

Every war has turning points, and every person too.

First Osbert went off in the truck with the army guy and came back all beaming with a job, so I guess all those hours learning Morse code and playing spies turned out not to be in vain. I would have been happy for him if it wasn't so obvious that the rest of us had been simultaneously demoted to Expendable Civilian Status and thus were a whole lot less interesting to him. I think he did feel responsible for us in his fashion, but we were way down his list of Things to Worry About what with having the responsibility for saving the world on his shoulders.

By noon the house was starting to fill up with army types and at first we were outraged to see them putting all their stuff into OUR rooms and setting up radio equipment in the barn and moving the animals out without even asking and then we decided the better part of valor was discretion and if we made ourselves scarce they might not get the feeling that we were the sort of kids who needed to be Taken Care Of elsewhere.

We even went so far as to offer them lunch which I'm sure is what the collaborators in France did to the Nazis to keep them happy and I felt pretty much like a pathetic groveling turncoat even though we were supposedly on the same side. But they said No Thank You we've brought Our Mess with us and I wondered why anyone would think it was a good idea to call food Mess. Piper said their food was better than ours, which hardly surprised me given that we'd reached the limit of the number of edible meals you can make with rice and they were eating chicken and dumplings.

So there were Piper and Isaac and Edmond and me Making Ourselves Scarce and just considering whether we should move up to the lambing barn and make ourselves even scarcer when Osbert came out looking guilty and told Piper and me to pack a bag with our things because we were going to be rehoused and I just looked at him and shouted there is NO WAY I'm going to be sent off to some REFUGEE HOME in the BACK OF BEYOND especially BY YOU and Osbert looked pretty miserable and stared at the ground and said Orders Are Orders and I thought It's lucky they didn't tell him to shoot us.

Piper looked from me to her brother like a rat in a trap and then Edmond put his hand on my arm just when I was thinking that maybe if I slugged Osbert it would help him understand I was serious and very very softly Edmond said Don't worry and I said I AM NOT WORRIED because THERE IS NO WAY I AM GOING. And looking at all those miserable faces I wondered whether this was a cultural thing or what, that no one in this country says You've got to be kidding when told to vacate their home and abandon their newly discovered loved ones by a bunch of jumped-up reject army guys playing war games for a lark.

Osbert slid off like a sorry snake and I figured that was the end of it until about five minutes later when some guy who said he was Left Tennant something or other came out and was Awfully Apologetic in an awfully unapologetic way and the gist of it was we were out of here whether we liked it or not. He made it extremely clear that the army was not in any mood to hang around watching some Female American National have a tantrum at this Vital Juncture in History so I took Piper and we went upstairs and packed all the stuff we could think of for a week including some books in case we got stuck with a bunch of local hillbillies, and all I could do was stare at Edmond and Isaac and even Osbert and try to keep from crying and then Edmond kissed me and said Take Jet in a way that no one else except maybe Isaac could hear

and I said back I'll find you and he nodded as if to say Likewise.

Our chauffeur wasn't exactly thrilled at me dragging a dog along but I wasn't budging on this question and he rolled his eyes and said Get In and then with almost everyone I had left in the world standing nearby looking sad and young and helpless, we were off. Given how things turned out you might wonder why we didn't make more of a scene about staying together but at the time we figured we could survive a week or two apart.

That's how totally in the dark we were about our situation.

Anyway, we bundled into this open van and as we started off I thought about Ding but I didn't say anything in case Piper got more worried than she looked right now and I tried to pull myself together because I was Piper's guardian now and I thought I'd better act like it and make it clear to her that she was safe with me no matter what. And the thought made me fierce and strong like a mother wildebeest and all of a sudden I knew where people got the strength to pick up cars with babies lying under them which I always thought was made up.

I took her by the hand and smiled the bravest smile I ever smiled and it was real, even though it might not have been one hundred percent sane, and it worked a little because she smiled back at me and hugged Jet and started to sing her angel song quietly under her breath.

We drove and drove and I tried to look at the road signs and follow where we were going but it was pretty confusing and the best I could do was notice the names of villages we went through and hope somehow I would remember.

I started making up a mnemonic the way I used to do in school but it was hard to keep it straight since I had to keep adding words on as we went along, and whoever named these places wasn't doing it with any particular pattern in mind.

We went through Upper Ellaston and Deddon and Wincaster and New Northfield, and Broom Hill and Norton Walton and then I gave up trying to remember and just noticed each one and hoped if I needed them to come back into my head someday they would.

I felt a little pissed off at all those spy shows where the guy gets blindfolded and thrown onto the floor of the backseat and finds his way home by the noise of a chicken here and two bumps in the road there and a dog barking in the key of D which I can tell you now from experience is a load of crap, well who'd have guessed it.

Some of the things that made the biggest impression were the things that were almost normal but not quite.

