

Helen Lipscombl Chicken Mouse

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CAST

At Home

Milly Kydd

Eva Kydd, 'O'

Catherine Lilova, 'Bab'

Max Deverall

Leonora Deverall

The Bombardier

Boris

Student ballerina and spy

Milly's mother – prima ballerina and secret head of Swan House School of Ballet

Milly's Russian babushka

Ballet dancer and choreographer

Max's daughter

Milly's next-door neighbour

Milly's cat

At Swan House School of Ballet THE STUDENTS

Lottie Li : Milly's best friend

Benedict Spencer

Milly's friend

Merv Crump Head of IT and Milly's friend

Willow Perkins

Milly's nemesis

Amy Bee, 'Bumble' Willow's best friend

Tom Garrick

Injured year eight

Fleur Fontaine, Dipti Patel, Danny Debello

Other year eights

Jada Gayle

Head Girl

Dafydd Wynn-Jones Head Boy

William Flynn : A sixth-former

THE VIRTUAL MENTORS

The young Filipp Popov Milly's mentor

The young Nora Doone Lottie's mentor

The young Ivan Korolev : Spencer's mentor

THE STAFF

Ms Celia Sitwell | Director of Swan House School

of Ballet

The Captain Spy Craft teacher

Madame de La Cloche | Disgraced ex-Head of Ballet

Madge Little Shoe Keeper and doobrie

inventor

Emmeline Topping, 'Topsy' Housemistress

Cook Topsy's mother

Sid Virtual librarian

Nurse Sleeping draught specialist

At Meekes the Shoemaker's

Mr Stubbs, 'Heart Maker' Milly and Eva's shoemaker

Mrs Huntley-Palmer Shop manager

Other spies

Ivan Korolev Ex-Swan House student, founder of the Korolev Dance Academy

Kristina the Knife Korolev's star pupil

Trevor Topping Cook's husband and Topsy's father – Swan House agent.

Danaga d

Deceased.



'Twas the Night Before Christmas

hots ring out. Swords slice the air. One by one, dancers fall.

My skin tingles. It's like I'm right there.

Onstage.

The Nutcracker *jetés* and my feet flex. Clara *relevés* and my toes point. When they defeat the evil Mouse King, Mum and Bab cheer. I squeeze Mum's arm and her muscles tense. She's thin, but Mum's a ballerina. And ballerinas are stronger than they look.

'Milly, come closer.' Her whisper kisses my cheek. 'This reminds me of an important rule in *The Guide to Espionage* about never giving up – try, try, try again. I wouldn't be here today if I hadn't followed that rule.'

Darkness wraps her shoulders like a shawl and the battle onstage glints in her eyes. I remind myself Mum's not just a ballerina.

The lights go up for the interval. 'Vhat a vonderful evening. Isn't the Prince to *diiie* for?' Bab winds a feather boa around her neck. 'Christmas simply isn't Christmas vithout *The Nutcracker* and it's even more perfect now that ve're together again – that calls for champagne!'

'And ice cream?' I say, blinking myself back to earth.

'And ice cream, dahhling. You can have anything you vant – it's Christmas Eve!'

My babushka takes my hand, still tingly from clapping, and we wind from our box to the stairs.

People make way for Mum. She swishes past the black suits and silky dresses in a long white gown studded with jet-black beads. I'm wearing the new dress and silver high-tops Bab bought me last term, 'for the Christmas party at your new school'.

Turned out Swan House School of Ballet wasn't that kind of school. Spy schools don't do parties.

I find the ice-cream queue in the foyer, and listen to murmurs of 'Isn't that Eva Kydd?' follow Mum to the bar.

I smile to myself. After 364 days of being kidnapped, she's home. And not just for Christmas Day. For the whole of the Christmas holidays. That's two whole weeks of just Mum, Bab and m—

There's a tap on my shoulder.

'Millicent?'

I know that voice. My legs want to scarper, but not as much as the rest of me wants to see the Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy in Act Two.

I stick my smile back on and turn around. 'Oh, hi, Willow. Are you enjoying the show?'

