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Jennifer Killick always wanted to be a writer, but really started when she applied for a Creative Writing MA at Brunel University, which is where she got the idea for her first book *Alex Sparrow and the Really Big Stink*. Since then she has gone on to write many books, including two more in the Alex Sparrow series; *Mo Lottie and the Junkers*; Bookbuzz bestseller *Crater Lake* and sequel *Crater lake Evolution* as well as the *Dread Wood* series. Jennifer lives in Uxbridge, in a house full of children and animals.

Also in the Alex Sparrow series:

ALEX SPARROW AND THE REALLY BIG STINK
ALEX SPARROW AND THE ZUMBIE APOCALYPSE

Also from Firefly
Jennifer Killick

MO, LOTTIE AND THE JUNKERS
CRATER LAKE
CRATER LAKE, EVOLUTION

Alex Sparrow and the Furry Fury

More than anything else, this story is about kindness. So I dedicate it to Toby Cox – one of the kindest people I have ever known.

JENNIFER KILLICK

ALEX SPARROW AND THE FURRY FURY



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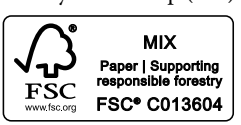
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1

MY LIFE AS A HERO

'Agent A is back on da case; hunting 'dem pigs who off on da chase; picking up clues like he picks up da ladies; smellin' so fresh like a field of daisies…'

'Smelling like poo, you mean,' Jess snorted. 'You just stepped in some.'

'Oh, nuts,' I said, trying to scrape it off my school shoe. 'Mum's going to kill me.'

'Anyway, ladies doesn't rhyme with daisies.'

'It would be easier to freestyle if you laid me

down some sick beats, Jessticles,' I said. 'But of course you're in too much of a mood.'

'I never thought I'd say this, but I wish you'd go back to the narration thing. It was slightly less annoying.' Jess bent down to look under a stack of PE equipment at the side of the games area.

'This is the first mission we've had in weeks.' I dropped into a crouch and sniffed at the ground like proper trackers do on TV. 'You could be a bit more enthusiastic.'

'Looking for Boris and Noodle is hardly a mission, Alex.'

'There are two ferocious beasts on the loose in the school grounds. We've been charged with protecting the innocent and bringing those thugs to justice.'

'They're guinea pigs.' Jess rolled her eyes so hard that I thought they might disappear into her brain cavity.

'That's right. And we're taking them in – dead or alive.'

I rubbed a bit of dirt between my fingers.

'You know that's poo too, right?'

'How's that poo?' I wiped my fingers on the ground. 'They look like little brown candies.'

Jess just sighed and looked at the sprinkles of poo leading out of the playground. She turned towards the school field. 'This way.'

'At least we know we're on their tails,' I said. 'Followin' da trail of candy-poo devastation; Agent A and moody J spy out their destination; A's majestic stealth don't need no explanation…'

'…But Alex's attempts at rapping are a sad abomination.'

'Now you're getting into the spirit of it, Jessticles,' I said, patting her on the shoulder with my poo fingers.

'Also, guinea pigs don't have proper tails.'

We made our way across the field towards the furthest corner, where the garden lived. It was November, and times were tough. As you probably know, I'm a pretty upbeat person, and I've always been like a flipping ray of sunshine compared to Jess. I was used to that. But in the aftermath of PALS and Miss Smilie, it was like she wanted life to go back the way it was before we got our powers. And I couldn't understand it. I tried not to let her bring me down, but it was getting harder. I'd thought that volunteering to look for Boris and Noodle would make her remember the

good times, but it just seemed to pee her off even more.

'I think I can see something moving,' I said. 'Under that green leaf thing.'

'You mean the lettuce?' She looked at me like I was the most stupid person in the world.

'I'm not a vegetarian like you – I can't be expected to remember the names of *all* the vegetables.'

'The other day you said you didn't want to eat the orange stick thingy.'

'Well, I didn't. It tasted weird.'

'It was a carrot, Alex. A *carrot*.'

'What's your point, Jessticles?'

'My point is that it's the most basic of all the vegetables. Two year olds know what a carrot is.'

'My mind is way too busy with important business to worry about things like that.'

