

THE POSTER COMES TO LIFE

"Aunt Amy! Come quick!"

Dennis ran across the farmyard shouting. Something was wrong.

An alarmed Amy appeared in the doorway.

"Whatever's the matter with the boy?"

"It's the goat!" Dennis gasped.

"What about it?"

"The garden!"

Dennis turned and raced back the way he'd come, with Amy and Norman close behind.

The vegetable garden lay in tatters. Somehow, the goat had got loose in the night and had munched her way steadily through most of the plants.

"How did she get loose?" asked Norman.

"Accidents happen," sighed Amy.

"The rope must have broke," said Dennis.

Luigi shook his head. "Not break," he said. He was looking closely at the two ends. "Knife!"

Somebody had cut through the rope! But before

anyone could say anything else, Mr Jenkins arrived on his bike. He was waving an envelope.

"Letter for Master Norman Starkey!" he shouted out.

Norman gave a whoop of excitement. A letter! It had to be from his mother.

Norman was right. He read the letter through while Amy made Mr Jenkins a cup of tea.

There wasn't much news. She had moved into a one-bedroomed flat, not far from the munitions factory where she worked. It was only tiny but would do for the time being. There had been more bombing raids but she was safe and well. That was all. Apart from telling Norman to be good and not to get into trouble.

Suddenly, Norman felt very lonely. All he could think about was his mother and home. He didn't even hear what Mr Jenkins had to say when he heard that the goat's rope had been cut.

"Could be sabotage," Mr Jenkins suggested. "They say there are agents everywhere. Trying to ruin the war effort."

"Like spies, you mean?" asked Polly. Her eyes sparkled with excitement.

"Saboteurs! Spies! Same difference," Mr Jenkins told her. "Bad news."

Norman was still in a world of his own. He didn't even notice Luigi walk past the window. But Mr Jenkins did.

"Good job I managed to get you some help," he smiled at Amy.

"You, was it?" said Amy. So that was why Luigi had been sent to help. Mr Jenkins had organised it.

"Good worker, is he?" he asked.

"He'll do. Till my boy gets back from the army."

Jenkins finished his tea and picked up his cap.

"Remember," he told Polly and Dennis. "Keep your eyes peeled for strangers. Anybody acting suspicious. That sort of thing."

"We are doing," said Polly.

Jenkins looked across at Norman. He hadn't said a single word since he'd opened his letter.

"Everything all right at home, Norman?" Jenkins asked.

Norman just stood up and walked outside.

Jenkins turned to Amy. "That wasn't like Norman. Something must be wrong."

Amy shook her head. "Just needs time on his own," she said.

Norman sat on the wall by the vegetable garden watching Luigi. Luigi was doing his best to save as many plants as he could.

"Polly's going to show me the hideout. Are you coming?" Dennis had come looking for Norman.

But Norman didn't want company. He got down off the wall. "You go," he told Dennis. "I'm going for a walk by the river."

Norman wandered off towards the road. Luigi watched him go. "He not good today?" he asked Dennis.

"I think he's missing home," said Dennis.

Luigi nodded. "Ah yes," he said. "Luigi also."

Because of the war, lots of people were missing home.

It was washday at Westbourne Hall. So Mary was working harder than ever. Water had to be heated and tipped into a tub. Then washing was put in and pounded up and down with a wooden paddle to get the dirt out. Finally, it was squeezed between the heavy rollers of a mangle to get rid of the water and hung on the line to dry. It would take all day. And already Mary felt worn out.

Still, there was one good thing about it. Being in the washhouse meant that Millington didn't keep poking her nose in all the time.

Mary lifted a soppy wet sheet up out of the water and fed it between the rollers. It wasn't easy.

"Want any help?" a voice called out from behind.

Mary looked round in alarm.

Polly and Dennis were standing in the doorway.

Norman sat by the river reading his letter for the tenth time. He didn't hear the footsteps behind him. A hand grasped his shoulder.



Norman twisted round. A soldier was towering above him. A soldier in the uniform of an American G.I.

Norman jumped to his feet.

"It's OK!" said the G.I. "Nothing to be afraid of. I'm Mike Johnson. I'm from the U.S. base a few miles down the road."

