SUN SLOWER SUN FASTER

MERIOL TREVOR

Illustrated by Edward Ardizzone

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Note to the Reader

In 1955 an edited American edition of this book was published by Sheed and Ward. Our republication is based on the full-length British original version, brought out by Collins in 1955. We have chosen to use standard American spelling for the benefit of our American readers.

The reader will find, embedded in each sequence of this story, well-depicted details from the particular moment in English history it represents. And very concretely, the area of southwestern England around Bristol and Bath contributes its local features to that history. Various events or names that will be recognized at once by many English children may be missed, or mystifying to those of us not so well acquainted with English history. Bearing this in mind, we are confident that the liveliness of Miss Trevor’s tale will compensate for the unknown and be good incentive to venture further into the history of England.
Contents

1. To the West 1
2. Through the Secret Room 14
3. Way In and Way Out 32
4. Backwards by the Clock 42
5. Day in, Night out 56
6. The Hole in the Wall 72
7. The Hunt is Up 90
8. The Snare is Broken 107
9. Through the Lady Door 125
10. Dovecote Door 143
11. Norman Gate 153
12. Coronation 170
13. End of a World 184
14. The Secret Society 197
15. The Sign and the Seal 215
About the Author 225
CECILIA MORNE sat in the train going from London to Bristol. It was October, and the trees on the hills were turning yellow, but she was not at school, nor going to school. To-day her father and mother were flying to West Africa and she had stayed with them till the last day of their leave. Now there were two cases of poliomyelitis at her school and it was closed. So Cecil had been packed off to the country, to her father’s uncle, Ambrose Morne, whom she had never seen, and who lived at Welston Manor.

“I’d like her to get to know Welston,” said her father, who had lived there as a child, “and she’ll have company, as Dick’s boy is there.”

“Company?” said her mother. “I thought the boy was so stupid he couldn’t pass Common Entrance.”

“Exams aren’t everything,” said her father.

So here was Cecil on her way to Bristol, where she had never been before. She was thirteen, a thin, pale-brown girl with straight hair the color of honey and brown eyes, thoughtful and obstinate.

At last the train stopped, for the first time, and she stared out anxiously. Below her rose the buildings of a town, the stone golden in the clear afternoon, towers and squares folded between high green hills.

“Bath,” said one of the passengers.

Cecil sat down again and the train went on.

Sooner than she expected they arrived in Bristol, which seemed to her all noise and smoke and confusion. A tall grey-haired woman in tweeds walked briskly towards her from the barrier.
“Cecilia Morne?” she said. “I’m Edna Blake, Mr. Morne’s housekeeper and secretary. Have you a trunk?”

In a very short time she had got the porter, had the trunk wheeled out into the yard and put into the back of a shooting-brake. Inside were sacks of poultry meal and a large box of books.

“We generally shop in Bath,” said Miss Blake, as she got into the car. “But to-day I had to pick up some books for Mr. Morne, so I asked your parents to send you here.”

They drove out of the yard. The sky was already red with sunset as they went through the city. Cecil had a brief view of tall warehouses and offices and then, suddenly, spires, ruins and the masts and funnels of ships, and cranes rearing against the smoky light.

“Oh,” she cried, “ships in the middle of the town!”

“They used to come farther in than that in the old days,” remarked Miss Blake.

“All the churches have fallen down,” Cecil said, as they swept through a waste land of rubble where the ruined arches and towers stood up against the fiery sky, dark and forlorn.

“It was the bombing in the war,” said Miss Blake. “Bristol had it very badly.”

Now they were in ordinary streets again and might have been in any town in England. They ran on for miles between dull houses and shops.

Miss Blake said suddenly, “I hope you know how to be quiet. Mr. Morne is nearly eighty, and he spends most of his time reading or dictating to me. He can’t be disturbed by noise.”

“I don’t make a noise,” said Cecil, offended at being treated as if she were six years old. She added, “I thought there was a boy here.”

“There is,” said Miss Blake, pursing her lips.

“What’s his name?” Cecil asked.