'You mean like your investigation of Miss Hussein?'

When Miss Smilie was arrested earlier in October, the school got a new teacher to replace her. She was called Miss Hussein and I was certain she was another bad guy in disguise, possibly planted by Montgomery McMonaghan and his

corrupt organisation, SPARC. So I did what any good agent would do: I devoted my life to uncovering Miss Hussein's secret identity. I followed her. I asked her constant questions. I tried my hardest to make her mad and trick her into telling a lie. But the thing with Miss Hussein was that she was really, *really* nice. Like, so super-nice it was annoying.

We moved towards the vegetable patch: me with the stealth of a panther, and Jess with the clomp clomp of a buffalo. The sky had suddenly turned dark and it had started to rain freezing fat blobs of water. It was the perfect weather for our manhunt. I made a series of hand gestures and head movements to communicate to Jess what our plan should be without giving away our position.

'What?' she said.

It was quite dark so she must not have seen clearly. I did them again.

'Alex, it's cold and wet and I have no idea what you're trying to do.'

'I'm saying we should flank them, of course! Also – you ruin everything.'

'Whatever,' Jess said, and moved to the right of

the garden. At least she knew what flanking meant, that was something.

I took the left flank, sneaking like a shadow through the gloom towards my prey. The vegetable patch was like an unlidded box made of logs, about the size of a wrestling ring. It was filled with mud and leaves and freakish-looking scarecrows that the Reception kids made out of old Coke bottles.

And there was definitely something in amongst the vegetables. I braced myself for the pounce, for the beast to fight back. Instead, a white floppy-haired head poked out from under a leaf and squeaked. I looked over at Jess. Her special power isn't as useful as mine, obviously. But in this situation being able to talk to animals would come in handy. I used to laugh when I saw the twitch that came as the side effect of her power and happened whenever she talked to them, but even her twitching just wasn't the same anymore. She'd decided to have 'office hours' for her power, when animals were allowed to come see her with their requests. At other times, she didn't like talking to them – she said it got too tiring, what with all the Year 6 exam work we were doing at

school. Now she twitched in the most bored way possible.

'Boris is surrendering,' Jess said. 'He doesn't like the rain and he wants to go back to his hutch.'

'Oh,' I said, feeling quite disappointed. 'Well, one down, one still on the loose.'

A golden-brown head peeped out next to Boris and managed to squeak through the mouthful of green leaf it was munching on.

Jess twitched and sighed. 'Noodle's surrendering too. He does whatever Boris does.'

'I think they were intimidated by my powerful presence,' I said.

'Let's just get them back to school before we're completely soaked.'

'Shouldn't we interrogate them about why they escaped?' I said, really hoping for a bit more excitement out of the situation.

'Alex,' Jess turned to me, 'they're guinea pigs. They got out of their hutch and stole some lettuce. Even you can't make this into a drama. Now grab Boris, and I'll get Noodle.'

'You grab Boris. He looks like he might bite.'

'Fine,' Jess huffed and scooped up Boris with an air of professionalism I had to respect.

I crept towards Noodle.

'There's no point tiptoeing, Alex. He's looking right at you. He already knows you're coming.'

'Right,' I said. 'Do guinea pigs have claws?'

'Would you like me to carry it back to the hutch?' An unfamiliar voice made me jump out of my skin, and Jess too from the look of it.

The new boy, Rex, had somehow walked across the entire field without us noticing, and was standing right behind us. He was almost as stealthy as me.

Jess frowned at him, not in an especially nasty way, just in the way she frowned at everyone except Dave. Rex had only been at Cherry Tree Lane for a week, and he'd been getting a hard time from the other kids. His uniform was old, even though he was new. His trousers were too short, his jumper was too big and his shoes looked like they'd come out of a dustbin. Also, he hardly talked, just stared the whole time like he was judging everyone. I hadn't picked on him, but I hadn't made an effort with him either. He was a bit weird.

'I'm used to dealing with animals,' Rex said. 'Me and my mum have just taken over the Cherry Tree Lane Animal Sanctuary.'