Willow Perkins rolls her violet eyes. 'Did you see the duel between the Nutcracker and the Mouse King? Sooo lame. And Davina – that's my dad's fiancée – says Clara was *très gauche*. Honestly. Even you could do better.'

That's Willow trying to be nice. I try to be nice back. 'Ice cream?'

Her nose wrinkles. 'No, thank y— OMG! Don't look now, but Max Deverall's behind you.'

'The Max Deverall?' I peek over my shoulder, hoping to see the superstar dancer turned superstar choreographer. 'Where is he?'

'Too late, you missed him.' Willow's face is a picture of smugness, like one of those tiny dogs that gets to ride in their owner's handbags. 'Anyway, I'm glad they found your mother. The papers said she had amnesia.'

I practise my unreadable spy-face. 'Yes. She was looked after by a very nice family in Piccadilly or thereabouts. Bab says it happens all the time.'

I score myself a two out of ten on the fib-o-meter,

but Willow's not even listening – she's got her own news.

'Did I tell you Davina has her very own drama school in LA?'

'What flavour would you like?' says the ice-cream boy.

'Strawberry, please. Um, LA?'

Willow swishes her blonde ponytail. 'You know – Hollywood. She says it won't be long before my acting is as good as my dancing. She says I'm going to be a star.'

I'm not surprised. Acting and lying are almost the same thing, aren't they?

Willow lowers her voice. 'And given that I almost died last term, I've decided spying's not for me. So I don't suppose I'll see you again.'

I peel off the lid of my ice cream. 'I don't suppose you will.'

'You'll see me, of course, on the silver screen.'

I scoop out a pink creamy dollop and suck on the small, wooden spoon. How many miles are there between Hollywood and London? Must be thousands. Next to having Mum home, that's the best Christmas present ever.

Willow waves at a woman in a long black dress. 'Here's Davina. Divine, isn't she? Guess this is *adieu* then, Millicent.'

'Guess it is. Bon voyage, Willow.'

The woman kisses her cheek and I realize I'm happy for Willow Perkins. I really and truly am.



I take my seat in the box, snuggle into the dark and wait for the Sugar Plum Fairy.

Mum puts down her programme. 'I hope Bab comes before it starts. I'd forgotten how long it takes her to powder her nose.'

We clap for the conductor. The orchestra waits for his baton to twitch but there's a noise. Not the tinkle of a harp or the toot of a flute – a *whoosh*. A *whizz*. A *KER-RACK*.

Like bonfire night.

One of the cellists squeals. A squiggle of neon shoots through the air, hangs over the orchestra and bursts in a shower of stars. The lady playing the celeste swats a spark from her hair. There's a scream from the stalls below and my stomach squiggles too.

Mum jumps up.

'What is it, Mum? Is it part of the show?'

'I doubt it, sweetheart, and I don't think we should stay to find out. Hold my hand. We've got to find Bab.'

Mum's hand is cool and dry. Mine is hot and

sweaty. It's only been three days since I stopped Filipp Popov from blowing up Swan House. To be perfectly honest, I've had enough excitement for one week.

Another rocket explodes over our heads. Fiery sparks rain down. My heart gullumps.

People are clambering over their seats, charging down the aisles.

'Milly, this way!' coughs Mum.

Smoke creeps up my nose. We run out of the box and into a stampede of dark suits, silky dresses, pointy elbows.

Gull-ump. Gull-ump. Gull-ump.

Wrapped around her wrist like an almost invisible bangle is Mum's Swanphone. She holds it to her lips and whispers a command. The next thing I know her voice is booming over the screams and clacking heels. It's Mum on loudspeaker.

'PLEASE REMAIN CALM. MOVE SWIFTLY TO THE EXITS AND TAKE CARE ON THE STAIRS.'

We move against the crowd. I lose Mum's hand. A heel stabs my foot. We keep pressing forwards. Then down. And down.

Mum bursts into the Ladies. 'Mama, ty gde?'

I shout too, 'Bab, where are you?'

No reply, just a tinny recording of 'The Dance of

the Sugar Plum Fairy'. One by one, we crash into the cubicles.

'She might have gone outside,' says Mum. 'Let's go!'

I take one last peek in the loos and run after her.