

The Secret Agentinas and

THE PERFECT GIFT



Lauren Teague

Lulu 5 1/2 · Felicity, 7 · Gwyneth, 9 · Paige, 11

Chapter One

The Secret Santa Surprise



The four Nelson sisters always enjoyed time in their town square, but this particular visit was one they looked forward to all year.

“I can smell cinnamon!” Paige breathed in.

“I can hear the sleigh bells!” Gwyneth squealed.

“I can almost taste the gingerbread,” Felicity smiled.

“I can see my breath!” Lulu puffed.

They turned one last corner and there was the long awaited Festivities on the Square in all its glory. The twinkling lights, the stalls filled with food and crafts, the people greeting each other. It was one of the Nelsons' most favorite Christmas events.

As the girls went on ahead of their parents, Paige noticed a friend and her mom from ballet class. “Hi, Grace! Hi, Mrs. Carter! Merry Christmas!”

“The Nelson girls! How are you? Weren't you excited about who you got for Secret Santa?” Mrs. Carter asked with a wink. She leaned over and whispered, “I only know because I helped organize it. I can't wait to hear—oh, excuse us, there's my brother's family arriving. Merry Christmas!”

The sisters waved them off and looked at each other.

“Who’d we get for Secret Santa?” Felicity asked.

“There was a Secret Santa?” Gwyneth asked.

Paige spotted their parents catching up. “Mom, Mrs. Carter said something about a Secret Santa?”

“A Secret Santa? For ballet?” She pulled her phone out of her bag and unlocked the screen.

“Can we get hot chocolate?” Lulu asked as their mom tapped.

“Oooh, and maybe a gingerbread cookie?” Felicity asked.

Their mom stared at her screen. “Oh, no.”

“No hot chocolate?” Lulu whimpered.

“Not that— I meant oh, no, I found the email about Secret Santa,” their mom said flatly. “It got sent to my spam three weeks ago. I had no idea.”

“Oooh, who’d we get? Mrs. Carter said it was someone good!” Felicity said.

“Well...” their mom hesitated. “We got Miss Leah.”

The sisters cheered.

“We got Miss Leah! She’s the best!” Lulu spun around on her toes.

“She puts her heart and soul into teaching us dance!” Gwyneth added while bouncing in place.

“We have to get her the BEST gift ever!” Felicity grinned.



Paige immediately began trying to think of gift ideas. "Anything pink, anything Christmassy, she loves decorations..."

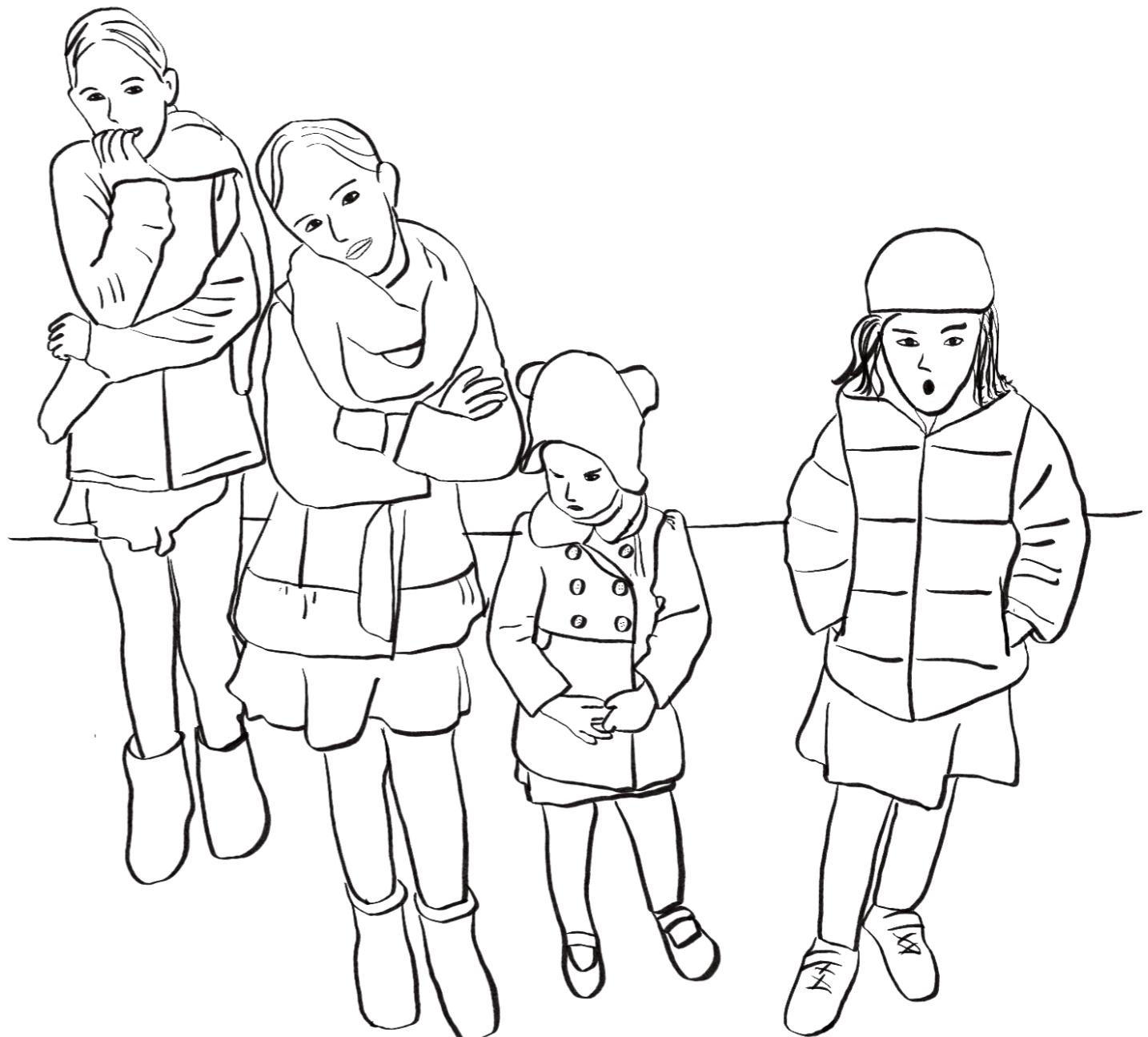
Their mom took a deep breath. "The only thing is, it looks like we missed it. Today was the last day of ballet before Christmas Break, right? And Miss Leah told me when I picked you up that she's leaving tomorrow to visit family out of town, so..."

The girls' faces fell.

"But, Mom! It's Miss Leah! She's the best!" Lulu wailed.

"She puts her heart and soul into teaching us dance!" Gwyneth looked like she wanted to cry.

"We have to get her the **BEST** gift ever!" Felicity was horrified.



“Mom, we can’t not get Miss Leah a gift! We’re her Secret Santa!” Paige moaned. Then she remembered. “Wait! It might be okay. Miss Leah is coming here tonight! We’ll get her something here!”

