



# A SPRINKLING of DANGER

⚡ SARAH TODD TAYLOR ⚡

*nosy  
crow*



# For Richard



First published in the UK in 2023 by Nosy Crow Ltd  
Wheat Wharf, 27a Shad Thames,  
London, SE1 2XZ, UK

Nosy Crow Eireann Ltd  
44 Orchard Grove, Kenmare,  
Co Kerry, V93 FY22, Ireland

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ISBN: 978 1 83994 885 5

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Printed and bound in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, Elcograf S.p.A.  
Typeset by Tiger Media

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1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

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# CHAPTER ONE



Alice Éclair hurried across Pont d'Iéna, holding a cake box close to her chest and wishing that she had set out before it started to snow. Paris looked beautiful, cloaked in white, with flakes falling like icing sugar all around, but the box that contained her precious creation was getting decidedly soggy and she had to get to her destination before it caved in completely.

The remains of Christmas hung all around. The streets were packed with shoppers eager to take advantage of a bargain at the sales, and it was hard work dodging the crowds. Alice breathed a sigh of relief as she rounded the corner of the street that led to Claude's flat and hammered on his door.

"Finished already, Alice. Excellent work," said the older spy, waving her into the warm kitchen and putting an espresso pot on the stove.

Alice placed the box on the table and undid the grosgrain ribbon. She took a deep breath before removing the lid, hoping that the puckering she could see in the cardboard did not mean that what was inside was damaged.

"Oh, stop fussing, Alice," said Claude. He whisked the top off the box.

Inside sat a cake iced in shades of pink and peach, with wisps of gold leaf that shimmered in the light. On top was a vase made from spun sugar that looked like etched crystal. Bursting out of the vase was a bouquet of red and white camellias and red roses surrounding a single blue hyacinth.

Claude nodded admiringly. "Fantastic work, Alice," he said. He reached down to take a closer look at the flowers. "How do you get them so lifelike?"

"Maman made me take a painting course," said Alice. "I still think a white flower in the middle would have been better. That hyacinth looks out of place. I made some ivy too, if you think that would work..."

"Ivy? Absolutely not. Alice, did nobody ever teach you the language of flowers?"

He pointed to the flowers one at a time. "Red roses mean deep love. Red camellias, you are a flame in my heart. White camellias, you're adorable. And the blue hyacinth means constancy. Together they are perfect for the message I need. Ivy means friendship, which would be very sweet, but not quite what I'm aiming for."

Alice rolled her eyes. Grown-ups in love were

so boring. She had hoped that Claude would be immune.

“Now then,” continued Claude, not noticing Alice’s look of disdain. “How do I get into the centre?”

Alice reached into the box and took hold of the vase. She pulled on it gently and it lifted free from the cake, revealing a hollowed-out centre, lined with gold leaf.

“Perfect,” said Claude. He slipped a hand into his pocket and drew out a velvet box marked with the crest of one of Paris’s most exclusive jewellers. Placing it gently in the hollow of the cake, he replaced the vase of flowers and smiled at Alice.

“I don’t see that anyone could resist this,” he said.

“An engagement ring?” asked Alice.

“Maybe, maybe not,” he said, closing the lid of the box. “Now then, to business.”

Five minutes later, they were sitting at the table with Claude’s huge radio transmitter between them. Claude fiddled with the dials on top while Alice blew on the piping-hot coffee that he had placed in front of her, hoping that this time he’d remembered not to make it *quite* so strong.

After a few minutes there was a buzzing, and a voice Alice did not recognise came down the line.

"Henri!" Claude cried. "How are you?"

"Cold," said the voice. "We don't all get the cushy jobs in the city, you know. These mountains are bitter."

Claude laughed. "I was never a mountaineer, Henri. You know that. Any news?"

"Not much," said Henri. "I thought I saw a hare the other day. A rare grey one. But it was nothing. The snowdrifts are building fast. Soon it will be difficult to get through."