Norman just stared at him.

"Looking for the best place to fish," Mike explained.

"Thought you might know."

Norman shook his head. His letter had dropped to the ground. Mike Johnson knelt down to pick it up.

"That's mine!" Norman held out his hand for the letter.

"Sure!" said Mike. He handed the letter to Norman. Then his hand went to his pocket and he pulled out a pack of gum. "You like gum?" he asked.



Dennis was helping with the washing. "They wouldn't starve me," he said as he turned the mangle's handle. "I'd pinch some food when they weren't looking."

Mary was telling Dennis and Polly how she was being treated by Miss Millington.

"And what about Grainger?" asked Polly. "What's he like?"

"Horrible!" said Mary.

"We think he's a spy," said Dennis.

"A spy?" Mary repeated.

"And we're going to catch him," Polly told her.

"Do you want to help us?"

Mary nodded. She'd do anything at all to get her own back on Grainger and Millington. But how could they do it? Even meeting Polly, Dennis and Norman, without Grainger and Millington finding out, was going to be difficult.

"But we've got a hideout," said Dennis proudly.

Polly and Dennis told Mary about the greenhouse.

"We can meet there," said Polly. "Do you want to see it now?"

Mary thought for a moment. Leaving the washhouse was a risk. But if she was going to get her own back on Millington and Grainger, she was going to have to start taking risks.

"All right," she said. "But we'll have to be quick."

Mary ran to the door. Then turned back. There was a look of panic on her face.

"What is it?" said Polly.

"It's Millington," Mary whispered. "And she's coming this way."



"Just loosen your wrists a little." Mike Johnson was teaching Norman to fish. Norman was staring across the river at the float bobbing in the water. Already the homesickness was forgotten.

"I guess it's not easy for any of us," Mike said.

"Before this war, I was never more than twenty miles away from home. Now look at me."

There was a ripple of water near the float.

"Make the most of it. That's what my old man told me," Mike smiled. "And that's what I aim to do. Know what I mean?"

Norman nodded. He knew what Mike meant but he was concentrating too hard to speak. Suddenly, the float dipped down.

Mike jumped to his feet. "Hey!" he shouted. "I think we made a catch."



Millington stood in the doorway of the washhouse.

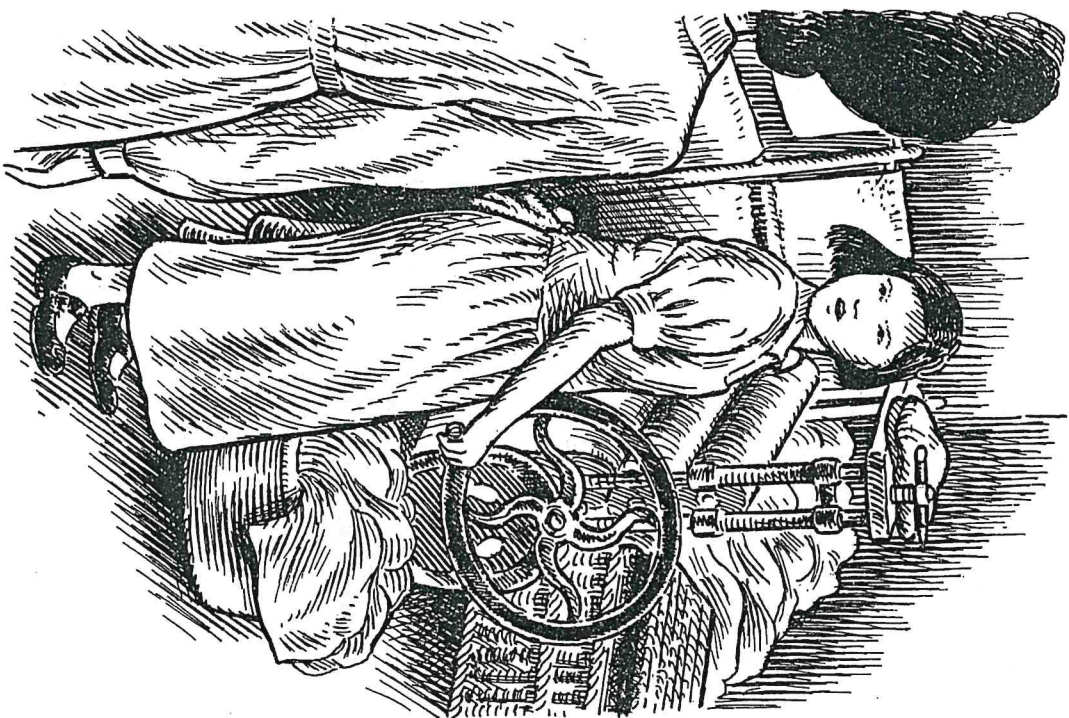
"What's going on here then?" she snapped.

