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Opening extract from

Spies, Dad, Big Lauren and Me

Written by

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Spies, Dad, Big Lauren and Me

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For Sarah

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When I Grow Up by Billy Grimshaw

When I grow up I want to be a spy, like Zac Black, or my dad. Zac Black is a secret agent with superpowers and special gadgets and he's in four books, three films and a TV series and was my dad's favourite when he was my age.

My dad's already a spy. Except he doesn't have superpowers like x-ray vision, or a laser beam biro. But I know he's a spy because last time I saw him, which was on Boxing Day when he picked me and my brother Stan up to see Granny Grimshaw, he was

always on his mobile saying things like, 'The big cheese says just one more week and then it's all over,' which is exactly what Zac Black said in the episode when he caught his mortal enemy Dr Van Fleet trying to poison the water supply in New York with truth serum. Plus that's why Dad lives in London now, so he can be closer to MI5. I haven't been to London yet, but I know what it's like. I've seen it on TV. Everyone lives in loft apartments, which is where everything is in one room. Except for the toilet because that would be disgusting having to see someone poo while you're watching *Millionaire*, for instance. I'm going to go and stay there soon. Mum's checking a weekend with him when he's not too busy (i.e. at MI5 headquarters). Stan says he's not going because he'll miss *Doctor Who*, but he's mad because they have *Doctor Who* in London, and anyway Mum can record it. Mum says Dad moved to London because he got a job on a bigger newspaper than the *Broadley Echo*, but that's just his cover. All spies have a cover story. Like Zac Black pretends to go to work every day at Global Bank but instead of going up to

the third floor where the bank is, he goes down to the basement which is his headquarters, and uses his supersonic sonar radar and his x-ray vision to track down Dr Van Fleet and his minion Vespa Morris.

I'm already training to be a spy. I've got binoculars, and a *James Bond* box set and the *Zac Black Annual 1985*, which has the Top Ten Tips for Junior Spies. I don't have a mortal enemy yet, but I'm keeping my eyes peeled, which is Tip Number 5.

On the MI5 website it says you have to be at least eighteen to be an Intelligence Officer, a.k.a. a spy. But, when I'm good enough, Dad will just come and pick me up and I'll be his assistant, like Angelica Drew in *Zac Black*, except not a girl, and we'll live in the loft and have orange juice on a tap in the fridge and beds in the air. Maybe they'll make a TV series about us one day.

Saturday 31st May

Something BAD has happened. The kind that Nan says is spelt with a capital B.

Mum was all quiet on the way home from school yesterday. Miss Horridge, who's my teacher, went up to her in the playground at home time while me and Stan and his best friend Arthur Malik were on the wooden pirate ship, and Miss Horridge was showing Mum the essay. I knew it was my 'When I Grow Up' essay because I was at the top of the mast and I could see the swirly letters spelling Billy Grimshaw on the front that Big Lauren did with her gel pens. And I saw Mum nod and then put her hand over her forehead

like when she has a headache or Stan has wet the bed again, and when she came to get me and Stan her eyes were shiny and wet. And all I could think while we walked up Brunel Street was that I should have said I wanted to be a footballer, like Stephen Warren and Kyle Perry did. Or Leona Lewis, like Big Lauren next door. I told her she can't actually be Leona Lewis because she's not even a bit black, she's ginger, and also Leona Lewis is Leona Lewis, but Big Lauren said she can be anything she wants to be. She read it in a magazine.

When we got home, Mum told Stan to play outside on his scooter and made me sit at the table. And then she said the same stuff as before, that Dad isn't a spy he's a reporter. And that he's not coming to get me to take me to work in MI5 or anywhere else for that matter so I might as well forget about it.

But she's still 'in the dark' about his real job, so it's not her fault.