Alice raised an eyebrow. She had expected important information about France's security. Why was the agent talking about wildlife? Claude hastily scribbled down *hare – enemy agent, snowdrift – our radio connections* on a piece of paper. Alice nodded. Of course, they needed a code. The agent had not spotted any of the enemy, but the radio network was being built so they would certainly catch one soon.

"Don't forget to check for burrows," Claude said. "Those hares can hide in the smallest of places."

*Burrows must mean enemy hideouts,* thought Alice.

"Understood," said Henri. "Now, listen, Claude... What? NO!"

There was a crash at the end of the connection as Henri was cut off. Claude leapt from the table as the sound of an explosion burst from the set. "Henri? Henri – are you all right?"

The radio set buzzed. Alice felt her hands go clammy. She knew that the agents working in the mountains were taking great risks, looking out for enemy agents who might infiltrate France. Had Henri been discovered and attacked?

"Henri!"

There was a crackle and then another voice came down the line.

"He's a little busy, I'm afraid, Claude. But you can always talk to me instead."

Alice's blood ran cold. She recognised this voice, but the last time she had heard it, its owner had been falling from a steam train after betraying her and his country.

It was Uncle Robert.





“What are we going to do?” asked Alice for about the fiftieth time.

Claude paced the kitchen. “About Henri? Nothing,” he said. “The other agents in the area know that his location has been betrayed. They will do what they can, but they might be putting themselves in even greater danger.” He looked out of the window and muttered to himself. “Well, this is more proof – I *knew* he would be involved somehow.”

“Uncle Robert?” asked Alice.

Claude stopped pacing. “No, not your uncle.” He wrenched open a drawer in the kitchen dresser and reached to the back. Alice heard a click, and a panel on the side of the dresser popped open. A secret compartment. Claude drew out a roll of papers and tossed them across the table.

“How much do you know about what’s happening at Versailles?” he asked.

“The film set?” Alice asked. All of Paris had been agog for weeks at the news that a production company from America was moving into the Palace of Versailles to shoot a film about the life of the last queen of France, Marie Antoinette.

Claude flicked through the papers and smoothed out a newspaper cutting. A man in an evening suit smiled out of a report on a glitzy film premiere. "This is the director. Glen Carmine. He's American. They started the film with a French director but he was hit by a car a few weeks ago. It was a hit-and-run, and Mr Carmine was all too eager to step into his shoes. In fact, he was on the phone to offer his services even before it was public knowledge."

"And you don't trust him?" Alice said.

"More than that!" spat Claude. "The man is a traitor, I'm sure of it. In the war he fought on our side, but he took too much interest in the movements of troop divisions he had no connection to, always asking questions about their whereabouts. There was talk that he was a spy for Kaiser Wilhelm."

"But you said he's American?"

"You, more than most, Alice, should know that the enemy will recruit from all nations. After all, isn't your uncle French?"

Alice winced. She had idolised Uncle Robert once. He was the person who had first taught her how to spy and she had trusted him almost as much as she did her own mother, only to have him betray

both her and France by turning out to be in the pay of the enemy all along.

“Why didn’t you arrest Carmine in the war then?” she asked, eager to change the subject.

“Oh, it’s never that easy, is it? I couldn’t get enough evidence to make a charge stick, so no one believed me. But I felt it, instinctively. And now he is back in the country, I’ve been waiting for a sign that he might be up to something. I don’t think the betrayal of Henri is a coincidence. You see, Carmine knows those mountains. He became a film director because of his first hobby – nature photography. There are few people who know more about the French mountains than he does, and he’s a skilled mapmaker. I *knew* he wasn’t here just to make a film.”

Alice was not so sure. Henri could have been betrayed by any number of people. But then, she had never seen Claude so animated. She decided to trust him.

“What do you want me to do?” she asked.

“There is one way to check that he is really only there to make a film, Alice. We need to spy on him – find a way on to that film set,” he said. “I have

all phone calls from the palace monitored. I have intercepted all post from there and from the lodging houses of the cast and crew. I have agents in the area ready to follow him at all times, but I haven't uncovered *anything*. I need someone on set to be my eyes and ears. I would go myself, but I'm too busy. We desperately need more spies. And that brings me to another thing, Alice. How would you like to help me train some new recruits?"