Mary looked round in alarm, as though Millington had taken her completely by surprise.

Millington stared at Mary. She thought she'd heard voices as she came across the yard but Mary was on her own. There was washing everywhere.

"This should be finished by now," Millington told her. "What have you been doing?"

Mary opened her mouth to speak but before she could say anything, Millington had turned on her heel. "Don't bother to explain," she said over her shoulder. "Just get on with it."



Millington's footsteps crossed the yard back to the house.

"All right now," Mary hissed.

The lid of one of the laundry baskets lifted and Polly and Dennis jumped out.

"That was close," said Polly.

"You'd better go," Mary told them.

"But what about the hideout?" asked Polly.

"Mary wasn't worried about the hideout. She'd find it herself once she could get away. 'It's all right,' she told Polly. 'Now please go before Millington comes back.'"

Mary checked outside and gave Polly and Dennis the all clear. They slipped out of the door and across the yard. A few minutes later, they were hurrying through the woods. They had almost reached the road when they came face to face with a young woman.

It was hard to say who was more surprised. They stared at each other in silence. Then the young woman spoke. "I was trying to get to the house," she said. "I saw it through the trees. I thought I might be able to get some help there. I'm hopelessly lost."

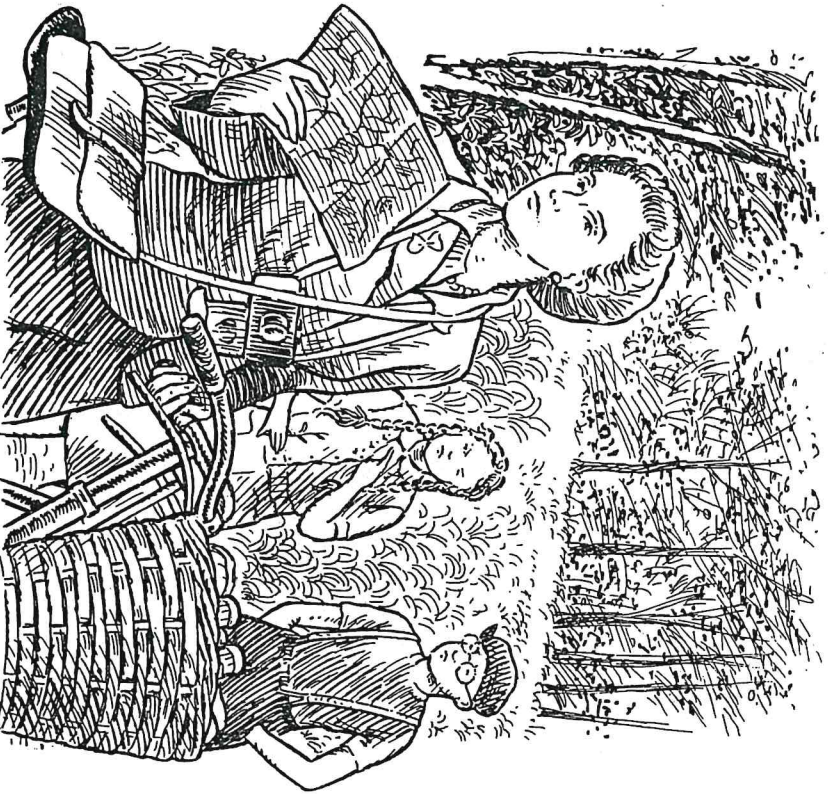
"Lost?" Polly repeated. There was something familiar about the woman. Polly felt that she had seen her somewhere.

"My bike is back on the road," the woman told them. "Perhaps you can help by pointing me in the right direction?"

