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From the report of May Wong, WOE operative,
18th December 1940

My name is May Wong. I am ten years old (nearly eleven), and I have become a spy in order to save the world. That is true and not an exaggeration. *Anything* can happen in a war, and anyone can be a hero.

And anyone can be evil too. When the war began, I thought that Nazis might look like the lizards who used to bask on the steps of our Big House, back in Hong Kong. I imagined them with scaly, flickering skin and yellow eyes. I thought that being evil must make you *look* evil.

But, now that I'm older, I've realized that evil can look like anything. Evil can look like a starchy governess, or a kind old lady, or the warden who comes round to check the blackout.

This is the story of how I – how *we* – uncovered a Nazi spy in England, solved a murder and joined the Ministry of Unladylike Activity. It was much harder than I expected.

We had to be very clever, and, as usual, none of the grown-ups listened to us until it was almost too late. Grown-ups really are hopeless. But they're listening now, at last, and they want to know everything that happened. That's why I'm writing this.

By the way, this is the *official* version of the notes I took during our mission. I'm supposed to be using formal language, the way we're taught at school, but I've decided that this is *my* report, and I'm going to tell it my own way. And that means explaining some things first.

The most important thing to know about me, apart from the fact that I am now a spy, is that I'm not supposed to be in England at all. I'm *supposed* to be living in Hong Kong, where I was born, with my mother and my father and my little brother, Teddy. But I came to England last year with Father and my second sister, Rose, to visit Deepdean School for Girls – the stupid English boarding school that Father planned for us to go to. And, while we were here, the war began.

Father went home as quick as he could to be with Ma Ma and Teddy, but he left me trapped in England with Rose and my biggest sister, Hazel. I can't go back to Hong Kong until the war ends – so obviously the only thing I can do is make sure it ends as quickly as possible. I miss Ma Ma and I miss Teddy (even though he's too small to be very interesting). I think I even miss Father, although he was the reason I got stuck in England in

the first place, and the reason I have to go to Deepdean, which I hate.

Or at least I *did* go to Deepdean until I ran away to become a spy.

I ran away because I had to. There was no other choice. Everyone in my family – including Big Sister Hazel – thinks that I’m still a baby, but I’m not. The truth is that I can speak two entire languages and run for ten minutes without stopping and lie well enough to trick Father and the Deepdean mistresses. I can fight with a sword (or I could if someone would give me a real one – all I’ve practised with is a stick) and with my feet and my fists.

So I was sure that I’d be an excellent spy, if only someone would give me a chance.

You see, I knew a spy already: Hazel.

I am absolutely not making that up. It’s true.

And it’s hard when your sister has already done all the things you want to do. Hazel went to Deepdean once too, and she’s famous there, even now that she’s very old (nineteen). She loved school. And Rose, who is twelve, loves it as well. So, when I first decided I wanted to become a spy, I thought I had to love it too. I spent minutes and minutes on my school compositions, and I *tried* not to hit any of the other girls during Games, and I even gave Mariella Semple my jam roly-poly pudding at dinner. (I was sorry about that later – she didn’t even

finish it. What a waste of jam roly-poly!) But it all just made me notice how much I hated school, even when I was trying.

So I decided to become a spy another way.

I asked Hazel how to do it, but she would never answer any of my questions. She wouldn't even admit she *was* a spy, even though it was perfectly obvious.

And then I found the note in her handbag.

Obviously it wasn't for me – I'm not stupid – and I shouldn't have been looking in Hazel's handbag in the first place. But I was bored, and I was cross, and sometimes I just *do* things without thinking about them. I only feel bad about them later.

It happened like this.

By September 1940, the war had been going on for a year, but you almost wouldn't know it, living in Deepdean. Deepdean Park was full of sandbags, a bomb had fallen on the cinema by mistake (no one was hurt) and there was no cream on the cakes at the Willow Tea Rooms or soap powder at our boarding house to wash with. I didn't care much about the soap, but I did about the cream. But that was really as far as it went. It wasn't at all like war is in stories. The newsreels at the pictures, of cities in Europe falling and German soldiers marching and shooting, felt exciting but nearly as made up as the main feature. It sounds strange now that I know better, but I was . . . almost disappointed.

