



The Spitfire Fund

Chapter 1

Author Tom Palmer

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Illustrations by Nick Grant

nickgrantillustrator.com

Written for children aged 7+

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Yusra, Lily and Danny had been studying the Spitfire in the RAF Museum, London for 10 minutes – and from all angles – when it happened.

Work in threes and create a school project about something important you can find from history, Mrs Trenchard had told them.

They all wanted to do the Spitfire. It was such an obvious choice for their Year 7 history project. Was there any more famous object in the history of Britain?

No.

Yusra saw the lady first. She pointed her out to Lily and Danny and the trio considered her as she came towards them.

Medium height. Light hair. A hat with a brim. A kind smile. And – in front of her – a collecting tin and a small board of pin badges.

'Care to support the Spitfire Fund?' the lady asked. Her voice sounded clipped, like the Queen's on Christmas Day.



Lily squinted at the pin badges. Four rows of tiny brass Spitfires. 'Do you get a badge if you donate?' Lily asked, her hand already in her pocket.

'Yes, my dear,' the lady replied.

Each of the three friends put a pound coin in the lady's tin. They saw it had the words:

OUR LOCAL FIGHTER PLANE FUND

written on it, along with a simple line drawing of a Spitfire.

Now they looked at their pin badges, which felt cold and metallic. They were two centimetres wide and had the word SPITFIRE engraved across the wings.



Each of the trio carefully pinned the badge onto their school jumpers.

Immediately everything changed.

Dramatically.

Frighteningly.

For Lily it was the smell of petrol or some sort of fuel burning and crowds of faces around her. For Yusra it was loud buzzing and vibrations running straight through her. Danny could see a huge sky above him, tiny planes weaving their trails in corkscrews and spirals. Instinctively, they grabbed each other.

It was Lily who acted first, tearing off her pin badge, then easing the tiny Spitfires off the tops of Danny and Yusra too. They staggered to sit on a row of three chairs away from the aircraft.

'What was that?'

'Did you?'

'I don't understand ...'

Now each of them turned over their Spitfire badge in their hands.

'Mine's warm,' Yusra said. 'Really warm. It was cold before.'

Lily nodded. 'Mine too.'

'When I had this on ...' Lily said, holding up her pin badge to the light.

'... you were somewhere else,' Danny finished her sentence.

'Yes.'

'Me too,' Yusra agreed. 'Do you think ...' her voice trailed off.

Danny was glancing nervously around the RAF Museum, under the roofs of the old hangar, between the Lancaster and the Lightning aeroplanes, searching for the lady.

'She's vanished,' he told the two girls.

'We should have asked her more about what the Spitfire Fund is,' Lily frowned. 'We need to ask someone. So that we can understand.'

Together the three children approached two members of staff in red uniforms, Museum Ground Crew written across their backs. One woman. One man.

'Excuse me,' Lily began. 'Can you tell us any information about the Spitfire Fund, please?'

They had all concealed their pin badges in their pockets or hands.

'Of course. That's a great question,' the woman said, her eyes excited. It was clear she loved the Museum and the stories the planes had to tell its visitors.

'In 1940 the Nazis were planning to attack and occupy Britain,' she began, 'like they had occupied most of the rest of Europe. And we needed Spitfire aircraft to defend ourselves. But there wasn't enough money to pay for them, so hundreds of people volunteered to collect money from the public and gave them little badges as a way of saying thank you. A bit like poppies or red noses now. There's a real example on display in Hangar One.'

Danny was desperate to show the woman his badge, but, after a sharp look from Lily, he kept it in his pocket.

The woman carried on explaining. 'People would donate a penny. 6d would pay for a sparkplug. And some people donated more. £40 for a petrol tank. Or £2,000 for a Merlin engine. Towns used to compete against each other to see who could raise money for a whole Spitfire. There was a famous case in Wolverhampton, near where our other RAF Museum is in Cosford: a whole Spitfire aircraft was paid for by the people who lived there. The city was presented with a plaque. You can see the plaque in the Museum.'

