of sand in one hand and a bucket of water in the other.

'Sorry?' Ned said, thinking she was referring to him and his ribs.

'Bring him in, then, and we'll take a look at that tail.' She nodded at Kip. 'That's why you're here, isn't it?' she prompted.

Ned and Robyn looked at one another. 'Yes, that's right,' Ned said, following Kip.

'Best to be prepared,' the woman said, pointing at the buckets as Kip acquainted himself with her coat pocket. 'Treats after, young hound. Let's tend to your wounds first. You are a big lad, aren't you? Bet he eats you out of house and home.' The woman went to take Kip's lead and harness from Ned.

'No!' he hissed. 'I'll bring him. He won't go to anyone else.' Ned began babbling to cover up his rudeness.

'That's true. He's a Guide Dog, see his training jacket,

there.' Robyn tried to smooth things over. 'He has to stay with Ned.'

'All right.' The woman took off her tin hat. 'I can see that. That jacket's filthy, you been digging holes? And that harness needs looking at. You hold him while I examine him. I don't think we'll get him up onto the table; he's too big,' she told Ned. 'I'm Eloise, by the way.'

'Are you a vet?' Ned asked, uncertain whether to trust this Eloise woman. There was no knitting, and she wasn't wearing a russet-red hat, but you couldn't be too careful.

'No. But I'm with the animal ambulance. See?' she pointed at the wooden box next to the storage hut. It had writing in white capital letters on the side.

'Right.' Robyn nodded at Ned encouragingly. 'That's good.'

'Thanks,' Ned said. She did seem legitimate.

'He should rest that tail. Same thing happened to my little dog; it'll heal in time. Now, I'm going to give him breakfast, since you're up with the lark. Is that all right with you? Looks like you could do with some tea and toast yourselves. You look a bit pale, young man. Tell you what, I'll give you two a decent breakfast, if you clean out the back of my wagon,' Eloise offered.

'Sounds fair,' Ned agreed, without consulting Robyn. Once again, his stomach gave him away. At least his appetite was back – that had to be a good sign.

'And try to keep your dog nice and calm. Though that's easier said than done with a Golden Retriever. I wouldn't be surprised to hear there's some Newfoundland in him too.'

What a lovely mix. He'll be right as rain in a few days, but you bring him back to me if he's not wagging by Wednesday. We're open all hours.'

'But we don't live round here . . .' Robyn started, then clapped her hand over her mouth.

'Oh. Well, I'm sure there'll be someone who can look at him wherever you do live. We're off to Green Park, once that wagon's clean.'

Ned and Robyn exchanged looks then Ned asked, 'Could you give us a lift? We need to make sure Kip rests and mends his tail, like you suggested. I don't think I . . . I mean, I don't think he can walk another mile.'





At Green Park they waved goodbye to Eloise and the animal ambulance crew then sat on the nearest bench to discuss strategies. Next to the bench was a sign threatening prosecution to anyone who wasted their bread on feeding the birds. Robyn tutted. And at the far end of the park, anti-aircraft guns reared their terrifying heads. Treetops had been cut off, leaving the trees looking oddly misshapen and out of place. There were no lakes, no playgrounds, no flowerbeds, no monuments or statues. Everything ornamental had been pruned away, making way for the machinery of war.

'I've got to take these boots off,' Ned said.

'Please don't!' Robyn grimaced. 'I do not want to smell your sweaty socks!'

Ned ignored her and unlaced his hobnailed boots. He was grateful once again to Mr Howse for looking after him. He shook out both boots, expecting to find a stone or grit. Instead, a tiny folded-up piece of paper fell onto the grass.

'What's that?' Robyn bent down to pick it up and passed it to Ned.

'I don't know. I didn't put it in there!'

'Come on, then, open it up, let's see.'

'It's . . . Morse code! It's from Anni!' Ned said, laughing.

'Who's Anni and what on earth possessed her to go near your boots?'

'Anni's a friend. She's a refugee.'

'Oh. Where did you meet her?'

'Where Mum and I've been staying. I've been teaching her Morse code.'

'Did you hear the BBC have started transmitting news bulletins in Morse code?' Robyn said excitedly.

'That's brilliant! We'll be able to listen in and maybe even understand some of it. I'm so glad Mary taught us.' Ned was thrilled. Anni would be pleased too.

'Oh, I miss Mary so much! Did I tell you she came back to Bletchley for a bit? She said she was a teacher but couldn't tell me what she was teaching. Then she disappeared again, and she hasn't written in ages. Read it out, then.'

'It's . . . you're not going to believe this . . . it's instructions, No . . . It's directions. Look!' They peered at the paper with dots and dashes on, deciphering Anni's instructions.

'It's from a park, I think. This should lead us to the . . .'  
Ned stopped.

'Go on, lead us where? I won't tell. Cross my heart and hope to die.' Robyn theatrically crossed her heart.

He knew he could trust her. They'd been through enough together. And surely now they were in London and had Anni's amazing directions, it was safe to tell her. She was his absolute best friend, after all.