“Here?” Her sisters looked around at the rows of stalls and lights and vendors.

“They do have lots of great things here. I’m sure you girls can find the perfect gift,” their dad said. “It can be a special Secret Agentlinas Christmas mission! Right?”

The girls tilted their heads to consider. They’d never had a Christmas mission before. It sounded cheery.

“He’s right,” Paige said. “We can do this. We’ll work together and we’ll find the best gift for Miss Leah right here.”

Gwyneth, Felicity and Lulu nodded in determination.

Paige turned to her parents. “We’ll go look for a gift. If you see Miss Leah, make sure she doesn’t leave until we’re back, okay? But also try not to let her see us shopping for her.”

Gwyneth smiled. “You can be part of the mission! Honorary Agentlinas!”

The Honorary Agentlinas accepted their new roles, promised to do their absolute best, and left to keep an eye out for one special dance teacher.

Chapter Two

Loops of Lights

The Secret Agentlinas wasted no time and began walking towards the first stall. A man was standing behind a table, fiddling with a mound of light strands.

“It’s Mr. Stewart! Hi, Mr. Stewart!” Gwyneth called.

“Hello! Merry Christmas! Have any need for some Christmas lights that run on battery packs? They’re great for outdoor displays, last for weeks, and come with remotes!” Mr. Stewart held up one end of a strand. “I can show you how long they are, just give me a second to get one loose here. These got tangled on the drive over.”

Gwyneth watched Mr. Stewart struggle with the lights. “Mr. Stewart, try pulling that loop out a little,” she suggested.

“Which loop? This one?” Mr. Stewart tried tugging on a strand. “Okay, then.”

“No, sorry, I meant that one,” Gwyneth pointed.

Mr. Stewart looked at the clump helplessly.

“Actually, Mr. Stewart, would you like us to help?” Paige offered.

“Oh, that’s okay girls, you don’t have to,” he tried widening a loop but ended up with two smaller, crisscrossing loops. “Well, if you’re up for it...”

Paige picked up the mess of lights. All the Agentlinas immediately went to work, pulling loops out, slipping through them, twisting and turning to free the strands from the tangle, holding lights above their heads to give each other room. Before Mr. Stewart’s eyes, the tangle of lights transformed into clean, simple lines.



“That’s better!” Felicity approved.

“Well, ladies! That was like watching a dance! I don’t know how you did that, but thank you!” Mr. Stewart smiled as he helped them wind the strands and place them on the display tables.

“We have a lot of practice untangling hairnets,” Gwyneth explained. “Especially when bobby pins get stuck in them, you know?”

“No, not really, but it sure sounds complicated. Can I interest you in one of these light strands? It would be my gift for your help,” he offered.

“Thanks so much for offering, Mr. Stewart! We just started looking for something for our ballet teacher but we might come back later,” Paige said.

“Sure, sure, I’ll be here! And thanks again!” Mr. Stewart turned to help a customer who was admiring the tidy, arranged strands of Christmas lights.

The girls checked the time. “Yikes, time is going quickly,” Paige realized.

“Maybe we should split up so we can cover more ground?” Gwyneth suggested.

“Sounds like a plan. You take Lulu and head to the right. Felicity and I will take the left,” Paige handed half the money to Gwyneth.

“Take this for now. The gazebo can be our rendezvous point. If you find a gift, need more money, or you have a message, send an Agentlina there.”

“Got it,” Gwyneth agreed as she pocketed the money.
“Come on, Lulu.”

Gwyneth started walking and held out her hand. Lulu didn’t take it. Gwyneth looked over to see Lulu’s big eyes staring directly into Gwyneth’s face.

“Oh, no.” Gwyneth knew that look. Lulu wanted something.



“Can I have the money, Gwyneth? Please?” She held her hands up near her chin as she pleaded.

“Oooh, Lulu, it’s just that this money is for Miss Leah’s gift. We’re not here to buy anything for us, remember?”

Lulu held her clasped hands up even higher. “I know! I just want to be in charge of it. I’ll take really, really good care of it. Please, Gwyneth, please?”

Gwyneth tried not to look at Lulu’s desperate face. It was very hard to ignore. She handed the money over with a sigh. “Oh, okay. But remember—”

“It’s for Miss Leah! I’ll remember!” Lulu clutched the money in her hand. “Yay,” she whispered to herself.

Gwyneth smiled and reached out for Lulu’s other hand. “Let’s find a great gift for Miss Leah, okay?”

On the other side of the Square, Felicity saw a lovely fabric caught in the wintry breeze.

Chapter Three

The Flying Skirts

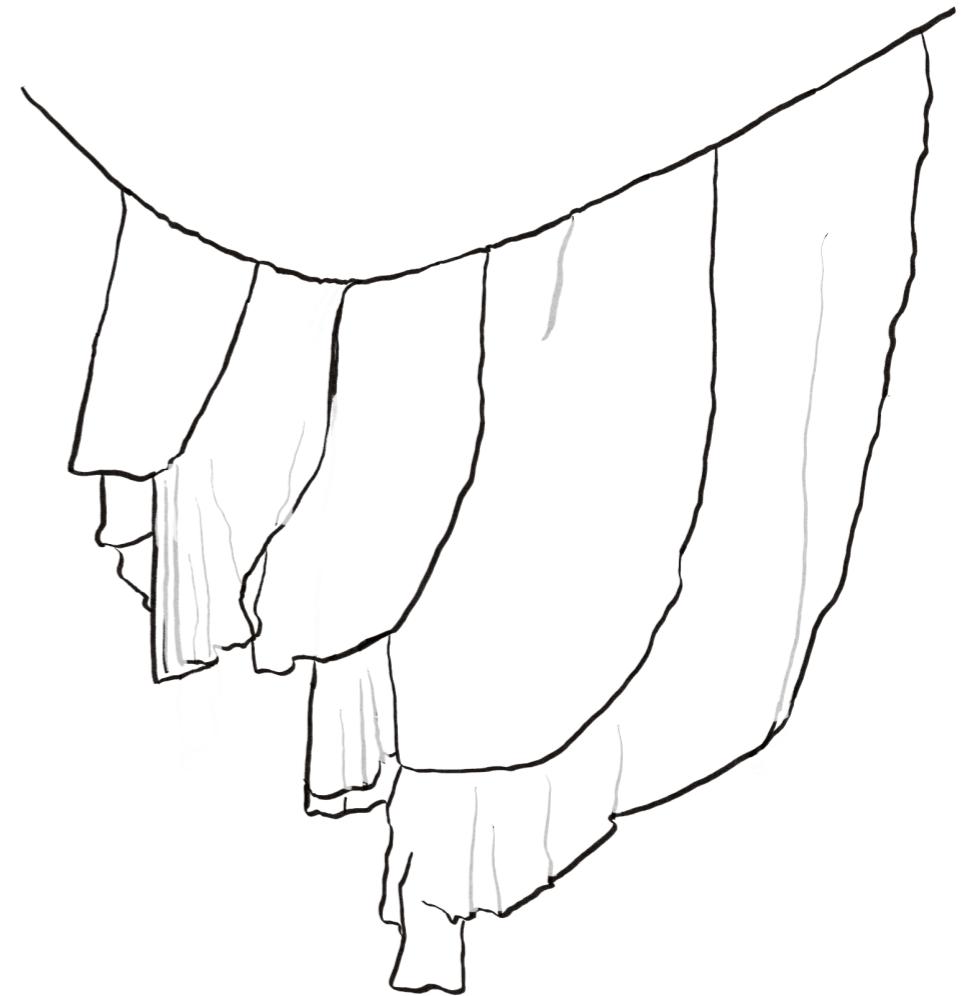
“Ooh, look Paige! That’s pretty! Is it a scarf?” she squinted.