Like the fact that no one seemed to be outside even though it was a beautiful sunny day, and there were no kids in the playgrounds or riding their bikes along the streets or anything. Also there were no other cars driving and lots abandoned by the side of the road where they ran out of gas, which took me a while to figure out like What's Wrong With This Picture.

Other things, I recognized from our village, like most of the shops either had broken windows or were all boarded up and lots of houses had boarded-up windows too, presumably for when the marauding hordes swept through the Back of Beyond and wanted to rape all the housewives and pillage their dining room sets.

And then sometimes there were tanks. Mostly just sitting by the side of the road with someone's head and arms sticking out the top, smoking, and holding on to a gun. In some villages there were lots of them and then for a while you'd see none at all.

About every two or three miles we passed through checkpoints where our driver had to stop and show papers to a bunch of guys with machine guns who didn't speak fabulous English and I thought Oh my god, so there is an enemy after all. They all seemed bored rather than

scary and Our Army Guy was very polite to Their Army Guy and I thought it's just as well I don't waste a lot of my spare time trying to figure out this war stuff because if you ask me they're not in the spirit of the thing at all.

We drove for nearly an hour along tiny winding country roads and though judging distances isn't exactly my forte unless we're talking Manhattan city blocks, I figured we'd gone about fifteen or twenty miles by the time we got where we were going, what with speed divided by time equaling four birds in a tree singing Melancholy Baby.

The place we arrived at was a little better than my worst fears which is the sort of thing you have to be thankful for under these conditions and after piling out of the van we were introduced to Mrs. McEvoy who lived with her army husband in a newish brick house just outside a village called Reston Bridge and first impressions, while not always right, suggested she wasn't the type to carve us into tiny pieces and feed us to her dogs when the going got tough. But I've been wrong before.

Speaking of dogs you could tell she hadn't quite reckoned on us showing up with one of our own but she took it pretty well considering Jet marched straight over to her pretty little blond cocker spaniel and started to hump it on the spot.

There was also a four-year-old boy named Albert who they called Alby, and from the room she put us in it was obvious there was an older boy somewhere but not here since we were getting his room. We unpacked our stuff and Mrs. McEvoy came up and said we should call her Jane and her husband was On Duty and they'd heard about Our Plight and thought it was a Sin to let a Perfectly Good Room Go to Waste when there were Poor Children like us without anyone to take care of us and I had to squint and think of Piper to keep my fake smile from turning into something more like Jason in Friday the 13th.

But when I opened my eyes and looked at her again I saw that under all the cheery stuff she looked desperately sad and her face was kind of blotchy like she'd done a lot of crying lately and I thought Well everyone in this weirdo war has a story and hers is probably as bad as any and maybe a whole lot worse.

The sympathy angle got a little strained when she went on about how adorable Piper was and how much she always loved to hear an American accent but after a while I got used to her and thought at least she was trying to be nice which even I had to admit is something.

After having a cup of tea we asked if she'd mind if we just went up to our room and read a book for a while because of being tired from the trip not to mention the war, and off we went to our twin beds under pictures of racing cars and about twenty half-naked posters of some teenybop star with cellulite and I thought this room's seen a fair amount of action à la Lyle Hersberg and his pet Smurf.

Piper asked if this was where we were going to have to live now and I said I guessed it was for the time being but that once we were settled we'd come up with a plan for getting back together with Edmond and Isaac and she looked more cheerful at that thought and you could tell she was making an effort to make me feel OK about our situation and she said Isn't this a funny place you've ended up in Cousin Daisy, and I said You mean here in Reston Bridge and she said No Here in England with Me.

And then I looked so far into her eyes that I could practically see out the back of her head so don't ever say I'm not related by blood to the whole telepathic gang of them and I said PIPER: I would have to be buried alive in a ditch and stamped on by elephants before I would ever think that being anywhere with you wasn't a good thing SO THERE. Then Jane McEvoy

called up that there was some food ready and we found ourselves tramping down the stairs like somebody else's well-behaved children and Piper and I just looked at each other and burst out laughing because we'd gotten so used to being in a world without any sign of adults.

Secretly I was wondering whether these people were going to take care of us or whether we were still all on our own, only now in a slightly different form.

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When Major McEvoy came home later that night I accosted him the second he stepped through the door, demanding that he say whether Edmond and Isaac had been moved somewhere else and if so where.

At first he just looked stunned like maybe he'd forgotten he had a fifteen-year-old daughter and then he smiled a little and said I don't think we've been properly introduced, I'm Laurence McEvoy and I thought OK, I can play the Let's Be All Polite Game too and I said very sweetly like the well-brought-up girl I am AND I'M DAISY and I WANT TO KNOW WHERE MY COUSINS ARE.

He smiled a little and looked at me in a searching kind of way for a minute, maybe trying to figure out whether I was planning to overthrow the English government with the information I wheedled out of him, and then, I guess remembering that I was just a kid all on my lonesome caught up in the war and we were more or less on the same side, he relaxed a little and he said They've been moved too, to a farm just outside of Kingly which is a Fair Distance East of Here and I'm sure you'll see them again All in Good Time.

