

WINK, MURDER

A BLETCHLEY PARK
MYSTERY

THE BLETCHLEY PARK MYSTERIES

I, Spy
Hide and Seek
Wink, Murder

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A BLETCHLEY PARK
MYSTERY



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1

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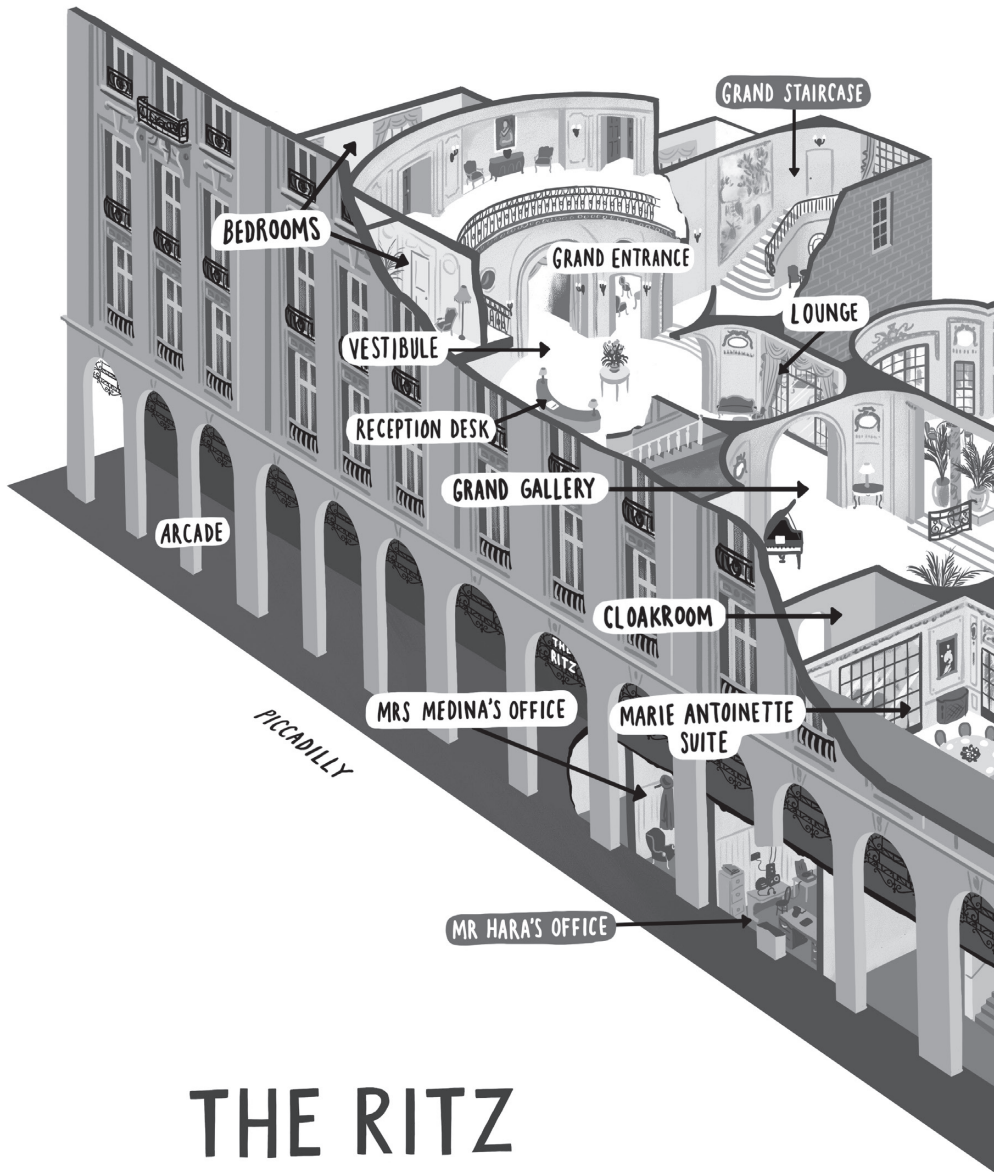
*This book is dedicated to Gillie Russell, whose
faith in my writing powers my pen.
Onwards!*