Paige looked, too. “Maybe? It could be a wrap tutu.”

The girls looked at each other hopefully and chasséd over.

“Oooh,” they admired a stall draped with fabrics that swished and twirled in the wind.

“There’s more around these Christmas trees,” Paige noticed.
“Maybe a decoration?” She saw a familiar face rushing around the tree stands. “Miss Whitlock?”



A lady looked up. “Oh, hello, Paige and Felicity! Hang on, I just have to—” Miss Whitlock had several fabric pieces over her arm and was trying to arrange them around the Christmas tree stands.

“There now,” Miss Whitlock straightened up as another breeze swept through the Square. “And there they go again.” The fabrics she had so carefully put into place were swept into wrinkled puddles.

“We really like your...decorations,” Felicity said.

“Thank you! Are you in the market for a tree skirt?”

“OH! Tree skirts!” the sisters said together.

“I mean, of course they’re tree skirts,” Felicity said quickly.

Miss Whitlock sighed as she looked at her windblown inventory. “Don’t feel badly. No one can tell what they are. I like to use lighter fabrics for a nice clean look for a tree. But out here—”

The breeze blew even harder and her tree skirts were swept under the Christmas trees.

“Maybe you could find a way to secure them into the ground?” Paige wondered.

“I tried using some rocks to keep them in place but that looked terrible and the fabric was getting all dirty. I should have brought some heavy ornaments to use as weights.”

“How about some bobby pins? I think I have some,” Paige rummaged through her dance bag. “Ah ha! Wait, no, those are safety pins. Here are some standard ones, but I think the U pins would work better, right?”

“Definitely the U ones,” Felicity nodded.

“That’s so thoughtful, Paige,” Miss Whitlock said. “But I would need probably fifty pins to keep all of these in place and I’m sure you don’t have that many on hand at a moment’s notice—”

“Here they are!” Paige opened a plastic box and dumped a hundred bobby pins into Felicity’s cupped hands. She tossed the empty box over her shoulder into her dance bag and took half of the pins from her sister.

Felicity and Paige cambréd in graceful arches as they circled the display trees and carefully pinned the tree skirt hems into the grass.



Miss Whitlock was delighted. “I love it! Now this is how I pictured it. What do you think?”

“They look beautiful, Miss Whitlock!” Felicity grinned.

Paige thought of their mission. “Do you happen to have any pink tree skirts? It’s our dance teacher’s favorite color.”

Miss Whitlock looked at her stall. “I don’t think so...I hadn’t thought of pink. But I would be more than happy to make one for you and drop it by your house in a few days!”

“Thank you! But we have to find something by tonight. We might come back later for one of the ones you have, though,” Paige said.

Miss Whitlock assured them she would be happy to give them one for free as a thank you. The sisters assured Miss Whitlock she didn’t have to replace the bobby pins.

“Bobby pins, we have. What we don’t have is an idea for Miss Leah,” sighed Felicity as they left. She checked the gazebo. “I don’t see Lulu or Gwyneth, so I guess they’re still looking, too.”

At that moment, Lulu was pulling on Gwyneth’s hand as hard as she could. “Look! LOOK!”

Chapter Four

Reindeer Bells

“What? WHAT?” Gwyneth asked. “Something for Miss Leah?!”

“No, it’s Santa’s sleigh! AND HIS REINDEER!!” Lulu let go and galloped towards the sleigh.

Gwyneth hurried after her. “Wait, Lulu, we can’t get distracted from our mission!”

Lulu was already at the velvet rope separating the reindeer from the walkways. She reached her hand towards one that was eating from a little wooden trough.

“I think that one is Dancer! He’s my favorite! Come here, Dancer! Here, boy!”

Gwyneth tried to take Lulu’s hand again. “Come on, we’ll try to stop by and see them later.”

The reindeer looked up. He took a step towards Lulu.

“He’s coming! Yay! Come on, Dancer!” Lulu wiggled her fingers.

“Whoa, I don’t think he should be getting this close,” Gwyneth tried to pull her back.

“He just wants to say hi! He’s a good boy, aren’t you, Dancer? Here, boy!” Lulu encouraged.

The reindeer took another step as a sleigh bell harness slipped off his shoulder.

“Sheesh! His harness isn’t buckled!” Gwyneth looked around but didn’t see anyone who seemed to be in charge. “Stop calling him, Lu.”

Something caught the reindeer's attention. He sniffed the air and jerked his head towards a dog on a leash nearby. His nostrils flared a little.

"I think he's scared of the dog," Gwyneth whispered. "He might run away and get loose in the Square!" She still didn't see anyone who looked like a reindeer keeper. "Stay right here— I'm going to see if I can get his harness back on."

The reindeer still had his eyes locked on the dog. Gwyneth took a careful and slow high step over the velvet rope. She gradually lowered her foot to the ground, resting on the ball of her foot so she didn't make a sound. She brought her other foot forward and slowly, silently made her way to the reindeer's side.

She reached around the loose reindeer to grasp the dangling buckle. She fastened the harness into place so gracefully and with such care that the bells didn't even jingle.

Gwyneth exhaled a bit, then leapt back over the velvet rope. Lulu clapped. "You did it! You saved Dancer!"



"Who's Dancer?" a voice said from behind them. They turned to look and saw a cheerful looking man with bags of feed in his arms.

"Are you the Reindeer Man?" asked Lulu.

“That’s me,” he answered. “And ‘Dancer’ is...?”

“That one,” Lulu pointed. “The one that almost ran away but my sister saved him because we’re Secret Agentinas and she knows how to be very quiet and sneaky. But only for good.”

“He almost ran away?” the man asked in alarm.

“His harness wasn’t buckled and he started to walk off,” Gwyneth explained. “And there was a dog and he looked a little scared so I buckled it. I’m sorry for going over the ropes, but-”

“No, thank you! You saved the night! I was late and in such a rush, I must have missed his buckle. Can you imagine if he’d gotten loose and went running into the theater?” He shuddered. “We probably wouldn’t be invited back next year, let’s just say that.”

“I like the sleigh!” Lulu piped in. She looked up at the man with her big eyes. “Can I go inside?”

“For the girls that saved Wally here?” He caught Lulu’s eye. “Um, I mean, Dancer? Wally’s just his nickname.”