'I've been there with my dad,' Yusra interrupted.

'Then,' the man went on, 'soon after that, the Battle of Britain took place. Exactly 80 years ago. Right here. Over London. The battle that saved us from being taken over by the Germans, like this country was once taken over by the Romans, then the Normans.'

After hearing all the fascinating facts from the Museum ground crew the children walked to the café. They bought drinks and cake, then went to sit down outside on one of the benches in the

sunshine.

It was a lovely day. But none of the children had their minds on the weather: they were thinking about what had happened when they had put on their Spitfire Fund badges. As they ate, they discussed all they'd seen and heard and smelled when things had become so weird.

'I saw aeroplanes flying in circles, diving, even crashing into each other,' Danny started. 'And bombs falling on a big city.'

'I saw a mob of people, surrounding us,' Lily pulled a face. 'It was frightening. And ... I smelled petrol.'

'Yeah,' Yusra added, 'And the sound of dozens of planes flying around.'

Yusra, Lily and Danny stared at the skies above them. 'Do you think we were seeing it? The actual Battle of Britain?'

Now a silence. None of them saying anything. But they were all thinking. Lily looked hard at her two friends until they returned her gaze and their faces all changed at the same time. From frowns to smiles.

'The things we saw ...' Yusra started.

'The planes and the bombs and the danger?' Danny asked.

Lily paused before she spoke, just to be sure they were all thinking the same thing. She held up her Spitfire Fund badge and grinned.

'Shall we see what happens if we put them on again?'

As one, the trio began to pin their badges onto their clothes for a second time.

Yusra, Lily and Danny are about to put on their Spitfire Fund pin badges to find out if what happened to them the first time happens again. What will they see, smell, hear or feel? Who actually was the lady with the collecting tin? Are they about to have the ultimate history lesson, or be dragged into a frightening war that was raging in the skies above London just 80 years ago?

Find out more in chapter two of *The Spitfire Fund* ...

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Chapter 2

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Yusra, Lily and Danny have been given Spitfire Fund pin badges that might – just might – take them back again in time to the Battle of Britain. Excited about what could happen after their visit to the RAF Museum, they decide to go for it and discover what it was that they had seen so fleetingly when they put their badges on.

It began with running. Fast and hard through streets. No time to look at or think about their surroundings.

They barely saw where they were going: everything was about noise. The woeful wail of air raid sirens. Bomb blasts battering their eardrums. Aeroplanes whining as they flew overhead. Wood crackling. Buildings collapsing. Noises so loud they could never have imagined what was creating them.

Except that London was under attack. They were under attack.

'Let's go back,' Danny screamed. 'Let's go back.' He fumbled at his pin badge, but it wouldn't come off. They were still here. In a war zone.

Led by Lily, they reached the foot of a hill and scrambled up around it among some trees, far away from where the bombs were falling. From the hillside they saw dozens of fires, smoke billowing high, then drifting west.

'This is horrible,' Yusra gasped.

Lily nodded, but found herself speechless.

Together they watched the occasional flash of a plane flying above them, bulky barrage balloons twisting and turning in the wind. And the spiralling condensation trails left by the battling aeroplanes. All accompanied by the bells of fire engines ringing as they raced from burning building to burning building.

And then, at last, the battle seemed to calm. There were none of the larger aircraft – the German bombers – anymore. Just Spitfires and Hurricanes checking the skies were safe before they returned to base.

After seeing two women walking their dogs, chatting as if the world was a normal place, Yusra shushed her friends.

'Can you hear that?'

The other two shook their heads, then Danny was on his feet.

'More planes,' he gasped. 'Coming right at us.'

Lily grabbed Danny and pulled him to the grass. 'Get down, then.'

Danny struggled to get out of her grasp. 'No. Look. They're Spitfires.'

And they were.

Six of them dropping towards the hilltop they were sheltering

below.

Lily felt a tingle down her spine and the three children watched the planes come in to land.

'We must be near an airport,' Danny said.

And then they were running again. To see the Spitfires land. What an opportunity!

