

Warning. This story mentions war.

Hide-and-seek.

I could hear Maisy and Anna running away into the forest, leaving me alone. I squeezed my eyes shut and continued counting. Nineteen, twenty, twenty-one. That should be long enough. I opened my eyes and blinked at the sunshine peeking through the branches of the old, strong oak tree I stood next to.

"I'm coming!" I called into the forest, walking around the tree. My bright yellow boots were caked in mud and my dress floated around my ankles, collecting pieces of dirt. I heard a giggle from behind a bush nearby and ran towards it. But nobody was behind the bush when I reached it. I sighed and stared into the trees. This was going to be a long game of hide-and-seek.

As I trooped through the undergrowth, something caught my eye. I walked towards it, and realised it was a house, old, and abandoned. The perfect place to hide. I pushed open the gate to the small garden and it creaked in welcome. As I walked up the path towards the house, the overgrown weeds brushed against my dress, and something sharp caught it. I bent down to look at it, and realised it was a rusty, and jagged key, wedged between stones. I lifted my hand to pull it out, but as my fingers touched the key, the rust evaporated from it. I felt as though I was free falling, and I clutched my head in dizziness. The world fell away, turning into a similar place, though it was dark, and stormy, the weeds shrunk into pale flowers. I looked around in shock, what had happened? Suddenly the door to the house swung open, revealing a tall man dressed in a smart black suit. A short but haughty looking woman followed him closely. The man held out the door to let the woman through first.

"Looks like there will be a storm." Sniffed the woman, squinting at the sky. The man nodded grimly, and they walked down the path towards me. I stood up,

"I'm sorry, is this your house?" I asked, feeling embarrassed that I had been crouching in their garden. They didn't reply, nor even look at me. The man glanced beside my feet,

"Oh, my key. How did that get there?" The man bent down and scooped up the key I'd been looking at. He pocketed it and continued down the path. As the pair walked out the gate, the woman opened the letterbox and pulled out an envelope. She handed it to the man, who opened it,

"It's about New Year's Eve, we can't have parties, the German pilots could see." He read aloud. "1941. That has a nice ring to it." The pair walked into the forest. My head was spinning, 1940? That wasn't the year, it was 2025. German pilots? I decided to follow the people, to find out what had happened.

I soon found them again, they were sitting at a bus stop on a narrow, empty road, which I'm sure wasn't here before. They were staring nervously at the sky and the man was clutching a newspaper. I frowned at the sky too, wondering what they were looking at. Suddenly a roaring noise filled the air, and the people covered their heads. A bomber roared overhead, and I remembered, if this really was the 1940's, then it was World War 2, wasn't it? I gulped, had I gone back in time? No, I couldn't have, that's impossible. Was it? Well, I definitely wasn't in 2025.

A small grey bus bolted down the road, screeching to a halt at the stop. The man stood up but dropped his key under the seat. He didn't seem to notice.

"Sir," I called, "you dropped your key." But he didn't hear me, as though I didn't exist; neither did the woman. I rushed over to the silvery key and picked it up, but suddenly it felt as though the world was spinning, falling away, replacing itself with a brighter place, with the sound of birdsong filling the air, instead of bombers. The road sunk into the earth and turned into grass. The bus stop melted away and from the place sprouted a huge oak tree. In my shock, I dropped the key, and it melted away into the dirt.

"You found us." A sulky voice - Maisy and Anna were slouching around the tree.

"Yes," I whispered, staring at my pale, shaking hands, "I found you."