“A nickname for what?” Lulu eyed the sleigh.

“For...Waltzing Dancer...anyway, yes, you can go inside the sleigh,” the Reindeer Man said.

“Yay!” Lulu scampered up. “Fake snow!” she cheered. She buried her face into white puffs decorating the back of the sleigh. “It’s so soft and not cold at all. I love fake snow.”

“Come on, Lulu, we should keep looking. We have to find something for Miss Leah, remember?” Gwyneth motioned for Lulu to hurry down.

“I know! Would you like to take a picture in the sleigh and give it to your friend?” the Reindeer Man asked.

“That’s really nice of you! We’ll look a little longer but we might come back,” Gwyneth said. “Thank you, though!”

“Thank YOU for saving Wal– Dancer! Merry Christmas!” the man turned back to pour more reindeer food into their troughs of the secure and fully harnessed reindeer.

On the other side of the Square, Felicity and Paige were surveying the nearby stalls. “Hmm. I’m seeing scarves,

Chapter Five

Gingerbread Village



winter hats, snowman kits, lots of food choices, but—” Paige was interrupted by a soft clunk. She tried to keep her focus. “—but nothing that’s perfect for Miss Leah.” Clunk.

Felicity thought for a moment. “Which way haven’t we been yet? We’ve covered that walkway—” she pointed. Clunk. “But not this way—” clunk. This time the clunk was followed by a grumpy, “Ugh.”

“Okay, what is that?” Felicity looked around. The sun had set and there weren’t any lamplights in this part of the Square. She could barely make out several plastic canes laying nearby. A teenaged boy walked over to pick one up.

“Hi, Andrew. Is your mom here?” Paige asked. Andrew’s mom, Mrs. Polk, was the Nelson girls’ favorite baker. Her gingerbread displays were one of the highlights of the Festivities on the Square.

“Hi, yeah, she’ll be back in a minute.”

Felicity and Paige waved to Andrew's brother, Adam. He was pushing one of the plastic candy canes into the ground. He let go to wave and the candy cane flopped over. Clunk.

"We're going nuts. This keeps happening," Andrew grumbled. "The ground's too soft," he said. "And these are too wide or too tall or light or something."

Felicity picked up one of the plastic canes. "Can I try?"

Andrew nodded, "Sure, but don't worry if it doesn't work, it's not worth the frustration— whoa!"

He backed up as Felicity jumped high in the air, knees bent and feet together in a Russian jump. She came down into a grand plié and shoved the plastic cane into the ground with all her ballet might. She straightened and stepped back. The candy cane stayed in place.

"Can I do the rest of the candy cane lane? I'd love to help your mom!" Felicity asked, sniffing the air. There was definitely some of Mrs. Polk's famous gingerbread somewhere close by.



“I’ll help, too,” Paige added. “A row on each side of this path?” She checked as they jumped and plied down the walkway. “Did your mom make any gingerbread houses this year?”

“Yeah, that’s why we’re trying to make this path. It leads to Mom’s Gingerbread Village,” Andrew said.

“A whole village?” the Agentlinas squealed. They stuck the last of the plastic candy canes into the ground and looked into the shadows.

Felicity thought she saw something. “Oh, is that it? It’s... kind of hard to see?”

“Yeah, we realized that when it started getting dark. Mom’s trying to find some kind of light. She’s not too happy with us,” Adam said sheepishly.

“Because someone forgot to plug in the huge light we rented for that exact purpose,” Andrew said.

Adam turned to his brother. “Yeah, well, someone was already in charge of music and brought a speaker and came up with a playlist of Christmas songs.”

Andrew grimaced. “Someone also brought a speaker.”

“That’s true- someone brought a second speaker that we didn’t need. Someone who could have been paying attention to lighting,” Adam pointed out.

Andrew rolled his eyes. “Someone was thinking of lighting when he reserved this spot because it was near one of the only electrical outlets in the whole Square.”

“Which would have been helpful if, again, someone had remembered to actually plug in the light,” Adam said.

“Guys?” Paige interrupted. “Why can’t you plug the light in now?”

“Snow icing,” the brothers answered.

“Someone gave Mom the all clear to cover the ground in snow icing without plugging in the light first,” Adam said.

“Yeah, well, someone feels terrible about it and also that someone has been helping her put candy trimmings on the houses for the last month, okay?” said Andrew.

“We can’t just step onto the snow icing?” Paige asked.
“Smooth it over when we’re done?”

“Nope. It hardened. If you step on it, it’ll shatter,’ Andrew sighed. “I think broken snow is better than not being able to see it at all, but Mom said it would look like a giant attacked the village and that might scare the kids.”

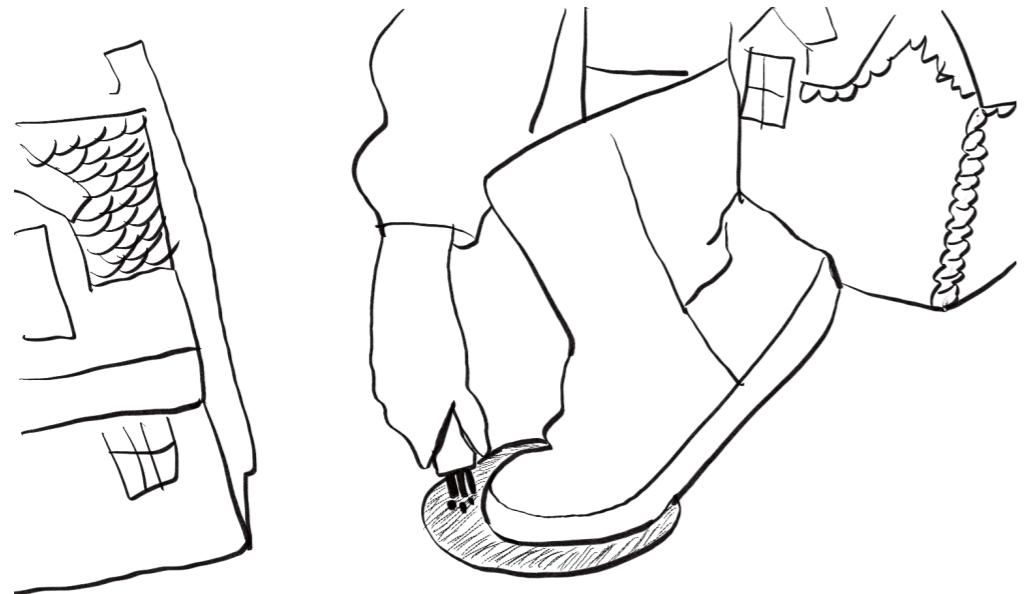
“Where’s the outlet for the plug?” Paige asked.

The boys pointed. Paige looked. “Can one of you use your phone light to show me?”

Adam got out his phone. “There’s really no point because in order to get there, you’d have to leap over all this icing and land on that tiny 6 inch metal plate and you’d probably have to land on your toes or something— WHOA!”