'To the National Gallery. Kip's carrying a painting.'



'But I will one day! Just you watch me.' Robyn stuck her tongue out at him, looking much like the green gargoyles protecting every corner of the cream brick hotel.

Just like Bletchley Park, Ned thought. They were travel-weary, filthy faced and accompanied by a scruffy dog.

'We're hardly their usual clientele,' Robyn joked.

'Making the place look dirty,' Ned agreed.

'Probably stink to high heaven too. When did you last have a wash?' Robyn asked.

'I can't even remember.' Ned wiped his nose on his sleeve. 'But after the war, we'll come back here, and we'll remember this moment.'

'Even if we washed, we'd still not be allowed in! This place isn't for the likes of us. But I tell you what, we'll do the conga out here instead to celebrate.' Robyn spun around and grabbed Ned, ready to dance, when someone almost crashed into them.

'What are you doing here?' Robyn asked the young woman who had come to a standstill in front of her.

'Mary! How did you get in there?' Ned asked her. 'And why are you in London? I thought you were in the countryside somewhere, learning languages.'

'Robyn! Ned!' Mary threw her arms around both of them. They all hugged each other tightly.

'Ouch!' he groaned, ribs aching. 'Ow, ow, ow!'

'Sorry! Are you all right, Ned?' Mary checked.

'Fine, fine.' He winced as Kip nudged the three of them, wanting to be part of the action.

'What are you doing here, Mary? Why didn't you come

back to Bletchley? I haven't had a letter from you in ages.' Robyn sounded hurt.

'I'm sorry. You know what it's like. What are you two doing in London? And who's this handsome boy?' Mary held her hand out to Kip, who accepted the fuss and attention and gave her handbag a thorough investigation. Robyn and Ned exchanged a look at the sight of Mary holding a woman's handbag. She looked a bit like . . . a mam, Ned thought.

'We're on a day trip,' Robyn lied.

'Seeing the sights,' Ned added.

'*With a dog?*' Mary questioned.

'Yes, we're training him.' Ned felt awful lying to Mary and tried to stick as closely to the truth as possible. 'He's a Guide Dog.'

'Oh, I didn't realise you knew someone who's blind,' Mary said in surprise.

'And you? Why are you here?' Robyn ignored the tuts from passers-by.

'I'm working in London, for a while,' Mary said evasively, adjusting her hat, which was also new and odd.

Mary's plaits had disappeared. Her hair was pulled back into a boring bun at the base of her neck.

She checked her wrist. 'In fact, I'm late. I've got to go.'

Mary was wearing a watch, like a grown-up. She almost looked like she was wearing a costume or dressing up as someone else. Ned felt like a schoolchild in comparison, in his shorts and V-neck jumper. He'd decided against wearing a boilersuit to travel in, but now he was regretting it.

'Where are you working?' Robyn seemed unable to stop



herself asking. 'Surely not in there?' She juttred a thumb at the Ritz.

'No! No! I'm not working in there.' Mary laughed strangely. 'I'm working in a hat shop,' she said quickly, touching her hat as if to prove it. 'And . . . my lunchbreak's over.'

'But it's nowhere near lunchtime,' Ned pointed out sadly.

They were lying to one another, and they all knew it. It felt miserable.

'Fancy you working in a posh shop! It's like we don't know you any more,' Robyn tried to joke.

'Look, I've got to go. I'll write! I promise.' She didn't say when or how but Robyn and Ned both nodded and hugged her goodbye.

'Wait! Do you know the way to Trafalgar Square?' he asked.

'Yes. Why?'

'Because . . . I want to see that tall column,' Robyn said.

'Nelson's Column?' Mary checked. 'I've heard the enemy have plans to relocate it to Berlin.'

'Sounds like we're just in time, Ned,' Robyn said.

Mary reached into her handbag, pulled out a small pad of paper and quickly jotted down directions.

'You seem to know London rather well,' Ned said admiringly.

'Oh, only this bit, really,' she said before thrusting her whole notepad at him. 'I barely go anywhere else. It's too dangerous,' she added mysteriously.

They watched her walk off at a brisk pace, her smart court shoes clipping up the street.

'I think I can see the sign for Fortnum & Mason. Anni said that's next.' Ned got out the Morse code directions

and compared them to Mary's neatly drawn instructions.

'Wait!' Robyn cried.

'She remembered! Look, Mary's drawn the directions rather than written them. Though I don't know why she gave me the whole pad. She must have been in a rush.'

This cheered him up immensely; she knew how he'd much rather follow a drawing than a boring list of words.

'Wait,' Robyn repeated, putting her hand on his arm.

'What? Why?' Ned was impatient to get going again.

'We're going to follow her,' Robyn said plainly.

'But what about the gallery?' he hissed.

'There's still time, now we know where we're going. I want to see what she's up to.'

They followed Mary at a distance, trying to keep a low profile. This wasn't easy as Kip stopped to sniff every shop doorway and people were keen to say hello to him.