Polly nodded. She was too excited to speak. She'd just remembered where she'd seen the woman.

"I think I've seen her before," Dennis said as the woman made her way back towards the road.

"You have," Polly agreed. "And so have I. It's the woman on the spy poster."



Dennis's mouth dropped open. Now he remembered. Polly was right. It was just as though the spy poster had come to life.

The young woman was climbing on to her bicycle. She had a small haversack on her back. Over one shoulder she had a camera and over the other was a pair of binoculars. Just the things that spies needed.

"These country lanes all look the same to me," the woman was saying. "It's like being in a foreign land. There aren't even any signposts around."

She was right. The signposts had been taken down to make it more difficult for the Germans if they invaded.

Polly nodded. "They've taken them away. To fool spies," she said.

"Well it certainly works," the woman replied. "Now perhaps you can tell me the way to Ombersleigh Childenham." She pronounced the name of a nearby village all wrong.

Polly corrected her. And gave the woman a series of directions.

"Thank you," the woman said. "That's very helpful." She was eager to get going but Polly hadn't finished.

"That's a nice camera," she said.

"It's a Leica," the woman replied. "I take a lot of photographs."

And she pedalled off down the lane. She needn't have hurried. Polly had sent her the wrong way. In ten minutes, she would be hopelessly lost again.

Polly and Dennis raced back to Wells Farm to tell Norman. An American forces jeep was parked in the farmyard.

"A jeep!" said Dennis. "What's a jeep doing here?"

They soon found out. Mike Johnson was walking down the path with Norman and Amy right behind him.

"Hey!" he called out. "You must be Polly and Dennis. Am I right? Norman told me all about you."

Polly and Dennis just stared.

"This is Lieutenant Johnson," Amy announced.

"Mike. Call me Mike."

Polly and Dennis were puzzled. What was the G.I. doing here? They looked to Norman for help. He just held up a tiny fish on the end of a line. "I caught a fish," he grinned.

"And before I go," said Mike. "I'm going to take a picture of it. And everybody else too."

Mike pulled a camera from his pocket and lined everyone up in front of the jeep. The shutter clicked. "I'll get this developed and bring you a copy over," he said.

Suddenly, Polly found her voice. "That's a nice camera," she told Mike.

Mike looked surprised. "Just a Kodak," he said.

"Nothing much."

"Is a Leica a good camera?" Polly asked.

Mike smiled. "The best. But I wouldn't use one right now. It's German."

From that moment, any doubts about the woman in the woods being a spy disappeared from Polly's mind.

"I'd say a German camera settles it," she told Norman that night as they were doing the washing up.

"And there's the poster," added Dennis.

Polly nodded. "She looked just like it. Didn't she, Dennis?"

"Like two peas in a pod," Dennis agreed.

Norman thought about it. There certainly seemed to be plenty of evidence. Perhaps there were two spies – Grainger and the woman.

"Anyway, I sent her the wrong way," Polly said proudly. "She's probably still lost now."

There was a knock on the door. Polly hurried to answer it. Who could it be at this time of night?

Polly stepped back in shock.

The "spy-woman" was glaring in at her. "You!" she snarled. "I want to speak to you, madam!"

BOMBS IN THE COUNTRY

Polly backed across the scullery with the woman after her.

"You sent me in totally the wrong direction! Why? That's what I want to know."

Polly couldn't think what to say. But a second voice came to her rescue.

"And what I want to know is - who are you? And what are you doing in my house?"

Amy was standing at the kitchen door, looking like fury. Immediately, the woman calmed down.

"I'm sorry," she said. "My name is Vivienne Belling. And I've been riding round in circles for the last two hours. Thanks to this little madam here." She pointed at Polly.

Amy turned a suspicious gaze on her granddaughter. "Polly! What have you been up to now?" She didn't wait for a reply. Instead she said, "You better come in, Miss Belling. And I suppose you could do with a spot of supper as well."

For the first time, Vivienne Belling smiled. "Thanks. I'm absolutely starving," she said.

Polly was horrified. Her grandmother was asking a spy in for supper!

To Polly's disgust, Amy served Belling with thick buttered toast. And tea in her best china cups. She was treating her as an honoured guest. And it got worse.