He stared as Paige did exactly that, landing with one foot on the plate and the other leg high in the air in an arabesque. She felt for light's cord and plugged it in.



In the blink of an eye, darkness and shadows changed into an adorable landscape of gingerbread homes with candy fences. Mrs. Polk had outdone herself.

“Felicity?” Paige looked around at the hardened icing that surrounded her in all directions. “I didn’t think of an extraction plan.”

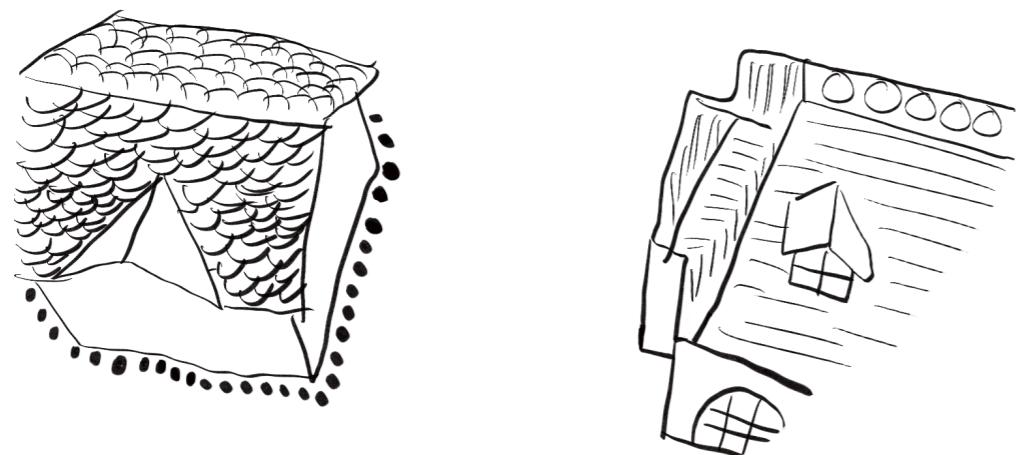
“Hang on!” Felicity called. She looked around. “Oooh, got it,” she hurried over and unwound some Christmas garland from a fence nearby. She tossed one end of the garland to her sister and asked the Polk brothers to help her pull. “I think you’re tall enough to help her clear the houses.”

She called to Paige, “Just bring your legs up as high as you can, okay?”

“Okay,” Paige called back. She was breaking into a bit of a sweat from the effort of balancing over the village.

A minute later she was pulled safely back to the grass, just in time for a huge hug from Mrs. Polk.

“Look at my village! Look! You can actually see it!” The baker was breathless from rushing around the Square. She grabbed Felicity into the hug, too.



“You’re-oof-welcome-Mrs. Polk!” the Agentlinas said as Mrs. Polk squeezed them.

“I’m so relieved! I thought I had lost a whole month of work! I wish there was a way to thank you!” Mrs. Polk said. “How about a personalized gingerbread house? Do you have any pictures of your house handy? I’ll create a replica tomorrow!”

“Thanks, Mrs. Polk! We’re happy to help. But we should probably keep looking- we have to find something by tonight.”

“Of course! I hope you find what you’re looking for. Let me know if you think of a way we can help! Merry Christmas!” Mrs. Polk hurried off to her well lit and fully visible Gingerbread Village.

Chapter Six

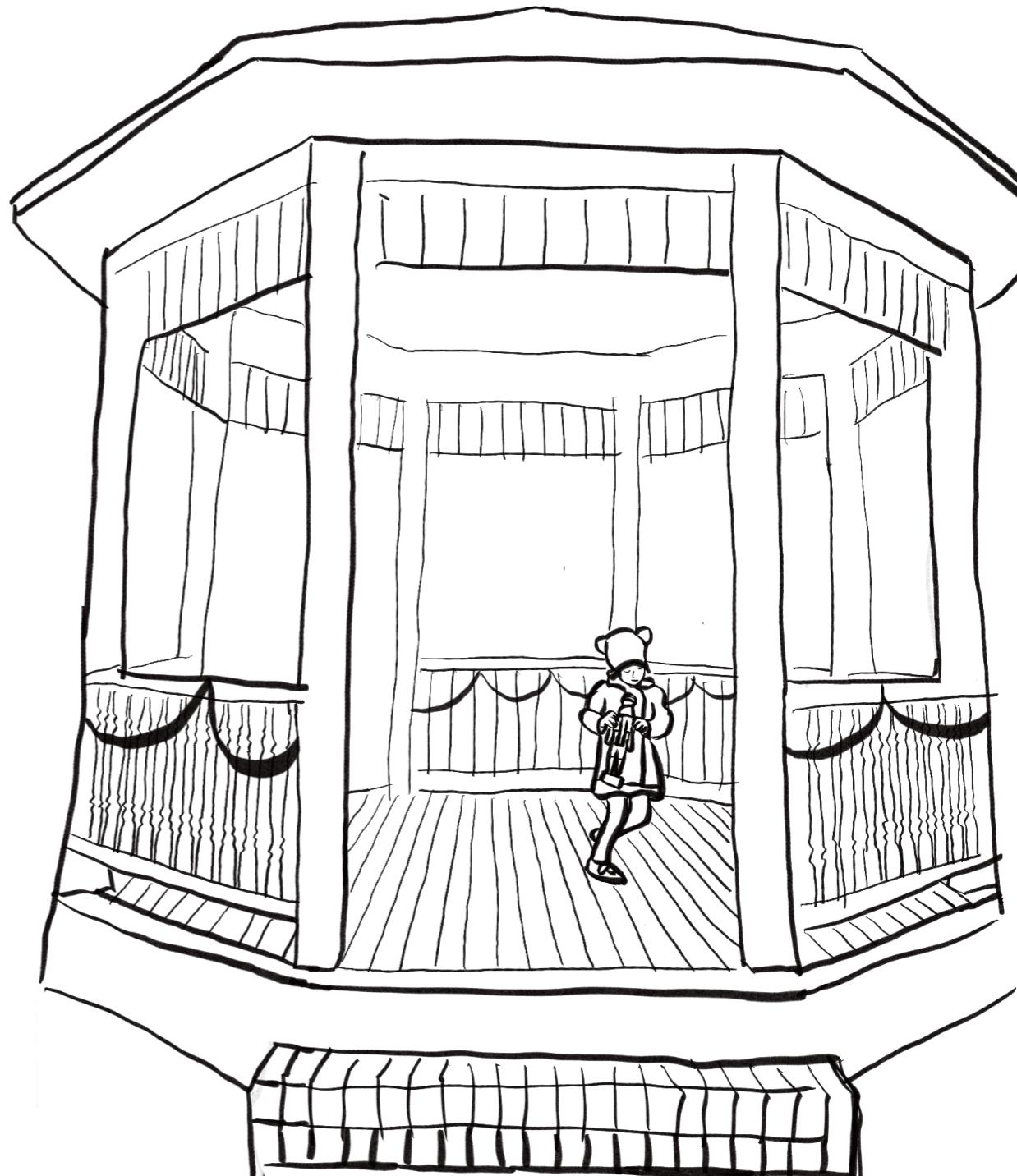
Nutcrackers

“Paige, look! Lulu’s at the gazebo-maybe she and Gwyneth found something!” Felicity took off into a crowd of people.