'He's a Guide Dog. A Seeing-eye Dog. You can't pet him. He's working,' he repeated over and over to passers-by.

Mary went into a shop. They stopped several paces behind her and watched. And waited. When she didn't come back out, Robyn marched towards the shop. Ned grabbed her and pulled her back.

'Look. It is a hat shop. That's what she said.' He pointed. 'See. Nothing suspicious. Come on, let's go.'

'And dresses. It is suspicious. Everything about her was suspicious. And she didn't mention dresses,' Robyn replied. 'I'm just popping in quickly. You two wait here. They'll never let you in.' She ran her fingers through her hair in a futile effort to smarten herself up.



'You've got five minutes and then I'm off!' Ned warned, and he wasn't joking either.

He hadn't come all this way to turn up late at the National Gallery. He had his mother's reputation to protect. And the sooner they got there, the sooner he could find her. He stood and watched the steady stream of soldiers, exercising or marching somewhere, file past him and Kip. He heard a range of languages being spoken but the only one he could make out was Polish, because he'd heard a bit of that at Bletchley Park. When Robyn came back only two minutes later, Ned was relieved He'd expected a much longer wait.

'Good. Satisfied?' he asked.

'No. They'd never heard of her in there. It's a tiny hat and dress shop with the type of clothes your mother and mine would wear.'

'And she wasn't in there?'

'Not a sniff of her. It's like she went inside then disappeared into thin air.'

'Like my mum,' he couldn't help adding.

'Now we've got two mysteries to solve,' Robyn said wearily.

Robyn loved a mystery, but she wouldn't be able to solve this one quickly. Still, Ned knew from experience she would niggle away at it until a thread came loose. And then she'd pull it until whatever Mary was up to unravelled.

'We're going. Right now,' Ned said.

They trekked down the long street past Fortnum & Mason. Silver barrage balloons, set at different heights, glinted in the sun. Ned could see one clearly enough to read the word *Joyance* on it. The National Gallery queue

snaked around the fountains; a mixture of men and women in uniform and civilians on their lunchbreak from work, women in headscarves clutching sandwiches in brown paper and men opening flasks of tea. As they approached the four large lions lounging in Trafalgar Square, Kip grumbled and barked at one. This made them both smile.

'I see old Nelson's still standing, then.' Robyn blinked, looking up at the admiral on his column. 'The enemy haven't blown him to smithereens or got their hands on him just yet. The king will be relieved.'

They came to a halt outside the National Gallery doors. Its grand pillars and steps were surrounded by window boxes full of peas, beans and lettuce growing. There was a helpful sign with an arrow directing them towards the correct entrance for the concert. There was another sign directing visitors to the gallery, towards the War Artists Exhibition.

'One o'clock. The orchestra of the central band H.M. Royal Air Force with Miss Myra Hess, pianoforte.' Robyn read out the sign to him and he was grateful he hadn't needed to, as he hated reading information signs as the words seemed to move around. Ned gave himself a little shake, stood straight and smart, and then, despite tuts and murmurs of 'don't you know how to queue?' he walked to the front, Robyn by his side, smiling, telling the people she passed that 'it's as busy as Piccadilly Circus!' Ned still wasn't sure where that was in relation to the National Gallery but now was not the time to find out, he thought, letting Kip in his Guide Dog jacket, with its precious cargo hidden inside, proudly lead the way.





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Once he had successfully delivered the painting, Ned felt the tension ease from his shoulders as they found two chairs at the back of the room where the concert was taking place, inside the gallery. He and Robyn grinned at each other, and both gave Kip far too many treats. And finally, he had word that his mother was safe too. No longer trapped in Bletchley, they'd told him but had arrived right here in London, yesterday. Although he hadn't been able to see her yet – that would have to wait until after the concert – he'd been promised that the woman she was staying with would take Ned to her.

'My mother will have a whole basket of kittens when I tell her I saw Buckingham Palace. And that I sat next to the queen,' Robyn whispered gleefully.

'You're not sat next to her. You're sat next to me. The queen – and we can only see the back of her head – is rows and rows away from you, right at the front sat with very important men with shiny slicked-back hair. Far away from us waifs and strays at the back here,' Ned pointed out.

'Hmm, well, that's not how I'll tell the story,' Robyn folded her arms.

'And you won't be able to tell your mum because she'll kill you when she finds out that you disappeared into the night!'

'I haven't disappeared. Don't be so melodramatic, Ned. I wrote on the note that I was with you. Mum always said you were a good sort,' Robyn said casually.

'Did she?' He was surprised and pleased.

'Anyway, Mary's the one who's disappeared, not me,' she started again. 'At least we know where your mum is now. One less disappearing act to worry about.' Robyn turned Mary's drawn instructions over and over in her hand.

'It was a good job I mentioned her to the gallery's security guard.'

'Bit of a risk, wasn't it?' Robyn looked at him almost in awe.

'I had to start somewhere. And he had a friendly face, for a guard.' He smiled, thinking of the nightwatchmen at Manod.

