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opening extract from

Jane Blonde: Spies Trouble

written by

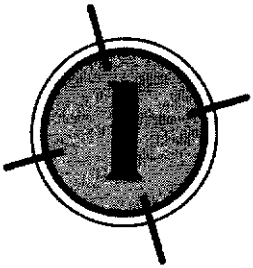
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a piece of cake

The cubicle fizzed as Jane Blonde, Sensational Spylet, stepped into the Wower to be changed back into an almost normal schoolgirl once more.

It had become such a familiar routine that she barely noticed the pearlescent moisture drops swirling around her inside the glittering spy-shower cubicle. Blonde was already thinking about what she had to do when she got out of the Wower. Her SPI:KE (Solomon's Polificational Investigations: Kid Educator) was in the Spylab, chewing anxiously on a carrot stick as she awaited a debrief from her prize pupil. In fact, her only pupil.

There wasn't long to wait. Within a few moments a robotic hand had removed Jane Blonde's voice-activated Ultra-gog spy spectacles, so that her eyes dimmed a little to their usual misty grey. Her silver Lycra SPIsuit was removed, and the angular limbs beneath it were encased once again in regular school-holidays uniform: jeans and a 'Give Me Sunshine' T-shirt. Finally, another metallic hand whisked the bright platinum colour from her hair, along with the band that had held it firmly in place



in a high, multi-functional ponytail. The Spylet's fine mousey waves settled on to her shoulders, and Janey Brown emerged from the Wower.

Janey grinned as G-Mamma rifled through her large stainless-steel fridge. 'Is this what you're looking for?'

G-Mamma seized the tatty box before Janey even had her arm fully extended. 'That was mean, Blonde-girl. Mean, mean, mean. You know the order you're meant to do this in: decode, debrief, de-Wow. Since when did you start de-Wowing before you gave me the goodies? I mean, the crucial info.'

'Just trying to help you stick to your diet, G-Mamma. You said that was my mission for the holidays,' Janey said teasingly.

G-Mamma rolled her Amethyst-Dazzled eyes heavenwards. 'That was just a trick, Blondette! I was bluffing! You were meant to see straight through it immediately and do the reverse: BRING ME CAKE!'

'Well, I worked it out in the end,' said Janey. 'Unfortunately the only place to get cake at midnight was from the bins behind the bakeries. I chose the cleanest bin I could find. The cake's probably only a day or two old . . .'

'It's been through the Wower though!' G-Mamma's eyes gleamed as she pulled a very smart cake box complete with ribbon out of the cubicle. 'Look at that baby.'

Janey laughed. The rather squashed and miserable Victoria sponge she had raised from the depths of the dustbin had been upgraded to a mighty gateau. Light-as-

air angel cake interspersed with hefty layers of jam, cream and butter icing made its way into the cavern of G-Mamma's mouth. 'Save me some!' said Janey. 'That looks amazing. I didn't know the Wower worked on food as well as people. Oh, and cats.'

She looked around the lab for her Spycat, Trouble. Since being embroiled in Janey's first mission, Trouble had become very attached to her and now spent most of his time on the other side of G-Mamma's fireplace, in Janey's bedroom, although the smell of cream cakes and doughnuts often enticed him back to G-Mamma's lab. 'Where is he then? Have you seen him tonight?'

G-Mamma shook her head. 'He's a cat, girly-girl. He's probably out chasing mice.'

'He hates mice.'

'True. Well, chasing birdies then.'

'It's night-time.'

G-Mamma tutted. 'The kitty's fine. Now listen, it's the end of the holidays, and I want to show Solomon how much we've done since you saw him last.' She reached out for a ruler, dropped a little kiss on to it and pointed one end at Janey. A tiny pinprick of green light danced before her. 'Speak. Tell your father what you've learned in the last couple of weeks.'

The ruler was actually a LipSPICK (Lip-activated SPI-Camera Kilobank) – a spy camera with an enormous memory. Janey stared into the winking light and took a deep breath. When she went back to school tomorrow she would have to write a report about what she'd done



in the holidays. There was no way she would be able to say what had really happened that summer: that a mad woman called G-Mamma had turned up to inform her that Janey was actually a spy (well, a Spylet), spy-name Jane Blonde; that her never-seen-before Uncle Solomon was actually the head of the mighty Solomon's Polificational Investigations (SPI) and had disappeared with a secret so huge that it could change the world, since it allowed for one creature to be frozen and changed into another, completely different animal; that her lovely teacher and nice new friend Freddie were actually leading members of the evil rogue spy organization Sinerlesse, which Janey had had to thwart on her first mission. She certainly couldn't write that the head teacher and her son, Alfie, were really a SPI and Spylet, and her greatest friends and supporters.