Paige caught up. “Is this a line or something? Why are so many people standing right here?” She glanced at their faces and saw that they wore matching expressions of “awww.”

They were all looking towards the gazebo.

“I don’t think Lulu is up there because it’s the rendezvous point,” Felicity said.



Paige sighed. “Nope, she’s dancing. And she’s got that look on her face. She’s ‘lost in her own dancing world’, as Mom says. Oh, and she has a Nutcracker! She’s dancing as Clara! This could take an hour. We don’t have an hour! Where’s Gwyneth?”

Felicity jetéd up in the air to see over shoulders. “There she is! In that stall over there!”

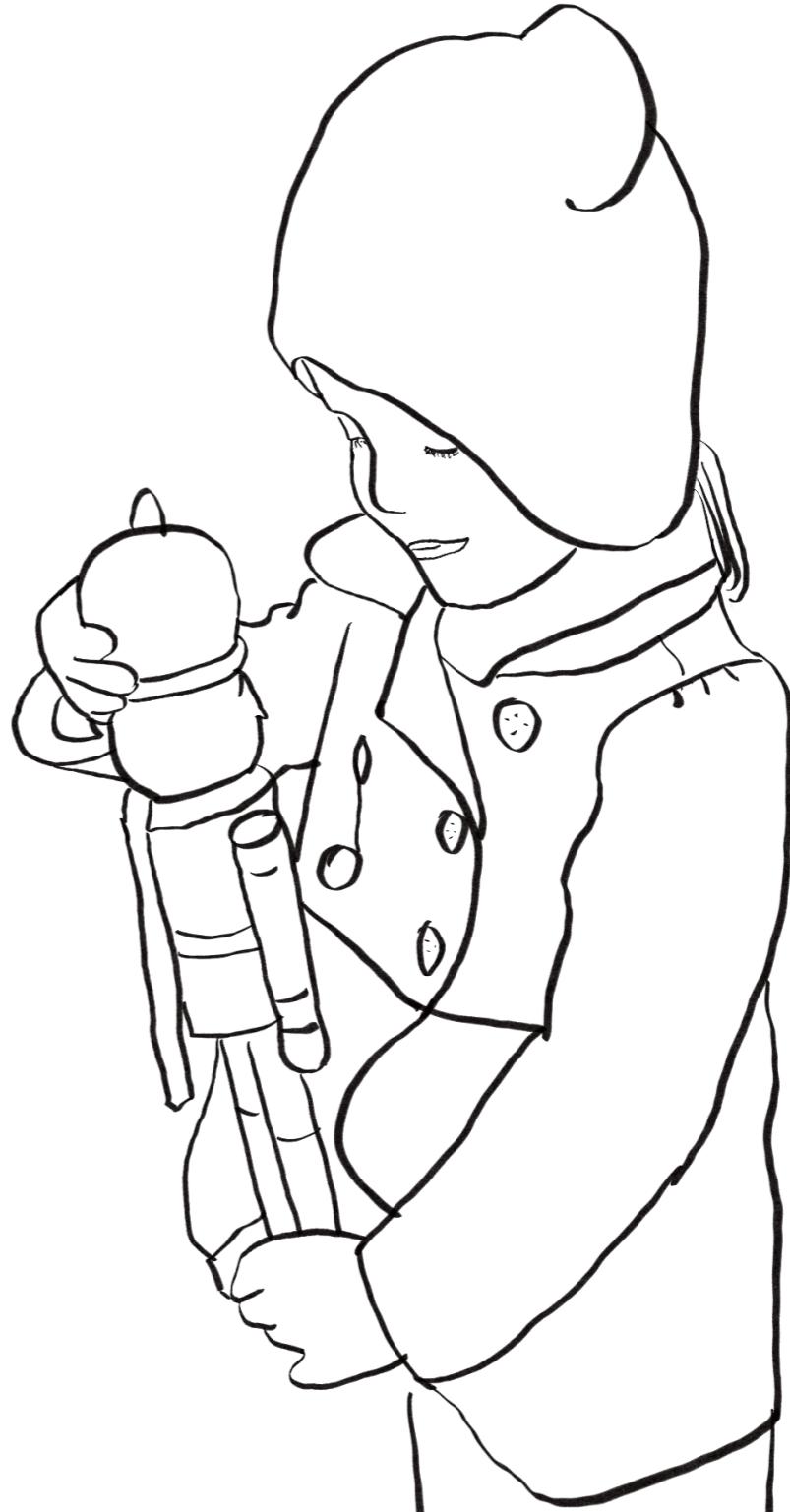
Paige and Felicity slipped through the crowd.

“Gwyneth!” Paige called.

Gwyneth looked up from behind a table. “Hi! Oh, wow, what time is it?!—Merry Christmas, thanks for your contribution!” she interrupted herself as she handed a shopping bag to someone.

Paige and Felicity watched as another customer reached Gwyneth, who handed her a Nutcracker similar to the one with which Lulu was dancing. “I’ll have that ready for you right away!” Gwyneth assured the customer. She pulled out some brown wrapping paper from a roll.

“What’s going on?!” Paige asked in bewilderment.



“Ah, well, you know Mrs. Holland down there?” she nodded towards a lady taking payments at the other end of the stall.

“She saw Lulu and me walking,” Gwyneth lay the Nutcracker flat on the paper.

“and she asked if Lulu wouldn’t mind posing with a Nutcracker on the gazebo,” she sliced through the paper with scissors “so she could post it on social media,” she wrapped the paper around the Nutcracker “to promote these Nutcrackers- thank you for your contribution!” Gwyneth taped the paper, put it in a bag, and handed it off to the customer. “Merry Christmas!”



Another customer placed another Nutcracker in Gwyneth's hands.

"Great choice!" Gwyneth smiled. She looked back to her sisters, talking as she wrapped. "So Lulu went up to take the picture but then she started dancing and you know how Lulu gets when she's caught up in the moment- Thank you for your contribution! Merry Christmas!- and so then Mrs. Holland posted the picture and then I guess it got a lot of attention and then the whole thing kind of took off and Mrs. Holland couldn't keep up with the payments and the gift wrapping, so I offered to help."

Felicity watched as a lady walked toward them with another Nutcracker. "Why do you keep saying, 'contribution?'"

"Oh, well, Mrs. Holland's father makes these- they're one of a kind!" she said brightly to the lady as she took the doll to wrap. "All proceeds go towards charity!"

She turned back to her sisters. "Isn't that so kind and Christmassy?"

Paige wished the lady a Merry Christmas as she walked away with her shopping bag. "It is, but Gwyneth, how long have you been here? Did you find something for Miss Leah?"

Gwyneth tried to speak through her smile at the next customer. "I may have lost track of time. Have you found something?"