'And he said your mother had been kind to him when she'd been at the gallery, remembering to ask after his evacuated children.'

'Sounds like Mum. He was the one who called my father. I wish he hadn't.'

'He wasn't to know, though, was he. Your mother probably had to put your father's name down as her next of kin.'

'True,' he had to agree.

'So, this person who's taken your mother in, this Myra Hess, who is she exactly and how does your mother know her? I thought you said your mother didn't know anyone in London.'



'Other than her name being on the programme as the pianist, I don't know anything else about her. Bizarrely, I think Myra's a friend of Anni's father. I think Miriam knows Myra too. My mum must have met her at the gallery on one of her Picture of the Month trips and asked to stay with her.'

'Wait, who's Miriam? And how does Anni's father know Myra? You seem to have made a whole bunch of new friends, Ned.'

'Miriam is amazing! And I want you to meet her one day, you'd get on like a house on fire. Anni's father . . . well, it's a very long story. Do you mind if I tell you later? I'm so tired, I don't think I can talk any more. I just want this to be over with because then we can find Myra.'

'And Myra will take us to your mum?'

'Yes.' He let out a long sigh. 'Do you think mum knows about Robert? That's he's safe?'

'I hope so. I'm sure she would have got someone to find out, to tell her.'

'Good. Good.' He managed a small smile.

'OK, no more questions or talking, as long as you help me work out what Miss Mary Clark is up to.'

'You're not going to let this go, are you? Pass it here, then,' Ned instructed, taking a pencil out of his bag. 'If Mary's leant heavily enough on her notepad,' he said as he shaded it in with a pencil, 'whatever she's written or drawn should be revealed! *Ta-da!*'

Robyn leant forward to look at the shapes and patterns appearing.

'It worked but I've no idea what these drawings mean.' Ned shrugged, disappointed.

'I'll get to the bottom of what Mary's up to, OK?' Robyn promised, taking the notepad back.

'The gallery said they'll get a message to Mrs Thomas to let her know Harri's in hospital. And that the animal ambulance treated Kip. I wrote it all down for them to read to her. Anni be worried too.'

'Do you think Mrs Thomas will be able to come and see Harri? Without Kip?'

'I don't think so. I need to get Kip back to Mrs Thomas as soon as possible. Harri shouldn't be stuck in hospital too long, should he? It's all my fault.'

'He'll be fine, it's just a broken leg, could have been a lot worse. For both of you. Which reminds me, we need to get you looked at.'

'After I've seen my mum,' he bargained. 'We can get my ribs checked out once I've seen Harri.'

'Deal. It looked like they were taking good care of your friend. He'll probably be in a nice comfy hospital bed with nurses fussing around him.'

'We didn't do a bad job in the end, did we?' Ned pointed out, sitting higher in his seat to gaze at the back of the queen's head. The feather in her hat was taller than anyone else's.

'Are you looking at the picture or her majesty?' Robyn teased.

'The picture, of course.' He smiled, dragging his eyes away from the queen, whose presence had lent an air of glamour and excitement to the occasion. He was drinking in every detail to share with Anni and Mrs Thomas.



'Do you think she'll bring the princesses with her? Maybe next month?' Robyn asked hopefully.

'No idea.'

'To think no one had ever thought of bringing the picture into the concert room. You're full of ideas and surprises, Ned Letton. Maybe they'll carry on doing it, you know, for the rest of the war?' Robyn said excitedly.

There was beauty everywhere in the gallery, despite the sandbags stacked in front of taped-up and blacked-out windows, framed by fire and water buckets. The audience were flanked by blank walls with empty gilt frames, other than the one in front of them displaying the Picture of the Month. Ned looked down at Kip, who was cooling himself on the mosaic floor. He now understood why the artist had chosen to paint, of all the things in the world, the National Gallery itself. He looked up into the glass-domed roof and counted the panes, then stopped himself. He didn't need to count. He was here. They were here.

'What's the painter you picked called again? What's his name?' Robyn elbowed him.

'Her name is Lily Delissa Joseph. And the painting is *The National Gallery*,' Ned whispered as the orchestra began to tune up.

'It's very blue. And purple. Clever idea, really, to paint a picture of paintings.' Robyn nodded in approval.

Ned was admiring the frames Lily Delissa Joseph had painted. There were some gilt ones in there; Mr Howse would be pleased. He tuned in to the conversations of the people around him. Some opened paper bags and tucked into sandwiches, as it really

was lunchtime now. Others were discussing the painting over cups of tea. Every single chair was occupied, and several men stood leaning against the wall. Smartly dressed men in forces uniform walked onto the stage and began tuning up violins, then were followed by a woman who arranged herself and her sheet music at the polished piano, which had STEINWAY printed on the side in capital letters. A man stood next to her, ready to turn the pages of her music. She was wearing a sparkling dress with geometric squares all over it and her wavy chestnut-brown hair was held back off her face. She was smiling.

'That's Myra Hess,' someone behind him whispered and he turned around.