They emerged on the edge of a flat piece of land. Just grass and a scattering of low buildings. It was no airport.

The six Spitfires were stationary now, a thin trail of smoke coming off the front of one. Another's wing looked ragged, holes punched through it. Several men were attending to the aeroplanes.

'The aircrew,' Yusra said as they noticed another group of men, walking in dark clothing, bulky yellow life vests around their chests, leather helmets and goggles dangling from their hands.

'The pilots,' Lily added. She couldn't believe what they were seeing.

They watched the pilots slump to the ground or onto chairs. They gave them a few minutes to finish their mugs of tea, before approaching. There was a chalkboard at the entrance to one of the buildings. It read Tuesday 20th August.

'Hi kids. You all safe?'

Lily replied first.

'Yes,' Lily said. 'Thanks to you. You're amazing.' She felt a rush of emotion and struggled to hide it.

The pilot smiled. 'You're welcome. It's a thankless task.'

'No,' Danny objected. 'We say thank you. Everyone loves you. You're saving the country.'

Another pilot piped up now. 'I'm not sure we are. Will we save the country? I don't know ... Hitler's planning to invade, maybe within days.'

The first pilot told the other to be quiet. 'He's grumpy,' he whispered to the children. 'Got one in the wing.'

Yusra stepped forward to speak to the second pilot. She remembered what she had read on one of the information boards back the RAF Museum.

'You'll be remembered for centuries,' she told him. 'You do know that? You'll be called "the Few". I read about it. 'The Few who saved this country from occupation. When anyone uses the word heroes, they'll think of you before anyone else in history.'

The second pilot looked serious and held out a plate. 'Well, I never heard us called the Few before. But, kids, that helps me. Knowing you think that. Thank you. Here, have a sandwich.'



Yusra, Danny and Lily sat and ate with the pilots, watching as the aircrew made the planes right for the next German attack. The children felt that it was almost normal. Them sitting here with Spitfire pilots. Eating sandwiches. Sitting on the grass in the sun. Right in the middle of the Battle of Britain.

‘Hang on, chaps. Winston’s speaking on the wireless,’ a member of the aircrew said, turning up a radio.

They sat in silence and listened:

The gratitude of every home in our Island, in our Empire, and indeed throughout the world, goes out to the British airmen who, undaunted by odds, unwearied in their constant challenge and mortal danger, are turning the tide of the World War by their prowess and by their devotion. Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few.

‘The Few?’ the second pilot gasped. ‘That’s what you said.’ He was staring at Yusra. ‘Just now. How ... how did you know before Mr Churchill even said it?’

The pilots were standing, looking at the children. Lily, Danny and Yusra felt suddenly nervous.

The first pilot took it on himself to be spokesman and to calm them. ‘Well, however you knew that, children, we want to say thank you. You’ve given us a boost. Next time we go out we’ll fight all

the more fiercely for you. We need to know that you're aware of what we're doing up there. And we need more funds to build more Spitfires. So, thank you.'

Their Spitfire Badges off, after the pilots had headed back to their tents for a rest, the three children found themselves back at the RAF Museum, London in front of a display. Behind the glass was a document labelled a Card of Honour with six one penny stamps on it.



Each stamp on this card is another Rivet in one of the Four Fighter Aircraft that will make air fighting history against an enemy that menaces civilisation.

'Wow!'

'That's 6d. Enough to buy a sparkplug.'

'Amazing. So, this was used right here to raise money for the planes that would fly from here. Like the pin badges.'

'But you heard what the pilot said before?' Lily asked. 'That people in the rest of the country need to help too.'

'We need to do something, then.'

'But what?'

'And where?'

Yusra pulled out her phone and started to text her dad.

'What are you doing?' Lily asked.

'This,' Yusra smiled.

Can you take us to the other RAF Museum, please?

The one in Cosford.

We need it for our school project.

Sure, came the quick reply.

'Now we can see the plaque that was put up for real,' Danny said.
'And do something to help them raise money for enough Spitfires to protect everyone ...' Yusra added.