Author's Note

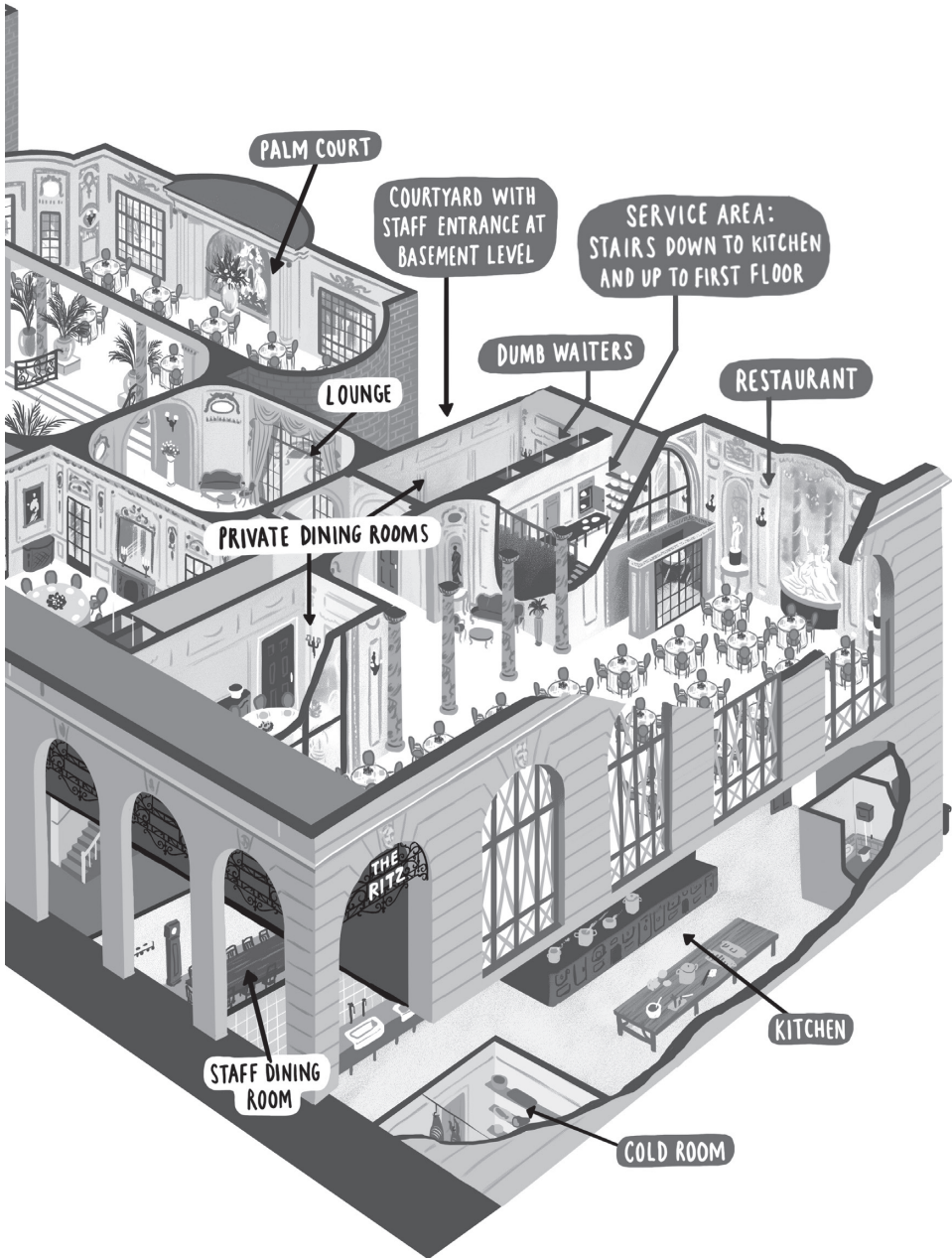
Wink, Murder is the story of a fictional character called Mary who, like many people in 1940s Britain, was born in England to parents who were first- or second-generation immigrants. Mary's father is Jamaican and her mother is White British. Today Mary might be described as mixed race, or being of mixed or dual heritage, but in keeping with the language used in the 1940s, she is referred to as 'coloured' in the book.

Each day is a journey
And that journey itself
Is home.

Matsuo Bashō



THE RITZ



Robyn's Guide to the Armed Forces

Army - British Armed Forces

Navy - Royal Navy

RAF - Royal Air Force

ATS - Women's Auxiliary Territorial Service

WRNS - Women's Royal Naval Service

WAAFs - Women's Auxiliary Air Force

WTS - Women's Transport Service

WVS - Women's Voluntary Service

WLA - Women's Land Army/Land Girls

FANYs - First Aid Nursing Yeomanry

WTC - Women's Timber Corps/Lumbergills

Prologue

Bletchley Park, January 1941

‘And remember the Bletchley Park code, Miss Clark! “Do not talk at meals. Do not talk on the transport. Do not talk when travelling. Do not talk in the billet!”’ Robyn parroted, sounding stern, just like the Heron, as they said their goodbyes.

