HIDE AND SEEK

The Bletchley Park Mysteries

I Spy
Hide and Seek

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A BLETCHLEY PARK MYSTERY

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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.

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

Alice in Wonderland, Lewis Carroll

MANOD
QUARRY
QUARRY
LLYN Y MANOD RESERVOIR
MANOD BACH (511M)
QUARRY INCLINE
QUARRY
RIVER AFON DU-BACH
Y MANOD PUB
CHAPEL
HIGH STREET
BLAENAU FFESTINIOG (TRAIN)
MRS DAVIES' SHOP
MR+MRS EVANS
BUTCHERS
POST OFFICE
OLD BAKERY
WOODS
YSGOL (SCHOOL)

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.

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 priceless 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

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 won't wait.'

His mother gestured to two small cases sitting under the kitchen table. If this train was taking them 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

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 that 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; they 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 those of 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 that 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 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 not 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 in what looked like the mouth of a cave. 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 peered 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 much longer.

'They know we're coming. I expect they're busy. 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 reaction 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.

2

A circle of torchlight shone towards them, dazzling Ned and making him think of Sirius, the brightest star, also known as the Dog Star. People thought the North Star was the brightest, but this wasn't true. He'd borrowed books on the solar system from the library in town, when his mother had taken him. And his grandfather had given him an old pocket telescope. Ned had shoved the telescope into the pocket of his shorts before his mother rushed him to the station to catch the train.

After many trains, they'd eventually reached Birmingham, where they'd walked through the blitzed streets, navigating by pubs and cinemas and other landmarks. He wondered if he'd ever be able to navigate by the stars, like sailors did. It wasn't until he had to step out of the path of air-raid wardens that he realised he'd been feeling sorry for himself, and quickly pulled himself together.

The wardens were working their way through the rubble of a building to find people, dead or alive. Although he'd seen the pictures in the papers and heard the reports on the radio, Ned wasn't ready to see the ruins of strangers' lives.

Yet as they passed one particular bombed-out house, Ned had found he couldn't take his eyes off it. The front was ripped open and a bedroom exposed, like a doll's house from a horror story. Splinters of plaster and jagged edges of bricks were all that was left of a church. His mother gently suggested he recite the names of the planets aloud, which helped distract him, as it always did. Then they'd caught another train and somehow, finally, arrived in Wales.

As the circle of light got brighter, the gloom of the tunnel gradually receded. Ned could see a man approaching the gates, holding a gas lamp. He was dressed in dark trousers, a waistcoat and a flat cap. The man was about his father's age – clean-shaven, with white shirtsleeves rolled up and held in place at the elbow. 'Hello there!' he called out, and smiled, clearly pleased to see them.

Ned could tell this reassured his mother. She pulled her case tighter to her side and gave herself a little shake. Ned lifted his own small case, which his mother had packed for him, and drew himself up to his full height. He wanted to show that he was up to the job from the start. He knew his mother had had to pull strings to convince the gallery people to let her bring him along. He wanted to be taller than his brothers, Robert and Joseph, by the time they came back from the war. *When* they came back, not *if*, he told himself.

'Ah, good, you're here. You must be Mrs Letton. I'm Mr Rees. Come on in, then, let's be having you,' he said, taking a key out of his jacket pocket and unbolting the locks in the gate. 'We don't usually lock up during the day, but the security guards have spotted one or two skulkers

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. 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 his 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 it 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 she knew 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.

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 in the warm, but Mr Rees escorted him back to the entrance, like a guest who had outstayed 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 the man'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 the man 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 some 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 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. That was next to a church or chapel, 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, liebling?'

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. He remembered Mr Rees's reminder: *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!