'Before it's too late,' Lily concluded.

Having seen the fear and damage that bombing has caused in London, and after listening to the pilots' worries about running out of aircraft, the children are desperate to help the Spitfire Fund raise money to buy new aeroplanes to fight off the German invasion. But what if they fail? What if people away from London who have not seen it for themselves don't understand? Can Lily, Yusra and Danny help change their minds and raise more money for more Spitfires?

Find out more in chapter three ...

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Chapter 3

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Having seen Spitfires fighting above London to save Britain from the Nazis, the children decide to travel to the RAF Museum in Cosford. They've heard that Wolverhampton – near to Cosford – did lots to raise money and they want to help. And they know that the Germans had been bombing Birmingham and Wolverhampton during August 1940. But will other cities in Britain want to help? How can you ask people for money when they're poor, at war and their sons and some daughters are fighting away from home?

Yusra's dad drove the children to Wolverhampton. He said he would take them to the RAF Museum, Cosford after they had first had a look around the town. He would wait in a coffee shop so they knew where he was if they needed him. Then he suggested they could go to Cosford on the train together.

As soon as he had gone Yusra, Danny and Lily put on their Spitfire Fund badges. They were keen to get cracking, to raise some money in wartime Wolverhampton.

Badges on, the whole shape of the town suddenly changed. Huge blocks of concrete, metal and glass buildings disappeared, revealing old buildings made of stone, dark stone, discoloured by smoke. And everything was lower, fewer storeys, with more sky and light and warmth. The noise from the roaring ring road faded to that of the calls of market traders. Passers-by were wearing old fashioned clothes, no jeans or fashionable dresses in the late summer warmth.

And then – once again – she was there. The woman from the London Museum. She was holding a board of badges and a collecting tin.

'Do your best, children,' she encouraged, giving the children their collection tins and pin badges. Then she disappeared between two market stalls.

The children stood and watched the lady vanish, each of them thinking how odd it was that the weird things happening to them didn't feel so weird at all.

It was time to get started.

'Sustain the valour of the Royal Air Force,' Yusra shouted out, holding the collecting tin before her.

'Help fortify the cause of freedom!' Lily added.

Danny looked at them. 'What are you saying?'

Yusra started laughing. 'I don't know, but it's working.'



And she was right. The children already had a queue of people waiting to buy pin badges. Most put coins in the tin. But one man put in a bank note.

‘Thank you, sir,’ Danny said. ‘God bless you.’

Now Yusra and Lily were laughing at Danny as children fished their pocket money out and dropped it into the tin.

After selling all their pins and filling their collection tins, Danny, Lily, Yusra and her dad took the train out of Wolverhampton towards Cosford, accelerating through yards packed with trucks delivering to warehouses and then into the countryside. The trains were not like what they were used to in London. In these 1940s trains you sat in compartments, a bench of seats big enough to hold four or five facing another bench opposite. There were racks above the seats where passengers stored their bags.

Yusra’s dad didn’t appear to notice anything odd, so none of them mentioned it to him.

‘It’s like the inside of a Harry Potter train,’ Lily suggested quietly, as she opened the window in the side of their compartment, causing the man opposite’s newspaper to flutter in the wind. She shut the window and apologised.

‘Not a problem,’ the man said, nodding, then went back to his newspaper.

The children spent the rest of the journey staring at the countryside and at the front page of the man’s newspaper.

The Wolverhampton Express & Star
Saturday 14th September 1940
RAF DOWN 37 ENEMY FIGHTERS IN ONE DAY

Once they arrived at Cosford the children took their Spitfire Fund badges off. But not before they gazed at what the airfield looked like in the 1940s.

'Wolverhampton was where they built the Boulton Paul Defiant during the war,' Yusra's dad said. 'And Cosford is where many female pilots flew Spitfires, transporting them from one base to another for the men to fly in battle. But,' he smiled, 'I'll leave you three to it. I'll be in the café in the Museum if you need me. They do lovely scones and hot chocolate, I seem to remember.'