## CHAPTER TWO



Alice stepped out of the Eiffel Tower lift and heard the metal doors clang behind her. It was even colder than it had been on the ground, and Alice watched her breath turn white in the freezing air. She drew the collar of her coat a little more closely around her neck, glad that she had wrapped herself in one of Madame Éclair's warm scarves before setting out. The observation deck was busy with tourists, waiting in line to pay a few centimes to use the viewing scopes that offered a glimpse into the life of the city far below, or standing at the edge of the platforms to take in the vast view of a frost-covered Paris through the gold wire cage that surrounded them. Alice turned to Pierre, the new spy that Claude wanted her to teach her skills to, but he ignored her.

"Claude said the film crew would be here," he muttered. "Come on, let's try to find them."

"Try not to rush into anything," said Alice. "Just observe and then follow my lead."

Pierre huffed. "You'll find I don't need a nanny, Éclair. There's some sort of fuss going on over there." And he strode off towards a crowd that was gathering around a woman in a red velvet cloak with a fur-trimmed hood.

"I want us to shoot part of the film right here," the woman was declaring. "Think of how romantic it would be."

"But not historical, Mam'selle Belle. The tower was not here when the queen was alive, of course..."

But the woman was not listening. She was posing for photos for the excited crowd.

"That's Catrine Belle," Alice heard a woman say to her companion. "Isn't she elegant? I saw her last film six times."

Her companion scoffed and flicked a snowflake off her cuff. "Catrine! I heard that she's called Jennifer Bell and she comes from somewhere called Chicago. Film companies will make up anything to get us to think their stars are something special. I never believe any of it. Her last two films were *flops*."

Alice caught up with Pierre, finding that she felt strangely nervous. When Claude had outlined the plans for the day, she had been excited at the thought of a double mission – testing out the new recruit and finding a way on to the film set for herself, but now that the plan was in motion she was worried. If things went badly it would reflect on

Claude and on her. She wondered if this was how the older spy had felt the first time he had been told she would be his partner. "*The baked Alaska was not created by a nervous cook,*" said her mother's voice at the back of her head, reminding her of the time she had been scared to try the dessert that was ice cream baked inside a sponge cake. The memory made Alice smile, and by the time they reached the group where Catrine Belle was holding court she was feeling calm. It was a perfectly simple plan. Alice was to present Catrine Belle with an exquisite gift from *Vive Comme L'Éclair*, her mother's bakery. Pierre was to study the people around her and recall as much as he could for reporting back to Claude. Any tiny detail could be important.

Alice waited till there was a pause in the barrage of questions from the crowd, then she leapt forward and drew a small box from her pocket.

"Mam'selle Belle," she cried. "*Vive Comme L'Éclair* welcomes you to Paris with a gift that I hope will celebrate your next great role." She clicked open the box to reveal a macaron, perfectly piped with the image of Catrine Belle herself picked out in gold leaf. A tiny balloon made of rice paper



was attached to it and a wisp of spun sugar was suspended above the macaron. Catrine Belle let out a gasp and reached for the tiny morsel, but Alice waved her hand aside. She produced a packet of matches and, lighting one, touched the tiny wisp of sugar. It burst into flames and the balloon lifted into the air. Alice gave the tiniest of puffs and the balloon carried the macaron over to Catrine, where, burning itself out, it suddenly disappeared in one gust of flame and the macaron dropped into Catrine's waiting palm, to a burst of applause from the crowd.

Catrine stared at Alice, her gorgeous eyes wide. "Can I eat it?" she asked.

"Of course, Mam'selle. The finest that *Vive Comme L'Éclair* has to offer, I assure you."

Catrine lifted the macaron to her mouth and gave an exclamation of delight. "Oh, it is perfect!" she cried. "It just crumbles away to nothing! Did you say your bakery was called *Vive Comme* something? I'm going to get Glen to make you bring a box to set every day just for me. He won't say no."

