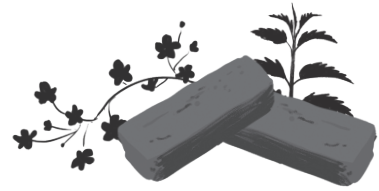
SALLY NICHOLLS



OUT OF THE RUBBLE

Coming home when home is gone

OUT OF THE RUBBLE



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Sample

To my mum

Sample

Chapter 1

The Station

The train pulled in to Paddington Station on a grey evening in early February.

The journey had taken nearly all day. The train kept starting and stopping. A whole troop of soldiers got on at Bath and filled the compartment, laughing and shouting. Judy didn't mind. She was used to soldiers.

It was five and a half years since Judy had left London. She looked out of the train window now, trying to get a sense of what it was like. Everything looked grey and cold and dark. There were big stone houses, lots with boarded-up windows. She saw a half-destroyed block of flats with all of its beams showing on one side, like wooden bones.

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London looked a bleak, rundown sort of place, Judy thought. This was supposed to be a home-coming. But it didn't feel like home at all.

The lady in the seat opposite smiled at Judy. "Are you an evacuee?" she said.

Judy nodded. "Mum got sick of waiting for the end of the war and said I could come home," she explained. "She sent me a telegram when we won the Battle of the Bulge. The Germans are retreating. There's hardly any bombing any more, she said."

"My boys are coming home next week," the lady told her. "I can hardly wait! Five years they've been away." She smiled at Judy again. "Excited?" she asked.

Was Judy excited? She wasn't sure. She'd been sent away in 1939 when she was nine. She'd lived in Somerset with two old ladies, Auntie Betty and Auntie Poll. They weren't her real aunties – that was just what she'd called them. They were best friends who lived together in a small cottage with a straw roof and chickens in the garden. The house looked like something in a storybook.

Judy couldn't remember being sad to leave Mum and Dad. She remembered being nervous, but mostly she remembered how *exciting* it had

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been. Like going on a really, really long holiday. Her parents had always loved and looked after her, and Judy had taken it for granted that the aunties would love her and look after her too. And they had.

Auntie Betty and Auntie Poll didn't know much about children. But they were kind. They showed Judy how to make bread and how to pluck a chicken. They helped her write letters to her mother and father. They had saved their butter rations to make cakes for her birthdays and invited her friends round for buns and party games when she'd been younger.

The rooms in the aunties' cottage were small and dark. There was no electricity, and there were mice in the roof. There were oil lamps in the living room, and Judy had to take a candle up to bed. If she needed a wee in the night, she had to use the pot under the bed.

But there was a garden with foxgloves and hollyhocks and ox-eye daisies, and potatoes and carrots and cabbages. There were fresh eggs for tea, and a tiny village school with two rooms. Their milk was delivered on the back of a cart pulled by a real horse. Judy had missed Mum and

Sample

Dad, of course. But she had loved the little town right from the start.

Auntie Betty and Auntie Poll had nearly been crying when they'd put Judy on the train that morning.

"Send us a postcard when you get to London," Auntie Betty said.

"Don't forget the eggs and the butter in your basket," said Auntie Poll. "Give them to your mum straight away. There's never as much food in cities."

"All right," said Judy. The whole thing felt very strange. Would she ever see the aunties again? She didn't know how she was supposed to feel. Sad to be leaving? Happy to be going back to live with Mum? Could you be happy and sad and nervous and excited all at the same time? Judy didn't know. Not knowing made her feel awkward and cross. Fortunately, Auntie Betty seemed to understand.

"Well," she said. "Goodbye, darling. Give our love to your mum."

And that was that.

"I bet your mum can't wait to see you," the lady on the train said to Judy.

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Judy nodded. Her mum had come to visit whenever she could, but it was hard with her work. Often three or four months would pass without Judy seeing her. Mum wrote Judy a letter every week. Her dad wrote too, but not so often. He was a chaplain – a vicar at an air-force base in Brighton.

"The war will be over soon," said the lady. "Everyone says so."

"I know," said Judy. But she didn't really believe it. The war had been going on for so long, she couldn't remember what life had been like before it started.

The train was slowing down. Judy could see other tracks out of both windows, all heading towards different platforms. And suddenly, there they were! In the station. One of the soldiers got Judy's suitcase down from the rack for her.

"Can you see your mum?" asked the lady.

Judy looked out of the window. "Oh! Yes!" she said. Mum waved at Judy, and Judy stumbled out of the train. The soldier handed Judy her suitcase. And then Mum was hugging her and she was home.

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