It was the knitting woman, sitting with the man from the van. They both nodded at him.

'Well done. Well done indeed. We didn't think you'd manage it,' the knitting woman said.

'What do you mean? How did you get here?' Ned was ready to stand up and well . . . not fight them, but shout at them at least.

'What's wrong, Ned?' Robyn asked as Kip stood up, hackles raised.

'It's them! The knitting Nora and the van man!'

'It's all right. We're on your side. Sit down, you're causing a dreadful scene,' the woman said curtly. The first aider must have cleaned the blood off her face, although there were bruises from the train accident at Bletchley station.

She continued, 'Don't worry. We're with K. He sent us to find you once he realised your mother had gone AWOL.'

'AWOL?' Robyn looked puzzled.



'Absent without leave,' the woman replied.

'And then K heard that you were missing, and guessed you must have stolen the picture.'

'I didn't steal it! I was bringing it to my mother,' Ned interjected.

'K had a right to-do with someone called Bob, at the quarry. Bob tried to protect you. Quite the row until it all came out. Anyway, I am sorry it turned out the way it did,' the van man apologised.

'What do you mean you're with K?' Robyn asked. 'Who are you?'

'I'm B and she's . . .' the van man began.

'We're part of his underground network and that's all you need to know,' the knitting Nora cut across him.

'A knitting network? Trying to pull the wool over the enemy's eyes, are you?' Robyn laughed. 'Next you'll be telling me that your knitting needles are actually poisoned arrows!'

'Well, not quite, but there's certainly more to them than meets the eye.' She pulled a knitting needle out of her sleeve, pressed the end and a small sharp blade shot out.

Robyn gasped as the woman quietly tucked the needle away.

'There's plenty more where that came from. After K found out about your mother, he sent us to find you. But we were told it was just one boy travelling alone. Didn't even know if we'd got the right boy,' she shared. 'An ordinary-looking boy in shorts and a jumper wasn't much to go on. And no one said anything about an enormous dog!'

'Our network had people stationed across the country, on Opps. Between us, we knew we'd find you,' the van man said.

'That's why you had the *Echo* in your van!' Ned said, the pieces of the puzzle falling into place.

'Yes. We all received copies via K. Never did find the culprit. Though of course I knew your mother wasn't a Person of Interest.'

It was such a relief to hear someone say those words out loud.

'K has officially closed the investigation, but I'd put good money on him still being on the lookout,' said the van man.

Of course he was. Ned felt sure K wouldn't rest until he'd found out who was behind the leak. And wouldn't they all like to know who had caused them all such trouble!

'Anyway, after the train crash, I thought I should step in.' The knitting woman had the grace to look embarrassed. 'Things had got out of hand. I thought it was unfair to put this on you. I guessed the artwork must have been hidden on the dog, which was a very risky move, although a bold one.'

'What would you have done, then?' Ned challenged.

'I've carried documents in a corset before,' she snapped back. 'To be honest, I simply didn't think you children were up to the job, and I didn't have time to explain myself to you. Nor should I have to.'

'But here we are!' Ned said too loudly.

A woman darning socks shushed them.

'That's right. We did it!' Robyn snapped.

'You did. And we're glad. Aren't we?' The van man nudged the knitting Nora.

'Yes, yes,' she agreed reluctantly.



'But the Guide Dog was confusing. Put us off,' the van man explained. 'We thought we'd got the wrong boy, see. Course, you can't trust anyone these days, but I was going to explain the situation to you once we got to my lockup. Hard enough to drive in the blackout as it is without having a difficult conversation. And I had to get off the road first. I'm convinced we were being followed.'

'That's why you drove like a maniac!' Robyn said.

'But then you ran away,' the van man finished. 'I'm sorry I gave you a fright.'

'We were worried the enemy would pick you up and then God knows what would have happened to the art!' the woman added coldly.

'And to you!' the man said more gently. 'We were worried about you too, of course.'

'What's on the back of that paper?' the knitting Nora asked, gesturing to the pad Mary had given them and holding her hand out. 'Just scribbles,' Robyn said dismissively. 'Ned did the shading thing with a pencil but it doesn't make any sense.'

'Can I have a look?' The van man asked. Robyn reluctantly handed it over. The knitting Nora and the van man studied it together, pointing at different markings and whispering before handing it back to Robyn.

'What is it?' Ned asked. 'What's the matter?' They both looked concerned.

'It's Japanese codes. Excellent work with the shading,' the van man said.

'What does it say?' Ned asked.

'No idea. There's only two people in the whole of Britain

who know Japanese and it's not easy to learn. Or so I hear, anyway,' the van man said cagily.

'Where did you get this?' the knitting Nora leant forward, unable to hide the fear on her face.

'Found it on the pavement,' Robyn lied quickly.

'Stop talking,' a man next to the knitting Nora said directly. 'I spent my whole lunchbreak queuing for this. It's the only time we're relatively safe from air raids. And I've paid my shilling. So, if you want to gas, go outside.'