The airfield was a huge expanse of grass, with a pair of hangars in the background, covered over in green, black and brown blotches to camouflage them from the German bombers.

Now with badges off, the children saw the same airfield in the modern day. It had a runway going left to right and more hangars at the top end of the field. But the 1940s hangars were still there.

And now – instead of Spitfires – they saw a pair of Jaguar Jets and a group of RAF men and women standing around them being trained.

They walked up the side of the airbase, watching one of the Jaguars taxiing down the runway, stopping at one point to watch a red helicopter hover over them, then come into land near the road.

Then the Museum. Up a winding path underneath the huge wings of a Lockheed Hercules and past a Vickers VC10.

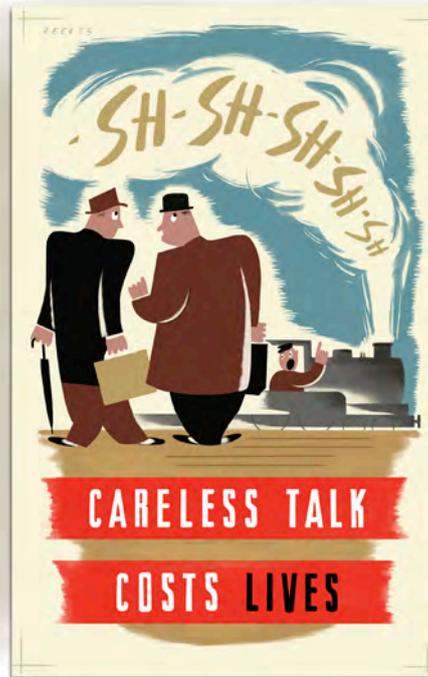
'These planes are amazing,' Lily gasped. 'I love it here.'

'There's more inside,' Yusra said, excited. 'Massive planes just hanging off wires and some ten times bigger than these. And a Spitfire. This place is just as fab as the RAF Museum in London. My dad brings me here a lot when he's working in Birmingham.'

'Oh yes ...' Danny enthused. 'I can't wait.'

Inside the Visitor Centre the children asked for directions to the Battle of Britain exhibition. They walked through the Test Flight Hangar, past a Fairey Delta 2 and through a dark corridor to the War in the Air Hangar.

There they saw German and British aircraft; a Junkers 88, a Hawker Hurricane and - of course - a Supermarine Spitfire. There were a range of uniforms from the Second World War, including the uniform of Sir Hugh Dowding who was the commanding officer of RAF Fighter Command during the Battle of Britain. There was also a mysterious poster ...



The poster read CARELESS TALK COSTS LIVES.

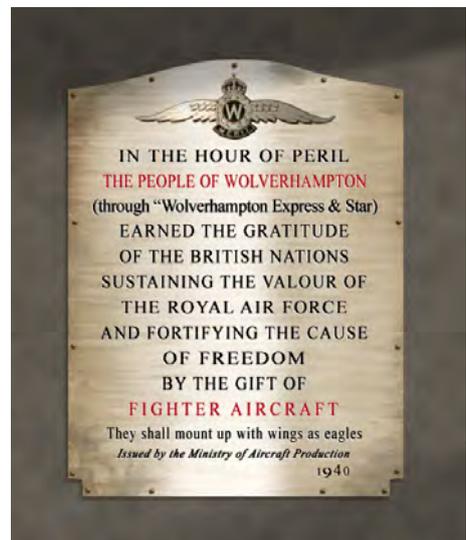
'What does that mean?' Danny asked.

'In the war, you had to be careful what you said,' Yusra explained. 'There were spies who wanted to find out things that the Germans could use against us. Everyone was made to be suspicious. Just to ...'

Yusra stopped talking when they saw the plaque. It was made of brass. A sheet of metal attached to the wall.

On the plaque were written the words:

In the hour of peril the people of Wolverhampton earned the gratitude of the British nations sustaining the valour of the Royal Air Force and fortifying the cause of freedom by the gift of fighter aircraft.



