

# SUMMERLAND

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HOT  
KEY  
BOOKS

First published in Great Britain in 2019 by  
HOT KEY BOOKS  
80–81 Wimpole St, London W1G 9RE  
[www.hotkeybooks.com](http://www.hotkeybooks.com)

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A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN: 978-1-4714-0827-4  
*also available as an ebook*

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This book is typeset using Atomik ePublisher  
Printed and bound in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, Elcograf S.p.A.



Hot Key Books is an imprint of Bonnier Books UK  
[www.bonnierbooks.co.uk](http://www.bonnierbooks.co.uk)

*In memory of the real Hidden Children.  
Persecuted and driven into fearful secrecy, they lost  
their identities, their families, their youth.  
And in tribute to those who kept love,  
trust and joy alive.*

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## Fish-Paste Sandwiches

There are lots of stories about war. Stories about glory. Suffering. Survival. But who talks about what happens afterwards, about life now, when we've scrambled out from under the rubble and stopped waving flags of victory or surrender? Who dares mention what we've become?

Not me. I don't talk. I watch, mostly, and wait.

That day – the day we blew across the sea to England – I was so excited it felt as if minnows were swimming around inside me. There was so much to see in the port . . . ropes, cranes, sailors, seagulls . . . rainbows in oil slicks and fish guts in buckets.

'Stick together!' cried our Red Cross escorts. There were nearly fifty of us in our group, aged five to sixteen. Forty-seven orphans of war, and me. Leftovers.

We lurched up a gangway onto the ship. Once that was pulled in, the only escape route was overboard.

'Keep away from the railings!' yelled a Red Cross woman. Then, in a quieter voice, 'Honestly, it's like herding cats.'

I hid in the middle of the group, holding tight to my case. The air was a fug of fuel and salt spray. The deck thrummed.

I'd never been to sea before. 'One day we'll go to England,' my mutti had said, a lifetime ago. 'When the sun shines, it's the most beautiful country in the world. A true land of summer.'

October clouds hid the sun now. Down we plunged into the murky green, then up to the white wave-tops. I wondered which bright spark had thought it was a good idea to give us fish-paste sandwiches for lunch. They looked and smelled horrible, but when you've sucked on pebbles out of hunger, you're not too fussy. I was saving mine for later, which was just as well, because the other children hung like limp monkeys over the railings, sicking theirs up.

I turned my face to the sky, amazed at how wide it was.

Behind us . . . Europe, its ghosts swaying on the dawn beaches, thick as dune grass. Ahead of us . . . England. A new life.

Had I been followed?

Landfall.

Crowds pulsing and pushing. Smells of sweat and wet clothes. Rain on the docks. I was hurried along with everyone else, off the ship, onto English ground, into a huge wooden hall that creaked as the wind gusted. *Customs*, said a sign. The crowd slowed. Men in uniforms ahead!

*Keep calm. Act natural.*

My fingers played a soundless piano tune against my thigh, a rhapsody by an Englishwoman my mutti had admired called Rebecca Clarke. The music was half ominous, half hopeful. I understood that feeling.

'Stay together! That means you too, Arek,' shouted one of the Red Cross women. Betty, her name was. *Poor Betty*, the

kids called her behind her back. Always with a snuffle and no hanky. Arek was a Polish boy who'd survived a hell worse than hell by hiding in a toilet pit. Now he was free, it was as if his arms and legs had to be all places at once. I knew how it felt to be so trapped you wanted to run mad like a crazy spider. Instead I kept calm and ladylike, as I'd been taught.

While Betty checked names, another Red Cross lady – Margaret – tried to line us up in order. Margaret had been a hockey player before the war – what was *hockey*? – and said she loved children, though she probably meant normal kids who picked flowers, not fights. Ones who didn't lick the plate when the food was all gone. I'd been normal once, I think. It was hard to remember. I'd been happy before the war. There'd been a boat on a lake – a wooden toy with a cotton sail. A tall man with sun behind his shoulders.

'Brigitta Iggle?'

I blinked and the memory vanished. Someone had said a name I knew – the name I used, pronounced wrong. It was spelled *Igeul* in German, like *eagle* in English, and it meant hedgehog.

Betty tapped her fingers on a clipboard. Her woollen gloves had unravelled at the tips.

Margaret squinted at the list of names. 'Brigitta? Like Bridget . . . ?'

They both glanced round the group, eyes passing right over me.

Betty sneezed and called out again. 'Is there a Bridget Iggle?'

