



The Spitfire Fund

Chapter 2

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Written for children aged 7+

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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 ...

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.