SPY ANOTHER DAY

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ANDERSEN PRESS • LONDON

First published in 2012 by
Andersen Press Limited
20 Vauxhall Bridge Road
London SW1V 2SA
www.andersenpress.co.uk

2 4 6 8 10 9 7 5 3 1

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data available.

ISBN 978 1 84939 417 8

Printed and bound in Great Britain by CPI Bookmarque,
Croydon CR0 4TD

CHAPTER ONE

Saturday Matinee

Kip McCall let himself out of the house and walked into the village to his dad's cinema, the Paramount Picture Palace. It was a scruffy, single-screen cinema, one of the last of its kind in an age when multiplexes ruled. It was also a very special cinema. Since the arrival of its new projectionist, the mysterious Mr Lazarus, it could do something more than just show you the films – it could actually put you into them.

It was three months since Kip's adventure in the horror film, *Night on Terror Island*, and he had to admit that since then life seemed rather flat. That had happened during the summer holidays when he was spending all his spare time working at the Paramount. But now it was grey, miserable November; he was back at school and Mum had recently put her foot down, saying that homework was more important than helping his dad to sell popcorn and choc ices. In Kip's house, Mum's word was law.

Of course, he still met Beth at the pictures every Friday night so they could watch whatever new release was on offer – and today being Saturday, he was free to help out with the kids' matinee that always started at two p.m. Things weren't that bad . . .

But, still, why did everything seem so dismal? The main problem was that ever since his terrifying ordeal on the island, where he had been menaced by flesh-eating Neanderthals, giant snakes and a sabre-toothed tiger, Kip had found himself thinking wistfully about the experience. And, with each new film that came to the Paramount, he couldn't help wondering what it would be like to go into that film – to experience it *for real*. He knew it was crazy. He had come so close to being trapped in a monster movie for ever, doomed to do the same stupid things over and over again for the rest of his days . . . and yet . . . hadn't his visit to the island been the most incredible experience of his life? Wasn't there a tiny part of him that longed to repeat the it?

Mr Lazarus wasn't exactly helping. Every time he saw Kip he had that look in his cunning grey eyes . . . that, 'Ooh, Kip, see what we're showing *this* week!' kind of look. And Kip knew that the ancient

projectionist was silently asking him if he would like to go to Baker Street to help Sherlock Holmes solve a crime . . . If he would like to step into the arena to fight alongside a Roman gladiator . . . If he fancied swinging on a rope with a horde of marauding pirates. Of course, he would have been a fool to go along with it because, when you went into a film, everything became real – real swords, real bullets, real monsters. He wasn't stupid enough to make that mistake a second time . . . was he?

The Paramount came into view, looking a little less shabby than it had in the summer. Now audience figures were up, Dad had decided to use some of the extra money to give the building a bit of a makeover. He'd had the exterior sand-blasted, and he'd hired builders to replace some of the missing tiles – he'd even invested in a new lettering system, replacing the ancient black characters which went across the front of the canopy with shiny new ones in midnight-blue. Dad was also talking about getting the seats and carpets inside the building steam cleaned, something that hadn't been done in living memory.

Kip noticed a familiar figure standing on the steps of the picture house looking up at the COMING SOON! poster. It was Beth and she seemed lost in

thought. Her short black hair was swept back from her face and her blue eyes were staring up at the poster entranced.

Beth was sort of Kip's girlfriend. Just before he'd left for Terror Island she had told him that she wasn't going to let 'her boyfriend' go on a dangerous mission alone. This had been news to Kip at the time; he hadn't realised that Beth thought of him as a boyfriend, but he'd taken it well. He liked her – the two of them were mates, had been for years – and, of course, they'd been hanging out with each other and going to the pictures together every Friday night for just about for ever – but since returning from the island nothing else had been said about the girlfriend–boyfriend thing. They had continued pretty much as before. Which Kip found kind of confusing. Weren't they supposed to be snogging by now? Only he couldn't bring himself to make a move like that in case Beth gave him a funny look and said, 'What do you think you're doing?' Which would be awful. So they were just kind of bumbling along as they always had.

As Kip came up to Beth, his gaze followed hers and came to rest on the poster for an upcoming film, *Spy Another Day*, the latest in the incredibly

successful Jason Corder series. This explained Beth's enchanted expression. She liked the Corder films, just as lots of other people did, but she particularly liked Daniel Crag, the latest in a long line of good-looking actors to play the role of Agent Triple Zero. In fact, if Kip remembered correctly, Beth had once told him that Crag was 'seriously fit.' Whatever that meant.

So, little wonder she was gazing up at the image of the actor with such a faraway look on her face. Crag was dressed in a black tuxedo and he was cradling a huge gun in one hand, while his other arm was round the waist of an impossibly slim woman in a flimsy dress. Kip could imagine just what Beth was thinking. *What would it be like to go into that film and help Corder with his latest mission? What would it be like to meet Daniel Crag in the flesh?* Well, best to nip that one in the bud, he decided. He cleared his throat, a little louder than was strictly necessary.