Much as I preferred being invisible, I didn't want to be left off the list. I absolutely had to be let into England.

‘Here!’ I called. When no one looked my way, I realised no sound had come out. Too many years of just whispering, or talking with fingertips only. I raised my hand.

‘Oh, *her*,’ said Betty. ‘The dark one. *Now* I remember: she kicked up a stink at the clinic when she had to undress for the examination. In the end I told her to keep her underthings on. Hey, you, Arek, get *down* from that table! I swear that boy’s got ants in his pants – he *never* sits still. Er, what was I saying?’

‘About Brigitta,’ Margaret prompted.

‘Oh yes. Not a bad-looking kid. She’ll be a heartbreaker before long. A couple of eggs short of dozen of course,’ she added, tapping the side of her head.

‘Hush,’ said Margaret. ‘She’ll hear you.’

‘Her? Doesn’t speak a word of English, or any language, it seems. Doesn’t speak at all.’

‘Poor thing. Poor all of them. No homes, no parents . . .’

‘Oh, children are like rubber, don’t you worry. They soon bounce back. Even after . . .’ Betty’s voice trailed off. She sniffed and quickly looked back at her clipboard and stabbed the list of names. ‘How on *earth* do I pronounce *this*? Why can’t the Polish language have more vowels and fewer consonants? Arek Whateveryournameis, put whateverthatthingis *down* and line up with the rest of us . . .’

The crowd shuffled forward, closer to the men in uniforms with shining buttons. Uniforms meant trouble. Questions. My heart was racing so fast the beats blurred into one continuous throb. I looked down at my hands, now fingering a tricky bit of Beethoven on the wool of my skirt.



*I can't do this.*

*I have to do this.*

One by one the officials crooked a finger for someone to step up and show their papers. My turn.

*Do what everyone else does.*

A customs man behind a big wooden desk looked me up and down. What did he see? A dark-haired girl in a red check coat, brown cardigan, brown skirt, brown socks, brown shoes. It was a smart coat at least, though it had been through a lot. All my clothes were cast-offs. A bit like me.

'Name?'

I was paralysed, unable to speak.

'She's Bridget Iggle,' said Betty, looming over my shoulder.

The man scanned my creased identity papers. 'From Germany?'

I shook my head and mouthed, 'Austria. Vienna.'

'Says here you trained as a seamstress.'

What should I reply to that?

The customs man frowned at Betty. 'Here, you, miss, ask her if she's a seamstress.'

'Like I know!' Betty spluttered. 'My job's just to fetch them here. I barely learned how to say *parlez-vous* in school, let alone German.' She turned to me and did a pantomime of sewing.

I nodded.

'Coming to England to work?' continued the customs man. Another nod.

'Anything to declare?'

I handed over my brown cardboard case, given to me at the Red Cross refugee centre in Berlin. The customs man clicked

the lid and opened it. It didn't take long for him to search through all I owned in the world.

One nightshirt.

One spare set of underwear.

One small book with tiny, tiny writing.

And, most precious of all: one grey glove. Just the one.

'Anything else?'

I shrank away. They wouldn't do a body search, would they? That would be disastrous. Then I remembered my uneaten sandwich. Wordlessly I pulled it out of my pocket and handed it over. The customs man took one sniff at the fish paste and shoved the whole sandwich back at me. 'Move along now. Nothing to declare.'

I moved along, head down, eyes down. Eventually I allowed myself a quiet smile.

*Nothing to declare*, the man had said? Well, we all have our secrets. No one needed to know about the knife in my sock.

## Bacon Butties

'Late through customs and only just made it to the train,' Betty fretted. ' Oi – Arek, get down from that rack – it's for luggage, not boys.'

We tumbled into the carriage, a mess of scabbed knees, sharp elbows and suitcase corners. The train seats were hairy. I got jammed between a soot-speckled window and a little Czech girl who had yet to take her thumb out of her mouth. She stroked her nose with a forefinger as she sucked.

An Englishman in a cheap coat and thin leather gloves pushed through to the seats opposite. 'Shift up,' he told the two Polish boys who were trying the seats out for bounce. The man's teeth were a spectrum of yellow, black and gold. He made a point of spreading his buttocks as wide as he could across the seat, then he opened his newspaper. The headlines were bold.

NAZI TRIALS IN NUREMBERG! WAR CRIMINALS TO BE HANGED!

JUSTICE MUST BE DONE!

NAZI SPIES FEARED HIDING IN ENGLAND!