‘Might be best if you don’t talk at all, Mary!’ Ned suggested. He knew she’d far rather be quiet than talk, unlike Robyn.

Mary held back a sigh. They were both doing their very best to send her on her way with a joke or two, and she knew they were waiting for her to smile. It was the right response, even if her heart wasn’t in it. It was just what people did; she’d watched them often enough to know. Her mother and her sister, Sybil, had both turned away from her to hide their tears when she was evacuated from Liverpool at the start of the war. But her father and nana had smiled bravely until their faces must have ached.

Well, if they could do it, so could she! She kept her mouth shut so she didn't look like she was grimacing, even though she could feel she was. Her two best friends smiled back encouragingly. Mary knew Robyn would swap places with her in a split second, because even though she loved the carrier pigeons and her apprenticeship with Mr Samuels, she had what Nana would call cabin fever and was desperate to escape Bletchley Park's many gates. And Ned would probably leave too, given half a chance, to escape his miserable father and the melancholy funeral parlour. But his mother needed him, or at least that's what Ned had told them. He hadn't specified exactly what his mother needed him for, but Mary had known better than to pry.

She would have happily stayed at Bletchley Park. It had taken some time, but now she was finally settled and knew every inch of the place. She could see it in her mind's eye like an architect's blueprint. Instead, though, she was being sent away from the only real friends she'd ever made. Mary looked down at the travel pass in her hand, stamped with the words *War Department* and the king's crown, and thought fleetingly about crumpling it up in her fist and launching it into the lake . . . but that would probably be regarded as an act of treason!

Mary would follow orders, as she always did, sticking to the rules like glue. She was going to stay with yet another stranger, someone called Mrs Craddock. At least she would be leaving stinky Mrs Fisher's billet behind. That thought had put a spring in her step and a genuine smile on her face. There'd be no more lumpy mashed potatoes on burnt toast

for tea! She was to catch a bus on her own, travelling to a place she'd never been before, although it wouldn't take as long as the journey from Liverpool had. She felt like an evacuee all over again, as if history were repeating itself. After Mr Chamberlain had announced the country was at war, Mary had been sent to Edge Hill railway station with a large identity label hanging around her thin neck, a gas mask in its clunky cardboard box banging against her hip, and her worldly possessions in a freshly washed and pressed pillowcase, slung over her shoulder and tied in a knot. Much like the knot in her stomach now, that no amount of smiles, waves or jokes would undo.



Bedford, February 1941

Mrs Craddock, her new landlady, a no-nonsense Irish woman, gave Mary a cup of scalding hot Oxo and a boiled egg for breakfast the next morning. The combination was not a success, but Mary was grateful all the same. Yesterday had been a trying day, and as soon as she'd arrived and been shown to her room she'd fallen asleep on top of her bed, just pulling a crocheted blanket over herself.

As Mary ate, Mrs Craddock vigorously wiped down the kitchen window, taking care to avoid the criss-cross tape.

'I don't normally cook this early, pet, but I'll make an exception. The vicar's wife is kindness itself. Sharing her spare eggs helps stretch the rations, so it does. What a good egg won't cure, there is no cure for, isn't that right?'

Mary wondered whether Mrs Craddock would pry and poke her nose in as much as the dreaded Mrs Fisher had. Mrs Fisher had made the evacuee experience one to

remember for all the wrong reasons – in it for the money she received, making Mary use cut-up strips of newspaper rather than proper toilet paper, which she kept for herself and her children. Mrs Fisher had treated her like a dog, and made it clear it was because of the colour of Mary’s skin.

She hadn’t shared any of these details with her family in her letters home. There was no room for whingeing in wartime. She didn’t lie about her evacuation experience either, though. Instead, she kept her letters factual, leaving out any unnecessary details that would cause trouble at home. She knew her sister would poke fun at how dull her correspondence was, but that was better than Sybil trying to give her advice about standing up for herself. In fact, she was almost relieved that Sybil had been too old to be evacuated with her and had stayed at home, although she’d been sick with jealousy at first, picturing her family carrying on without her. She unfolded Sybil’s latest letter to read it again.

Hullo, our Mary!