And then we began to hear stories about the Nazis crossing the Channel to flatten us like a thumb squashing a bug. Planes buzzed overhead every night, and every day the invasion seemed closer and closer. So, when Hazel came to Deepdean to take me and Rose out for tea, one weekend at the beginning of October, I decided I couldn't wait any longer.

I asked and asked and asked Hazel about spying, and what it felt like to be in a real air raid, and how many people were dead in London, and whether it was true that the Germans were about to invade, and if so what were we going to do about it, until Rose got all wobbly and started to cry, and Hazel told me to stop. Rose had to sit down on a bench on Deepdean high street and put her head between her knees, hugging her gas-mask case, while Hazel patted her back and gave her a bullseye to suck. Hazel always has sweets in her pockets, even now they're rationed. Spies get all the best things: another reason why I wanted to be one.

'It'll be all right,' said Hazel, as a man in a Home Guard uniform walked by. 'No one will hurt you, Rose, I promise. We're prepared. We won't let them come here.'

I didn't see how she could promise something like that. It sounded like a grown-up lie. I picked up her handbag to look for more sweets. But what I found, instead, was a note.

It was scribbled all over with crossings-out, but circled at the bottom of it was a very simple message, underlined:

Your attendance is required for
training of the utmost importance.
The Ministry, 13 Great Russell Street, London,
4 p.m., Saturday 26th October 1940.

This looked important. I shoved it in my pocket just as Hazel turned to look at me.

‘Give me that,’ she said, and slid her handbag back onto her arm. So she *hadn’t* noticed what I’d taken. ‘Come on, who wants scones?’

I did, obviously. But, more than that, I wanted to find out what that message meant. It was *spy business*, I was sure of it. I knew that this was my chance to find out what Hazel was really doing, and help her do it.

I just had to run away from school first.

2

From the report of May Wong

The running-away part was easy in the end.

Everyone at Deepdean has stories about how hard it is to get away, and what a bad idea it is (the stories all end with the girl either getting detention for the rest of her life or falling over dead in a ditch). But actually all I had to do was leave our boarding house in the usual Saturday crocodile of girls, wait until we were almost at the park, and then pretend to be ill and have to go and sit down next to some sandbags. Eloise Barnes wanted to stay with me, but I told her that I thought I was going to be sick, and she squealed and scuttled away. As soon as she was gone, I ran as fast as I could to the train station.

I'd filled my gas-mask case with everything I'd need: some sweets, a manual about air raids, extra shoelaces (in case I needed to tie anyone up), a London A to Z, a small torch, and a spare pair of knickers. Once I'd done that, there was no room for my actual gas mask, so I'd

hidden that under my dorm-room bed. I also had all the money I could find, most of which I'd had to pinch from Rose's tuck box because I'd spent mine. I felt quite bad about that because Rose is a kind person and would have given it to me if I'd asked – but she's also very honest, so if I *had* asked she'd have told Matron what I was up to.

I bought a half-fare to London, one way (because I was not planning on going back to Deepdean), and ducked into the loos to swap my uniform for my weekend dress, cardigan and hat. When the train came, I pretended to belong to an old woman with a crowd of children. I climbed aboard and sat in the blue half-light next to another woman in a siren suit (these are funny overalls that you're supposed to wear over your clothes in case there's an air raid, which just make people look like they're about to go fix a car), watching out of the edge of the lowered blind as the train crept through the countryside. It was going slowly because there might be bombs on the line, and everywhere it stopped was a mystery, all the signs painted out and no announcements, in case of German spies. It already felt like I was part of a story.

Finally, we pulled into the big dome of Paddington station. I dodged round grown-ups in uniforms, and newspaper sellers, and came out onto a street full of red London buses that had advertisements for OXO cubes and powdered eggs on their sides.

I got on a bus that I knew from my A to Z would take me to Great Russell Street. I pretended to belong to another grown-up – it's useful being little sometimes: no one thinks you could possibly plan anything yourself – and as the bus jolted its way through London I tried not to look shocked at what I saw out of the window.

I'd heard stories about the Blitz, how the whole city was lit up with fire every night, how the Germans had huge great big bombs that could crush whole houses to powder and peel the clothes right off the people who lived in them, but I thought it all sounded too big to be true. Except, now that I *was* in London, I realized the stories might not have been big enough.