But that wasn't the capital B bit. We found out in *Doctor Who*. Mum actually turned it off to tell us. Even

her boyfriend Dave was a bit annoyed because he was watching too. It's his third favourite programme after *Battlestar Galactica* and *Stargate SG-1*. Anyway, everything was excellent up until then because the Doctor had just sealed the pilot inside his suit to stop the meat-eating Vashta Nerada devouring him alive, and Stan was scared and felt sick so I got to eat his half of a Milky Way Ice Cream. But then Mum came in and switched it off just as the creatures got inside and started eating him and said she had something to tell us both. Dave said, 'Now's not a good time, Jeanie.' And I thought he meant because of the Vashta Nerada, but Mum just said, 'It's never a good time, Dave.' And then I knew it wasn't about *Doctor Who* at all. Because Dave got out of the green chair and put his arm around Mum. And I got that funny feeling in my stomach and my legs when they get sort of electricity inside them, and I tried to concentrate on something else like Dr Singh said to do. So I concentrated on Dave's arm and stared at it really hard to make it move by the power of my mind (which is called telekinesis, I saw Derren Brown do it on telly).

But it didn't work. Instead the arm squeezed around Mum's waist and her face went a bit red and she said, 'We've got some very exciting news and – Stan put that remote down please' because Stan was trying to turn the telly back on to see if the pilot was eaten completely. 'The thing is, we're going to get MARRIED, isn't that amazing?'

And then everything went totally quiet. And the word MARRIED sort of shone madly and hung there in the air like it was an actual thing and you could touch it. And I could see it all red and hot and alive in front of me. And it was like all the excellentness had been sucked out of the room by that word MARRIED, like it was a Death Eater or a Vashta Nerada. And I didn't want to be in the room any more with a Death Eater so I just ran.

Mum didn't come upstairs straight away. I heard Dave say, 'Leave him, Jeanie. Let him calm down.' But I didn't calm down. I got out my logbook.

A logbook is kind of like a diary, but for more important things than dentist appointments or which

celebrities you fancy, which is what Big Lauren puts in hers. Tip Number 7 in the *Zac Black Annual* is *Don't trust anyone* and Tip Number 8 is *Put it on paper*, i.e. you should write down the things that happen all around you, even stuff that doesn't seem unusual at the time, because, according to Zac, villains *DO NOT go round twirling moustaches like in cartoons, they're all around us, disguised as ordinary people, doing ordinary jobs*. Like his mortal enemy Dr Van Fleet, who's a doctor. And Vespa Morris, who's a nurse. Like Dave. So I'm keeping a record of everything Dave does, just in case. Like the time he took Mum away for a night to Wales and didn't take me and Stan even though we begged him to because they were going to the beach. And like when he shouted at Stan for spilling Fruit Shoot on his mobile phone so that the keys stuck and he couldn't do any phoning for a day until his friend Dave Two, who's also a nurse but has a tattoo of Daffy Duck on his arm and comes from Bolton, lent him his old Nokia.

And like him saying, 'Leave him, Jeanie.'

After I'd written it down, I hid the logbook again

up the chimney bit in the fireplace in my bedroom. But I still felt weird, so I had to lie down on my bed and count my glo-stars on the ceiling, just to make sure there were still fifty of them. (There were fifty-three once but Stan climbed on the wardrobe and picked part of Orion off.) But, when I got to twenty-seven, I could hear the door opening, then I felt Mum sit down next to me on the blue duvet. But she didn't say anything, she waited for me to get to fifty, because otherwise I'd have to start again from one. Then she stroked my hair until the electricity feeling stopped, like Dr Singh told her to.

'It's going to be fine, Billy,' she said. 'You'll see. It'll be fun. Just a big party, like at Nan's birthday.' But Nan's was just for her seventy-fifth. Nan didn't say, 'I do' and wear a big white dress. She wore blue trousers and a cardigan. And Nan didn't have to go home with Dave until death do them part.

Mum said, 'Nothing will change.' But she's wrong. Everything will change. It already has. It was OK when Dave lived on Pilkington Street. Then we only saw him when he came to pick Mum up, and Nan

babysat for us and she let us eat Sugar Puffs for tea and stay up until the news at ten. But now he's here all the time, in Dad's green chair, and he eats all the Sugar Puffs and kisses Mum with tongues, which is gross, and she could catch glandular fever or MRSA off him. Big Lauren says she has seen an MRSA once, it was green and the size of a Rolo. But she also says she has met a vampire, which I know for a fact is a total lie. Anyway, the point is, he will never not be here now. Every time I come home from the park or from school, he'll be here. Just sitting in Dad's green chair. And if Dave's in the green chair, it means Dad can't come home.

So now I know who my mortal enemy is. It's Dave.