

UNIT 1

The Crash

Albert and the narrator are young boys during the Second World War. One day they are playing on an abandoned building site known as Kor. They see a fight in the sky between a German and a British plane. One of the planes crashes ...

'Shall we go and look?'

'He might be trapped ... He might be ...'

It was unsayable. But we went.

It took a long time to search ruined Kor. Expecting at every corner ...

But what we found was a surprisingly long way off. A new row of furrows in the field beyond Kor, as if a farmer with six ploughs joined together had ...

And a gap in the hedge that something had vanished through. Something definitely British, because a lump of the tail had fallen off, and lay with red, white and blue on it.

We tiptoed through the gap.

It looked as big as a house.

'Spitfire.'

'Hurricane, you idiot. Can't you tell a Spitfire from a Hurricane yet?'

'It's not badly damaged. Just a bit bent.'

I shook my head. 'It'll never fly again. It looks ... broke.'

The tail was up in the air; the engine dug right into the ground, and the propeller bent into horseshoe shapes.

'Where's the pilot?'

'He might have baled out,' suggested Albert, hopefully.

'What? At that height? His parachute would never have opened. Reckon he's trapped inside. We'd better have a look.'

'Keep well back,' said Albert. 'There's a terrible smell of petrol. I saw petrol take fire once ...'

There was no point in mocking him. I was so scared my own legs wouldn't stop shaking. But it was me that went a yard in front.

The cockpit canopy was closed. Inside, from a distance, there was no sign of any pilot.

'Baled out. Told ya,' said Albert.

'With the canopy closed?'

'The crash could've closed it, stupid.'

'I'm going to have a look.'

I don't think I would have done if I'd thought there was anybody inside. I edged up on the wing, frightened that my steel toe and heel caps would strike a spark from something. The smell of petrol was asphyxiating.

He was inside.

Bent up double, with only the back of his helmet showing. And there was a great tear in the side of the helmet, with leather and stuffing ... and blood showing through.



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