We heard that you’re going to be moving to a new address. Well, our kid, you are gadding about the country, aren’t you! Once you get there, you must tell us what Bedford’s like! I’ve heard the Americans have arrived! I’m sure you’ll fill us in once you get settled. You’ll never guess what’s happened! Nana’s only gone and moved into our bedroom, and she doesn’t half snore! She’s a right menace, keeping me up all hours wanting to chat when I’m trying to get me beauty sleep. Remember when I was

working in Murphy's Chippie? Well, I had words with Mrs Toffee-Nose Murphy – she wouldn't let me serve on the counter, said being served by 'someone who looks like you' would put people off their food. Wanted me to hide out the back and peel spuds. Nana said she didn't mean it, but you and I know she did. So, I left.

I've got a new job down at the gas mask factory now. It's better pay too, and there's loads of girls to have a decent chin wag and a cuppa with. And my hair smells a lot better! I was having to wash it every week, and it was getting as dry as Nana's boiled potatoes. I'm surprised they're still making them – the masks – cos hardly anyone round our way's wearing them. Mr Churchill will be fuming if he drops in. Or the king and queen. They're visiting all the bombsites. The king looks an absolute picture in his naval uniform, and the queen looks so glamorous, even our Nana hasn't got a bad word to say about her. That's enough for now. Write back and tell me about those easy-on-the-eye American GIs.

Chin up!

Sybil x

'A bicycle's been left for you in the yard, although you'd be wise to go on the bus. Sure, the weather is desperate. It's a dirty-looking sky out there.' Mrs Craddock swept Mary's empty plate from under her nose and stood waiting while she downed the dregs of her Oxo. 'It'll take you right into town. Or wherever you need to be, pet,' Mrs Craddock said.

Mary didn't like going on the bus. The driver might

comment in surprise about how clearly she spoke, as if she hadn't been speaking the King's English her whole life! Sometimes people stared at her, as if they'd never seen someone her colour before. And children often whispered questions to their mothers about Mary's 'tan', shyly asking if they could touch her hair. Buses really were more trouble than they were worth.

'Lovely breakfast, Mrs Craddock, ta very much.' Mary returned Sybil's letter to her skirt pocket, tucked her chair under the wooden table and checked the time on the clock against her wristwatch. She was going to be the first to arrive this morning. 'Ta-ra!'

Mary glanced at the darkening sky, pulling on her hat, scarf and gloves, then grabbed the bicycle from Mrs Craddock's yard. She'd already sampled the view of the Vauxhall factory where, according to rumour, Churchill tanks were manufactured. It was hard to see what was going on in there as they drove past on the bus yesterday, but now she could have a closer peek. They'd gone to great lengths to camouflage the roof with trees. Who knew? Maybe the prime minister, Mr Churchill, would visit Bedford to see how his tanks were progressing, and then she'd have something to pop in a letter home.

The bicycle wasn't a Bletchley Belter, like the one Mr Knox had found for her so she could dash about the park delivering the mail, but it was good enough. Besides, she was glad of the fresh air and freedom it allowed her as she wheeled along the road, not entirely sure what was waiting for her at the end of it.



Mary looked up at the nondescript red-brick building, fighting the wind while balancing the bicycle against her hip. It wasn't snowing yet, but the wireless had given them fair warning. This couldn't be the right place; it looked like a shop, not an intelligence school. All the street signs had been removed at the start of the war, but she'd had a chance to briefly study a map at Bletchley Park. They couldn't send her off with the map as it was illegal to carry one now. She'd been told to report at oh-seven-hundred-hours sharp for an interservice special course at a secret intelligence school – a school so secret she was having trouble finding it!

She wheeled her bicycle past a shop front. To the right of what looked like a gas showroom was a set of impressive double wooden doors, firmly closed at such an early hour. The street was almost deserted, everyone else sensibly tucked up in their beds or still in shelters after last night's air raid. She leant her bicycle carefully against the wall and pressed her face to the glass, cupping her gloved hands. Black wrought-iron shutters protected the showroom display windows from bombs and burglars and made it impossible

to see much inside. Frustrated, she pushed her bicycle past the shop front and up a side street. A long row of identical red-brick cottages with matching blue front doors ran the length of it. But she couldn't exactly go knocking on strangers' doors asking for directions to a secret intelligence school, could she?

'Say, it's over here if you're looking for the way in,' someone said behind her.

She was pleased not to have jumped at the voice. American, possibly? Or Canadian. The words 'out' or 'house' usually gave it away. Both Canadians and Americans were becoming common enough in England these days, so it was no surprise to hear their glamorous accents. She turned around to see the head of a young man – a boy, really – appearing from behind one of the blue doors. His shiny blond hair had been flattened down, probably with Brylcreem. He was wearing long grey trousers rather than shorts and a burgundy knitted V-neck sleeveless jumper over a shirt that had once been white. She looked past him to the cobbled yard. It was cluttered with several bicycles propped up against the red-brick wall.