Alice smiled. She began to reach into her pocket to take out one of her mother's cards when Pierre

suddenly pushed himself forward.

“Such an honour, Mam’selle Belle,” he gushed, elbowing Alice out of the way. “We would, of course, be glad to supply you with as many macarons as you wish. My friend is naturally too shy to ask, but we would love a photo with you, if you would be so kind.”

Alice glared at him. What on earth was he up to?

Catrine murmured that of course she would be happy to pose for a photograph, and Alice found herself dragged to stand by the actress.

“Oh, but heavens, just look at your hair, Alice!” Pierre cried, rather too dramatically. “We must fix it at once.”

Alice stared open-mouthed as Pierre whisked combs and pins from his jacket pocket. His hands moved quickly, and in a minute Alice’s hair was piled up on her head. She stared at herself in the glassy reflection of a window opposite. It was a style quite unsuitable for mid-afternoon.

“Pierre, I don’t—” Alice began, but she was cut off by Catrine Belle.

“Glen! Come here and just *look* at what this young man has achieved! I *told* you I needed a

Parisian hairdresser instead of that sheep-shearer you brought over from Chicago! I *demand* that you hire him at once!”

Alice’s jaw dropped open. Hired? Had Pierre just got himself invited on to the film set? How had he known that Catrine Belle was unhappy with her hairdresser? She tried to interject, but Catrine was busy giving Pierre all the details for where he should arrive at the palace. Alice and her cakes were forgotten.



It was an uncomfortable ride down to the ground. Alice glared at Pierre, who smiled back at her smugly. She longed to say something, but they were surrounded by tourists and she could not give away that they were spies.

Dot. Dot.

Dot. Dash. Dot.

Alice started. Someone was tapping out Morse code. She glanced at Pierre’s hands. Yes. He was tapping on the metal cage of the lift with his signet ring. Alice began to quickly translate in her head.

“I read the celebrity papers,” Pierre tapped. Of course! That was how he had inside knowledge on

Catrine not being happy with her hair. If only Alice had thought of that, but she wasn't interested in the gossip sheets. "Trivial nonsense," her mother had once called them. It had not occurred to Alice that they would ever be of use.

"This wasn't your mission!" she tapped back.

"I don't need training by someone with a traitor in the family."

Alice felt her face colour up. How had Pierre learned about her Uncle Robert? She wanted to tap out a cutting retort but, before she could think of something, the lift reached the next level of the tower and the door was wrenched open by a furious Claude.

"You two, follow me!" he snapped.



"Did you *want* the entire city to know what you are up to?" he hissed once they had reached the ground. "Have you any idea how well sound travels down these girders? Your conversation has been ringing through the whole tower. *Anyone* could have picked it up. I would have expected better of you, Alice."

Alice blushed. She hated looking bad in front of

Claude. After their successful mission saving a young engineer from being kidnapped by the enemy, she thought that she was gaining his respect, so it was humiliating to see him looking so angry at her very foolish mistake. She should have realised that the metal might carry their code down the tower.

Claude motioned for the two of them to follow him and they began to walk towards the park that led away from the tower.

“So how did it go?” he asked eventually.

“She wants me to take her macarons every day,” said Alice glumly.

“So it was a success? Excellent. And how did Pierre do?”

Alice was about to say that Pierre nearly ruined everything by being pushy, but to her irritation the young man answered before she could. “I managed to get an invitation too. You see, I have studied Catrine Belle, and in her interviews she is always talking about how she can never find a good hairdresser when she travels. Well, that just happens to be one of the many things I’m good at. I start on the set tomorrow.”

Claude looked delighted. “Excellent work,” he

said. "What a good idea to check her interviews. Alice, that's the sort of thinking I would expect from you."

Pierre shot Alice a nasty look. Alice could have kicked herself. Why didn't she think to look at the gossip sheets? She should have been looking everywhere for information on the film crew. She would just have to work twice as hard to impress Claude once she got on set.

"I was thinking..." she began, but Claude was already three steps ahead of her, chatting to Pierre about what to expect in his first mission. The two of them strode on towards the park exit, leaving Alice behind.