

**ANN TURNBULL** grew up in south-east London but now lives in Shropshire. She has always loved reading and knew from the age of ten that she wanted to be an author. Her numerous books for children include *Alice in Love and War*, *A Long Way Home* and *House of Ghosts*, as well as her Quaker trilogy – *No Shame, No Fear* (shortlisted for the Guardian Children’s Book Award and Whitbread Award), *Forged in the Fire* and *Seeking Eden*. For younger children, she has also written *Greek Myths*, illustrated by Sarah Young.

Local history was the inspiration behind the powerful and poignant trilogy of books about a mining family, the Dyers. *Pigeon Summer*, *No Friend of Mine* and *Room for a Stranger* follow the family and its fortunes from 1930 through to the early years of the Second World War. *Pigeon Summer* has been dramatized for TV and radio as well as being shortlisted for the Smarties Book Prize and the WH Smith Mind Boggling Books Award.

Find out more about Ann Turnbull and her books  
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## **Praise for *Room for a Stranger***

"The sharply drawn wartime poverty will thrill readers of  
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"Turnbull combines an easy economy of style with a sharp  
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"A vibrant picture of preadolescent angst against the  
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"An eminently believable character study of a girl on the  
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life in a small English town during wartime to illustrate a chapter  
in history in a fresh, approachable way." *Publishers Weekly*, US

"This finely written, brief novel gives a sensitive, realistic portrayal  
of a difficult and turbulent time in England during World War II.

An excellent addition to historical fiction collections."  
*School Library Journal*, US

"An honest picture of a working-class family."  
Hazel Rochman, *Booklist*, US

*Room for  
a Stranger*

ANN TURNBULL



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WALKER  
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*To Gina Pollinger*



## *Chapter One*

Doreen turned the corner into Lion Street and saw a car parked outside her home.

The doctor! she thought. And she felt alarmed.

But it wasn't the doctor's car; she realized that almost at once. Then whose could it be? No one else she knew had a car.

She ran towards the house, but before she reached it the visitor came out: a woman, small, grey-haired; a stranger. She got into the car and drove away towards Station Road.

Rosie Lloyd next door stood in her front yard, staring, a skipping rope loose in her hands. She wiped her nose on her sleeve as Doreen approached, and said, "A lady came to see your mum."

“Who was she?”

“Don’t know. Can I come round?”

“No.” Doreen darted down the covered passageway between the two houses and in through the back door. “Mum! Mum, who was that?”

Her mother came out of the front room, carrying a tray with tea things on it. Someone important, then, Doreen thought.

Mum put the tray on the draining board. “That was Miss Wingfield, the Billeting Officer.”

“Billeting Officer?”

“You know, for the evacuees. She finds billets for them – places to stay.”

“You mean...?”

“We’re going to have an evacuee.”

Doreen stared at her. “But – I don’t want one!” She hadn’t realized until now how strongly she felt this. “Why do we have to have one?”

“Oh, Doreen!” Mum rounded on her. “You went on and on about *wanting* an evacuee when the war started.”

That had been in 1939 – two years ago – when the evacuees first came; when all her friends had been getting them and Doreen had felt left out.



“I’ve gone off them,” she said. “They have nits.”

“You’ve had nits.”

“They pinch things. And swear. And they pong.”

She became aware of Rosie Lloyd, with her skipping rope twined round her, standing outside the open back door.

“Go home, Rosie,” she said. “I’m not playing.”

Rosie drifted a few yards away and began to skip half-heartedly.

“Most of them aren’t like that,” said Mum. “There’s Maura O’Brien; she’s nice. And little Shirley. And Mrs Mullen’s boys.”

She turned away to wash the tea cups.

“I felt,” she explained, “that I ought to say yes. We couldn’t have anyone before, with your dad being so ill, but now that he’s ... gone, and we’ve got the space...”

Her voice was tight, and Doreen thought of Dad and felt a lump in her own throat.

Mum went on. “Miss Wingfield’s got some kiddies need moving quickly – foster mother taken ill. So I said we’d help.” She turned back to Doreen. “It’ll be a girl—”

“What girl? What’s her name? How old is she?”