"Not yet and we're running out of time. Are you almost done?" Paige asked quietly through her own bright smile at the customer.

Gwyneth didn't answer until she finished wrapping the next Nutcracker. "I don't know! I think it might be an endless supply!"

Another man walked up with a doll in his hand. Gwyneth wrapped it as quickly as she could as Paige whispered, "Do you think you could, you know, wrap this up—I mean, finish up, I know you're wrapping things up— you know what I mean."

"No! I'd feel weird about leaving now! Business is booming and it's for charity, Paige! Charity! I'm not sure how to stop helping for charity!" Gwyneth's face was desperate. Suddenly, she lit up. "What if we got a Nutcracker for Miss Leah! She loves the Nutcracker ballet!"

Paige and Felicity hesitated. "I don't know— she already has a huge collection," Paige said.

“But these are unique, handmade, and one of a kind!” Gwyneth said. She started to reach for another doll but nobody handed one to her. Instead she heard Mrs. Holland say, “Thank you so much, Gwyneth! I don’t know how I would have handled this without you!”

“It was my pleasure, Mrs. Holland!” she smiled. “I was thinking we might buy one of your Nutcrackers ourselves!”

Mrs. Holland looked surprised. “Oh, I wish I had thought to save you one! Thanks to you and Lulu, I sold the entire stock,” she said.

“Would it be alright if we bought the one Lulu has been using?” Gwyneth asked.

“I’m afraid I sold that one as well! Oh, I feel terrible,” Mrs. Holland said.

“That’s alright, Mrs. Holland, I’m sure we’ll find something else- wait, where’s Lulu?” Paige looked around for the youngest Agentlina.

“I thought she was here with you! She gave me her Nutcracker a few minutes ago and said she was going to buy something.”

Three Agentlinas felt their stomachs drop at the same time.

Chapter Seven

Lulu's Baby Doll

"Lulu! LULU!" Paige yelled.

"What?" a little voice said down near her elbow. Paige grabbed her sister in a hug. "We didn't know where you were! You're supposed to stay with us!"

"I was right there," Lulu pointed at the next stall over. "And look what I found!" she held up a baby doll in triumph. "Ta da!"

Paige gasped. "Lulu, put that back right now! You can't just take toys!" Paige reached for the baby doll but Lulu held it behind her back.

"I didn't take it! I bought it!" she said.



Paige, Gwyneth, and Felicity slapped their palms to their faces.

“Lulu! I told you that you couldn’t buy something for yourself!” Gwyneth exclaimed.

“We’ll have to return it right now,” Paige added.

“The money was supposed to be for Miss Leah’s gift, remember?” Felicity said.

Lulu’s eyes grew shiny with tears. “I know that! I got this for Miss Leah! It’s the—” she broke down crying.

“Aww, Lulu,” her sisters sighed. They bent down to hug her. “It’s really cute, but I don’t think Miss Leah likes baby dolls as much as you do,” Paige tried to explain.

Lulu cried harder. “It’s—” sob “—not just a baby doll.” Hiccup. “It’s Baby Jesus!” Wail. “Because Miss Leah said he was the best gift ever!” Lulu’s shoulders slumped as she cried.

“Oh, Lulu!”

“We’re sorry, we didn’t understand!”

“That’s really sweet, and you’re right, Miss Leah does say that—wait, do you hear that?!”

Over the sounds of Lulu’s hiccups, the Agentlinas heard Miss Leah’s voice. “I’d love to stay and see them, but I still have some packing to do, maybe—”

“NO! No, um, we haven’t, uh, looked at the Gingerbread Village yet!” their mom was talking in a very high, strained voice. “I just overheard someone say it’s the best one yet! It is not to be missed! You have to see it with me and I won’t take no for an answer. Off we go! Post haste!”

The Secret Agentlinas peeked around a tree. Paige caught her dad's eye. He waited for Miss Leah and their mom to walk on ahead, took a few steps backwards and leaned against the tree. Facing away from his daughters, he asked, "I'm afraid your mom is starting to crack under the pressure. I hope your mission has been a success?"

Paige sighed. "I guess so. Lulu found something she really wants to give. I only wish we could make it more personal for the best dance teacher—WAIT!"

Paige whipped her head around to look at her sisters. "I've got it! I know what to do!" She turned back to the tree. "Dad, can you keep Miss Leah busy for forty-five more minutes and then meet us at the stage?"

"Forty-five minutes!"

"Please? Please? It will be perfect, we just need time to get it ready. Please?"

"Oh, alright, I'll try. I could offer to take her and your mom for a hot chocolate or something," he said.

"Thank you! Thank you! Drink it very slowly! We'll see you at the stage, with Miss Leah, in—"

"Forty-five minutes, roger that," he said. "Honorary Agentlina out." He walked off.



Chapter Eight

Mission Accomplished



“Alright, Agentlinas, I know how to complete the mission,” Paige announced as they huddled up. She told them her idea and her sisters’ faces lit up like Christmas trees. They spent the next few minutes in a flurry of planning and talking in short hand, guessing what each other was thinking and finished each other’s sentences. It would have been difficult for a non-Agentlina to keep up.

“The tree skirts!” “Ask if we can borrow—” “Definitely, what colors—” “Blue, brown, white” “What about—” “Great idea! You bring the trough” “Something for the crook?” “Cane shaped, but—” “The brown wrapping paper!” “Genius!” “We all have leotards on from ballet class” “put shoes on” “brought our dance bags” “course, always in the car” “What song?” “Favorite—” “Oh, right right, I’ll borrow a phone and the speaker” “need time to choreograph” “should be the angel” “yes, no time for wings” “lights halo!” “Battery powered!” “Still have the the safety pins” “What about Lulu” “Fake snow!” “That’s brilliant” “So you’ll be” “Yeah, I can do the shepherd” “And I’ll be his mom” “I think so, anything else?” “We’ll have to choreograph like we’ve never done before” “but we can do it” and finally “Let’s head out! For Miss Leah!”



After a frantic dash around the Square collecting supplies, the Secret Agentlinas met behind the stage, and made their final preparations.

Soon the forty-five minutes was up and they heard, “Thanks again for the hot chocolate but it’s getting late and—”

“The girls really want to see you! They said to meet them here, I’m sure they’re—”

“Now!” Paige whispered from the side of the stage. Gwyneth nodded and hit play on the borrowed phone. “O Holy Night” began playing on a speaker.

