

Chapter

1

SENT AWAY

NORMAN Starkey was leaving home. His mother was sending him away. He didn't want to go. But he had to.

It was wartime. Planes were bombing the cities. Children were being sent to the countryside. It was safer there.

Norman didn't care. He wanted to stay with his mother in the city. He wasn't afraid. Even when a bomb destroyed their house. But Mrs Starkey had had enough.

"It's just too dangerous here," Mrs Starkey told Norman. "You've got to go."

That afternoon, Norman was sent off to the country. Mr Jenkins, the village postman, picked him up from the railway station. Mr Jenkins had to find somewhere for the city children to stay. These children were called evacuees.

Mr Jenkins took Norman, and another evacuee named Mary Parker, to Westbourne Hall.



Westbourne Hall was a large country house with lots of rooms. Mr Grainger and Miss Millington were the only people living there. But Mr Grainger didn't want evacuees.

"This is not a Children's Home," he said. "I won't have any evacuees at all."

"Then I'll have to report you," Mr Jenkins told him.

That made Grainger change his mind. "All right, I'll take the girl," he said.

Miss Millington took Mary upstairs. Mr Jenkins put Norman back in the car. It was getting late and he still had to find somewhere for Norman to spend the night. He decided to try Mrs Hobbs at Wells Farm.

Mr Jenkins knocked at the door. As soon as Mrs Hobbs saw Norman, she hurried him inside. "Let's get him fed before he wastes away," she said.

Mrs Hobbs already had one evacuee but she let Norman stay as well.

"Call me Aunty Amy," she said.

She gave Norman his supper and showed him upstairs to bed. Dennis, the other evacuee, wasn't there. Mrs Hobbs thought he'd run away. But Norman found him sleeping under the bed.

"That's where I sleep at home," Dennis told Amy. "Bombs can't get you there."



At Westbourne Hall, Miss Millington was arguing with Grainger. "We don't want anybody snooping around," she told him.

"She's just a kid," Grainger replied. "You can take care of her!"

Miss Millington went up to Mary's bedroom. She tried to frighten Mary. "I hope you're not afraid of ghosts," she said. "Just stay in bed and you'll be all right."

Mary lay in bed. She didn't like Westbourne Hall. Grainger and Miss Millington didn't want her there. But she had to stay. She turned over and tried to sleep.



Dennis and Norman were already asleep. Suddenly, there was a noise. Norman sat up and listened. There it was again. He wasn't imagining it. Something was tapping at the bedroom window!

Chapter

2

GRAINGER DANGER

NORMAN and Dennis looked out of the window.

A girl was standing in the front garden. She was tapping the window with a broom tied to a long stick. "Not scared, are you?" she hissed. "I thought townies weren't scared of anything."

"Who's that?" said Norman.

"Whoever it is – I don't like her," said Dennis.

At breakfast, Norman and Dennis found out who the girl was.

"This is Polly, my granddaughter," Amy told them.

"Eat your breakfast and then she'll show you round the farm."

Norman and Dennis didn't want to be shown round the farm. Especially not by Polly. But they didn't say so, they just kept eating their bacon and eggs.



There was no bacon and eggs for Mary.

"This is not a holiday," Miss Millington told her.

"You can't expect to live here for nothing. We didn't ask you to come."

She made Mary wear an apron, then left her to clear the table. It was just the start of the work.

Norman and Dennis followed Polly around Wells Farm. She showed them the goat. They thought it looked dangerous. Then she took them to see the pigs. They hated the smell. Finally, Polly led them to the hen-house. A squawking hen flapped its way out. Norman and Dennis jumped back and crashed to the ground. Polly thought it was really funny.

But Norman and Dennis had had enough, so they ran away from Polly. They kept running until they reached the fields. They lay down and closed their eyes. It was safe there. No animals to bother them.