“Don’t you know?” Miss Blake seemed surprised. “Your father and his were cousins, and brought up at Welston like brothers. But Richard’s father was killed in the war: in the desert.”

“Does his mother live here?”

“No. She is dead too.” Miss Blake paused and then remarked, “Richard has not been here long and he won’t be staying long. His aunt looks after him, Mr. Morne’s niece, but she and her husband are on a business trip to the States.”
“Why isn’t he at school?” Cecil wanted to know.

“He failed for his public school,” said Miss Blake, “and now he’s supposed to be having special coaching.” She spoke sarcastically, and Cecil wondered why.

All at once they turned off the main road and were in the real country. The side road climbed the lower slopes of rolling wooded hills. High up in the still blue sky one star shone, very bright. The hill grew steeper, Miss Blake changed gear, and then they swung in through a stone gateway and drew up in a gravel sweep.

“Bush!” called Miss Blake peremptorily, as she got out.

Cecil climbed out of the car. It seemed strange to stand still, after hours of being rushed along in trains and cars. The evening was windless and beginning to grow cold. Beside her the old house rose, golden grey stone, with yellow light shining from the windows. Birds still twittered in the garden.

An old man appeared at last from a shed and began to haul at Cecil’s trunk. Then the back door opened and a stout woman in an apron came out, full of smiles, to help.

“Let me take un, Father,” she said in soft west-country tones. She smiled at Cecil. “Had a good journey then?”

“Yes, thank you,” said Cecil.

“This is Elsie, Cecilia,” said Miss Blake. “Come in now, please. Is tea ready, Elsie?”

“All but, Miss Blake. I laid the children’s in the nursery, as you said.”

They went in through the back door into a wide, flagged scullery, full of baskets, paraffin cans, and boots and shoes. Miss Blake walked straight through the kitchen and Cecil barely had time to notice the big fireplace and shining black range, and the two china dogs on the shelf above. Then they were in the hall and she was aware of dark paneling, the picture of a soldier in a wig, crossed swords on the wall and a grandfather clock. The house had a very old country smell, compounded of aged wood, polish, rush mats, lavender and mold. It was rather cold.

Miss Blake took her upstairs and along a passage whose boards squeaked and up some more, narrower stairs. Up here it was lighter and the doors were painted white. “This will be your room,” said Miss Blake, opening the door.
Cecil went in. It was a small attic room, bare and clean and
cold. There was a shelf of old battered books and a picture of a gal-
leon in full sail.

“We don’t light fires in bedrooms,” said Miss Blake, “but
there’s one in the room we call the nursery, which you will share
with Richard as a schoolroom. It’s the second door on the left, the
one with the ship knocker.” She pointed out the bathroom and went
downstairs.

“Boo! How cold!” Cecil said to herself, used to a London flat.
She felt unwilling to take off her coat. She went and washed her
hands and face, and found the water was hot. There was electric
light too, she discovered to her relief. As she was brushing her hair
Elsie and her father came upstairs with her trunk.

“It’s a fair way up,” Elsie said, panting, as they put it down.
“I’ll bring your tea directly, Miss Cecilia. You’re not much like
your father, but you’ve got his eyes, nice brown eyes he had.”

“Do you know him?” Cecil was surprised.

“Oh yes, but I was only kitchenmaid when he lived here,” said
Elsie. “Mother was cook then, when she was alive. Your dad used
to sleep in here.”

Cecil felt a new interest in her cold little room.

“It was him put up the ship picture,” said Elsie. “He bought it in
Bristol. It’s a Bristol ship, I reckon, in the old days.”

“Elsie!” called Miss Blake’s voice from below.

Elsie winked and moved slowly away.

“No rest for the wicked!” she said cheerfully, and creaked heav-
ily downstairs.

Cecil at last took off her coat and found a jacket to put on
over her jersey. Then she went along, reluctantly, to the nursery.
She did not specially want to meet this stupid cousin Richard.
She had decided already he was the sort of boy who whistled and
shouted all the time, was only happy playing football and didn’t
like girls.