So the few Nazi leaders who'd been captured alive at the end of the fighting were on trial for their crimes. Would the judges one day catch up with all the other little Hitlers who'd carried out the orders? I could think of a few. Before I could read more, the man folded the newspaper and took his lunch out of a bag. It was a floury bread roll cut in half, with two slices of warm fatty bacon dropping out of the side.

Arek and the other refugees were drawn to the smell like hungry dogs.

The man flapped his newspaper at them. 'Get away, greedy beggars! A fella ought to be able to eat a bacon butty in peace. Hey, you, nurse! Are you in charge of these brats? Keep them under control or I'll have them thrown off the train.'

Margaret went pink. 'Boys, *sit down*. You will get fed again, I promise.'

'Ruddy foreigners,' said the man, through a mouthful. 'No manners! I blame the parents. They ought –'

'They don't have any parents,' Margaret snapped. 'They're Jewish survivors of the Horror Camps, if you must know. I dare say you must've read about them in the papers – Auschwitz and Belsen and suchlike. We managed to get permission for one thousand orphaned survivors to come and find new homes in Britain. Unfortunately we couldn't actually find one thousand camp children left alive. Not even eight hundred. This is the last batch.'

The man looked down at his bacon butty – what was a *butty*? – then he looked at the boys clustered round him. 'Oh. Well. They can have some if they like . . .'

'They're *Jewish*. They don't eat pork.'

I flinched. What was Margaret thinking, saying the J-word out loud? Anyone could be listening!

The man wiped greasy fingers on his trousers. 'Shocking what 'Itler did to them Jews,' he said, picking at a piece of rind stuck in his teeth. Then he smiled at the little Czech girl sitting next to me. 'Don't cry, sweetie. You're safe now. It couldn't happen here. This is England.'

I hadn't noticed the girl crying. What was I supposed to do? I remembered my mama's warm, firm voice: *Here, hold my hand. Don't let go.* I felt for the Czech girl's hand and gave it a squeeze. With a quiet sob, she turned and burrowed into me.

There was a crackle from my coat lining. Had anyone else heard it?

The Englishman nodded at me. 'You're a good girl, you are.'  
I held myself still. *That's what you think.*

Whistles, pistons, smoke and steam. On we rushed, to our future. Who'd welcome us? Who'd want us? Who'd want me?

A faint sun shone on hedges, fields and villages. Kids pressed flat against the train windows, pointing things out and chattering away in half a dozen languages. Arek got locked in the lavatory and Margaret nearly blew a gasket trying to get him out again. Farms and countryside gave way to factories and wasteland, and rows of red-brick houses with pigeons on the roof tiles and washing strung in the yards.

'This is it, this is London!' cried Betty. 'Make sure you've got everything. Whatever you do, stay together and don't –' The rest of her words were lost in a very wet sneeze.

More clambering, shoving, lugging and bickering. I had my

suitcase tight in one hand and the Czech girl limpeted to the other.

Just as Arek tripped off the train and onto the platform there was a shout. 'There they are!' A cluster of men in hats jogged towards our carriage. Questions shot out like bullets. 'How do you like England? Are you happy to be here? What was it like in the Nazi camps?'

Then they hoisted up cameras with bulbs that flashed and shattered, crunching underfoot. 'You there, the pretty dark girl, smile for us!'

Too late I turned my head away. Too late I yanked my hand from the little Czech girl's and raised it to my face. I was stabbed by the lights and caught on film.

So I did what any self-respecting, honest citizen wouldn't do. I ran.

I burst out of the station, heart pounding, almost straight into a jam of traffic. Horns blared. 'Watch where you're going, darlin'!'

I dodged cars, jumped puddles and slid between strangers on the far pavement. Then I slowed. You might look normal running *towards* a station, maybe late for a train, but you stand out running away. It's best to blend in and be what everyone expects. Hide in plain sight.

London looked endless and I was lost, of course. Still, if I didn't know where I was, no one could track me down. But what if I ever wanted to be found? To answer that question I had to get to Summerland, which meant un-losing myself.

*Where are we, Mutti?* I used to ask my mama.

She'd peer through keyholes, or out from under beds, or along the moon-silver stones of a secret pathway, wherever

we'd been hiding at the time. You could criss-cross an atlas with all the places in Europe we went, looking for refuge.

*Where are we?* I'd ask, wondering if it was Romania, Moravia or Bavaria, and she'd say, 'We're exactly where we are on the surface of the planet, and we're together. That's all you need to know right now.'