Beth jumped and turned to look at him. Her cheeks reddened a little as though she realised that Kip knew exactly what was on her mind. She waved a hand at the poster. 'That, er . . . should be good,' she managed.

He frowned. 'The reviews are saying this might be Crag's last Corder film. He's done three now and they usually have a change after that.'

Beth looked shocked at the news. 'No way! He's the best Corder since Shane Connelly,' she said, referring to the man who had originally played the role back in the 1960s, and whose films were now only seen on TV on Sunday afternoons. Connelly's Corder had been suave and sophisticated – Crag had a different approach to the role; he was rough, hard, almost as nasty as the villains he fought, but a lot of females seemed to approve and Beth was no exception. She returned her attention to the poster. 'Can you imagine what it would be like to be in *Spy Another Day*?' she sighed.

Kip gave her a cold look. 'Forget it, Beth. Too dangerous.'

'Doesn't *have* to be. We could talk to Mr Lazarus, ask him to put us into a safe scene.'

Kip laughed at that. 'There's no such thing!' he protested. 'Remember last time? He was just going to put us on the beach so we could grab Rose and head straight back to the cinema. But it didn't work out like that, did it?'

Rose was Kip's six-year-old sister. She had

accidentally ended up on Terror Island, and Kip and Beth had been obliged to go in to the film to rescue her. Kip still had nightmares about his sister stuck on a sinking ship or being pursued by flesh-eating cavemen. It had been touch and go right up till the end of the film, and they'd only made their escape seconds before the closing credits rolled.

'I'll admit it wasn't plain sailing,' said Beth. 'But we'd be better this time. We've learned from the mistakes we made . . .'

'No way,' said Kip bluntly. He walked past her up the steps to the entrance. 'We should get moving,' he told her. 'The kids will be arriving in fifteen minutes and they'll be wanting their popcorn.'

Beth trudged after him. 'You know as well as I do you loved being in that film. You've been thinking of nothing else since we got back,' she insisted. 'Don't tell me you haven't. I've seen it on your face.'

'I'm not talking about this now,' whispered Kip, his hand on the door. 'Dad will hear us.'

'All right then, when *will* we talk about it?' asked Beth.

'Later.' He opened the door and stepped into the cinema.

Chapter Two

Coke and Popcorn

Dad was sitting in the little office doing his paperwork and looking a lot happier than he had in a long while. He glanced up as Kip and Beth appeared in the doorway and gave them a grin.

'You two are cutting it a bit fine,' he said, glancing at his watch. He studied Beth for a moment. 'How's things?' he asked.

'OK.'

She sounded matter-of-fact, but Kip could tell she was still annoyed about his reluctance to go into *Spy Another Day*. That was the problem with Beth. She sulked about things.

Dad selected a sheet of paper from the desk and showed it to Kip. 'Got a quote in for the steam cleaning,' he said, and indicated a sum of money at the foot of the page.

Kip let out a long whistle. 'Jeez! I didn't realise you were going to buy an entire new cinema.'

'I'm not,' Dad assured him. 'Believe it or not,

that's what it costs. You've got to remember, Kip, this place hasn't had a proper clean since . . .'

'Nineteen twenty-three?' ventured Kip, referring to the year the cinema had opened for business.

'Well, probably more like the nineteen seventies,' said Dad. 'Minnie runs the hoover around once a week but that's just scraping the surface. There's more than thirty years of grime in here that needs shifting, so of course it's going to cost and arm and a leg. We'll need to get the seats reupholstered too. It'll be worth it, though. Imagine coming in here and settling into a seat that feels as good as new.' He sighed and slipped the quote back into place. 'We might just have to wait another month or two, that's all. If business continues like it has been we'll be able to afford it for Christmas.' He glanced at his watch again. 'It's ten to two,' he said. 'Time to—'

'Get the popcorn on,' said Kip. He went into the adjoining confectionery booth and switched on the popcorn machine. Then he opened a huge bag of corn kernels and upended it into the mouth of the machine. The Paramount was showing the latest Pixar animation today and there was sure to be a big crowd. Before Mr Lazarus came on the scene

Kip had often presided over matinees that boasted no more than fifteen kids and their parents, little more than break-even point for the cinema. But when the mysterious old man had taken the post as the Paramount's projectionist he had brought with him the Lazarus Enigma – a machine of his own invention that made the films look and feel more 'real'.

The audiences who watched the films here had no way of knowing just how real they could be... How the Enigma could be used to actually send people into the films themselves. Only Kip and Beth had enjoyed that privilege – and Rose too, though after a little hypnosis from Mr Lazarus, she remembered very little about the experience.

Beth ambled into the booth and stood for a moment, looking glumly into the drinks chiller. 'We need more Cokes in here,' she muttered.

'No worries.' Kip squatted and reached under the counter for a new tray of drinks. When he stood up again, the tray of Cokes in his arms, he nearly let out a yell. A dark figure was at the counter gazing in at him – a tall, thin man with a full-length leather coat, a wide-brimmed fedora hat and the palest grey eyes in history.