The knitting Nora opened her mouth. She clearly had a lot more questions for Ned and Robyn but then Myra Hess and the orchestra started to play. Ned, happy to stop talking to K's network of knitting spies, willingly gave himself up to the orchestra and Lily Delissa Joseph's creation. But by the third piece of music, he was getting twitchy and so was Kip. The dog kept turning around in the tiny space before settling back down again, grudgingly.

'Stop fidgeting, Kip,' Ned whispered as a rumble came from outside.

He grabbed Robyn's hand and instinctively ducked, pulling her down onto the floor. He covered Kip and Robyn, as much as he could, with his body. The orchestra stopped playing. There were a few screams from audience members, followed by a deadly hush. Questions flew around the room like shrapnel. *Was it a bomb? Is this it? Where's the shelter? Is there a basement we can get to? This is it! They're invading!*

'Please. Calm, please.' Myra Hess stood centre stage, her dark hair still neatly in place.



Someone from the gallery ran onto the stage and whispered in her ear.

'A bomb has exploded outside, in the courtyard. There are no injuries. The gallery staff are dealing with it and clearing the debris. Happily, the disposal crew were having their lunch in the canteen. They will put their sandwiches aside for our safety.'

This was followed by a cheer and then applause from the audience. He saw the men lean in and reassure the queen, who applauded and turned and smiled at the audience. For a second, Ned thought he recognised one of the men sat next to her but before he could place him Myra Hess addressed the audience again.

'If you would like to leave, please do so. And for those who wish to stay . . . the band will play on! And perhaps we'll even have time for some Bach.'

The packed room stood and applauded, whistling and shouting encouragement. Ned looked around at the faces of these strangers, and even gave the knitting Nora and the van man a quick smile. Not one single person left the room or dashed off to find the nearest air-raid shelter. People were stamping their feet and so he joined in. As did Robyn. And Kip barked. Everyone wanted more music, more art and for the concert to continue – and he did too, he realised. He stared at the Picture of the Month, in awe of the artwork, then turned to watch Myra Hess fan her dress out before sitting back down at the piano. She raised her hands and started to play. And this time, Ned was more than ready to listen.

## Epilogue

'Hello, I'm Myra. I hear you were looking for me?' The pianist stood up from the piano and walked over to him.

'Yes, I'm Ned. I think my mum is staying with you.' He held out his hand. It was about time he started shaking hands.

'Oh! *You're Ned*. I'm afraid your mother wasn't making much sense when she arrived last night. She looked like she hadn't slept in days. I'm so glad you're here,' Myra said, clasping both of his hands in hers and shaking them enthusiastically.

Robyn had taken Kip outside to stretch his legs, giving Ned some privacy.

'Is she all right? What happened to her?' he asked, as Myra led him to the piano stool. 'I thought she was in Bletchley, with my father, but when I got there, she'd already left.' He didn't have to hold back now, as the gallery was empty, apart from the guards and cleaners.

'She collapsed on my doorstep. She'd been to the gallery and found someone who gave her my address. We'd met quite a few times over the past few months and got on very well. I'm glad she thought to come to me. I'd already agreed



'Yes, I found it at the back of the . . .' He wasn't sure what he was allowed to say.

'Wherever it was, I don't think I could have asked for a better painting to accompany my concert. Do you know, Ned, *and sidekick*, Delissa Joseph was one of the first Jewish suffragettes and ended up missing her debut showing because of it! *The Jewish Chronicle* reviewed her work and apologised for her absence because she was detained at Holloway prison.'

Robyn gasped.

'Her work was regularly shown at the Royal Academy, but she's never had a showing at the National Gallery, despite painting almost a dozen interiors of this very gallery. Few women have their work hung here. Until now, Ned!' Myra said in delight.

'You've made history.' Robyn looked at him in awe.

'And what a brave act it was too.'

'Oh, I'm not brave! And it wasn't just me! My friend Harri came with me, until he broke his leg after the train crash – after I check on Mum, I really need to get back to Bletchley and find out which hospital they took him to.'

'I'll come with you,' Robyn immediately offered.

'And the dog jacket thing was Anni's idea. And Sadie, Robyn's friend, she loaned us a Welbike, which we need to return. And lots of other people helped too, like Mr Howse who drove us to the station. And you too, Robyn.' He gestured to his best friend. 'You see, it wasn't just me, Miss Hess.'

'Well, what a team. They must all think the world of

you, to have put themselves in such danger,' she said in admiration.

He hadn't thought about it like that before.

'We did! *We do!*' Robyn cried, causing Kip to wag his tail.

'You know you've started something revolutionary, Ned, by pairing the picture with the music in the concert hall, instead of outside on the steps. I'll be speaking to C about it in the morning.'

'*You know C?*' Ned said in amazement.

'Yes. He was sat with the queen, she's a great patron of the gallery. Look, that's a photo of him there, with K.' Myra pointed at a framed portrait on the wall near the exit door.

