



CHAPTER 1

AGATHA

My name is Agatha Topps, I'm nine years old and – prepare to be impressed – I'm a detective AND a spy!

Yup, a detective-spy, or a spy-detective if you prefer.

If you think that nine is too young to be a detective AND a spy, I'm here to tell you that you're wrong. Big time. Last year, I had a one hundred per cent success rate.

First, I solved the case of the Little Strangehaven School Scoffer. I told Mrs Applebottom that Ralph had eaten Thomas's Yorkie and, after she'd stopped freaking out and realized I meant a chocolate bar and not a small dog, Ralph had to miss out on his playtime.

I also solved the case of Mrs Applebottom's missing glasses (on her head), Dipa's missing pencil (behind her ear) and Sami's missing trainers (on his feet). What can I say? Clients aren't always the sharpest.

But this year my spy-detectivizing finally got properly tested because things got whole-other-level weird.

The first day I realized something was going on was the fourth day after I'd started in Year Four, the fourth day after Mum had had the twins, Nigel and Trevor, the fourth night I'd had pretty much no sleep, and the fourth morning I'd had to sort out my own breakfast as well as my other brothers' and sisters'.

I had been on duty with Bethany in the school chicken coop. It was our turn to give the hens their feed, but Margaret Hatcher and Mary Poopins had done a runner and it had taken a while to catch them, which meant I was a little flustered when I got back to class.

Our teacher, Miss Happ, was busy talking about how the money from our school fundraisers was going to be spent on a new automated library system. Everyone was a bit annoyed that the school council's request for a bouncy castle in the playground had been ignored and the money was going to some company called Minerva instead.

I was just settling into my seat when, all of a sudden, I felt a **SHIVER** ripple through the air.

I thought maybe I was imagining it. Maybe I was stressed because of the chickens, or maybe it was lack of sleep because my new baby brothers kept waking me up at night. Maybe it was just that everything was starting to get a little too much.

But no.

Every hair on my body felt like it was crackling with electricity.

'Did you feel that?' I said to Ernie, one of the boys on my table.

Ernie put down the Pritt Stick he was licking.

'Did I feel what?'

‘That weird **SHIVER** in the air?’

Ernie shrugged and said, ‘Nope,’ then continued licking his glue.

The other boy on my table, Jordan Wiener (son of the school cleaner), stabbed his rubber with his pencil and said, ‘You’re what’s weird, Agatha Topps.’

That was rude, but I ignored him because I understand that not everyone has the sort of highly tuned senses I have been blessed with.

While Miss Happ droned on about how much fun we were going to have studying the Romans this year, I scanned the room for the source of the strange **SHIVER**. Maybe a door or window was open and there was a draught?

It was an excellent thought, but a wrong one – there was nothing to explain where the **SHIVER** had come from.

I was still puzzling away when the music started. Music like I’d heard on that TV show where the contestants learn to dance and wear spangly costumes and a lot of orange make-up.

I scanned the room again, but I couldn’t work out where the sound was coming from either. It almost felt like it was playing in my own head.

I stuck my finger into my left ear and waggled it about a bit to see if that would get rid of the music.

Nope. Still playing.

I found I couldn’t stop myself from swaying along. In fact, I had an urge, a strong urge – an almost *overpowering* urge – to dance. This was **VERY PECULIAR** as I’m not much of a dancer.

My spy-detective senses were crackling. Something **STRANGE** was going down. I was a gazillion per cent sure about that.

I completed another scan of the room and noticed the whole class was swaying in time to the music. Even Ernie’s tongue was lapping away in time to the beat.

I nudged him. ‘What is that music?’

He didn’t answer. Instead, he put his Pritt Stick down, pushed back his chair, strode over to Jordan and said, ‘May I have this dance?’

I expected Jordan to bop him on the nose, but he didn't. He took hold of Ernie's hand, dipped a little curtsy and off they went, spinning round the classroom.

I could NOT believe my own eyeballs. I was mesmerized. I didn't want to stop watching, but, before I knew what I was doing, I had leaped to my feet and was striding over to Rahul, who was wiggling about in his chair.

No, Agatha, I screamed inside my head. What are you doing?!

Must dance!

DON'T DO IT!

Have to boxstep!

RESIST!!!

Left foot, right foot, slide and close!

RESISSSTTTT!!!!

Then I heard my voice say, 'Hey, Rahul, fancy a foxtrot?'