'Sustain the valour of the Royal Air Force,' Yusra said under her breath.

'Help fortify the cause of freedom!' Lily muttered.

Danny was speechless. The writing on the plaque was the same wording as the things Yusra and Lily had said a few hours before when they'd been raising money in Wolverhampton.

The three children took their pins out of their pockets and stared at them.

'What is this all about?' Lily asked, as Danny dropped his on the floor crying out in pain.

Quickly the girls did the same.

'They're red hot,' Danny said.

Now the three children stared at each other. 'The badges going hot must mean something,' Lily said.

'Something we have to do?' Yusra asked.

Then Danny looked at a newspaper headline on the display.

'The date,' he said. It read:

14th September 1940

ZERO HOUR. IT'S NOW OR NEVER FOR THE INVASION
LONDON HOLDS ITS BREATH

'We have to get back,' Lily gasped. 'To London. Now.'

'What? Why?' Danny sounded confused.

'Tomorrow is 15 September. 80 years since the day Germany was supposed to soften Britain up for invasion. Operation ... what was it called?'

'Sea Lion,' Yusra said. 'Come on. My dad's just texted to say there's a train due at about quarter past.'

'But should we?' Danny asked another question. 'Is it really a good idea to go to London when there's bombs falling out of the sky? What if ... what if ... one falls on us?'

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The children have helped raise money to build Spitfires in London and Wolverhampton. Now they are heading back to London to try to help out on the day that Hitler is supposed to be invading Britain. Yusra and Lily want to get stuck in, but Danny is reluctant. The trio have ridden their luck so far, but how many times can they dodge danger in 1940s Britain before something catastrophic happens?

Find out more in chapter four ...



The Spitfire Fund

Chapter 4

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Yusra, Lily and Danny are heading back to London, keen to help raise money in the capital on the day the Nazis are going to try to start their invasion of Britain. Unsure what awaits them in London, they are about to get a very nasty shock.

The children knew exactly where they wanted to be in London. Victoria Station. Quite near Buckingham Palace.

On the way home from Wolverhampton in Yusra's dad's car, they'd read stories on the Museum's website and found out some amazing facts about Sunday 15th September 1940.

It was the day that Hitler launched a huge aerial attack on Britain. Hitler's plan to invade was called Operation Sea Lion and, as well as having hundreds of bombers coming over to flatten London in his biggest aerial attack yet, he had tens of thousands of men ready to come across the English Channel in barges to land and take control. If the Luftwaffe could beat the RAF and take control of the skies, the invasion could go ahead.

But, reading on, the children found out that instead, the RAF inflicted heavy losses on the German air force and Hitler decided to postpone Operation Sea Lion, never to be seen through. In Britain we now call September 15th Battle of Britain Day.

They also read on the RAF Museum website about a famous pilot:

On Sunday 15th September 1940, Sergeant Ray Holmes was taking a bath when a RADAR station on the south coast picked up a sudden activity. One hundred Dornier bombers, with a heavy fighter escort appeared on the screens crossing the English Channel, heading to London. For Sergeant Holmes this was his first air combat and he was thrilled and excited that he was flying his Hawker Hurricane Mk 1 right to the Battle. While attacking his first Dornier, he noticed another enemy aircraft, also a Dornier, on fire heading directly to Buckingham Palace. As his ammunition had run out, he understood that there was only one thing that he could do to prevent catastrophe, even though it would be a suicidal mission. His Hurricane rammed the Dornier, cutting through its rear fuselage, breaking the bomber up right over Hyde Park Corner in plain sight of hundreds of citizens. The Dornier's forward fuselage section crashed near Victoria Station, the tail landed on a rooftop in the Vauxhall Bridge Road. Two of the five crew members survived and were captured.

Thrilled by the amazing story on the website, the children devised a plan.

They needed to be near where thousands of people could see what Sergeant Holmes would do, then collect money for more planes. It was simple. Surely anyone who witnessed a feat like that would just turn out their pockets and purses? They'd raise thousands.