The buildings we drove past looked like a giant had been playing with blocks and got bored. Some of them were smashed sideways, and some of them were pancaked flat, and some of them were sliced down the middle – one half gone and the other half a dangling mass of broken beams and drooping floors and doors that went nowhere but the sky. There was glass everywhere being swept into piles by people in uniforms whose faces were pale with dust – and the air was full of dust too, and the clothes of the other people on the bus. I shifted my feet about, and they made dust patterns on the floor.

The bus stopped halfway down Oxford Street, and we all had to get out because there was an unexploded bomb in the road. I didn't understand at first, and tried to keep

on walking past shops with shattered windows and signs that said MORE OPEN THAN USUAL, but then a man with a walrus moustache shouted, ‘Go away, little girl, unless you fancy being blown up!’

That was when I suddenly realized that it wasn’t a joke or a grown-up invention. There was a real bomb, and it might really explode. I felt my face flush, and I couldn’t work out whether I was excited or terrified, and whether I wanted to run a mile or sit down right there on the pavement.

Instead, I turned onto a side street and kept on walking towards Great Russell Street. It was warm now in the afternoon sun, and my cardigan itched me – English clothes always do – and my gas-mask case bumped against my hip. Barrage balloons glittered in the sun like fat silver moons, and I stepped over bits of fallen building and reminded myself that I was here to become a spy and put a stop to all this.

When I got to Great Russell Street, it was five minutes to four. I was just in time. I walked down the row of houses, counting, until I arrived at Number 13. It had a red-painted door with a brass knocker shaped like a fox, and standing in front of it was a boy. He had dark skin, a round body, and a round, friendly face surrounded by dusty, curly hair. He was wearing a dusty knitted pullover and shorts, and he had a dusty, cross-looking ginger cat with one white paw in his arms.

The boy and the cat both stared at me.

‘What are you looking at?’ I asked. ‘And what are you doing here?’

‘I solved the crossword,’ said the boy simply, as though that explained anything. ‘I suppose you did too?’

I narrowed my eyes at him, not wanting to admit that I had no idea what he was talking about.

‘The one in the paper,’ he went on. ‘The Junior Championship puzzle. The solution was a message, about *training*, and this address.’

I’ve learned since arriving in England that when someone tells you something, it’s always best to pretend you knew all along.

‘Yes,’ I said. ‘The puzzle. I solved it too, and that’s why I’m here. I thought it was easy.’ The boy’s eyes lit up with respect, and I realized that was probably pushing it a bit. ‘Is that your cat?’

‘I found her,’ said the boy, petting the cat’s head gently. ‘In the rubble. I think she came from one of the houses that got hit last night.’

I don’t like cats. I think they’re too clever. But I liked how careful the boy was with the cat. It made me like him.

‘I’m May Lee,’ I said. ‘What’s your name?’

‘I’m Eric. Er, Eric Jones.’ The way he said that, with the pause, told me he was lying too. I respected that. ‘Do you think it matters that I’m not thirteen yet?’ he went on, frowning. ‘I’ll be eleven next month.’

‘I’ll be eleven soon too,’ I said, which was not technically a lie because I will, in half a year. ‘I shouldn’t think it matters at all.’

I still had absolutely no idea what we were talking about. How had the note I’d found in Hazel’s handbag ended up as the solution to a newspaper crossword? What other information had I missed?

‘I was almost late,’ I told Eric, just for something to say. ‘There was a *bomb* in the road.’

I was still a bit excited about it, and I wanted someone else to be too. But Eric just stood with the cat in his arms and stared at me as though I’d said something strange.

‘Where are you from?’ he asked. ‘You’re not from London, are you?’

I felt myself get all spiky with annoyance, because usually when English people ask where I’m from they’re being very rude. But then I looked at Eric’s curious expression, and something clicked into place. His accent wasn’t quite English. Mine isn’t quite yet, either, unless I concentrate, and I can tell when other people are trying as well.

‘I’m from Hong Kong, but I go to school in Deepdean,’ I said. ‘It’s in the country, over *that* way. You aren’t from London, either, are you? You’re—’

I struggled to think what the not-English bits of Eric’s voice sounded like. I couldn’t hold onto it at first, and then I had it. The newsreels.