'Ta very much. Are you . . .?' She hesitated, keen not to give anything away or reveal herself.

Bletchley Park had drummed it into her – secrecy on all fronts or else! Signing the Official Secrets Act before she left had been a chilling experience as the consequences of breaking her promise were dire. The Heron, head of Bletchley Park, had left her in no doubt that although she was going 'off site' he'd still be watching her, although she wasn't sure

how. She knew why the Heron didn't trust her. In his eyes, she had three grave flaws: firstly, she wasn't white; secondly, she wasn't a boy; and thirdly, she wasn't an adult. Children should be neither seen nor heard, in his opinion.

'This is the place,' said the boy. 'I got here a few days ago. You're the last to arrive. Scoot your bicycle in there with the others. Follow me, if you like,' he offered, holding the blue door to the yard open so that both she and her bicycle could fit through.

How did *he* know what kind of place she was looking for? She leant her bicycle against the wall and watched to see what he would do next. He pushed open the back door to the shop, revealing a steep set of wooden stairs, and ran up them. She followed him cautiously. If he'd got the wrong end of the stick and this wasn't *the place*, she would fly back down the stairs, leap on her bicycle and be out of there in seconds.

She'd been conscious of her appearance when getting dressed earlier and had done her very best with the clothes she'd been given – a Gor-Ray grey pleated skirt, above the knee (not the easiest of garments for bicycle riding; at the park they'd been allowed to wear trousers, but she wasn't yet sure of the lie of the land here), a cream button-down blouse, a round-neck knitted cardigan and a tan-coloured coat, which had seen better days. A quick glance in the age-dappled mirror at her new digs had been a disappointment. Best not to dwell on it, as it wasn't as if everyone else would be glammed up, not for a covert lesson in a schoolroom above a shop.

When the Heron had first told her about the ‘intelligence school’, she had pictured an ancient university campus with soaring ceilings, marble pillars and a fountain or two. Her impression of universities had been formed by the countless books she’d borrowed from Miss Stockley, the librarian. In truth, she’d have been out of place at a real university – she would never have been accepted. No one in her family had even finished school, let alone attended a college or university. But the secret of her attendance at this school was not for sharing, not even with her mam and dad. And definitely not with Sybil and Nana.

The boy opened a door at the end of an uneven hallway that reminded her of the wobbly floors of the fun house at the fair. Well, the building was certainly ancient, so that ticked one of her boxes. She followed him into a room full of single wooden desks with ink wells, like every other schoolroom she’d been in. But this one was full of men. A black man nodded at her and she smiled back in recognition. At least she wasn’t the only coloured person in the room, although it did look like she was going to be the only girl! At Bletchley, the women had outnumbered the men, and this had made her feel comfortable.

‘Wanna take a load off?’ The boy pointed at the empty desk at the front.

He was definitely an American, she decided as she slid onto a hardwood chair, feeling awkward. She’d have liked to bring her own notebook, a freshly sharpened pencil and a ruler. Then she could have busied herself organising her stationery. Sadly, the instructions were crystal clear:

bring nothing and take nothing. Usually she was a fan of instructions. You always knew where you stood with a good set of instructions.

She waited for a moment and then risked looking around the room to see if there were any familiar faces from the park. When she failed to find any, she was both relieved and disappointed. Where did these other people come from? She wondered if she'd hear not just American but other foreign accents. Maybe the man who had nodded at her would have a Jamaican accent like her father.

As more men filed in, she noticed that they were all dressed in civilian clothes. At Bletchley, it was easy to see if people belonged to the Army or the ATS, the Navy or the WRNS, or the RAF or the WAAFS, and their rank. Robyn had written a guide for Mary when she'd first started work at Bletchley Park, and very useful it had been too! Mary would know more as soon as they opened their mouths. An accent could reveal so much.

One of Robyn and Ned's favourite ways to pass the time was to call out the name of a city, and Mary would do her very best impression of the local accent. She'd never really thought of it as a skill, as her family was used to her parroting film stars, singers on the wireless and all the people from different countries who worked with her father down the docks. Her father would use all sorts of different accents and voices when he had read her and Sybil their library book stories, so, really, he was the one who started it all.

Sounds were easy for her to understand, but people were much less so. She wanted to ask each of the students where

they'd come from so that she could compile a profile on each person she was going to have to work with, preparing herself for every eventuality.

She turned to face the front of the room. Where was the teacher? And what exactly would they be taught? She looked around one last time and wondered: why, out of all the talented women and clever girls at the park, had the Heron chosen her?