She knocked with the ship knocker.

There was no answer.

She opened the door and looked in. The light was not on. A fire
burned brightly in the grate, casting flaming shadows over the ceil-
ing. The windows showed the dusky sky outside and the top of a
tree. Cecil went in, half relieved, half disappointed that the meeting
was postponed. The firelight glinted on the tea things, ready on the table.

Cecil turned on a reading lamp that stood by the fire and it illumined a row of little miniatures hung one above the other. They were all children, six of them, the eldest not much older than herself, a serious brown-eyed boy, and the youngest a baby in a frilly collar.

“Victorian children,” thought Cecil. “I wonder if this was their nursery?”

She looked round and at once liked the room. It was full of the old comfortable favorite things of several generations of children. There were big cupboards, shelves of books, old arm-chairs, an ottoman, all sorts of things. She saw an ink-stained table with books lying open on it and went to look. Someone, the stupid cousin presumably, had been doing Latin exercises. Cecil spotted two mistakes at once. The writing was very black and uneven. Cecil, who liked to keep her books neat, wrinkled her face with distaste and returned to the fire and the Victorian children. The second of them was a girl, round-faced and snub-nosed, the third a rosy mischievous boy in a blue hat with a tassel. She was just wondering what their names were when the door opened and then abruptly closed again.

She looked up and saw it open again, just a crack and she heard heavy breathing outside. Then she heard Elsie’s loud cheery voice: “Go in, Rickie, she won’t bite you.”

Sheepishly the boy came in, crimson to the ears, and at once fell over a chair. Saving himself he sat down on it hastily. Elsie, laughing, followed him in with a tray of tea things.

“Here you are, help yourselves,” she said, as she put it down. “I must go down directly.” She stumped off and left the cousins face to face.

Richard had now returned to his normal color but he seemed painfully shy. He was taller than Cecil and had big hands and feet which he seemed to find hard to manage. He might certainly be a footballing boy, Cecil thought.

“Hallo,” she said, diffident, even distant.

“Hallo,” said Richard.

There they stuck till Cecil advanced on the teapot. “Shall I pour out?” she said, in her party voice.
“Yes, please,” Richard murmured. He had a soft husky voice.
Cecil began to feel more in control of the situation. She poured out tea and handed him a cup, which he managed to spill over into his saucer. He looked so frightened of her that Cecil relented.
“Are those your books?” she asked.
“Lesson books,” he said and added: “I’m no good at lessons.”
“My father says exams aren’t everything,” said Cecil.
“Sometimes they seem to be,” said Richard. “Would you like some jam?” He pulled up his chair and ceased to look quite so alarmed.
Cecil took some jam and said, “I’m to do lessons with you.”
“I know,” said Richard, and he grinned. “Dominic was simply horrified.”
“Who’s Dominic?” Cecil asked, taken aback.
“He’s a sort of relation,” said Richard. “He’s coaching me just now.”
“Why was he horrified?” demanded Cecil.
“Just that he said he’d never visualized teaching a girl,” said Richard.
“Well, really!” said Cecil, annoyed. “What’s the difference? I bet I can learn as well as a boy.”
“Better than I can, I expect,” said Richard. “But we thought you were older.”
“I’m thirteen,” said Cecil.
“I’m fourteen,” said Richard.
“Why did Elsie call you Rickie?” Cecil asked.
“Because I’m called that,” he said.
“Oh well, I’m called Cecil.”
“Cecil.” He looked at her thoughtfully. She noticed now that his eyes were grey. His hair was dark and very untidy. It was, after all, a nice face, she decided.
“Cecilia is such a mouthful,” she defended herself.
“It’s a Morne name,” said Rickie. “She’s Cecilia.” He pointed to the other side of the fireplace and Cecil saw there were other miniatures. She went over to look and noticed a very elegant young lady in a tight bodice with a fichu.
“She lived at the time of the French Revolution,” said Rickie.
“She married an émigré Comte de something.”
“It’s like the Scarlet Pimpernel books,” said Cecil.