Ned walked closer to it, Kip following. He peered at the portrait and felt the shock all over his body, like electricity running up and down his arms. It was the man with the shiny slicked-back hair, the one who had reassured the queen after the bomb went off.

'Robyn, come here,' he whispered.

'What? What is it? Who's this C you keep banging on about . . .' As her eyes took in the portrait Robyn too fell silent.

'Is everything all right?' Myra called.

'Yes, it's nothing,' Ned replied, trying to sound as normal as he could.

'It's him,' Robyn breathed out the words. 'I don't believe it but it's . . . the Heron.'

It didn't seem possible, but at the same time, nothing surprised him any more. The Heron, their arch nemesis from Bletchley Park, was also C. Ned had known he recognised



the man sitting in the front row, next to royalty no less. C and the Heron had been the same person all along. It kind of made sense. It all fit together, like a jigsaw puzzle.

'Where's a heron?' Myra asked, confused.

'Oh, nothing, no one,' Ned said. How on earth would he begin to explain to Myra that her boss, C – *everyone's boss* – had been their number one suspect when things had started to go wrong at Bletchley Park?

'I always said that man was everywhere all at once!' Robyn huffed. 'Like a bad penny. I can't believe *he* of all people got to sit next to the queen.'

'I'd like to make your idea a tradition, and I'm sure your mother, once she's better, will be on board too. Who knows, there might even be a job for you here, after the war,' Myra offered.

'After the war! *After the war!* That's all we ever hear.' Robyn jumped away from the portrait of C and K and bent down to rub Kip's head, her tiredness suddenly catching up with her. 'I'm so fed up,' she said wearily.

'But all things end. All things . . . I can't keep calling you *sidekick*, what's your name?' Myra asked.

'Robyn Audrey Lewis,' she said automatically.

'Well, Miss Robyn Audrey Lewis, as I said, all things end. We must weather them out. And this is why we need music and art and brave people, like you, Ned.'

'And Kip!' Ned added.

'And Kip. If there's something that brings you happiness or pleasure, whether it's art, music, singing or your dog, hold onto it because it will give you hope. And hope will

get you through. And while we still have the power to make such choices, I choose to live and to see this war end, Robyn. Living is the most important thing of all, you know. And art makes all this living,' she waved her hand around them, at the sandbags and the buckets of water, 'bearable,' Myra finished.

'Maybe even beautiful?' Ned offered.

'Steady on, Ned!' Robyn snorted.

'That's right, Ned! You know, you're just like your mother.'

'Can we please go and find her now?' he asked, because there was living to be done. Whether it was in Wales or London, as long as he had his mother by his side, and art and music in their lives, it wouldn't be perfect – *there is a war on after all* – but it would be *his* life to live.

indents

*The End*



## Historical Note

About eight years ago, during the school holidays, I visited Upton House in Warwickshire with my children and was fascinated to find out that it had been owned by Jewish philanthropist and art collector Walter Samuel, Lord Bearsted, who created one of the nation's finest private art collections of the twentieth century and was the chairman of the board of trustees at the National Gallery. During the war, not only did he rescue Jewish refugees, but he also had a secret role under the code name K; he never once revealed his mission. As war continued, Walter became concerned for the safety of his valuable art collection. He wrote a letter to Kenneth Clark (K in *Hide and Seek*), the then Director of the National Gallery, asking if his paintings could be stored alongside the national collection in a disused slate quarry. The location in Wales was top secret, and his paintings remained safe for the duration of the war in a chamber alongside paintings belonging to the King! I suddenly remembered a primary-school trip I'd been on to that very slate quarry and a story began to grow, although very slowly.

In the course of my research, I also discovered that Walter's wife Dorothy, Lady Bearsted, employed Kathleen 'Kitty' Lloyd-Jones, one of the first female professional garden designers, who came to Upton in the 1930s and changed the face of the gardens forever; eagle-eyed readers may have spotted Kitty working in the Bletchley Park gardens in *I, Spy*.

After writing *I, Spy*, I knew I wanted to continue Robyn, Ned and Mary's journeys through the war, as well as the story of what happened to the nation's art treasures, and what better place to set a novel than in a secret slate quarry in the wild wilderness of Wales with the world at war.

## Jewish Refugees

I discovered during my research that a substantial number of Jewish refugees and evacuees arrived in Wales during the war. Jewish children were fostered, and Wales was heavily involved in the Kindertransport effort. Many refugees and evacuees remained in Wales, as well as across the rest of Great Britain, contributing greatly to literature, political life, society, culture and in particular art.

## War Artists

In Germany, the Nazis recognised art, alongside books, as an influential force, ripe for manipulation. Artists regarded as non-traditional in style, different in politics or racially 'non-Aryan' were labelled 'degenerate' and forbidden from working. Their work was confiscated or destroyed, and some

were beaten, intimidated or imprisoned. More than 200 artists from Germany and the countries it annexed or invaded were murdered in the Holocaust. Between 1933 and the Second World War over 300 artists came from Europe to Britain. They were supported by the art community and most stayed for the rest of their lives, going on to influence some of the most important British artists of the mid-twentieth century. In *Hide and Seek*, I wanted to capture the spirit of a welcoming community in a time of war. Anni is fostered and cared for by Mrs Thomas, but she is also the victim of anti-Semitism, when there is a leak about the artwork hidden in Manod in the *Liverpool Echo*, an event which really happened.

