

SPY, PIQ AND AUNTIE BUMBALL

“Now then Spy, put your little green cape on, there’s a good fly,” fussed Auntie Bumball. “There’s a nip in the air today. Brr, just been out myself to collect some honey for your supper so don’t be late!”

Spy nodded and wearily faked a smile. Even though he had a craving for sugar and honey suppers, he didn’t like it when Auntie Bumball tried to make him wear his little jacket. Although minuscule for his age, the spongy material and clumsy shape made him feel lumpy and babyish. At least she’d hadn’t mentioned his beret, a frightful tartan affair made of matted wool, patched together with tree sap that itched and irritated his skin. Piq was the only friend who never laughed at Spy’s costumes. Piq wasn’t sugar mad though. Piq just went crazy for the dark red stuff even though he demolished most of his honey suppers with Spy and Auntie Bumball before going home.

The two boys were off on an adventure. It was risky but Piq had always wanted to see how close they could get to The Diagonal where the dreaded Arach lived. Spy was less sure. He’d already seen what happened up there. It was cruel. The Diagonal was a dusty, dark enclave built into a ceiling recess of The Barn so high, it was impossible for humans to clean. If you got stuck, you didn’t come home for a honey supper and no-one would save you, no matter how hard you buzzed. Even the big boys got stuck sometimes.

All the same, a dart of adrenalin wouldn’t hurt and it was a lovely sunny day for an adventure so off they flew, Spy and Piq.

“It’s really quite simple, Spy,” remarked Piq matter-of-factly, gliding along on a thermal. “We just zip in and zip out! We won’t get caught! Only careless fliers get caught. Besides, I’m hungry. Come on!”

They were in luck. A shaft of warmish sunlight had lifted Spring spirits and opened windows, even though there was a chilly nip in the air. Auntie Bumball hadn't been wrong about that.

“There! Quick!” Piq dived in between one of the open living room windows. “Follow me. Remember to keep two metres apart or Mr and Mrs Twirl will suspect we're up to no good!”

Mr and Mrs Twirl were an old couple who lived at The Barn. If they had any idea about the heinous crimes silently performed by Arach in The Diagonal, they never showed it. Perhaps they just turned a blind eye or perhaps they were already rather deaf.

Spy flew into the coolness of The Barn, trying not to frizz his wings. Auntie Bumball often said he was the loudest insect she'd ever heard, even louder than her busiest bees and that he ought to watch it! Spy sighed. Sometimes it was impossible to fly any quieter.

When he flew outside the buzzing wasn't half so loud. His frantic beating was immersed within the sounds of travelling breezes but once inside, he cringed at how much noise he made, especially if the room was spookily quiet. Piq, on the other hand, possessed an on/off switch. He'd learnt the hard way, having lost a leg after a furious slapping from a very upset person who obviously had no idea how important mosquitoes were.

Today Mr and Mrs Twirl were sat on brown and pink armchairs gazing into an unlit fire. An ancient turntable crackled to play a worn disc. Spy wondered if they could hear anything at all the music was so quiet. A bundle of mustard-coloured knitting lay untouched on Mr Twirl's lap, the needles stuck into the wool at awkward angles. Towards the open plan kitchen, their grand daughter, Jemima, sat at one end of a long, wooden table, protectively hunched over a bowl of sweet-smelling apple pie. Two neat braids lay either side of her

shoulders revealing a neatly combed hairline and exposed neck and throat, the flesh as smooth and clear as a pool of glass.

Spy's antennae had already sniffed out Jemima's pudding. He could think of nothing more wonderful than a mouthful of those boggy fruits as he swooped around her crouched figure.

Meanwhile, Piq had quietly settled on the edge of a plastic photo frame. His stomach rumbled. Jemima's snowy-white neck beckoned. He had to distract himself. After all, they had come to tease Arach, not disrupt a five-year-old's pudding pleasure. He had to do something to distract himself.

"Pssst! Spy!" he hushed. "Find a ledge and shut up! You're being too noisy again!"

But Spy was lost in another world, a world of sugar and apples. The sweet smell rising up from Jemima's bowl was too much for his senses. His body began to tremble with a dangerous longing that he knew was forbidden and before he could stop himself he dived straight into a lump of hot apple, cape and all. It was a lightning strike!