Before the war I'd known exactly where I was. I'd be swinging my legs at the dinner table as grown-ups talked and joked. Making dens among the fallen leaves in the park. Running to school with a bouncing satchel. Were these memories or did I make them up to pass the years of hiding, when we were everywhere and nowhere at once?

Now I'd made it to the speck of the planet called London. I wished I could swing around lamp posts in celebration. I didn't of course. A nice girl wouldn't do such a thing, so neither did I.

*London is a place of magic and marvels*, my mama once told me, all in whispers. *Close your eyes, Liebling, and picture the city – a skyline of towers and spires. A river with ships that sail across every ocean on the planet, carrying sheep wool and spices, tree logs and diamonds . . . people and pineapples, cottons and queens. London is the heart of an empire. Unconquered. Defiant!*

Did I feel defiant? Definitely. Cold and overwhelmed too.

I crossed the river. *The Thames*, they called it, pronounced *tems*. It was brown and clogged with boats. I wished I could stop and gaze out over the sliding, slapping water. You could watch boats for hours, I reckoned, and never get tired of wondering where they'd been and where they were going. Instead I had my own journey to make. To the one place on the planet where I might find what I was looking for.

Which way was Summerland?

Everything everywhere, all mine for the seeing, as long as I kept moving. Stone lions crowned with pigeons . . . a red bus splattered with an ad for toothpaste . . . men in turbans talking with such animation their beards bounced . . . a blind accordion player at the underground railway steps, my heart squeezing with every wheezy note she played.

Mizzle turned to drizzle turned to rain. London people pulled down their hats and crouched under sudden umbrella sproutings. I thought they'd look happier that they'd won the war, not so pinched and tired. Didn't they realise they had it better than Berlin? Yes, they'd been bombed, and there were rubble hills between the buildings, but no one was fighting to eat clumps of stringy nettles growing in the debris, or chasing rats along buckled train lines. I shivered at the memory.

In Berlin it was women who cleared the bomb ruins at the end of the war, one brick at a time, one barrow after another. I'd done my fair share of chipping mortar from old bricks so they could be used again. Here in London, it was men with cranes who worked rebuilding. White, brown, black faces – the builders all wore wool caps but their hands were bare and their skin, whatever the colour, looked tough like gloves. Were they glad the bombs had fallen because now they had work and a pay packet every week?

'We'll bomb the Brits and all their filthy Jews into oblivion!' Herr Trautwein used to boast when he came home from work. Herr Trout-face, with a shiny swastika on his lapel and a voice that carried through the apartment to where I was hiding.



Herr Trout-face, manager in a factory near Berlin, building aeroplanes for the Luftwaffe so they could blow up the world. Frau Trout-face clucked and agreed with her husband, as all good Nazi wives should. My mama said nothing as she served them their dinner. The Trautweins didn't know she was a Jew. Had no idea I was crouched in their spare-room wardrobe.

Oh God – I couldn't go back there. Not to that cramped darkness with Frau Trautwein's fur coat tickling my nose and the fear that one sneeze would have me dragged into daylight to be shot.

This world I now had to roam in, it was all suddenly too much. I ducked into a doorway and held my suitcase close. I clicked the clasps open and checked that my one grey glove was dry. Such a small thing, and so seemingly insignificant, yet that glove was the real reason I'd come to England: I had to find the other glove to make a matching pair.

One by one the street lamps came on, making the rain shine silver. People poured out of the buildings, leaving the windows dark behind them. They all had somewhere to go. I did too, only the old fear gripped me: if I moved I'd be caught.

Across the street a boy on a bike skidded to a stop outside a grand building of golden stone, with carved lions guarding the entrance. One window in this building was still bright. I saw the silhouette of a man standing there, looking out, as if searching for someone. I wondered if he'd find whoever he was looking for. If *I* would. Then the blind was drawn and the man moved away.

The boy on the bike slapped a bundle of evening-edition papers on the pavement by a news kiosk. I thought of the

reporters and photographers back at the station. It was the worst luck I'd been caught on camera. Someone might see me. Accuse me. Arrest me. Better to be invisible. So here I was. Unseen. Unknown. One small soul, lost among the ghosts.

## Hot Buttered Toast

I'm not afraid of ghosts. Some people are, but I don't know why. The dead don't harm us – they leave that task to the living. I'd been seeing ghosts ever since I climbed out of the rubble after the bomb blast in Berlin, powdered with brick dust that stuck to the blood.

