PART ONE

OUR ADVENTURES BEGIN AGAIN

1

From the report of Fionnuala O'Malley,
WOE operative, 23rd April 1941

This is my report on the missing spy and the murder in Hogarth Mews. It's about the time that Eric, May and I discovered a dead body, and a lot of secrets too, and almost – well, you'll see. I don't want to give it all away just yet.

I can't believe it's me writing the *official document* this time, the one that Hazel will put in the Ministry's records when it's done. This makes it really important. And secret. We can't tell anyone anything about this case, or about anything we do for the Ministry. We all signed something to say so. I asked May if she wanted to help out because she did it last time, and she said once was enough, thanks very much. Then I asked Hazel what I should write, and she said that it's always best to begin at the beginning and say what's happened since your last case. That's what she does, anyway.

Winding back to last year feels weird, but sure I will. I've been at school – *real* school – at Deepdean since January, with May. I didn't really believe her when she told me she hated it – how could anyone hate learning stuff? But it's true. She's *awful* at it. It's honestly funny. She just can't sit still or follow the rules, and most of the girls and *all* the mistresses (that's what we call teachers; there are an awful lot of ridiculous made-up words at Deepdean) don't like her.

For a while, I wondered if I should hate it too, but I just couldn't. Deepdean's fun, even if you have to do a lot of pretending to fit in there. And one *extra* thing that I have to pretend is that I'm a normal schoolgirl, and not a . . . spy.

But I really *am* a spy, and so is May! We're part of the Ministry of Unladylike Activity, and we're helping the British government win the war, even though I'm only eleven and a half and May's not even eleven yet. That sounds strange, but it's true.

Here, let me explain.

Our first mission was last November at my family's house, Elysium Hall. That was when I thought May was my enemy. It's funny to think about that. May and Eric, our other friend, turned up as new evacuees, acting so suspiciously I thought they were spies for *the other side.* But they weren't, obviously. (Actually, they weren't officially spying for *our* side, either. The Ministry had turned them down as agents for being kids, so they were working on their own to try to prove they were good enough to be hired. May doesn't like

remembering that part.) They found out that someone at Elysium Hall was on the Nazis' side, and they were trying to work out who it was when my uncle Sidney was murdered.

Yes, seriously, murdered. It still gives me chills to think about that. You can read about it all in the Ministry's records. Hazel, who's May's big sister, collected the diary I wrote back then, along with May's notes, and put them together. I've seen it. It looks very official in its handsome red binding.

To cut a long story short, I helped May and Eric uncover the Nazi spy, and the murderer, and even though it meant the end of Elysium Hall it was worth it. I always kind of hated that place, anyway.

Now the army's requisitioned Elysium Hall, and my family have been given a little house in the village instead. That's where I'm supposed to live during the school holidays. But I'm not there right now, because Hazel wrote to me and May at Deepdean, towards the end of the spring term.

The letter was addressed to me, which made sense because May is always losing things. She's really careless, even with stuff she loves, and she usually forgets things the moment she puts them down. But she got snakey when she saw Hazel's looping handwriting in my pigeonhole: *For Fionnuala.*

'Why's she writing to you?' she asked me. 'She's *my* sister.'

I turned over the letter. I'd been hoping for one from my mam, so I felt a little strange about it.

This is for May too, it said on the back.

We both laughed, the tension between us vanishing for a second, and if May had been anyone else she'd have looked embarrassed. But because she's May, she just said, 'See?'

Then I opened the letter and didn't feel like laughing any more.

Dear Nuala and May,

Something's come up. You're needed in London – family emergency. Telephone me at the number I taught you and be ready to go.

Hazel

I felt scared, but not for the obvious reason. '*Family emergency*' was just the code phrase we'd agreed on, for crucial Ministry business. This was *spy stuff*.

May gripped my arm.

'This is it!' she hissed. 'They need us! We can finally leave!'

'But there's still weeks of term left,' I said. I didn't want to leave school yet. I felt like I was getting really good at it. Some of the other girls in our dorm even liked me.

'So?' said May spikily. Like I said, she'd been spiky with me all that term. I didn't know why. 'School is a waste of time. Anyway, even if they try to stop us, I ran away before. I can do it again.'

‘Sure, they’re going to be looking for you this time,’ I pointed out. ‘You’re on their list.’

I think May *is* their list.

‘Nuala,’ said May. ‘They need us. And when the Ministry needs us—’

I looked down the corridor towards the dorm, where I knew Eloise Barnes and Mariella Semple were planning a midnight feast for that night, and back down at the letter that May and I had been waiting for. I couldn’t think of what to do – and then May shouted, ‘MATRON!’

Matron stuck her head out of her study. May looked at me beadily. I did my best not to sigh.

‘Matron, it’s my aunt,’ I said, crumpling the paper in my hand so she couldn’t see it, and making my face as agonized as I could. I don’t have an aunt, but Matron doesn’t know that. ‘Something dreadful’s happened. I must call her at once.’