‘You’re *German!*’

Suddenly my heart was beating as fast as it had when I’d realized about the bomb.

Eric had turned almost purple, staring round the street as though someone might pop out at any moment and arrest him.

‘Don’t SAY that!’ he hissed. ‘*Please!*’

‘But you *are!*’

‘I’m *English!*’ said Eric fiercely. ‘I am now, anyway. My family – we came here four years ago. Mama and Papa were musicians in Germany, famous ones. But my mama has dark skin, like me and my sister, and the Nazis hate people who look like us. They think we’re not really people at all. So we had to escape to England. We were supposed to be safe here. But then, about a month ago, Papa was taken away by the British government because he’s German. They think he might be a *Nazi spy*. I thought that if I could prove that we’re loyal, not dangerous, and if I could help end the war, then Papa – then they might let him come home.’

He gave a gasp, his face red and upset. Almost automatically, he reached for his right wrist, for a heavy, grown-up watch that was too big for him. I wanted to know more about Eric’s family, and Eric, but I was most interested in what he’d said about ending the war. My breath had caught as he said it.

‘I think this is something to do with the war too!’ I said. ‘That’s why I ran away—’

I stopped myself because I wasn't supposed to be saying that, especially not to someone I'd only just met. We were always being warned about careless talk costing lives – and Eric was German, after all, even if he said he was loyal to Britain. But he looked excited.

'I ran away too!' he said. 'I've never done anything like this before. My twin sister, Lottie, is the brave one, not me. But I'm good at puzzles. I even know Morse code! When I solved the crossword and saw what it said, I knew I couldn't just let myself be evacuated, not with Papa taken. Our train left this morning, and I gave Lottie the slip on the platform. I put a note in her pocket to explain, and another letter for Mama for Lottie to post. It should stop Mama looking for me for a few weeks, anyway.'

I was very impressed.

'Won't Lottie tell on you?' I asked.

'We're twins!' said Eric. 'She wouldn't. Anyway, I'm usually the one not telling on *her*.'

As he was talking, the London clocks began to strike four. And then the red door we were standing outside opened.

3

From the report of May Wong

The person who opened the door was a tall, thin woman with pale skin, extremely blue eyes and wavy blonde hair. She stopped still when she saw us and glared at me and Eric. I glared back, my heart thumping. I knew her, and she was the (second) worst person I could have met just then.

This was Big Sister Hazel's best friend, Daisy Wells.

'What are you doing here, May?' she snapped, as she closed the door behind her and stepped outside. 'Why aren't you in school?'

'Hello, Daisy,' I said cheerfully, because I was *not* going to be talked down to, not after I'd gone to so much trouble to be here. 'I solved that crossword puzzle, and it told me to come here.'

Daisy's eyes narrowed and a wrinkle appeared at the top of her nose. 'What do you mean?' she asked. 'Did Hazel put you up to this? You can't be here – you're too young.'

‘Hazel doesn’t know anything about it,’ I said, drawing myself up. ‘I solved the puzzle all on my own!’

Daisy groaned. ‘I should have known you’d manage to stick your nose in where it isn’t wanted. That’s quite enough – you have to go back to school. You’re a baby, and Hazel would never forgive me if you got mixed up in this business. And you!’ She turned to Eric. ‘You can’t be here, either. Girls only: it said so in the crossword.’

‘No it did not,’ said Eric, fishing a battered bit of newsprint out of his pocket. ‘It didn’t say anything about girls.’

‘Really?’ asked Daisy. ‘Bother Hazel. I told her to put that in! This is a nightmare. Well, never mind that. The two of you must leave at once. May’s too young, as I said, and you’re a boy and – and are you *German*?’

‘So what if I am?’ asked Eric. His round face was glowing all over again. ‘I’m here to *help*. Anyway, I’m English too. I have a passport that says so now.’

‘We’re not leaving!’ I cried. ‘We solved the crossword, didn’t we?’ (I decided I’d better stick with my story about having solved it. It wasn’t really important, anyway.) ‘And we came all this way. We’re here to be trained, just like it says.’