Herr Trautwein once bragged, 'The RAF will never drop a single bomb on German soil!' That was shortly after Mama got the job as their housekeeper – on false papers of course. She'd long since destroyed her proper passport, stamped with a *J* for *Jude* – Jew. She used the last of our precious money to pay for a false identity. I had to memorise her fake name. I was used to that – forgetting who we really were, to remember who we had to be.

This was after the other hiding places had failed, maybe two or three years into the war. I forget dates as well as places. I carry tunes in my head instead. Mama smuggled me into the apartment while both Trauts were out. Frau Trautwein went to the Nazi Women's League meetings, where they boasted about their offspring and knitted children's clothes for charity. The Trauts had specified *no dependents* on the job description,

but Mama was desperate for work, and the job came with food and shelter. It was cold living rough. We hadn't eaten much for days, just raw potatoes we dug straight from the ground in someone's allotment.

How ironic, that after everywhere in Europe we'd searched for safety, we ended up in Berlin, the heart of the regime working to stamp Jews out. The only thing more outrageous would be turning up at Hitler's bunker looking for a bed and a bite to eat.

'They won't expect us here,' Mutti explained. 'They think Berlin is Jew-free.'

They were wrong. We saw others like us, scuttling about after curfew, or curled up in the sewers. Jews in hiding were called *submarines*, because they were under the surface. Jews not hiding were called dead.

So Herr Trautwein helped build aeroplanes to bomb Britain, and Britain retaliated with bombs on Germany. By the time all the bombs had fallen it was hard to tell ghosts from flesh-and-blood people, we were all so faint and grey.

Here in London ghosts were everywhere, dressed in all kinds of clothes – uniforms, evening gowns, shawls, short skirts, whatever they'd been wearing when they died. Some of them noticed me as I pushed between warm living bodies in an underground station to find a map of the rail network. Mostly the dead minded their own business, travelling in the groove of their last living moment.

Long ago one magic summer Mama had travelled across London by car. A *Silver Ghost*, she'd called it. 'But you'll need to get the train,' she told me. 'Look for King's Cross station.'

From the name I expected a king and a cross, or at least a crown. Instead I found arched girders thick with pigeon droppings.

‘All fares!’

The ticket inspector was moving along the train carriage. I knew this game. I’d played it before, in Berlin, keeping ahead of the uniform then jumping out at a station, sprinting along the platform and dodging into one of the compartments that had already been checked, just as the train moved off again. It was a trick I’d learned from other feral children after the war was over. We were like packs of rats, scavenging all over the skeleton of the city. If I hadn’t heard that the Red Cross were helping Jewish refugees get to England, I might have been stuck there still.

I squished into a compartment and sat down, suitcase tucked between my legs. Other passengers wrinkled their noses. Was it me that smelled bad or my sandwich? Hard to tell. Ignoring the disapproval, I fed the fish paste to the wolf in my stomach.

A young soldier opposite was reading the evening newspaper. My heart jolted at the headline.

#### NEW HOMES IN ENGLAND FOR NAZI VICTIMS

There was a photograph of a flash-bright face and a check coat. A picture of *me*, being ambushed by those idiot reporters. This was a disaster! What if I was recognised and caught before I got to Summerland? The soldier caught me staring. He folded

the newspaper – thank God – and leaned forward with a stained-tooth smile.

‘Going far, darlin’?’

I pretended not to hear.

A hefty woman next to him nodded at the newspaper headline. ‘Look at this: more foreigners flooding the country, coming here to sponge off us hardworking English. A disgrace, I call it.’

*Please don’t look at the picture.*

The soldier ignored her and spoke to me. ‘Come on, darlin’, smile – it might never happen.’

‘Aw, leave her alone,’ said his mate, a sailor.

The soldier casually put his hand on my knee. ‘Just being friendly, aren’t I? A pretty girl out on her own likes a bit of company.’

‘You wouldn’t think that if it was your sister,’ said the sailor.

The soldier pulled his hand back quickly, saving me from having to break his wrist or stab him through the palm with my knife.

‘Less of that hanky-panky if you please,’ huffed the hefty woman. ‘Honestly, girls today don’t know how to behave! I blame the war – giving young people too much freedom. Girls going away from home and wearing trousers and who knows what. No wonder the world’s in such a mess.’

‘Mind your own business!’ scowled the soldier. ‘And the world’d be even more of a mess if we hadn’t gone over there to sort old Hitler out. Why shouldn’t we have a bit of fun, now we’re back?’ He eyed me in a way that made me wish I had

the protection of trousers, not a flimsy skirt over bare legs. At least he'd forgotten about the newspaper.