## National Gallery

Winston Churchill, then Prime Minister of Great Britain, declared that 'not one picture shall leave this island' and suggested that the nation's treasures be hidden in caves and cellars if need be, and Kenneth Clark, director of the National Gallery, took this quite literally by organising a huge mobilisation of art. To begin, the artwork was sent across Wales to be stored in castles<sup>1</sup>, mansions, and grand stately homes, however, as the war progressed, Clark decided to gather the art in one place, Manod slate quarry.

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<sup>1</sup> It wasn't just art hidden in castles across Wales, children were too. As part of the Kindertransport operation, 200 Jewish children were housed in the ancient Gwrych Castle in north Wales, more recently the site of ITV's *I'm a Celebrity . . . Get Me Out of Here!*.



## Miriam Rothschild

Miriam Rothschild was a renowned Jewish British scientist, who published over 300 scientific papers throughout her lifetime. She was the first woman to serve on the Committee for Conservation of the National Trust and the first woman to become a trustee of the British Museum of Natural History. Miriam's family had held one of the finest art collections in the world, until they had to sell some of it to escape Nazi Germany. At the beginning of the war, Miriam was drafted into the Enigma decryption project at Bletchley Park where she spent two years decoding German wireless messages with Alan Turing. Miriam, a conservationist, actually worked for the Foreign Office throughout the war and it's with artistic licence that I have placed her in Manod.

The real Miriam aided refugee Jewish scientists during and after the war and also worked with several organisations dedicated to helping Jewish children escape from Germany and Austria, housing some of these refugees in her own home at Ashton Wold, Oundle, Northamptonshire, which was also used by the Red Cross as a convalescent hospital for military personnel.

## Picture of the Month Scheme

Following the evacuation of the artwork from the National Gallery, letters of complaint were printed in *The Times* newspaper, and Kenneth Clark realised that he needed to do something to appease culture-hungry Londoners,

so he devised the Picture of the Month scheme, whereby each month one piece of art was transported from Wales to London, to be put on show. The Picture of the Month scheme still runs today in the National Gallery.

## Lily Delissa Joseph

My daughter, ever supportive of my research process, helped me in my quest to pick the perfect Picture of the Month for *Hide and Seek* and came across a female portrait, landscape and interior artist whose work was shown everywhere but the National Gallery, despite the fact that she painted interior portraits of the National Gallery. This woman was Lily Delissa Joseph, née Solomon, a Jewish suffragette and artist, who failed to attend her own first art exhibition because she was detained at Holloway Gaol, on a charge in connection with the Women's Suffrage Movement. As soon as I saw her painting, which is just small enough to be hidden in Kip's Guide Dog jacket, I knew this was the Picture of the Month that Ned and Kip would carry from Manod to the National Gallery.

## Dame Myra Hess

Jewish concert pianist Dame Myra Hess initiated affordable lunchtime chamber-music concerts at the National Gallery as soon as war broke out and didn't stop until 1946. Her concerts were a great success and were even attended by Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother, wife of King George

VI. If you look on YouTube, there's a video of Myra playing during one of these lunchtime concerts, with the Queen and Kenneth Clark looking on, and the camera picks out a little girl sitting on her mother's lap – that little girl was Erica Kurz.

After writing the first draft of *Hide and Seek*, by sheer serendipity I was lucky enough to be introduced to Erica Barrett née Kurz. (Thank you, Sharon and Caroline!) Erica's parents were persecuted as Jews and forced to flee Austria. They emigrated to England, where Erica's father, Otto Kurz, an eminent art historian, author, professor and librarian, assisted with the evacuation of art treasures from London and helped to catalogue the King's art collection at Windsor Castle, with Sir Owen Morshead. Erica's mother, Hilde, also an art historian, worked for Sir Kenneth Clark, which is how Erica found herself evacuated very close to Manod during the war! Erica's father never disclosed if he had signed the National Secrets Act.

Erica and I have since become friends and she has shared with me her memories of her extraordinary parents, as well as her time as an evacuee in North Wales during the war. *Hide and Seek* would have been much the poorer without Erica's carefully curated collection of her parents' letters, photographs and wonderfully moving stories about her family's life in Vienna, London and Wales. Thank you, Erica, for being so generous with your time and your unique experiences.

Thanks to **Guide Dogs** for helping me with historical information and photographs to ensure my representation

of Kip was accurate. Guide Dog's expert staff, volunteers and life-changing dogs help 2 million people affected by sight loss live actively, independently and well. Founded in 1934, following their first partnership in 1931, they are a charity that is almost entirely dependent on donations. Find out more at [guidedogs.org.uk](http://guidedogs.org.uk)



## Acknowledgements

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