Jess's face lit up. Honestly, I'd been trying to cheer her up for weeks with very little success, and this guy rolls in with the words 'animal sanctuary' and she's practically smiling at him.

'Some help would be great,' Jess said. 'Alex is obviously afraid of the guinea pig.'

'I'm not afraid,' I said, my tiny white lie setting off my lie-detecting ear, which rumbled loudly and sent the odour of fart cutting through the damp naturey smell of the garden. 'He does have the eyes of a killer, though.'

Rex bent over the vegetable patch and laid his hands on the soil, palms facing up, and Noodle scampered out of the lettuce immediately. He sniffed at Rex's dirty fingernails and then hopped into his hands like he was his best mate or something.

'That's amazing,' Jess gasped in an infuriating way.

Rex just nodded like it was nothing and let Noodle cuddle into his jumper.

This was all it took for Jess to decide that the new boy was alright. I still had my doubts.

'Can I work at the animal sanctuary?' Jess asked. 'I could come in after school and on weekends. I'm

good with animals, aren't I, Alex?' She turned to me, which was nice because I was wondering if she'd forgotten that I existed.

'Yeah, she's got a special way with animals,' I said.

Rex looked at me and then at Jess. 'We do need help. But we can't pay you.'

'Stuff that then,' I said. 'No pay, no way – that's what I always say.'

'You've literally never said that, Alex,' Jess glared at me. 'And I'll work for free; I just want the experience.'

'Wait, what?' I said. The girl was nuts.

'Ok, I'll ask my mum if we can give you a trial,' Rex nodded. 'I like the way you handle a guinea pig.'

He turned and started walking back across the field to the school, leaving Jess with a huge smile on her face.

'I like the way you handle a guinea pig,' I said, pulling my hat low on my forehead to try to keep the rain out of my eyes. 'Dat boy got game, son.'



2

IT BEGINS WITH AN 'M' AND ENDS IN AN 'N'

'How can it not wake you up? It's the most horrific noise I've ever heard.' Jess yawned and picked at a scab on her elbow.

If anyone else had said that, I'd have expected my ear to fart extra juicily, but Jess was the biggest non-exaggerator in the world.

'And it's so loud,' Dave said. 'Maybe all that ear farting has damaged your hearing.'

It was lunchtime and we were sitting on what

used to be called the Friendship Bench, but was now called the Reflection Bench due to the whole school trying to avoid anything that sounded like it was in any way connected to PALS. PALS was the 'Positive Aspirational Life Skills' programme that our school decided to inflict upon us at the start of the year, but it didn't turn out so well. And after Miss Smilie was exposed by the amazing Agent Alex (that's me), they realised PALS actually stood for 'Pupil Automated Lobotomy Scheme'. People were pretty unhappy about it, and now the school was trying to act like it never happened. Anyway, they could call the bench whatever they liked – everybody still avoided sitting on it and being seen as a loser, which is why it was perfect for us. Wait – that came out wrong. I mean it was private and we could chat without anyone listening in. That's why it was perfect for us. We are most definitely not losers.

Anyway, Jess and Dave and everybody else in town were being kept awake at night by foxes. Loads of people were talking about it – it had even been on the news. Personally, I didn't see what all the fuss was about.

'It can't be that bad,' I said. 'They're just foxes, a.k.a. orange dogs.'

'It sounds like demons screaming from hell,' Jess said.

'I wonder if they've eaten Colin from next door. He's been missing for weeks.'

'Your next-door neighbour has gone missing?' Dave said. 'His poor family.'

'Meh, he was a scabby old thing anyway,' I said. 'I used to chase him out of my garden all the time.'

Dave looked confused.

'Colin is a cat, Dave,' Jess said.

'Maybe the foxes are performing some kind of dark ritual.' I imagined them dancing around a fire with Colin tied to a tree. 'That would explain these "alleged" (I did the annoying finger-quote thing) noises.'

'I can't believe anyone can sleep through them,' said Jess.

'What can I say? I'm especially skilled at sleeping.'

'Sleeping isn't a skill,' she huffed.

'You only say that because you're not good at it.'

'I'm too tired to even argue with you,' Jess said, yawning again and slumping back on the bench.