He went to light a cigarette in the train corridor. The sailor got up to follow him.

'Look after yourself,' he mumbled as he brushed past.

I watched them slouch and smoke and joke, feeling jealous. It was easy for men to do things. Girls were always getting warned about what might be done to them. Mama said it was safer to be a girl in wartime. In the early months they'd only been rounding up men and boys. Arresting anyone who might be a threat. There'd been three of us back then – me, Mama and Papa. We were waiting to hear from England, about a safe place to live. Then all the Jewish men in town got taken. 'I'll find you!' Papa said, as they dragged him along the street, away from me and Mama.

He never did.

It was so long ago I couldn't remember his face or his voice. I stared into the glass of the train window, thinking how things could have been different.

The hefty woman who didn't like foreigners fell asleep. She snored. When the train reached the station she was supposed to get off at, I didn't bother to shake her awake. My own eyes were so heavy. but I had to keep alert to check every single station name. It was only safe to sleep when you were properly hidden, or if Mama was on guard. Not safe now. Definitely mustn't, wouldn't . . .

'All fares!'

I must've nodded off, propped up against the window. We

came to a halt. The carriage was empty. Just me and . . . the ticket inspector!

Instinct kicked in: hide or get away. Nowhere to hide. I fumbled for the door handle and tumbled out onto the platform with my case. A whistle blew. Doors slammed shut. The train pulled off and I was alone in a circle of lamplight, rain spattering down.

The station name sign was underneath a basket of drowned flowers: *East Summer*. Mama must have been watching out for me, because it was the very place on the planet I needed to be.

Beyond the lamps of the station all was dark. Wet hedges edged a lane, making a black border to wide miles of windswept unknown. I felt a sense of emptiness – a space left behind in time.

Head down I trudged along the lane . . . and walked straight into a policeman. Without hesitation, I turned and ran – straight into the hedge. A beast loomed up, all white eyes and steaming breath. It bellowed. I yelped and fell. The policeman hoisted me to my feet.

‘All right, all right, it’s only one of Old Rory’s cows having a moo at you.’

A *cow*? Of course it was a cow. How stupid to panic. I had to think clearly. Behave normally. Mama had taught me how to produce real-seeming tears if necessary. She said to use this technique only as a last resort, because sometimes looking weak was the last thing you wanted.

The policeman planted his feet wide.



‘To be fair, it’s more likely to be a bull – not nearly so stropky as the cows. Old Rory’s got them to pasture on the old East Summer airfield now it’s closed. New here, aren’t you? A bit lost and wet by the look of it. Hang on, let me get me bike light and we’ll see what’s what.’

I knew all about policemen. They sometimes started with a pretence of friendliness. Next thing you knew, there’d be a concrete prison cell, questions, beatings . . . unbearable things. Once in Berlin my mother had been missing for three days. They’d picked her off the street and interrogated her – *What’s your name? Where do you live? Are you hiding something?* By the time she came back, Frau Trautwein was furious. Without her trusty housekeeper she’d had to do her own cooking and cleaning and shopping. Mama apologised and said it had all been a misunderstanding, she’d get right back to work as soon as she’d changed out of her bloodied clothes.

It had been one of the worst times of my life, those three days of not knowing. Of not daring to leave my hiding place to go look for her. Of being twisted with hunger because the potato peelings Mama had left me were soon gone. Of being parched with thirst because I couldn’t turn on the taps without the Trauts hearing, yet sick from the stench of the jar I had to pee in.

Mama came to me as soon as it was safe. *My darling, I’m sorry, so sorry, you poor dear* . . . That night, when the Trauts had scuttled down to the bomb shelter and searchlights criss-crossed the sky, Mama walked me around the apartment until my legs worked again. Usually we’d play silent piano

duets when we were alone together. After her time with the police Mama couldn't play anything until her broken fingers had mended.

*Never trust a policeman, she said.*

This English policeman was wide and tall, made taller by a strange helmet with a silver badge. He had gingery whiskers on his chin, and hairs coming out of his nose too.

He seemed surprised when I handed him my papers. He took them anyway and read them through.

'Brigitta . . . *Iggle? Eegoyle?* Austrian, are you? Hitler's homeland, eh? He should've stayed there, painting houses or whatever he did before trying to rule the world. Hmm, you don't look much like a Nazi to me. Says here you're with the Red Cross – a refugee.'

I nodded.

