

Silence.

Noiseless footsteps make their way through the park. A figure clad in black flickers between trees, benches, swing sets, never staying visible for long.

Finally she arrives. She looks left and right, then darts into the open for a split second—then melts into the shadows behind a trash can.

Yes, this is truly an elite spy. Skilled beyond any other. And she is on a mission. One that will surely put her skills to the test.

She touches her earpiece. “Sir, I’m in position!” she whispers.

I raced down the sidewalk, determined to beat them, the bag of food swinging behind me. I sprinted just a little further, then slapped my free hand down on the bench.

“HA!” I shouted, so loud that Olivia flinched. “Winner, MOI! BOW TO MY SUPERIOR SPEED!”

“Never!” Victoria yelled theatrically. “You had a *head start*, Amelia, you cheating—uh, cheater!”

“CHEATING CHEATER!” Olivia, Victoria’s little sister, agreed enthusiastically.

“Whatever.” I plopped the bag of food down on the bench and grabbed the food out of it, then crumpled up the bag. I walked over to the trash can and—

“Targets spotted!” someone said in a dramatically loud stage whisper.

There was a girl dressed in all black and a balaclava, crouched behind the trash can.

“Excuse me?!” Victoria said.

The girl touched her ear, like she had an earpiece. “Targets have absolutely *no idea* I’m here. Proceed with test.”

“Uh, you’re sitting on a spilled slushie,” I said, reaching towards her. “Let me help you up.”

She immediately slapped my hand away, then clumsily half-cartwheeled away and ducked behind the bench.

“We can all still see you!” Victoria said exasperatedly.

The girl ignored her, touching her ear again. “Targets attempted to make contact since I came out of hiding, but I ninja-rolled away. Record that in the notes, but make sure it sounds heroic!”

“Is she a *spy*?” Olivia said, sounding awed.

“It’s okay, Olivia, I think she’s just pretending,” I said, turning back to the girl. “Hey... uh, can you go... spy on someone else?”

We all kind of stared at the girl for a minute longer, while she pointedly did not respond, until Victoria broke the silence by announcing, “Well, I don’t know about anyone else, but I’m *starving*, so are we going to eat or not?!”

“Oh... right.” I sat down on the bench and unwrapped my burger. “Oh, yeah, I was meaning to tell you—we’re going to the beach on Saturday, and my mom asked your mom and she said you guys can come with us.”

“Me TOO?” Olivia asked eagerly.

“Yeah, your whole family,” I said.

“Oh!” Victoria exclaimed. “We could use those swimsuits we bought!”

“Yeah!” I agreed. “Oh my gosh, shopping yesterday was so fun—”

“Targets are now talking about shopping, and say they’ll possibly go to the beach on Saturday,” the girl whispered dramatically.

We all turned to stare at her.

She gasped. “Wait, what’s this? They appear to be looking at something... BEHIND me!”

She turned around, scanning the park for what we would be looking at.

Victoria lost her patience, which she never had much of in the first place. “Okay, can you STOP?!”

“They don’t want me to know what they’re looking at!” she said into her earpiece.

“Is she REALLY not a spy?” Olivia said, wide-eyed. “She SOUNDS like a spy.”

“I am *certain*,” I said irritably. “She’s just playing a game.”

“Are you sure?” Victoria said under her breath. “She sounds a little crazy.”

The girl had been watching us intently. “Hmm... targets are now talking about a senile grandmother, probably in her 90s...”

“NO!” Victoria snapped. “YOU! We were talking about YOU!”

The ‘spy’ ignored her, talking into her earpiece again. “No, I don’t think it’s time to take them out yet! We need to gather more information.”

“Can you go play somewhere else?” I said as nicely as possible, though really I was getting fed up with this girl; she couldn’t have been that much younger than I was, and nine-year-olds didn’t play spies.

Victoria lit up. “I know how to get rid of her!” she whispered, then went deadly serious. “So, Amelia, you know our secret base, the one hidden under the swing set, at exact latitude—uh, 97.34, longitude, um, 35.18? Yeah, well, I’ve been thinking, like,

what if someone figured out where it was? I mean, they'd have to be the *best spy ever*, but it could happen!"

I tried valiantly not to giggle. Now, with any luck, the girl would run off to the swing sets, and—

The girl gasped. "SIR! I think we now have enough information. Time to take them out!"

She leaped out from behind the bench, yelled, "Hi-yah!!!" while aiming a flying kick at me, missed by a mile, and fell to the ground. She quickly got back to her feet.

"Quick, guys!" I said, laughing, "get to the base!"

"Yeah, come on, quick!" Olivia said, bouncing up and down excitedly.

"No! You won't make it!" the girl exclaimed dramatically. "My team is already on their way here, and they're going to take... you... DOWN!!!!"

I collapsed onto the bench, roaring with laughter.

Then three secret agents in tuxedos and mirrored sunglasses dropped from a helicopter.

"Good work, Agent," the tuxedoed man says.

"Thanks," she replies, pulling off her balaclava to reveal the face of an eighteen-year-old female. "Works every time. Nobody would suspect that a kid playing spies would be serious."

"Helps that you're short," the man jokes.

"Guess so," the agent agrees. "But that's not even half of it."

*“That’s why you’re the best in the biz,” the man says.*

*They stand in silence for a few moments, watching the helicopter rise higher, then float away.*

*“Hey...” the man says as an afterthought, “what did those kids do, anyways?”*

*The agent shrugs. “Nothing in particular, but I babysit them, and they can be a little... y’know... annoying...”*