Standing in St James' Park they were all set, surrounded by hundreds of men and women, eyes on the skies, seeing German planes twisting and turning above them, Spitfires and Hurricanes routing the enemy. The day that Britain would be invaded. The last chance for Britain to save itself.

Then – as they watched – a Dornier bomber came tearing from the east, lower than the other planes, flames pouring out of its sides. This was it. This was the one.

Danny heard someone cry out. 'No ... no ... it's going to crash into Buckingham Palace.'

The crowd gasped.

'Don't panic. It'll be fine,' Danny shouted. 'Look. Here comes a Hurricane.'

Lily and Yusra cheered as they saw the small Hurricane plane catch the German bomber and smash into its side.

The gasp from the crowd was louder still. There was applause ... cheering ... tears, as the dark silhouette of the crippled plane fell into the streets of London. A louder cheer erupted as the Londoners witnessed the pilot of the Hurricane bale out of his plane and parachute to the ground.

'Oh good gracious ...' a man in a suit, his tie loose around his neck, cried. 'When will this end? The Germans might even have landed on the beaches now.'

'No,' Lily told him, gleeful, over-excited. 'The operation fails. The Spitfires and Hurricanes defend London. Hitler's soldiers don't even leave France. Operation Sea Lion is called off.'

The crowd around them was stunned to silence. Nobody speaking now. Everyone was looking at the children. At first they felt pleased, like they were passing on good news, hope. But then they understood ... what they were saying was being taken the wrong way.

Yusra swallowed.

Danny glanced at Lily.

'It's fine,' Lily said in a dry-throated voice to the people glowering at them. 'The Germans never get over here. And the war ends in 1945. We ...'



She stopped as a group of young men emerged, each of them grabbing one of the children from behind.

'They're spies!' a woman in front of them hissed.

'Did you hear what that one said?' another voice.

Now the crowd was drawing around them. Danny felt a terrible sense that violence was coming. Dozens of them were talking, relaying what Lily had said to them. And he could see three soldiers walking over, too. This was terrible. All they had wanted to do was raise money to help buy Spitfires. And now, with their arms held behind their backs, they couldn't take off their pin badges and return to the year 2020.

They were in deep trouble. And there was no one there to help them.

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Although Yusra, Danny and Lily have been trying to help Britain win the war by doing the right thing, suddenly they are in trouble. And you can't blame the locals. These children know too much! It's easy to see how they could be mistaken for German spies. But how does an angry mob of Londoners, some of whom may have lost people they love in the war, deal with German spies? And what will happen when the three soldiers who are walking over to them right now get their hands on them?

Find out more in the fifth and final chapter of The Spitfire Fund ...



The Spitfire Fund

Chapter 5

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The children are surrounded by an angry mob of Londoners who have taken them to be German spies after they were overheard talking about the Nazi invasion of Britain. Their hands are held behind their backs, so they can't take off their Spitfire Fund badges and return to 2020. And now – coming across the park – are three men in uniform. What will they do with the children?

'They even look like spies,' a man growled.
'Look at that boy. Look at his blond hair and blue eyes - he's German. I bet he's Hitler Youth. Sprechen sie Deutsch?'

'He's not German,' Yusra defended Danny. 'He's English.'

A woman's voice next. 'Well you don't even look English. Where are you from?'

Yusra was used to this and reeled off. 'I am English. I was born in Syria, but my mum and dad came over here and we're all British citizens. All of us. They work for the NHS!'

'NHS? Syria? Never heard of them. And you could be a German, too.'

Lily was watching the soldiers approaching as she listened to her friends being interrogated. And now they had arrived, the crowd of people, divided, letting them through.

'Got you some German spies,' a man shouted out.

But Lily heard another man say 'Go easy. They're children. Let's all calm down now, shall we?'

Yusra looked up and scowled at the man in charge to realise from his blue uniform that he wasn't a soldier: he was an airman.

'Now then, kids,' he said. 'It's good to see you again.'

The airman eased the hands away from each of the men holding the children. He was one of the pilots from the airfield. Yusra beamed, thrilled to see that he had survived the air battles.