"It's much too dark for you to be cycling into the village now," Amy said. "You'll just have to spend the night here."

"Oh no, I couldn't possibly," Belling replied.

But Amy insisted. "You can have Polly's bed," she said. "Polly can sleep down here."

And so Norman and Dennis were packed off upstairs. And Polly ended up on a camp bed in the corner of the kitchen. At first, Polly was livid. But then she realised that now she would be able to listen in to every word that Vivienne Belling said.

Amy and Belling sat in front of the fire and talked. About the war. About Polly's father going off to join the army and the way Amy was struggling to keep everything going. About the way Grainger was trying to get her off the farm. And about the "accidents" that were happening.

Belling seemed interested in Amy's story, but finally she steered the conversation round to the American base.

"It can't be far away," she suggested.

"Now, that I couldn't say for sure," Amy was being careful. "I reckon it's best not to know too much about such things."

Belling was surprised. "Really? Why's that?"

"What you don't know, you can't tell," said Amy.

"After all, careless talk costs lives."

"But we can trust each other," Belling smiled. "Or do you think I might be a spy?"

"You might be," said Amy. "But there again, so might I."

The two women laughed at the idea. But to Polly it was further proof that Vivienne Belling really was a spy.



Mary had been trying to sleep but it was no use. She was too hungry. She got out of bed and switched on the light. She opened the wardrobe door and checked her coat. Some time ago, she had found a shop which had boiled sweets. She bought a quarter and ate one every now and then as a treat. She pulled the bag out. All that was left was sweet papers.

If she wanted something to eat, she would have to steal it.

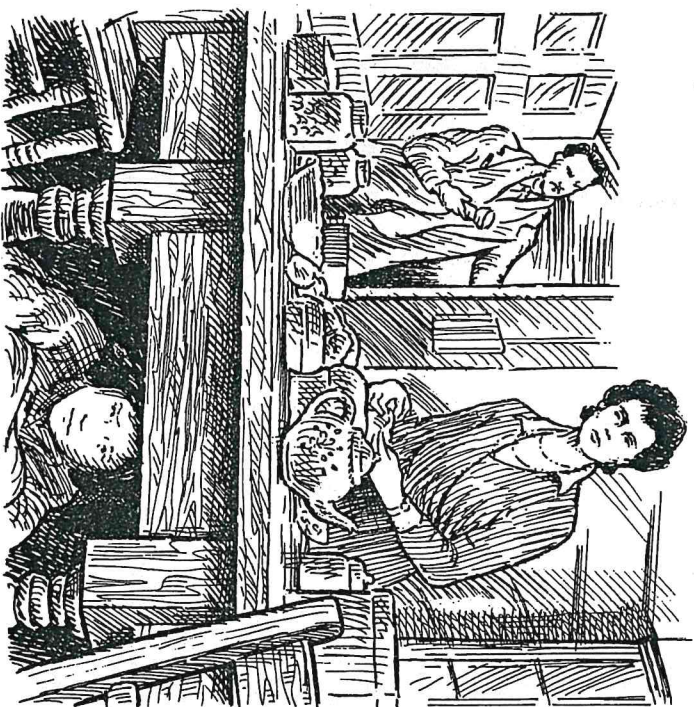
Mary slipped out of her bedroom and made her way downstairs. She could hear Grainger and Millington arguing in the dining room. They could go on like that for hours. All she needed was five minutes.

Moonlight was streaming in through the kitchen window. Mary's eyes went straight to the table. Her mouth started to water. A loaf of bread, a cold joint of meat,

a huge slab of cheese and several jars of pickles had been left out. It was like a banquet.

Mary took the carving knife and cut herself a chunk of bread and cheese. She bit into it hungrily. This was going to be a real midnight feast. She was just dipping her hand into the pickle jar when she heard the door to the dining room open and the light in the corridor went on. Millington and Grainger were on their way.

Mary's eyes flicked round the room, desperately searching for somewhere to hide. In a panic, she dived under the kitchen table.



The door flew open and Grainger stormed in. The argument was still going on.

"I've told you before, I decide when it's safe," he snapped. "It's me that takes all the risks."