Watching his partner in crime disappear without trace, Piq instantly flung himself across the room and planted himself on the child's neck, joyously sucking on a plump vein. As juicy as the red liquid tasted, it wasn't going to help his best friend. Spy the fly was victim to the swirl of her spoon, only grateful now that his sturdy green cape would provide some measure of invisibility. Round and round he went, the circles so fast and furious he was gasping for breath! There was not even any time to enjoy a lick of sugar! Suddenly the thought of being trapped by Arach was far more appealing than being eaten alive in a spoonful of apples!

At that precise moment, the exact second that Jemima lifted another tasty mouthful to her lips enriched with custard and pastry and apples and a tiny fly

wearing a little green cape, she shrieked as loudly as a fancy steam train hurtling through a tunnel.

“Help! Grandma! Popsie! I’m being attacked! Do something!”

Indeed, the young girl seemed to have gone quite crazy, striking a hand wildly around her neck whilst the other held its position, elbow crooked, the spoon laden with all the goodies waiting to be demolished.

Meanwhile, Piq was in heaven, happily dodging each feeble wallop of her hand. This was too easy! It only took seconds for his proboscis to take root in several different places until his appetite was sated. But there was always room for seconds! From their comfy chairs Mr and Mrs Twirl were slow to react. Mr Twirl had nodded off to sleep, steering a mush of fleshy folds as genteel as dainty potato sacks to bed, his veined tongue spilling out and over his bottom lip with glee. Mrs Twirl looked on disparagingly first at her husband and then over at Jemima, with a frown that told her hysterical grand-daughter she didn’t want to be disturbed as the recording hadn’t finished yet.

Confused by all the commotion below, Arach had raised a hirsute brow and reluctantly crawled over to the edge of The Diagonal. Eight eyes viewed a particularly ridiculous scene.

Jemima had taken it on herself to squirm around The Barn in a frenzied fit. Piq was having too much fun to let go. Enormous welts began to appear around his victim’s neck and shoulders. The poor girl’s howls could be heard for miles. Shocked out of a hamburger and fries dream, Mr Twirl awoke to his grand-daughter trampling his toes, begging him to kill the beast that was so ailing her. Mildly he fumbled to ease her distress and withdrew one of the knitting needles from the yellow skein, using vague stabbing motions that didn’t quite make their mark. Mrs Twirl refused to co-operate, folding instead her plump, posh arms over an impressive range of purple spandex, her mouth a single plop

of revolt at the disrespect both husband and child were showing her favourite composer.

Meanwhile Spy had spluttered to the surface. Thanks to his cape, he'd been able to use the stiff material as a type of fin device, seeing as his wings were decidedly sticky and almost useless. Viewing the pandemonium in the centre of room, he'd seized his chance. Why, this was an ideal opportunity to benefit from a free lunch so he began to gorge himself on the syrupy flavours, each nuzzled scoop a delight that far outweighed the torture of nearly being eaten alive. Piq was also in his element, growing fatter and fatter until finally he could fit no more juice into his expanding thorax. He burped, rather ungraciously and laid off a delirious Jemima. With a bolt of horror, he remembered his best friend was last seen, pitifully floundering in a dungeon of stewed apple!

“Psst! Spy! Where are you, mate?” Piq hovered over the bowl, guilt for abandoning his buddy not far away. Auntie Bumball would never forgive him. “You still in there? I can't see ya and I definitely can't hear ya!”

But whilst no-one was paying him any attention whatsoever, Arach had stolen down from his holy graveyard perch and had furtively scurried down the wall to Jemima's bowl, where he'd hooked out one gigantic furry tentacle, fished tiny Spy out of the pudding and gobbled him down whole. Seeing the mosquito approach, he'd hidden, his thick, black body, pulsating with power, then whoosh! Another fell swoop and an unsuspecting Piq was gone, down the gullet and into the tum.

Alas, alack, the tale of two intrepid fliers, and a worried Auntie Bumball who still waits in vain for her two little adopted cuddles to come home for a honey supper.