'And I bow down to your mastery,' Dave laughed. 'Teach me, oh wise one, for I am in desperate need of zees.'

'Don't encourage him, Dave.' Jess nudged him in the ribs but he didn't seem to mind.

'Well, before I go to bed, I like to have a largish snack,' I said. 'Because waking up from hunger is the worst. Something with cheese and ham, and then something with chocolate, or maybe…'

'What's going on over there?' Jess jumped up, rudely interrupting me, and ran over to where a crowd of kids had gathered by the climbing frame.

Me and Dave followed Jess, who was pushing her way through the mob. You'd think that after we saved them all from becoming blueberry muffins, brainwashed by Miss Smilie and PALS last half term, they'd show a bit of respect and stand aside for us, but life moves fast in the Juniors and last month's events had been pretty much forgotten. To be fair, Jess didn't need them to stand aside: when she was on the path to justice, nobody got in her way, not even Big Bad Bhavi.

As I fought my way through, I wasn't surprised

to hear Jason's voice shouting above all the rest. He used to be my best friend, but then I realised he was a total jerk. Apart from the odd comment under his breath, he'd pretty much stopped picking on me – I think because he was scared that Jess would kick him in the boy bits again. But Jason being Jason, he'd had to find someone else to bully. And that person was Rex.

'Did your last school kick you out for being a jack-up weirdo?' Jason said.

Rex's face went bright red as he looked down at his ankles. 'We moved.'

'Everything was going fine until you came here.'

'Apart from the PALS stuff,' someone shouted, and a few people laughed.

'I haven't done anything,' Rex said. 'I don't even know where you live.'

'I'm Jason Newbold: everyone in this school knows where I live. And someone set fire to my house.'

Jess marched forward and put herself in between Jason and Rex. 'Why would Rex set fire to your house? He hasn't even been here long enough to know how much of a jerk you are.'

'Oooh, burn,' I said. I totally had Jess's back.

'Stay out of this, freak girl,' Jason said, but more quietly and while moving his hands to cover his 'area'. 'Should have known you'd stick up for this scuzzy tramp.'

'Should we go in?' I whispered to Dave.

'Nah – Jess has it covered, and she'll be mad at you for thinking she couldn't handle it.'

'Call me that again, Jason,' she said, her eyes narrowing. She took a step closer to him.

'Whatever,' he said, edging back. 'Just stay the hell away from me – all of you weirdos. And when I find out who set my house on fire, they're dead.'

'Teachers coming!' someone said, and the group started to break up, leaving only me, Dave, Jess and Rex.

'Are you OK, mate?' Dave said to Rex.

Rex said nothing but looked like he might cry. There were only two situations in Year 6 when it was acceptable to cry: one – if you received a potentially life-threatening injury, for example, if someone smashed a chair over your head or you got a really bad paper cut; two – if you failed one of your exams and had to spend the next month in intervention. If he started crying now,

it would be totally awkward. And I felt a bit sorry for him.

'Do you want to sit with us?' I said, and Jess smiled at me for the first time in a week.

'Thanks, but I want to be on my own right now,' Rex sniffed.

At that moment, Miss Hussein reached us. 'Is everything OK, guys?'

'Rex is having a tough day,' Dave said.

'I'm sorry to hear that, Rex,' Miss Hussein smiled at him. And not like a Miss Smilie smile; it was a gentle, rosy smile with a twinkle in it. 'Would you like to come inside for a bit and have some quiet time? I think there might be some ginger biscuits left over from lunch – we could sneak you a few and find you a book in the library.'

Rex nodded and started walking towards the door.

'Thank you for looking after him,' Miss Hussein twinkled at us. 'It's so hard being new and it makes me proud when I see people like you being kind. I owe you all a ginger biscuit, too.' She hurried to catch up with Rex.

'There's definitely something sinister about her,' I said.

Jess rolled her eyes. 'Come on, let's go back to our bench.'

'Maybe she set fire to Jason's house?' I said.

Jess and Dave both turned to look at me. You know you've gone too far when even Darth Daver gives you the stink eye.

'I know, I know. Miss Hussein is like a fluffy unicorn and I'm being stupid and desperate. It's just that I want a new mission so badly.'