"What do you want? A medal?" Millington sneered. "All I'm saying is we're not doing enough. This war won't last for ever. Which do you want to be – a winner or a loser?"

"We'll come out on the right side," Grainger was looking for his torch. He was dressed to go out again. He started to move towards the door.

"What's the matter, Phillip?" Millington scoffed. "Losing your nerve?"

Grainger turned on Millington. "When I've got rid of that lot at Wells Farm, then we can think about stepping up operations."

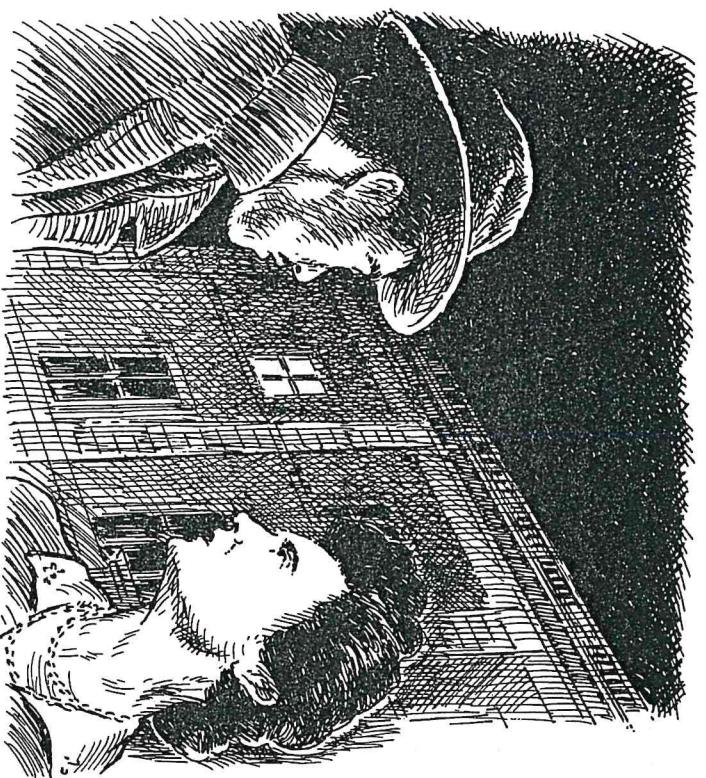
But Millington wasn't giving up. "And how long do you think it'll be before those people at the base realise what's happening?" she asked.

Grainger had had enough. "Now's not the time," he said as he left the room.

Millington followed him outside. "You're late," she complained. "They'll think you're not going to turn up."

Grainger twisted round to answer her. But, as he did so, he noticed a light shining from Mary's bedroom.

"Just a minute," he said. "That girl. What's she up to?" He started back towards the house but Millington stopped him.



"Leave this to me," she said.

Millington stormed back into the house. Whatever Mary was up to, there was going to be trouble.

Millington rushed up the stairs and threw open the door to Mary's bedroom.

The light was still on. But Mary seemed to be fast asleep in bed. The noise of the door opening woke her. Still yawning, she looked across at Millington.

"Is it time to get up?" Mary asked sleepily.

"Your light is on!" Millington snapped.

"I must have fallen asleep reading," Mary yawned. Millington was taken by surprise. She was lost for words. "Don't you know it's against the law to waste electricity?" she said finally. "There is a war on."

Millington flicked off the light and slammed the door behind her.

In the dark, Mary grinned. She took a huge chunk of cheese from under the bedclothes and bit into it. It had been close but it had been worth it. Not only had she managed to get some food, but she had fooled Millington as well. It was her first victory in the war between them. And it wasn't going to be the last.

When Polly woke, Vivienne Belling had left:

"She's gone about her business," was all Amy would say when Polly asked where she'd gone.

"And what is her business?" Polly wanted to know.

"Taking photographs for the Government," said Amy. "To show what it's like living out here in the country while this wretched war is on."

And with that, Amy hurried outside to get on with her work.

"Photographs for the Government!" Polly snorted.

"For Hitler, more like. That's what she's up to. Spying!"

But Polly, Norman and Dennis had not seen the last of Vivienne Belling. The woman was everywhere. And, wherever she went, she asked questions and took

photographs. In the end, about the only person Belling hadn't been seen with was Grainger.

