



Chapter 1 Scan the Plan

Janey Brown awoke the instant she heard the parcel thump onto the floor. She flicked her mousey hair from her eyes and leapt out of bed. Thumping parcels usually meant one thing, and one thing only – a message from her father. Of course, there was the odd disappointment when the package actually turned out to be something from one of her mum’s catalogues, but Janey now had enough of an instinct for this kind of thing to guess when something was afoot. This was one of those moments, she was sure.

It was only a few months since plain Janey Brown had discovered that she was actually Jane Blonde, Sensational Spylet, but in that time she had truly grown into the role. Her gadgets (known as SPI-buys to Blonde and her spy-friends) usually got her out of trouble – apart from the occasional instance when they flung her straight into it. Spy friends from her father’s organisation, SPI – Solomon’s Polificational Investigations – had formed a tight-knit

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group around her: there was G-Mamma, her vibrant and rather *unusual* mentor; the Halos, headteacher Mrs Halliday and her son (and Janey's best friend) Alfie; Trouble the spy cat, Maddy the spy sheep, and recently Bert, Australian ex-sheep farmer turned spy recruit.

And the very, very best revelation of all – that her father was not dead as she had believed all her pre-spying days, but was Superspy Boz Brilliance Brown, head of SPI and capable of changing his identity by way of his own miraculous scientific discoveries. Janey never knew whether he would be Boz, or his alter ego Solomon Brown or businessman extraordinaire, Abe Rownigan. What Janey did know, however, was that whenever her dad sent Janey a parcel, a new mission began.

She raced down the stairs in her pyjamas and glanced at the doormat. Sure enough, there was a flattish cardboard box, just about the right size to have squeezed through the letter box. It was

addressed to Janey Brown, in a logo'd envelope from Sol's Lols ice-
lolly factory in Scotland. Sol's Lols was another of the businesses her father operated to disguise his spying activities, along with Abe 'n' Jean's Clean Machines which he ran with her mother. The smiley round face of Sol the lolly-maker beamed at her above the words, "Be sure to shop for Sol's Lols!"

Janey's mum appeared from the kitchen. "I thought that would probably be for you. Seeing as you're the only one who ever gets any interesting parcels."

Jean Brown raised an eyebrow at her daughter, and Janey suddenly saw in her the Superspy that she used to be. For a few brief moments in Janey's recent memory, Gina Bellarina had returned to her former glory and fought alongside the husband she had believed to be dead. But the memories of that, and all other spy-related events, had been completely wiped from Gina's brain, and she had

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gone back to being Jean Brown of the Clean Jean cleaning company, and Abe 'n' Jean's Clean Machines.

“It's from ... Uncle Sol, I think,” said Janey, parting the gum around the edges of the packaging carefully. She could never tell whether the message would be contained within the envelope, or part of the envelope itself. A solid glass photo frame slid out onto her bare toe. “Ow! That's cold! I hope I haven't broken it.”

She picked the frame up anxiously. “Oh. It's a penguin,” she said in surprise.

Jean Brown peered over her shoulder. “I told you he always sends you odd gifts. Why on earth would you want a picture of a penguin? Maybe we could take the picture out and just use the frame for something useful.”

She reached out to take the photograph from her daughter, but Janey clutched it to her chest. “No! No, I really like penguins. We've been, um, studying them at school, so this really is useful.”

Just as her mother cocked her head quizzically, someone knocked at the door. Glad of the distraction, Janey flung it open to find her friend and fellow Spylet, Alfie Halliday, clutching a very familiar-looking brown package.

“Snap,” he said, shaking the envelope so that an identical glass frame slid out onto his outstretched hand. Suddenly he noticed Mrs Brown standing behind Janey, and blushed to the roots of his chestnut hair. How would they explain their way out of this one? “Err, Morning, Mrs B. Off to work soon?”

“It's Saturday,” said Jean Brown. “Even cleaners get a day off, you know. Now, isn't that strange? Janey's received exactly the same parcel from her uncle. Do you know Solomon Brown too?”

“I ... no. No, I don't. But I ... buy a lot of lollies. Love them. Favourite thing,” muttered Alfie.

Janey jumped in to help him out. “I expect they've got your name on a database somewhere from...from...”

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“...that competition I did.” Alfie nodded enthusiastically.

“S’right. Win a year’s worth of ice lollies.”

“So Uncle Sol must have sent this picture to lots of people,” said Janey. “Not just me.”

Jean Brown looked from one to the other of them, eyes narrowed over her tea cup as they both smiled brightly at her. “Well, it sounds like something he would do,” she said eventually.

“Marketing, I suppose. It’s all about sales, isn’t it? It even says so on the envelope. I’m sorry, Janey.” She stretched an arm over Janey’s shoulders. “I though this time he might have sent you something special. Just for you. Not just some gismo to make you buy his products.”

But Janey knew that she had been sent something extremely special. “I don’t mind,” she said, popping the package into her bag that was propped against the banister. “Maybe he’s got some special

offer on or something. Alfie, maybe we should go to the supermarket and find out?”

Alfie shrugged, a little annoyed that Janey seemed to have worked something out before him. This was often the case. “I’ve got an hour before football,” he said reluctantly.

“Great!” Janey stepped out of the door, but as she did so her mum grabbed her arm.