'From . . . how d'you say this . . . ? *Auswitsh?* Blimey – heard about that on the wireless. Bloody awful it sounds, killing babies and everything. Like that Belsen place. Mr Oakley in the village, he can tell you about Belsen, except he won't, it was so nasty. Don't worry, you won't find folks so badly behaved here in England, at least not in the village. Out towards town there's the glove factory, Gant's, and they do employ a lot of *foreigners*. No offence.'

And then, instead of locking me up, or kicking me into the gutter, or shooting me on the spot, the policeman gave me back my papers and he smiled.

*He smiled.*

'I'm Constable Ribble. Where d'you need to get to, petal? I'll give you a croggie on me bike.'

In my suitcase I had a dictionary. It was a tiny thing, with pages too small to be any use as toilet paper, which is probably why it hadn't been ripped up like other books. It was one of the few things I'd salvaged from the wreckage of the Trautwein building after the bombs. *Midget Dictionary German-English English-German* it said on the cover. I desperately wanted to check it now to see what on earth *croggie* meant, and why this Ribble had called me a *petal*. Wasn't that something to do with a flower? Did I look floral? The constable's dialect was nothing like the elegant English my mother had forced me to learn. I was in a place called Yorkshire now.

*You must speak like a local to avoid suspicion*, Mama said, when we were looking for safe places to stay. *If in doubt, say nothing*.

Constable Ribble pointed to the seat of his bicycle and mimed him pedalling with me balancing.

'A CROG-GIE!' he repeated, loudly and slowly. 'No? Suit yourself. I'll walk you back to the village anyhoo. I usually come to the station to pick up the evening papers that folk leave on the train – something to read while I'm dunking me biscuits on the evening shift. Nice time of evening this, 'cept for the rain. Most folk are snug and dry indoors, minding their own business, just a few rascals creeping round where they oughtn't to be. Don't suppose that's you, is it? Up to no good?'

Although he acted bluff, his eyes were sharp.

I produced a smile.

The lane led downhill until the hedges gave way to houses with warm chinks of light showing at curtained windows. Soon we were on a street with pavements, a pub – open, a shop – shut, and one solitary lamp post shining by a telephone box. A wide stream ran through the village and there was a pond.

Ribble stopped by a small stone building with a blue lamp that said *POLICE*.

‘Why don’t you and I get out of this rain for a bit . . . ? I’ll fix us a brew and rustle up biccies. No?’

Very no. *Brew* and *biccies* could mean any kind of torture device.

‘In that case,’ he said, ‘you’d better tell me where you’re heading. Can’t have you wandering around the village, scaring the cows and whatnot.’

After so many months and so many miles it was time to commit. I lifted my chin and took a deep breath. I said it out loud.

‘Summerland.’

‘Summerland? You mean the big ’ouse? That’s easy. Cross that there bridge, follow the avenue and you can’t miss it. Say ’ow-do to the missus for me. You sure you’re all right? Fair enough. Goodnight for now then, Miss Eego! . . .’

I went over the arch of a bridge, with invisible water rushing beneath, and came to the start of a long avenue. Ranks of tall tree sentinels marched along either side. Beyond the trees were shadowed lawns, lumped with grey-grassy humps like the burial mounds of giant ancestors.

I breathed in big gulps of the freshest air ever tasted. The

last time I was in the country it had been somewhere in Poland, scorching hot and so dry we drank out of puddles until these dried up. We'd been hidden in a sty, fighting bad-tempered pigs for a share of the slops. They were bacon by Christmas; we somehow stayed alive.

Now I walked alone in the English countryside, holding my case, humming a few bars of music over and over to calm my mind. My hands, gloveless, were so cold I could barely feel the suitcase handle in one hand or my knife in the other. Would I need it? I'd soon find out.

Ahead, in a dip among wet fields and beyond gates of black curling metal, was Summerland Hall – a place of fairy tales told in dawn light, in the last moments before doors were locked on me and I was left to sleep, while humans outside began their day. A house of wonders. A refuge.

I'd expected lights, warmth, glitter, not this picture of abandonment. Row upon row of blank windows, with ivy growing from ground to chimney-pots, as if trying to pull the house apart, brick by brick. In the middle of the roof was a clock tower. The hands on the clock were stuck on twelve.

To the left of the house a cold black lake spread towards bristling trees. There was a terrace with an ornamental pond. It was studded with a silent fountain and the cracked glass of a conservatory. To the right, a high brick arch and more brick buildings, all matted with dark leaves.