“I don’t know yet; Miss Wingfield hasn’t sorted out who’s going where. But I did say to her, ‘It’ll have to be a girl; she’ll be sharing a bedroom with Doreen’—”

“Sharing my room!”

It was only in the last year or so that Doreen had had the bedroom to herself. Before that she’d been squashed up at one end in a camp bed, with a screen separating her from her two grown-up sisters. But Phyl had got married, and then Mary had joined the WAAF, and now she only had to share when Mary came home on leave.

“What about Mary?” she demanded, producing her sister like an ace from a hand of cards.

But Mum said, “Mary’s no problem. When she’s home she can bunk in with me.”

Doreen conceded defeat. “So when’s she coming – this girl?”

“Friday night.”

Friday. And this was Monday evening.

“If you want to do something useful,” said Mum, “you could turn out the drawers in your dressing-table. Make a bit of space.”

Doreen scuffed at the fender with her shoe. Why

should she? None of this was her idea.

“Unless you want me to do it,” said Mum.

“No!”

Doreen ran upstairs.

Two rooms opened on either side of the tiny landing: Mum’s and hers.

Why should *she* have to share? Why not Mum? Why not Lennie?

She shouted down the stairs, “Why don’t you get a boy to share with Lennie?”

She knew why as soon as she said it: Lennie slept in the front room, on a camp bed that had to be packed up and put away every morning. There was no space for anyone else in there.

It’s all right for Lennie, she thought.

She pushed open the door of her room.

There were two beds, two chairs and a dressing-table; a rail across one corner with boxes underneath formed a makeshift wardrobe. Most of the clothes in it were Mary’s civvies. All Doreen possessed was a change of clothes and what Mum called her Sunday dress.

Which bed would Mum give to the girl? she wondered. Doreen slept in the one nearest the window.

The other had a spring that caught you under the ribs when you lay on your right side. She decided that if Mum thought the girl should have the window bed she'd get Lennie to help her change the mattresses round.

Tidy up; make space, Mum had said. Well, she could start with Mary's junk. She opened the dressing-table drawers and took out some stockings with holes in the toes, a handbag, a hairbrush, a dingy bra. She piled them on the floor.

On top of the dressing-table were scraps of paper on which Doreen had begun stories or designed film posters. She picked up a crayoned picture of palm trees and pyramids surrounding the words

DESERT SONG starring DOREEN DYER

Doreen Dyer. You couldn't be a film star with a name like that. She wished she had a romantic name: Amanda Daly; or Ann Hamilton.

She wondered what the evacuee's name was. She hoped it wasn't Mavis. The Ansons had a Mavis and she was awful. Isla would be better; she'd read that in a book. Surely no one called Isla would have nits or wet the bed.

She gathered up all her papers and hid them away in the top right-hand drawer. She didn't want the girl getting hold of them and making fun of her ideas. She dusted the dressing-table with an old vest of Mary's and moved her own hairbrush and comb to the right-hand side.

Mum came upstairs. "How are you doing? I'll give you a hand."

Doreen realized that Mum was trying to smooth things over, but she didn't want to be smoothed – not yet.

"I've finished," she said, putting on an injured voice. "She's got both those drawers and half the top and I suppose she'll have loads of clothes to put in the wardrobe."

"I doubt it," said Mum. "But I'll take Mary's clothes and put them in mine. You know, Doreen, I'm not doing this because I *want* another child in the house. I just felt we should help. It'll need an effort from all of us."

But especially me, thought Doreen.

She followed Mum into the other bedroom and watched her hanging up Mary's clothes.

Dad's shirts and trousers still hung there. Mum

pushed them along the rail. Her hand lingered on the last one. "I suppose I ought to give these away."

Doreen heard the click of the back gate.

"Here's Lennie!" She ran downstairs to tell him.

Lennie was wheeling his bicycle into the shed. He was unmoved by Doreen's news.

"I've got to call the birds in," he said, moving past her towards the pigeon loft.

Doreen followed him. "Lennie, you're just *pretending* not to be interested."

"It won't make any difference to me."

No, it won't, Doreen thought. I'll be the one who has some kid hanging around all the time. But she'd wanted support and sympathy from Lennie; he never had time for her these days.