"If only we could catch the two of them together," said Polly.

"Perhaps Mary's seen them meeting up at the Hall," Norman suggested.

Polly nodded. "We'll go over and find out tomorrow."

Polly, Norman and Dennis were sitting in the barn behind some bales of straw. It was a good place to talk. Nobody else could hear them there.

Suddenly, Dennis looked up from his comic. He was reading a story about a spycatcher. And in the story it listed all the things that a spy needed.

Dennis read out the list. "A pair of binoculars. A camera. A book of secret codes. And a something else beginning with W."

Polly looked over his shoulder. "A wireless transmitter."

"That's it. A wireless transmitter," Dennis agreed.

"What is a wireless transmitter?"

"Sends messages back to Germany," said Norman.

"Do you think Belling's got one of them then?" asked Dennis.

"Don't be stupid," Polly told him. "She only had a haversack."

"Grainger might have one though. It could be hidden in Westbourne Hall," Norman pointed out.

But that thought was forgotten as Mike Johnson's jeep turned into the farmyard.

Mike had two presents for them. A copy of the photograph that he'd taken. And a huge block of chocolate.

"Chocolate!" grinned Norman. "I can't wait."

"Oh yes, you can," Polly hissed as she grabbed the chocolate. "We're dividing this four ways. Next time we see Mary."



It was several days before they got to see Mary.

"I couldn't get away," she told them when she finally turned up at the greenhouse.

Carefully, Polly divided the chocolate into four parts.

She gave the biggest share to Mary. She needed it most.

For a while, nobody spoke. The chocolate was too

good. Then Polly remembered the question they wanted

to ask Mary. Had she seen Vivienne Belling talking to

Grainger?

Mary thought for a moment. "No. She could be

meeting him at night though."

"At night?" said Polly.

"I've watched him," said Mary. "Grainger goes out to

do something at night. And whatever it is they don't

want anybody to know about it."

That was exactly what Polly, Norman and Dennis

wanted to hear. Grainger was up to no good. But what

was he doing?

On the way home, they found Luigi mending the gate to one of the fields. Almost immediately, Grainger drove up.

"What the devil do you think you're up to?" he demanded.

"Not doing nothing," said Polly.

"Not you!" Grainger snapped. "Him!" He was

pointing at Luigi.

Luigi looked puzzled. "I fix the gate for Mrs Amy,"

he shrugged.

"He's working for us now," said Polly proudly.

Grainger looked as though he were about to explode.

"Oh yes?" he snarled. "Well, we'll have to see about that, won't we?"

With a screech of tyres, the car pulled away.

"What is it with him?" Luigi was bewildered. "He

sleep bad or something?"

Norman knew it was more than that. Grainger was

out to cause even more trouble for Amy. But when they

got back to Wells Farm, Amy was too bothered about

dinner to listen. She sent Norman to collect eggs while

Polly and Dennis went to look for mushrooms in the

top field.

Norman was on his way back when he heard the plane.

It was a sound that he knew only too well. He looked up

in alarm, searching the sky for the tell-tale outline.

"What's wrong?" asked Amy. She could see the

worried look on Norman's face.

"That plane!" said Norman.

That was all Amy needed to hear. The tone of Norman's voice said everything.

"Oh my Good Lord," Amy cried out. "Polly and Dennis!"



Dennis was kneeling down picking a mushroom.

"Not that!" Polly told him. "That's a toadstool. Don't you know the difference?"

But Dennis wasn't listening. His ears had picked up another sound. The sound of a plane coming their way.

Polly heard it as well. She wasn't worried. "It's all right," she said. "It's one of ours."

But Dennis knew better. "Don't you know the difference?" he asked. "That's a German plane." He grabbed hold of Polly and started dragging her across the field. "Come on!" he shouted. "Run!"

Dennis and Polly raced like mad towards the farm. But there was no way they could outrun an aeroplane. Suddenly, it was right above them. The noise was deafening. And then came a second sound. The whine of bombs.

"Get down!" Dennis screamed.

He pushed Polly to the ground and threw himself down beside her.

The next moment the bombs exploded in a huge cloud of dust and smoke. Then there was silence.