I was kind of taken aback by his willingness to breach the Name, Rank and Serial Number stuff and tell me where they were and after that I didn't know what to say except possibly How 'bout showing me exactly where on a map and leaving me the car keys in case we decide to go see them in the dead of night and never come back.

I don't get nearly enough credit in life for the things I manage not to say.

Of course in order to survive Piper and I needed to have a plan, and I was the one who was going to have to make it because Piper's job was to be a Mystical Creature and mine was to get things done here on earth which was just how the cards were dealt and there was no point thinking of it any other way.

Our major plan, which we didn't even have to discuss, was to get back together with Edmond and Isaac and Osbert by hook or by crook. So far, I was pretty hazy on the details.

I did, however, get so far as to find a Road Map of the British Isles hanging around the house and look up Kingly and Reston Bridge and what I discovered was that good old Major Laurence McEvoy had told me the truth and Kingly was pretty much straight east of us and not that far from Aunt Penn's sequestered house, though a little farther away from Reston Bridge than was totally convenient given the current difficulty in securing a taxi.

The extremely good news was that our very own swimming and fishing river near the house was a branch of the same one that the bridge in Reston Bridge went over and I figured navigation-wise that was a big plus.

It's probably best to say up front that maps are not what I'm good at. So I did what every other sensible New Yorker has been doing for years in the Public Library, I tore the page

out and hid it in my underwear. And from then on I always kept it with me Just In Case.

We went to bed early that night and pretty much every other night because without electricity and with even candles getting pretty scarce, there wasn't much point in sitting around in the dark. I didn't much like being in this boy's room with the stupid bimbos on the wall and I know Piper wasn't wild about it or being away from her brothers either.

Before she fell asleep she said Daisy—

And I said Yes Piper?

And she said, I always wanted a sister and if I had one I would want her to be like you. She paused.

Though I always thought she would be called Amy.

I laughed a little then and said It's all right with me, you can call me Amy if you want Piper, but she looked a little hurt and I stopped joking around and said, I practically am your sister now Piper, and that seemed to satisfy her on the subject and she didn't say anything more about it.

I didn't tell her that I had never wanted a sister, in actual fact had spent most of my recent life desperately NOT wanting a sister, but that was only because of the circumstances in which I was likely to get one and besides I never imagined how much I could love someone like Piper though having said that there probably isn't another person anything like Piper this side of Kingdom Come.

She asked me what was going to happen to us and I told her I didn't really know but that nothing could hurt us when we were together. I asked her Do you know what invincible means? And she nodded because she's read more books in nine years than most people read in a lifetime and I said Well, as long as we're together that's what we are.

Then she said in a croaky voice Mum must be so worried about us, and there was something in the silence that followed that sounded so desolate that I went and sat beside her on the bed and stroked her hair over and over and tried not to think about Aunt Penn's whereabouts or whether she was dead or alive. But you had to admit Piper had a point because if I were their mother, war or no war, I'd be half dead with worry by now not having any idea how all my children were doing or even if they were still alive.

Eventually Piper got quiet and I figured she was asleep so I went back into my own bed and started thinking my own thoughts for a while.

Now that I was away from Edmond I could think more or less in private about all the changes that were jamming themselves into my life and one of the thoughts I had was how you could love someone more than yourself and any worry about getting stuck in the middle of a war and ending up dead was transferred onto worrying about keeping them alive.

This was all confused by the fact that I loved Piper in a protective kind of way and Edmond in a slightly different way, to put it mildly, and given that I had about as much experience with sex and boyfriends as I did with brothers and sisters, it was pretty strange to find myself suddenly overwhelmed with attention from the world's biggest warehouse of magical misfits.

And just to complicate matters perfectly, I was starting to feel responsible for their safety and happiness and got panicked at the idea of them being captured or corrupted by the outside world. Now this was a definite shift from where we'd started which was all about them bringing me cups of tea and holding my hand and exactly when the shift occurred I couldn't tell you.

My head was kind of spinning from trying to clear this up and I wished there was someone I could have asked about it all since I'd never read about any similar kind of situation in all the magazines Leah and I used to buy which I guess either makes me or everyone else on the planet some kind of a freak.

But for once my fate was crystal clear and wedded to Edmond and Piper's and even Isaac and Osbert's so that was that, and I just had to get on with whatever it required of me.

This made me not quite as desperate as I had been and if I lay very still I could hear Edmond thinking about me wherever he was and I thought about him back and then the bond between us was complete.

I guess the difference between Gin and me is that when Gin got shut in the barn she thought Edmond didn't love her anymore but because I could feel Edmond out there somewhere always loving me I didn't have to howl all night. Thinking of Edmond like that made the single bed suddenly seem too big so I crept in with Piper who didn't even stir she was so used to it by now and I could hear Jet breathing quietly under the bed.

And so with all the ducks I had left in a row, I was ready to fall asleep too.