When Mum went off to work on Tuesday morning she left Doreen a shopping list. Doreen had got used to doing the shopping since the summer holidays had started. She enjoyed it.

She picked up the housekeeping purse and the ration book and went out early. She still felt apprehensive about the evacuee coming but she liked the idea of telling everyone.

She bought Spam, margarine, potatoes, dried eggs. In the butcher's shop, Mr Lee winked at her and brought out from under the counter a small pack of kidneys. That would please Mum.

She said, "We're getting an evacuee. Is Barbara there? I want to tell her."

"She's round the back, helping her mum. Go on through."

Doreen went into the back room. All the chopping up was done here, and it smelt of raw meat. Barbara and her mother were scrubbing the table-tops. Barbara wore an overall and her plaits were wound round her head like a factory girl's. She smiled when she saw Doreen.

Doreen told them her news. Mrs Lee said, "That'll be nice, Doreen. Someone for you to play with."

But Barbara looked downcast. "She'll go round with us, then," she said.

Doreen realized that Barbara was jealous. She was surprised, and pleased. "She's going to share my room," she told her.

Barbara didn't have an evacuee. There was a spare room, but it belonged to her brother, who had been killed at Dunkirk. It was rumoured among the

Culverton children that nothing in the room had been moved since. Being bereaved gave Barbara status. Doreen hoped that having an evacuee might help her catch up.

At five-fifteen on Friday night Doreen was mashing a small piece of corned beef into a lot of leftover cabbage and potato. There was more potato to go with it, and prunes for afters.

Lennie had just come home from work, hollow-eyed with exhaustion, and dropped into the armchair that used to be Dad's. Doreen made him a mug of tea; he took it in a hand ingrained with coal dust. "When's this girl coming, then?"

"After tea. Lennie, I feel all fluttery inside."

"Daft," said Lennie, but not unkindly.

"Well, I do. I'm sort of anxious but excited as well."

She turned the heat down under the potatoes and put some lard to melt in the frying pan. Mum had asked her to start cooking so that they'd be cleared away and tidy when Miss Wingfield arrived with the evacuee.

At a quarter to six Lennie said, "You'd better make



a fresh pot of tea. Mum'll be here in a minute."

The hash was sticking to the pan; Doreen scraped at a burnt patch.

"Kettle's there, if you want to fill it," she said.

Lennie didn't move. He was stretched out with his feet on the fender, reading *The Dandy*. "I'm a working man now," he said.

"You're a lazy bugger," said Doreen, and at that moment Mum walked in.

Doreen felt herself going hot, but Mum was in a good mood and just said, "Language, Doreen!" and hung up her coat.

Doreen filled the kettle. "Well, he is," she said. "Mum, he won't even move his legs so I can reach things off the mantelpiece."

Lennie immediately moved them and went to sit at the table.

"Where's my tea?" he demanded, grinning.

"He's only teasing," said Mum. "If you didn't rise to it, he wouldn't do it."

Doreen knew it was true. But she glowered at Lennie as they ate.

"Doreen's in a tizzy about this evacuee," said Lennie.

“I’m not!” She counted her prune stones, hoping for a sailor: “Tinker, tailor, soldier, sailor, rich man ... poor man. I’m going to marry a poor man.”

“That’s a fair bet,” said Mum. “Now listen, you two: when this girl comes, don’t stare or ask too many questions. She’ll probably be shy at first.”

They cleared the table, and Lennie went back to *The Dandy*. Mum switched on the wireless and found the Light Programme, and she and Doreen sang along together as they washed up.

“You’re a good little singer,” said Mum. “Pity you can’t come with me to choir practice.”

Most Friday nights Mum went to the church hall to sing with the choir; she’d joined it after Dad died.

“Are you going tonight?” Doreen asked.

“Oh, no. Not with the—”

There was a knock at the door.

Mum struggled with her apron strings. “They’re in a knot! Help me, Doreen.”

Doreen freed her just as Lennie opened the door to Miss Wingfield.

“Hallo, everyone,” said Miss Wingfield.

She ushered a girl into the room.

“This is Rhoda Kelly.”