“Two things, darling. One, you’re still in your pyjamas. And two, if you’re going shopping you could get a few bits and pieces for me.” She fished in her pocket for her purse. “Some Brie, crackers and grapes, and some tortilla chips and dip. I think that should do it.”

“Okay,” said Janey, bewildered. It didn’t sound like their usual Saturday tea, but maybe her mum had got so sick of cooking (as she did it so badly) that she’d decided on cold food only in future.

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“Fifty six minutes until football.” Alfie pointed at his watch, and within moments Janey was back downstairs in jeans, tee-shirt and cardigan.

They cycled to the supermarket on Alfie’s Spycycle, Janey sitting on the seat clutching both packages, and Alfie standing upright on the pedals to propel them along. They went on a strange, convoluted route through allies and back-streets to avoid being seen by any non-spies, as the Spycycle stayed proudly upright as Alfie spun them around corners, up pavements, and over the odd fence – straight up one side and just as straight down the other. Reaching Pick-and-Save in only moments, they headed for the aisle containing Frozen Confectionary.

“Walls, home brand, Viennettas...where is the Sol’s Lols stuff?” said Alfie, striding impatiently along the row. “Why can’t he just pick up the phone and give us a message the normal way?”

“Because then we wouldn’t be spylets,” said Janey, with that special thrill that went through her whenever she remembered she was not just Janey Brown, schoolgirl and dutiful daughter, but also Jane Blonde, ace spy-in-training. “Here they are. Look for one with a penguin on it.”

Placing the packages on top of the other ice-creams, Janey and Alfie leaned over the freezer and sifted through the Sol’s Lols products. Within moments their breath felt as though it were sticking to their cheeks, and their hands were aching with cold.

“Wish I had my Boy Battlers on,” said Alfie, referring to the super-charged gloves he wore when he went through the Wower and turned into spylet, Al Halo. The spy shower transformed anyone within it, adding gadgets and gizmos and, occasionally, sensible clothing. Janey wished for her Girl Gauntlet too. “My fingers are dropping off,” moaned Alfie. “Look, do you seriously think he’s

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planted a message in an ice lolly in the local Pick-and-Save?

Anyone could pick it up and walk off with it.”

Janey paused, rubbing her hands together. “That’s a good point. Some toddler could be eating the information right now. He wouldn’t risk it. So what else could it be?”

A cross-faced supermarket worker was bearing down on them. “What are you doing in there? It’ll take me ages to put them all back in the right boxes! Just choose one and clear off.”

“Actually, we don’t want one now,” said Janey. “Sorry.”

Both spylets made some half-hearted attempts to smooth over the stirred-up lolly section, then picked up their packages and ran. Janey skidded to a halt next to the cheese. “I’d better get this stuff for my mum first, and then we’ll try something else.”

“I don’t have time,” said Alfie. “Football’s in quarter of an hour.”

“Well, what’s more important?” said Janey impatiently, but she knew what the answer would be. While they were on a mission, Alfie was a million percent dedicated. Right now, however, when they weren’t getting very far, she guessed that the footy pitch was looking very attractive. “Oh, okay. I’ll walk home.”

Janey wandered listlessly round the supermarket picking up the items on her shopping list. The morning wasn’t turning out to be quite so exciting or satisfactory as she’d imagined. Furthermore, the package from Uncle Sol had become freezing cold from being placed on top of the lollies; so cold it was actually burning her skin through the patch of tee-shirt it was clutched against. She stopped and tipped it into the basket of cheese and crackers.

As it slid out of the packaging slightly, she looked again at the penguin. Maybe she should be looking elsewhere. Penguin biscuits? Or fish, that penguins might eat? It was a bit of a puzzle, and she was normally so good at those. But then she looked more

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closely at the space above the penguin's head. Etched into the glass was a little series of upright lines, like a broken fence, with a row of tiny numbers underneath. She'd seen one before, she was sure of it. Something to with maths at school? No. Closer to home. A series of bars. A run of numbers that could be a code. Now she'd thought it through, it was completely obvious. "Those things they put on tins for scanning. A bar code!" said Janey. How had she failed to notice it before?

She had everything she needed, so Janey raced to the check-out and waited anxiously in the queue, hopping from one foot to the other. At last it was her turn, and she turned the basket upside-down onto the conveyor belt, holding the penguin photo under her cardigan so it couldn't be seen.

"That's fifteen seventy five," said the till operator.

Perfect. Dipping into her pocket, Janey pulled out a couple of notes and a handful of coins and flung them towards the lady behind

the till. As she'd hoped, a couple of the coins catapulted across the other side of the conveyor belt and disappeared next to the till operator's seat. Tutting loudly, the woman clambered down off the chair and scabbled on the ground for the money.

She only had a split second. Opening up her cardigan, Janey swept her arm in front of the scanner. Nothing. She did it again, wondering what the man behind her in the queue would think of her flapping her purple-clad arm around like a bat-wing. Still nothing. The woman was straightening, turning around, and Janey had no time to lose. Grabbing the edge of the photo frame with her left hand, she located the bar code and aimed it straight at the front of the scanner. There was a faint beep, and Janey caught her breath as she spotted writing and images filling the small glass panel in the centre of the photo frame.

"School project," she said to the man behind her, then shoved the frame firmly beneath her cardigan as she picked up her

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bag of shopping. Wishing she had her Fleet Feet on beneath her jeans, she sprinted for home, or rather for the home next to her own.

G-Mamma's Spylab was what she needed now.