'It's all good,' the pilot addressed the crowd. 'I know these kids. They're no spies. They're heroes in my eyes.'

Danny rubbed his face.

'I'm Flight Lieutenant Jack Whittaker,' recently transferred to Hendon Airfield. 'And I can vouch for these children 100%.' Whittaker knelt between the three children. 'You're safe now,' he said. 'We'll get you back to Hendon. Have some more of those tasty sandwiches, yes?'

The crowd dispersed, the young men and the hissing woman coming over to apologise to the three children.

'We got carried away,' one said.

'By the febrile atmosphere,' the woman added. 'Please accept our apologies.'

The children understood and shook hands with the adults, remembering to look up what febrile meant the next time they got a chance.

After jam sandwiches, the children and pilots looked south to London. There were no Spitfires or German bombers now. No Hurricanes either.

'Looks like Hitler's given up,' Whittaker offered.

'He has,' Yusra grinned. 'His soldiers will be all heading to Russia. Thanks to you and the rest of the RAF, we've seen him off.'

The pilots looked at each other and grinned. 'We'll take your word for that. Smashing news. Thank you children.'

'You're welcome,' said Danny. 'And thank you,' he added. 'For everything you are doing.'

'For being the Few,' Lily added.

Later, having taken their Spitfire Fund badges off and put them safely away, the children walked through the gates of the RAF Museum, London.

'I love it that it's free to get into the Museum,' Yusra said. 'I mean, you can make a donation, but you don't have to. Anyone can come.'

Lily smiled and pointed at the two planes in front of the gates into the Museum.

'Look at that one,' she said. 'The Hurricane is a replica of the one that pilot – Ray Holmes – used to stop that bomber crashing into Buckingham Palace. Imagine if he hadn't succeeded!'

The children spent a few moments thinking about the Hurricane and its pilot. Then they headed back to the Museum's café.

In front of them they had three full collection boxes and no Spitfire Fund pins left, except their own.

Then a voice. A familiar one.

'My dear children. How did you get on with your collecting?'

It was the lady who sounded like the Queen, wearing the same hat and jacket and holding her usual collection tin.

Yusra pushed their collection of tins towards the woman. 'Full to the top,' she said.

'Thank you,' the woman beamed a beautiful smile. 'You have done well.' She looked at her watch. 'I think you should go and look at the Spitfire Mk 1 where we first met. It entered service in October 1940. It helped shoot down a German bomber that was going to do all sorts of damage.'

'We will,' Lily said.

'Do. Please,' the lady went on. 'The money that paid for it came from the Spitfire Fund. So, it should make you feel proud.'

Lily, Danny and Yusra rushed back to the Spitfire where their adventures had begun.

'It looks amazing,' Danny gushed.

'Not as amazing as when we saw the Spitfires in flight over London,' Lily said.

'Amazingly amazing,' Yusra laughed.



They studied the plane. It's dark propeller and rounded wings, looking carefully to spot the eight machine gun holes covered with red tape built into the wings and the exhaust stubs that stuck out either side of the nose.

As they looked, each of them picked their Spitfire Fund pin badge out of their pockets and held them.

'Mine's warm,' Lily said.

The other two nodded: theirs were too.

'And can you hear that sound?' Danny added.

They listened. Above the sound of families, children laughing and Museum staff chatting to visitors, they could hear the low drone of a Spitfire.

'So, what now?' Lily asked.

'The Museum shop? Danny suggested. 'Buy a book on Spitfires. Or a mug.'

'Or a model to make,' Yusra added.

The children laughed together as they walked to the bright lights of the RAF Museum shop, knowing that when it comes to museum trips, you couldn't really have a better experience than visiting the RAF Museum, London or Cosford.



Tom Palmer is proud to be the RAF Museum's Children's Author in Residence. He has written several First and Second World War children's books, including the Wings series that he wrote with the help of the RAF Museum, featuring stories about the Sopwith Camel, Spitfire and Typhoon.