

Sunday, 25th June

Mama gave me this book last Christmas, and today is exactly six months since then so I think it's about time I wrote in it! First of all, I was going to use it to practise my English. I suspect that's why Mama bought it for me. I've been learning English for a couple of years and I love it. But then I changed my mind. I've decided to write a diary. I'll keep it secret. I don't want anybody reading my private thoughts — not even Yvette Bertrand. I really like Yvette. She's been my best friend all my life. We do everything together and share everything, but I'm not sharing this diary. I won't even tell her I'm writing it.

How shall I begin? My name is Sophie Ridel. I was thirteen on 25th February. I've got long, dark hair and I'm quite small for my age. Not like my brother, Sebastien. He's fifteen and he's tall and blond. We're always arguing, and Mama's always moaning that she's sick of hearing us. It's Sebastien's fault. He insists on annoying me.

We live in a little village in the middle of the countryside. Papa works at Mr Masson's farm, which is close by, just across the railway tracks. Our house is quite small. We've got a kitchen and a living room downstairs and three bedrooms upstairs. You have to climb a ladder from the kitchen to get upstairs. My room is really tiny, but I like it. I'm lying on my bed now, writing this. It's so peaceful living here. I don't want it ever to change.

Monday, 26th June

I hate Sebastien! He always has to be one up on me. Today, he challenged me to a race home from school. He didn't have his bicycle with him so I thought it would be easy, but as I pedalled around the last corner, there he stood, right in the middle of the road. I braked and skidded and landed in a patch of nettles. I yelled at him then I spat on the palm of my hand and patted my legs. The white lumps of the stinging nettles were already beginning to show. Olivier Masson was there, too. The pair of them stood towering above me, laughing. I was so mad, especially when I noticed a scratch in the red paint on my bicycle. Then I found out how Sebastien had managed to get home so quickly. He got a lift across the fields on Mr Masson's tractor. The cheat!

Tuesday, 27th June

I feel a lot better today. When I had relaxed a bit yesterday, I went down the garden to the hen house. I let myself in and the hens clucked and fussed around me like they always do. I sat down on the end of the feeding trough, listening to their chattering and watching them scratching and pecking in the dirt.

I told them about Sebastien, about Mama moaning and about Papa always being busy out in the fields. As usual, the hens made sympathetic noises. They always understand. That's what I love about them. Some people say they're stupid creatures, but I know better.

After a while, I looked towards the house. Mama was swinging the level-crossing barriers across the road. That's her job. She has to open and close the gates every time a train goes through. Mr Masson had driven up on his tractor and was waiting on the other side of the tracks.

I heard the whining of the rails then the rumble of the engine as the train came around the bend. I closed my eyes. Soon I felt the earth trembling, and I was surrounded by a cloud of grey smoke. I love that smell of coal smoke and oil. Then the train whistle squealed. It made me jump, even though I hear it every day. I opened my eyes and watched the trucks rattle by on their way to the sugar beet factory on the other side of the village.

A few of the hens chattered nervously and one hid under the nesting boxes, but most of them ignored the train. They are used to it. Mama opened the gates, and the tractor chugged across. I stood up and opened the nesting boxes. There were ten brown eggs. I carefully lifted them out and put them in my basket, thanked the hens and let myself out of the run, making sure I fastened the door. I don't want a fox to get in among my beautiful hens!

Wednesday, 28th June

The news is always bad lately. It's all the fault of a man called Adolf Hitler. I don't know much about him except that he lives in Germany and everyone says he's doing some dreadful things. I don't like the sound of Adolf Hitler.