Matron stood over me as I dialled, and May hung around, breathing anxiously down my collar. Everything she does is loud, even breathing.

‘Hello?’ said an English woman’s voice on the other end of the line.

‘Hello,’ I replied in my posh Fiona voice, the one I use at school, in case someone was listening in. ‘Auntie? It’s me. I’m so sorry – I got your letter, and I feel terrible that I’ve been *swanning* around while you’ve been so ill.’

‘Nuala, love! You got my message.’

Swan is my code name, you see, so the Ministry's telephonist, Miss Lessing, knew immediately who I was.

'Yes, this morning. Are you worse?' I asked, making myself sound anxious. 'Really? How dreadful.'

'I'm suffering,' said Miss Lessing. 'I need you in London, urgently. You're to pack at once – both of you.'

'Oh no, I'm so terribly sorry! *Really* urgent?'

'I think you can catch the Saturday train. I shall be wiring you some money. Tickets these days are absolute *piracy*.'

My heart skipped. *Pirate* is May's code name – and Saturday would be *the next day*. The last we'd heard from the Ministry, we thought we *might* be coming to London some time around Easter for more training. This was all entirely new, and really exciting.

'We'll be there,' I said, thrilled.

'Do stop jabbering – let me speak to her,' said Matron impatiently. She snatched the mouthpiece away from me and barked 'Hello?' into it.

May squeezed my elbow, her sharp little fingers making me wince.

'Yes?' said Matron. 'Who is— Oh. Yes. Hello. How – how terrible. Yes, I understand. And . . . really, *both* of them? Did Mr Mountfitchet say so?'

She gave me and May a very suspicious look. 'You're sure? Oh – well – *tomorrow*?'

And that was how May and I ended up in London on a Saturday afternoon in early spring. We should have been

watching Deepdean beat St Chator's at hockey again, but instead we were about to be spies.

That's where this story starts, really. The rest of this account is my diary entries from that time, things I wrote before I knew what'd happened. The Nuala in these pages doesn't know what I know now. Sometimes she gets things wrong. Sometimes she doesn't behave entirely well. And sometimes—

—but I won't spoil it for you.

You'll see soon enough, anyway.

I've let Nuala do the writing in this account. Writing so much of the last one made me bored. It's just not as interesting to write about a murder as it is to solve one. It's been funny to read Nuala's diary (the bits she's shown me, at least) – sometimes she wrote down things that don't seem important but I know will be later.

I haven't always agreed with her, on this case. Sometimes she's been a beast. You'll see. Just remember that I am always right. She understands that now.

– May Wong, 23rd April 1941

2

From the diary of Fionnuala O'Malley

Saturday 22nd March

I'm writing this in the blue lights of the London train as it creaks along at half-speed. I haven't been in London since the end of last year, Diary, and I'm a little nervous about being back.

There was a big air raid on London while we were at the Ministry last December, before we got whisked out again to Fallingford House, the Ministry's country headquarters. That night felt like being stuck in an oven, the whole sky roaring with fire, and then the next day the air was just powdered ashes and dust. That was the first raid I'd really been in, apart from the one on Coventry in November. I've been having nightmares about them both, ever since.

Sure, I know by now that nowhere's safe, not really. We just have to pretend it is, because otherwise we'd never do anything. But it still feels scary to me, to be going into the

middle of a big city today. And scary to be doing spy training too. I'm afraid of a lot of stuff right now.

The good thing, though, is that May and I get scared in different ways. I think if she met Herr Hitler she'd just . . . bite him. Nothing bothers her – nothing but enclosed spaces, anyway, but don't tell anyone I told you that. So I'm worrying about raids, and what London's going to look like, and what the Ministry will be like, and whether maybe they'll regret hiring us as spies and kick us out and I'll have to go back to the little house in the village. But when I said all that to May, she just grabbed my hand and said, 'Stop talking or I'll be sick on you.'

May gets sick on trains, even the ones that go slow because of the war.

'I don't know if I can do that,' I said to her. 'I keep thinking of stuff to tell you about.' It's still weird to be on my own with her again. We have to pretend not to be good friends while we're at Deepdean, so we don't blow our cover.

'All right, if you promise to stop saying stupid things, you can talk,' said May. 'Read me the paper, here. I stole it from that old woman on the platform.'

'MAY!' I said.

'She didn't need it,' said May through gritted teeth. 'If you disagree with me, I *will* be sick on you. Read the best bits.'

So I read to her about a body that had been found in a bombed-out church hall, and about thieves who had stolen

paintings from a stately home, and about the new play at the Rue Theatre—

'The theatre's not important!' said May.