And there was an even greater revelation. Her Uncle Solomon was really her father, Boz Brilliance Brown, who Janey had thought had died before her birth and whom her (now very ordinary) mother, Jean Brown, had partnered in her previous life as the superSPI Gina Bellarina. It was all so crazy that Janey could hardly believe it herself.

'Come on,' muttered G-Mamma indistinctly through a fifth mouthful of gateau. 'Spill the beanage.'

'OK.' Janey ticked off the various things she had learned over the last couple of weeks in her spy lessons. 'Body language: I've learned how to make myself blend into a crowd without being seen, or how to stand out so all attention is on me if I'm the decoy. And I can read other

people's body language to know if they're lying. Codes: I've covered half a dozen different encryptions. I've learned that a single hair can tell you if someone's been looking at your stuff, and I can take fingerprints with talcum powder. Equipment: I've mastered the Girl-gauntlet and my Fleet-feet technique. My self-defence is getting much better but I know the best way for me to stay unhurt is to get out of the way. Um, I guess that's the lot.' Janey smiled into the camera a little shyly.

'Excellent briefing, Blonde.' G-Mamma held the ruler out to Janey. 'Now you hold it and turn it on me. I've prepared something a little special for Solomon.'

As Janey directed the camera G-Mamma whipped a lime-green cloth off the nearby counter and flicked a switch on the twin speakers that were hidden beneath it. A pounding rhythm filled the Spylab, and Janey's SPI:KE popped her head in time, from one side to the other.

Janey screwed up her eyes. 'Oh no, I think I know what's coming.'

'Yo, Sol!' yelled G-Mamma, flinging her hips around with wild abandon. 'Here we go . . .

'Your girl's been SPI:KED, and I hope you liked
What she had to say on graduation day.
A Spylet true is what I have for you
And a badge of honour is what you're gonna gonna gonna gonna . . .
GIVE BLONDE!'



Janey smiled hesitantly. G-Mamma had so much enthusiasm that it was difficult to avoid admiring her for it. 'So I've graduated? Wow. How are you going to get this message to Solomon?'

'You're all Spylet now, honey. Yes, you are. And a Spylet should be able to work out the answer to that second question.' G-Mamma turned off the beat box to allow Janey some peace to think.

'Well, we don't know where he is,' said Janey, 'so we can't send it by post. Right. He's not going to drop round here to collect it either, so . . . ah . . . got it! He can collect the image from anywhere, wherever he is, provided he has the right password, or . . . or no, the right lip-print activation?'

G-Mamma's round blue eyes shimmered. 'Oh, girl, I trained you well. How spiky is that SPI:KEd spylet? Very very, yes indeedy. Correct answer. Full points.'

'So can I have some cake now?'

'No way. Too late. You'll get indigestion. And it's school in the morning. So through the tunnel and into bed with you.'

G-Mamma shoved her towards the fireplace as Janey protested. 'You're starting to sound like my mum.'

Dropping to her knees, Janey shimmied through the short tunnel that ran between their two fireplaces and brushed herself down on her bedroom hearth before carrying out what was now her usual, secret night-time routine.

Swallowing down the guilty feeling that hit her in the

gullet each time she did this, Janey pulled out the old shoebox containing her precious collection of SPI-buys – gadgets her father had sent her over the years. It had once contained perfume that was really SPIT (SPI-Truth serum), a spy pen with invisible ink, rocket-powered hairslides and a LipSPICK ruler of her own. Now all that remained were a few drops of SPIT and a miniscule disc of metal from the LipSPICK. It was this tiny circle that she now balanced on the end of her finger like someone about to put in a contact lens. Instead of pushing it in her eye, however, she drew it to her mouth and, very gently, gave it a feathery kiss.

'Hello,' she whispered, as a moving image sprang up above her head.

The flickering light in Janey's bedroom caught the eye of the spy lurking outside in the garden. He turned his head slowly to the window, as if it was weighed down by the strange mask he wore – a circle made up of large jagged spikes. His Ultra-gogs were built into the narrow eye-slits cut into the metal.

'X-ray,' he instructed under his breath, 'and zoom.'

There it was again, on the ceiling – footage of a man stroking the head of a large tabby kitten and mouthing something to the camera. The spy caught his breath and focused the Ultra-gogs to lip-read what the man was saying, over and over again.



'. . . what I've created . . . what I've created . . . what I've created . . .'

The spy smiled. From here on in, it was going to be plain sailing.

'Thank you, my dear,' he whispered. And then he was gone.