The gates were half open. An invitation or a trap? I crossed the gravelled forecourt to the house. Every step I took sounded as loud as an orchestra playing chords out of tune.

Stone stairs, mottled with moss, lured me to a huge front

door. I reached for the lion's head knocker. It was heavier than expected . . .

*Bang! Bang! Bang!*

That surely woke the ghosts . . . Yes, here they came, the Summerland spectres, drifting to the downstairs windows. Young men mostly. I saw the fluff of hopeful moustaches and cropped, combed hair. A hint of uniforms. War-dead.

*Bang! Bang! Bang!*

Would no one living answer?

The sound echoed and the ghosts rippled. Silence. Then I nearly leaped out of my skin when a very unghostly set of knuckles rapped on glass. A white face with red cheeks was at the window by the door.

'There's nobody home!' came a muffled voice. 'Who are you anyway? Well? Cat got your tongue?'

Why would a cat have my tongue? I stuck it out to show that no such mutilation had occurred.

The woman stared.

'Just my luck, an escaped lunatic. You'd better come in. I don't want to be cleaning your drowned corpse off the steps in the morning. No, not this door. It doesn't open. Go round.' She pointed to the right side of the house and mouthed the words again: 'Go. Round.'

Through the arch was a garage, protected by a big rusty padlock. There were collapsing sheds and shadows. Wet cobbles made me slip, brambles tore at my bare legs. A light shone out.

'This way, hurry up . . .'

I fell up a doorstep. My suitcase handle snapped and the case dropped to the floor.

‘That’s one way to make an entrance!’

Strong hands had me upright and propelled me across stone flagstones to a chair. I found myself sitting at a wooden table, scrubbed bone-white clean. The table was by a great black oven range, blissfully warm. All around were high shelves stacked with pans and kitchen bits. Up above, snow-white laundry hung from a wooden winter-hedge. In the middle of it all, the woman. She had brown hair skewered into a knot at the nape of her neck, a cardigan with sleeves pushed up to show powerful arms and a starch-stiff apron almost down to her slippers.

‘Dripping all over my floor,’ she muttered as she threw me a towel. ‘Give me your coat and we’ll set it to dry. Fine. Keep it on and catch a fever, no skin off my nose. You will take your shoes off, mind. My kitchen, my rules.’

I bent and tugged at the laces, transferring the knife into my sock. As soon as my shoes were off, the woman grabbed them. She stuffed each shoe with newspaper and put them in front of the range. If I had to run, I’d need to lunge for my shoes before I made it to the door. So I might as well dry my coat as well. It had precious things hidden inside the lining. I handed it over to the woman.

She watched me squeeze rain from my braids.

‘I saw you had a tongue. Can you use it? Can you talk?’

*Speak to no one. Tell them nothing.* These were my instructions, drummed in week after week, year after year. Talking didn’t come easily. Carefully I sounded out some English words.

The woman frowned. ‘Speak up! I’ve heard gnats shout louder.’

Slowly my hand inched down one leg to the knife again. 'You are . . . Barbara Summer?'

There. I'd said it. I'd named her, the woman I'd come all this way to find. The one who maybe needed a knife in her heart. It was her fault there was only one grey glove.

To be fair, this woman didn't look like a wicked witch. In fact, she laughed.

'Lady Summer? Get away! I'm Sophie Rover – Summerland's housekeeper, cook and general dogsbody. No more, no less. Lady Summer indeed! Her Ladyship and maid are away till tomorrow, and just as well. Neither of them would take kindly to beggars knocking on the front door. Me, I've been in the army. I've seen a bit more of life, so I know when someone needs a good cup of tea and a sit-down.'

As she talked she put the kettle on to boil, set a chopping board on the table, took a loaf of bread from a white enamel tin and fetched a knife from a drawer. I left my knife where it was. Sophie Rover's was much bigger.

She cut two thick slices of bread and set it to toast on the range. Next she lifted the lid on a glistening golden-yellow block. Real butter. Not pale margarine, not white lard, not dark oil. Real butter on white bread.

'Hot buttered toast and a brew!' said Mrs Rover. 'Nothing quite like it for setting you right. And you look proper famished. I'm used to feeding a hundred fellas at a time, back in my army days. Getting some colour in *your* cheeks will be a doddle. Now, here's your tea – extra sugar – and here's your toast. Ask no questions how come we've got more



butter than the piddly ration amount. You make short work of that, then we'll get down to brass tacks: what's your name, where are you from, and what bad luck brings you here to Summerland?'