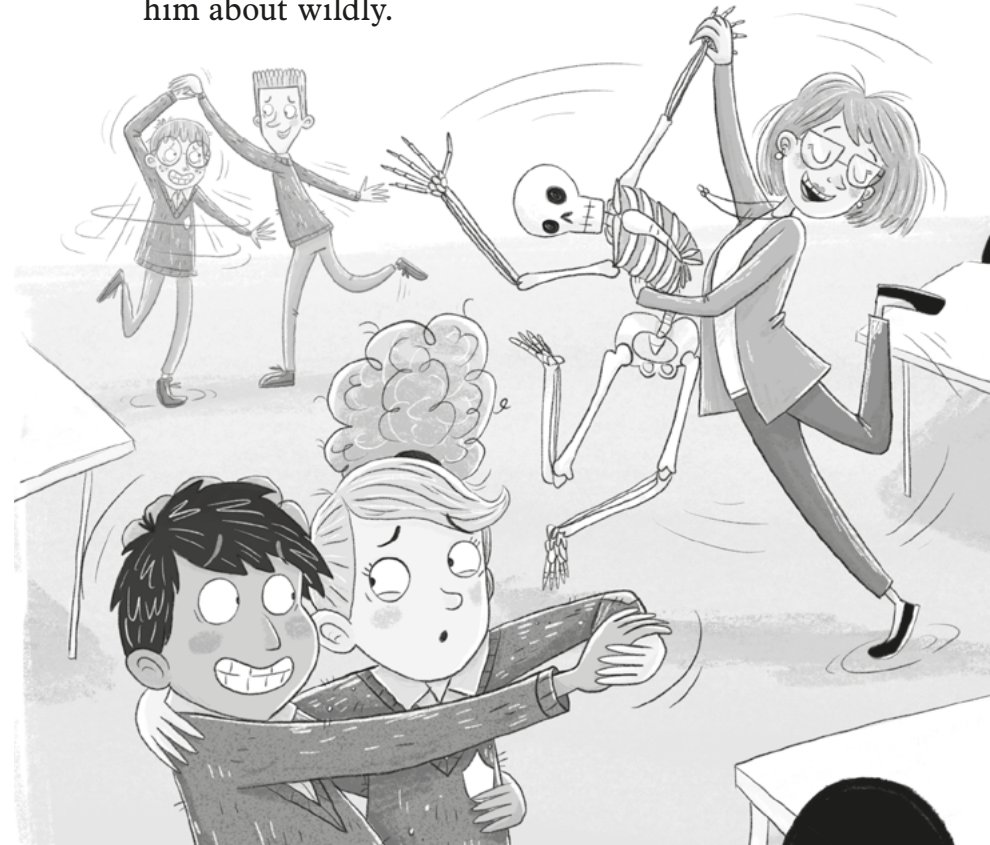
I shook my head at him so he would know I didn't *really* want to.

He looked back at me with big, terrified eyes that said, *I want my mummy!*

But what he actually came out with was, 'I'd love to, Agatha. I thought you'd never ask.'

And then we were off, spinning and turning round the room.

Everybody was. Fifteen pairs of reluctant waltzers, plus Miss Happ, who had grabbed the teaching skeleton, Skeleton Bob, and was flinging him about wildly.



No matter how much I silently yelled at my hands to let go of Rahul, I couldn't stop. Something in me needed to dance.

I thought, *This is it. The end. I'll dance myself to death doing the promenade pivot step with Rahul. Hang on – how do I even know what the promenade pivot step is?!*

Then, just as suddenly as the first **SHIVER** had come, a second one rippled through the room.

Immediately, everyone stopped in their tracks and looked at their partner with utter disbelief.

Ernie tried to remove his hand from Jordan's. I think it must have been a little sticky from the glue because it took him a couple of tries to pull free.

Miss Happ threw poor Skeleton Bob callously to one side and looked round the class, her expression changing from confused to a bit annoyed.

'Everyone, sit down now, now!' she barked and everyone sat down on the floor. 'Not on the carpet!

In your seats!'

So we all got up again and sat down in our seats.

I have to admit, I was baffled. I leaned across the table to Ernie and Jordan and said, 'What was *that* all about?'

They looked at me with puzzled expressions.

'What do you mean?' Ernie said.

'What do *you* mean, "*What do you mean?*"?' The dancing obviously!'

'What dancing?' Ernie said.

'Everyone was just dancing! You and Jordan were partners.'

'Shut your face!' Jordan hissed at me. 'We weren't dancing!'

'You were! You were quite good actually.'

'We were?!' Ernie sounded a little pleased.

'Shut up, Ernie!' Jordan hissed again. 'There wasn't any dancing! What are you talking about?'

'Didn't you feel the **SHIVER?**'

They looked at me blankly.

‘Then we all got up and danced? Then the **SHIVER** came again?’

‘Why are you saying shiver in that spooky voice?’ Ernie asked, scraping glue out of his teeth.

Jordan scrunched up his already scrunchy-looking face. ‘Yeah, you’re the weirdest, Agatha. What are you even talking about?’

I looked round the classroom. Everyone was acting completely normally! Rahul was doodling in his exercise book; Bethany was twirling her hair and staring out of the window; Ralph was picking his nose. Nobody looked at all like they had any memory of our ballroom boogie!

And that’s when I realized: I was the only person who could remember the Strangeness that had happened.

That is, until the new kid turned up.