'I heard Marek saying the fire happened when Jason's Xbox blew up,' Jess said. 'It was just an accident.'

'Wow – he gamed so hard he blew up his Xbox!'

I pictured a giant explosion with Jason's family leaping out of the way in slow motion, flames twenty metres high and a mushroom cloud of smoke where Jason's house used to be.

'I think it was just a small fire,' Dave said, as though he could see right into my mind. 'Nobody got hurt but one of the curtains was a bit brown at the bottom.'

How disappointing.

'Well, at least one good thing came out of this,' I said.

'You actually thought about someone else other than yourself for a change?' said Jess.

'Calm down, Saint Jessticles – even your hair looks ragey. Anyway, you got more out of this situation than anyone.'

'Why's that?' We'd reached the bench and she stopped and turned, hands on hips.

'Because Rex is definitely going to get you a job in the animal sanctuary now.'

She sighed and turned away, but not before I saw the corner of her mouth twitch upwards in what looked like the start of a smile.

We sat back down on the Reflection Bench.

'Well, that was the most action we've seen in a while,' Dave said.

A horrid feeling swept over me. I felt heavy and sad and it was hard to take a breath – kind of like I was being sucked down a plughole. After everything we'd been through and all we achieved. How had life got so boring?

'I can't stand this,' I said. 'No secret missions. No psychotic villains. No life or death situations. Life sucks right now.'

'The Professor gave us our powers for a reason, Alex,' said Jess, 'and we did what we needed to do. We won. We should be happy.'

'Then why aren't I?' It was true that Miss

Fortress, a.k.a. The Professor, had given us our powers specifically to stop Miss Smilie, but that didn't mean we shouldn't use them for other cool things. Ten years old was too young to retire.

A loud rustling from the cherry tree branches over our heads made us all look up, and a familiar-looking grey blob swooped towards us.

'Dexter!' Jess and I jumped up and shouted at the same time, before remembering we shouldn't be drawing attention to the fact that we had a friend who's a pigeon. We hadn't seen him since the day of Miss Smilie's arrest and, honestly, I'd never been so happy to see his beady eyes and yucky toe stump.

He landed on the bench next to us and started strutting back and forth like a boss.

Jess launched into the series of jerky movements that meant she was listening to Dexter and, it could have been my imagination, but I reckon she was doing it with more enthusiasm than I'd seen from her in weeks.

'Like what, though?' Jess was saying, and I felt this rising excitement, like the opposite of being sucked down a plughole. Maybe something completely awesome was going to happen.

When Jess stopped twitching, Dexter turned to me, bobbed his head and then took off.

'Did you see that?' I said. 'He nodded at me! He doesn't hate me anymore!'

'I saw him move his head a tiny bit,' said Jess. 'I wouldn't call it a nod, exactly.'

'Shush, Jessticles, it was totally a nod – a mark of respect between comrades. He was practically telling me he loves me.'

A slimy wet poo suddenly fell from the sky and spattered on the bench next to me.

Dave cracked up.

'I don't think it's love just yet, Alex,' said Jess.

'It wasn't on my head, so I'll take it.' I would not let her chill my buzz. 'Anyway, what did he say? Is it a mission? IS IT A MISSION?'

'I wouldn't call it a mission,' she sighed. 'But he said he's been witnessing some funny business on the ground. He made it clear to The Prof that something was bothering him, and she told him to pass the intel on to us.'

'What funny business, Jess? Tell me!' I bounced up and down on the bench.

'It's the animals. The animals are acting out of sorts; doing things they shouldn't be. We need to provide The Professor with a report.'

'Jess, my delightful friend, do you know what this is?'

'It's not a mission.'

'IT'S A MISSION!'

'Not really.'

'It's a mission, isn't it, Dave?' I turned to him for help.

'It does sound a bit missiony,' he smiled.

Jess whacked him on the arm. 'Now he'll be unbearable.'

'Mission, mission, mission,' I marched around the bench chanting.

'Shut up, Alex,' Jess said.

'Do you know what, Jessticles?' I stopped in front of her and leaned in. 'Mission.'

Jess rubbed her face with her hands and sighed. 'I told you, Dave.'