Daisy breathed out loudly. The crinkle at the top of her nose deepened. ‘This is exhausting,’ she said. ‘You’re all wrong for the job, both of you. We’re looking for older girls who are ready for this.’

‘We *are* ready,’ I said. ‘We’re perfect. And we’re your only options. No one else is here, are they? Oh, *do* let us in so we can learn to be spies. That’s what this is all about, isn’t it?’

Daisy’s eyes flicked from me to Eric to the empty street behind us. I thought, for a moment, that she might be about to give in. Then her expression hardened.

‘Absolutely not,’ she said. ‘Go away! And forget all that nonsense about being spies. You don’t know what you’re talking about.’

This was clearly yet another grown-up lie.

‘Oh, please let us in!’ said Eric suddenly. ‘I *have* to do something. Everyone else gets to!’

That was exactly it. It wasn’t fair that all the grown-ups could join up, while we had to sit about doing nothing just because we were children. Eric, I thought, was quite right and very sensible. I liked him even more.

‘This is ridiculous,’ snapped Daisy. ‘And, May, how did you get here, anyway?’

‘None of your business,’ I said rudely.

The top of my head was burning through my hat. Eric wiped sweat from his eyes. His knitted pullover looked very uncomfortable. Daisy crossed her arms and glared at us.

‘Good grief, did you *run away*? I don’t have time for this – I shall have to take you back. Hazel will be furious with me—’

I felt sick. My adventure was about to be over before it had properly begun.

But then the front door opened again, and a ginger-haired woman popped her head out. Her face was tense. ‘Daisy,’ she said, ‘you’re needed. It’s urgent. *Hurry.*’

Daisy replied with an extremely rude word. ‘You two,’ she said to us, ‘stay there. *Don’t* move. I’ll be back.’

And she whisked away into the depths of the house, slamming the door behind her.

Eric looked at me. ‘Er – should we stay?’ he asked.

‘Absolutely not!’ I said.

My heart was rushing in my chest. If I stayed, Daisy would take me back to Deepdean. The mistresses and Matron wouldn’t let me out of their sight again. Hazel would be angry with me. She might even tell *Father*, in Hong Kong, what I’d done.

But if we left now, then Daisy wouldn’t find us, and we might still get the chance to be heroes.

What if there was a way we could prove ourselves? I imagined us coming back to Number 13 Great Russell Street having completed a dangerous mission. Daisy and Big Sister Hazel would tell us how brilliant we’d been. They’d absolutely have to let us be proper spies then.

But what could we do to show them?

‘I think that’s it,’ Eric said sadly, putting the cat down. It trotted away towards the red door and sat in front of it expectantly. ‘I’ll have to go and find Lottie.’

‘NO!’ I said through gritted teeth. ‘We can’t just give up.’

‘But you heard that woman. She said we were all wrong for this. How did you know her, anyway? Who’s Hazel?’

‘Never mind!’ I said. ‘And we *aren’t* all wrong. We’re just right. We simply have to show them!’

‘How?’ asked Eric.

‘We—’ I said. ‘We—’

I stuck my hands into the pockets of my cardigan and squeezed them desperately, trying to think. And my fingers touched a crackly bit of paper. I pulled it out, and saw that it was the note I’d found in Hazel’s handbag, the one that had led me here. I turned it over, frustrated – and caught sight of something I’d missed before.

On the back was a list of place names, some of them crossed through.

~~Foxton Manor, Berkshire~~

119 Parrish Gardens, Berwick-upon-Tweed

~~The Cedars, Glasgow~~

29 Mote Street, Hull

Elysium Hall, Coventry

And a note in Hazel’s handwriting:

Information recently received by Berlin must be coming from these addresses! Identify the agents behind it.

I shoved the list at Eric. 'Here!' I said. 'Look at this! It's our mission!'

'What is it?' asked Eric. 'Where did you get this?'

'Hazel's my sister,' I admitted. 'And she's a spy. I got this out of her handbag, only I didn't realize how important it was until now. If someone is sending information to *Berlin*, it means they're working with the Nazis! We have to go to one of these places and work out who it is and how to stop them. Then, when we come back here, Daisy and Hazel and the people they work for will be really impressed. They'll have to let us in. Do you see?'

Eric nodded, his eyes wide.