'It is to me!' I said. Diary, you know Da had a theatre company when I was a little kid. I grew up travelling all over the world with him and my mam and the rest of the Company. Then my da died, and Mam and I came to England – which is how we ended up in Elysium Hall with all my English relatives, which is how May and I met, which is why I've ended up on a stuffed-tight slow-moving train to London reading the newspaper to May while a woman's gas-mask case presses against the side of my head and some soldiers have a singalong in the corridor. But my point is, I care about plays, just the way May cares about murders.

Lookit, I guess I care about murders too. I solved one, last year, with May and Eric, so I'm a detective as well as a spy. That's a secret, Diary – so don't tell anyone.

But this time the detective part of me won't matter. We're going to London to help with spy stuff.

There won't be any murders waiting for us this time.

We were met at the station by May's big sister, Hazel.

She looks a lot like May, but calmer and more comfortable, instead of being spiky with rage – she's fat, with a round, pretty face and long dark hair up in a bun, and a really nice smile. She was arm in arm with a tall blond man who

kind of reminded me of one of those bouncy blond dogs that fetch sticks. He was wearing a Navy uniform, and he had a battered detective novel sticking out of one of his pockets.

'I'm Alexander,' he said, shaking my hand enthusiastically. I flinched a little. It surprises me when someone's so friendly so quickly, when I don't know exactly how to behave around them yet. Then Alexander picked up our bags like they were nothing. 'You must be Fionnuala. Little May I know.' He had an accent that blurred in and out of American and English like a radio tuning between stations, kind of like how mine is if I don't pay attention to it. But he pronounced my name right, like *Fin-noo-la*. I was impressed.

'I'm not little!' snapped May at once. 'I'm almost eleven! Don't be an idiot, Alexander.'

He just grinned at her and started to lead the way out of the station.

'Alexander's my . . . friend. He's on leave,' Hazel told me, motioning us after him. 'He wanted to come and meet you both.'

'*Is* he going to marry you?' asked May. '*Have* you told Father you're marrying a gweilo?'

Hazel's cheeks went pink. 'May!' she said. 'Don't be rude!'

'I'm not! Rose says hello, by the way,' May carried on. 'And have you heard from Father? He hasn't sent even one letter to us, and I think it's the least he could do

after he LEFT US IN ENGLAND DURING A WAR.' Her voice rose.

'May!' Hazel's kind face flickered and fell. 'You know he's busy in Hong Kong. I'm sure it's important. Anyway, he's with Teddy – don't you want him to keep Teddy safe?'

'I want him to keep *us* safe!'

And then she and May started to talk very fast in Cantonese, looking even more alike than ever. Sometimes I wish I had brothers or sisters. It must be nice to have someone who knows you so well, without any pretence. I stared around at the station. It echoed with noise and light – it was a bright afternoon, and the sun struck down through the panes of glass (and the gaps where glass used to be) in heavy stripes.

Then we stepped out of the station and we were back in *real* London.

I came to London just once before the trip last December, when I was really little, with Da and the Company, but I don't have much memory of it. Sure, everything looks bigger when you're small, and you don't know how anything fits together because you're just following adults around. But this spring London's turned into an unfinished theatre set: buildings sheared off as cleanly as cut paper, doors open like they're waiting for their cue forever, a painting hanging sideways on a wall that's cracked through and useless. There are weary, determined-looking people in uniform everywhere, and dust has got on everything, so

that none of it looks quite real. But then again, life doesn't always feel real these days.

I thought we'd be staying with Hazel and Daisy in the flat they share in Bloomsbury, but we weren't.

'Why?' asked May.

'The Mountfitchets' baby,' said Hazel briefly. 'Their flat is right below ours, and she's . . . noisy.' Hazel paused, then added, 'And Daisy will be back soon. Anyway, Zosia has a spare room you can use.' We wound through the grey, cracked streets, dodging past adults in uniforms and children pushing scrap carts and ambulances on their way to their depots and newspaper sellers and women carrying shopping and a man with sergeant's stripes on his shoulder walking with crutches, one trouser leg folded up emptily.

'Where's Daisy?' I asked. It's confusing when people you know talk about lots of other people you don't. It makes me feel awkward, like I'm in the wrong room by mistake. When it happens, I have to pretend to be someone completely different – jolly English Fiona, the sort of person who fits in at Deepdean – so when I asked that question I made my voice as radio-English as I could. I know Daisy, at least. She helped me and Eric and May in our last case; she was actually the person who put together all the clues we'd found out and revealed the murderer. May's still mad about that.

I was sure I'd said it in a friendly way, but Hazel's face fell again and her fingers gripped her handbag nervously.

‘She’s on a business trip,’ she said briefly.

I thought I understood what she meant. A *business trip* was code for mission. Daisy’s a spy, see, just like Hazel.

‘Where’s she gone?’ May blared. ‘Is it important? When’s she coming back? What—’

‘May! *Quieter!* And you know I can’t say here. *Loose lips.*’

Then Hazel rushed us all the way across a park and past tiny shops and huge white marble buildings and down busy, dirty roads, all the way to the place we were staying, and where our friend Eric was waiting for us.