

around again. 'There must be different types of countryside.'

'Well, this is the wrong type.' Ronnie sticks out his bottom lip.

This is all I need – a sulky little brother. No one will pick us if he looks a proper misery guts.

'Be quiet and try to look like a nice boy,' I say, making sure the string of his gas mask box sits properly on his shoulder. 'Nice and smart.'

I look over his head to the far end of the platform. The smoke's thinning, but it still stings my eyes and catches in my throat. I can see the face of the station clock now; it's almost teatime. The sign is clear too:

LLANBRYN

Funny word. Too many Ls.

Here we are, a wriggling, squiggling line of school-children. Duff's at the front with his little sister. She's even younger than Ronnie; too young to understand any of this. I can't see many faces; most are looking at our teacher, Miss Goodhew. Some of us seem excited,



some curious, but I bet everyone's nervous. Even the ones pretending not to be. Maybe even Duff.

Ronnie's crying again. It's OK for little brothers to cry but big brothers have to be the brave ones. Not that I would cry, anyway. I'm twelve. He watches sadly as a guard puts our suitcases in a pile near the gate at the end of the platform.

'I want my Dinky van,' he splutters.

'You can't have it. It's packed. You know what Nan said.'

'But—'

'Ronnie, it's safe,' I say. 'Remember how well you wrapped it in your pyjamas? You did a really good job there.'

He nods and blinks back more tears. I know he's trying to be brave too.

Next to the guard, Miss Goodhew is talking to a man and a woman. The man is tall and has a thick overcoat buttoned over his large stomach, and he's got the biggest moustache I've ever seen. The woman's all done up like she's in her Sunday best. She's walking down the line now, giving out custard creams as she



counts us. When she gives one to Lillian Baker, Lillian thanks her for having us in their village. Duff's close enough to pull her plaits but he doesn't. He's not usually worried about getting into trouble; perhaps he *is* nervous. I bet Lillian Baker will get picked first. She's got long dark hair and her socks never fall down and all the grown-ups say she's pretty.

When the woman hands a biscuit to Ronnie, she stops and wipes away his tears with her hanky. She's got a metal badge pinned to her coat that says *WVS Housewives Service Identification*.

'What's your name?' she asks. Ronnie gulps and says nothing.

Now that she's close, I can smell lavender and peppermints. She lifts Ronnie's tag and says, 'Ronald, now that's one of my favourite names, that is.'

'We call him Ronnie,' I say, a bit harder than I mean to.

But she keeps on smiling, eyeing my tag. 'And you're a Travers too. Ronnie's brother, is it? So are you a James or a Jimmy?'

'Jimmy.'