And that was the moment that our first mission began.

4

From the report of May Wong

It was also quite easy to get out of London again. All we had to do was pretend to be evacuees.

Once we'd left Great Russell Street, Eric took us to a place that was a bit like a sorting office for people.

'It's called the Rest Centre,' he explained to me. 'People come here when they've been bombed out of their homes; they can get help finding a new place to live outside London. If we say we've got somewhere to stay in one of those places on your piece of paper, they won't ask questions. They're far too busy.'

It was true. There were lots of other people crammed in round us at the Rest Centre: children and grown-ups, all dusty and desperate and carrying strange things. I saw a woman with a pram full of dinner plates, and a man holding a cage with a parrot in it.

The tired-looking woman we spoke to didn't even look up at us properly when Eric told her that we were May

Lee and Eric Jones, neighbours whose houses had been hit by a bomb.

‘Any relatives?’ asked the woman.

‘My uncle’s in Coventry,’ Eric said hopefully. ‘Near – Elysium Hall.’

He was turning out to be very useful in this situation, and I felt more pleased than ever to be working with him.

The woman nodded, scribbled something down on a piece of paper and sent us to another room, where a second woman wrote a message on a second piece of paper and sent us to another room again.

This kept on happening, for hours, until we each ended up with an extra set of itchy clothes (why *are* English clothes so itchy?), an ugly suitcase and a large label with our made-up name and address on it. The suitcases and clothes had both been used by someone else before, and they smelled like it. We were also given tickets to Coventry for the next morning. Somehow, what Eric had said had started a strange series of misunderstandings that ended with the woman who gave us the tickets assuming that we were expected at Elysium Hall itself. And that was all right by Eric and me.

Another woman gathered us up, with five other dusty and miserable-looking children, and led us about like Matron for the rest of the day. I had to keep reminding myself that I was not helpless at all, but undercover and on a mission.

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That night we all sheltered in Leicester Square Underground station. I hated it. It turns out that air raids are not as fun as I thought they'd be.

The platform and the stairs and the ticket hall were all stuffed full of people, crammed together like they were playing Sardines. The air was hot, smelly and stale. After a while, we heard distant rumbling explosions, and then the crash of something big hitting nearby. Dust shook from the tunnel arches, and I wondered if one of these shelters had ever collapsed. Our evacuee leader made us all sit in a circle and sing songs, which was awful. But I gritted my teeth, and Eric put his arm round me, and we counted off the minutes on his big wristwatch.

'That's your father's, isn't it?' I said. It was a guess, but a good one because Eric sighed sadly.

'Papa gave it to me just before he was taken away. It reminds me of him. Do you miss your father?'

'No,' I said bitterly because my father was the reason why I was stuck here. And then, after a pause, as I imagined his big, warm hand with its square fingers on my shoulder, his voice rumbling above my head: 'Yes.'

Eric nodded. I could tell he understood.

In the middle of the night, a funny little train pulled up to the platform and some people got out of it and began to serve food and drinks. I sneaked past the evacuee leader and bought us both hot chocolates and buns, and, as we ate them, I realized the bombs had stopped.

‘Jerry’s gone home,’ said someone, and I felt suddenly cheerful. Eric and I had survived the air raid, on our own, without help. We could face whatever was coming the next day.

That following morning we were led through smashed-up, dusty, broken London to Euston station in time for our train.

Some of the evacuees in our group were excited, but others began to cry, which I thought was *wet* (an English word I’ve learned). I said so to Eric, and he made a thoughtful face and said, ‘It’s all right to be scared when you’re leaving somewhere you know for somewhere you don’t.’

I felt a bit ashamed then, because that was how I’d felt when I left Hong Kong. But I didn’t feel scared now. I felt full of purpose. I was away from Deepdean, and away from my family, and I was about to prove myself once and for all. Once we’d worked out who was sending information to the Germans from this Elysium Hall place – which sounded easy to me – all I had to do was telephone Big Sister Hazel at the number she’d taught me and Rose ages ago. Then she could come and collect us and take us back to Great Russell Street in a cloud of glory.

I *knew* we could do it, never mind what Daisy said. Eric had already shown how clever he was, and I knew that I was brave. Which was a good thing because I could tell