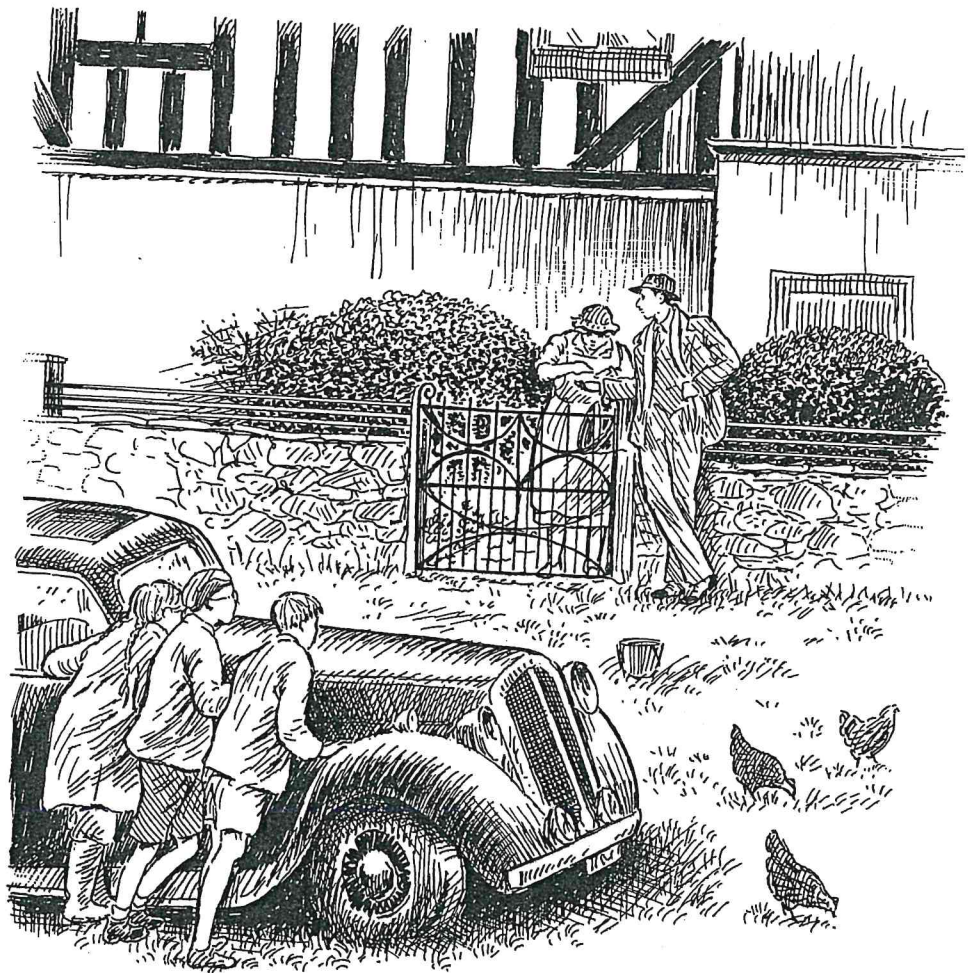
Then a cow mooed!

Norman opened his eyes and sat up. There were cows all round them. There was no escape. They were surrounded.



"Are you frightened of cows?" Polly grinned. She made a path through the herd of cows and led Norman and Dennis to safety. From then on, they were friends.

Norman, Dennis and Polly heard a car roar into the farmyard. It was Mr Grainger. He had come to collect the rent. They listened from behind his car.



Grainger wanted Amy Hobbs to leave Wells Farm.
"An old woman can't run a farm properly," he said.

He offered her three hundred pounds to move.
But Amy didn't want to go.

"It's my home," she said.

Grainger was angry. "You'll wish you'd gone when you had the chance," he threatened.

Norman, Dennis and Polly hated Grainger. They decided to help Amy by doing jobs around the farm.

But Grainger had plans of his own. Plans that only he and Miss Millington knew about.



That night, as Norman and Dennis lay in bed, something was happening out in the fields. Someone was cutting through a fence with a pair of wire cutters. Somebody was out to cause trouble.