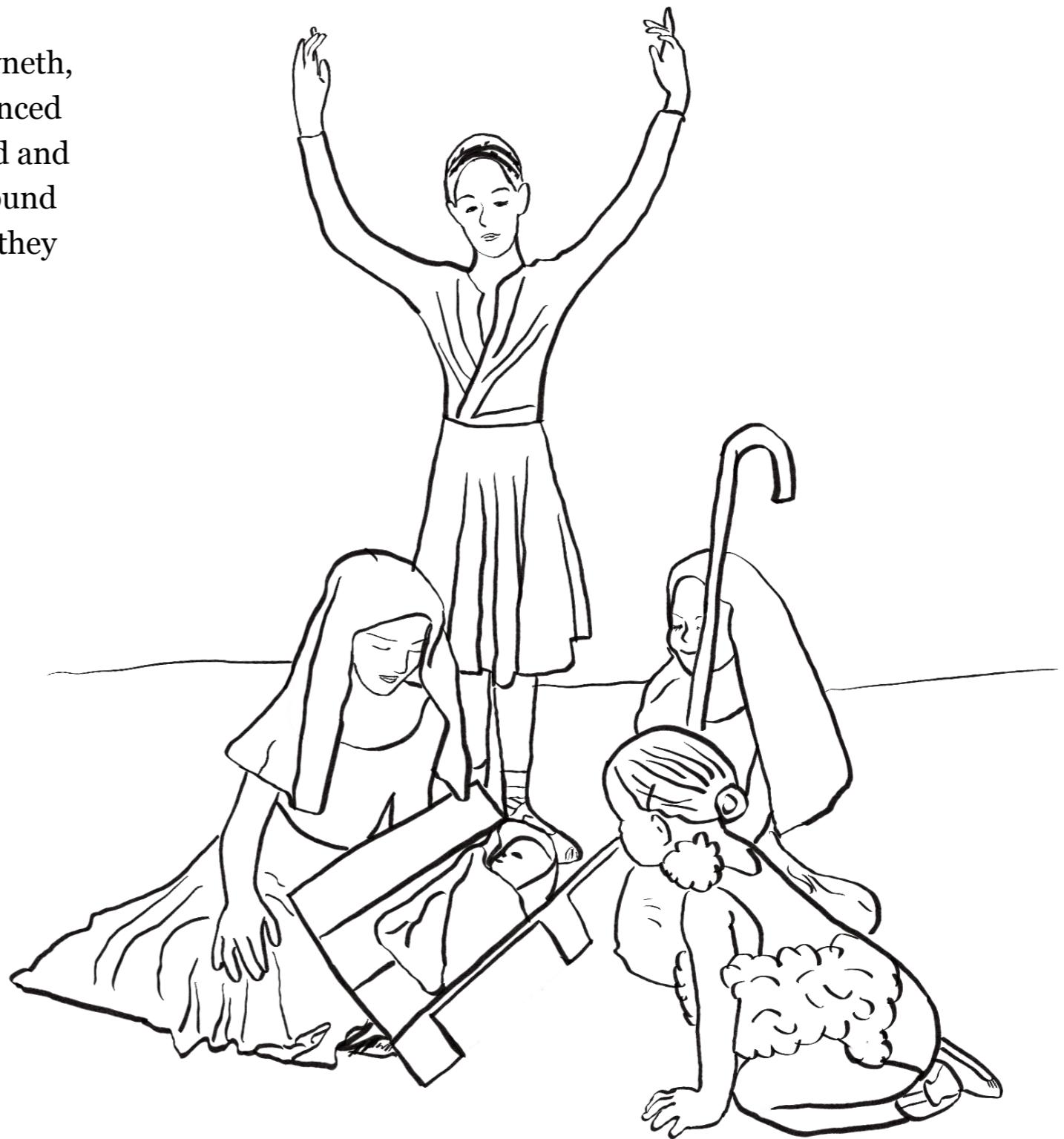
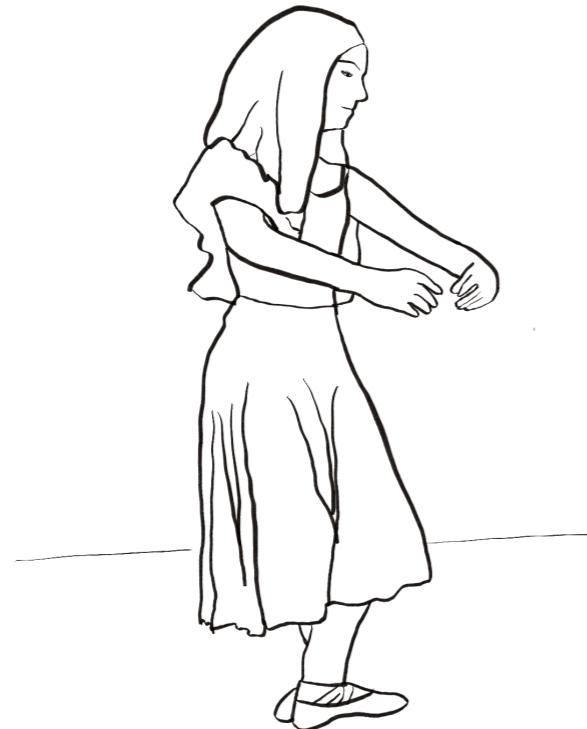
Paige rose up gracefully on her pointe shoes and quick stepped to center stage, stopping just behind a small wooden manger. **O Holy Night** the song played. She was dressed in a borrowed white tree skirt that flowed out as she pirouetted and raised her arms in a lovely port de bras over her head. A beautiful strand of battery powered white Christmas lights wrapped around her head to show an angel’s halo. She danced as an angel who was eager to share joyous news.



A thrill of hope, a weary world rejoices the song continued and Felicity joined her sister on stage, wearing tree skirts around her head and waist to look like a shepherd's head covering and robe. She waltz stepped onto the stage, shepherd's crook in hand, listening in awe as the angel told of a special baby.

Several people had gathered to watch the surprise performance and *aww*'ed at the sight of an adorable little lamb following the shepherd. They performed a precious pas de deux as they celebrated the angel's announcement that a child had been born to save the world.

Truly He taught us to love the song went on as Gwyneth, dressed as Mary in a borrowed set of blue tree skirts, danced from the other side of the stage to welcome the shepherd and sheep. The four Secret Agentlinas circled and leaped around the baby in the manger, smiles and joy on their faces as they celebrated the perfect gift, the Baby Jesus.



O Night Divine the song ended as the four ballerinas rested in their final poses. They looked up and found Miss Leah's face in the crowd right away. Tears dripped down their dancing teacher's cheeks.

The girls got up and ran down the steps to give her four of the biggest, most joyful squeezes the Square had ever seen.

“That was so beautiful! What a wonderful gift,” she weeped. The Agentlinas grinned at each other and Gwyneth motioned for their parents, who were also crying, to join them in their hug.

When they separated, Miss Leah wanted to know all about their costumes and props. “A shepherd’s crook made from a plastic candy cane wrapped in brown wrapping paper!”

“A halo made from Christmas lights!”

“What about your costumes?”

“Safety pinned tree skirts!”

“Someone had an extra speaker that they didn’t mind lending you to play that song? My favorite Christmas song?!”

“What about this little lamb costume? Fake snow from the sleigh. Of course—yes, Lulu, it is so soft.”

“And that perfect manger is actually a real trough for feeding real animals!”

“I would watch that performance every day of my life if I could! I wish we had someone record it!”

“Oh, I did,” their dad looked up from his phone. He waved it in the air. “Just sent it to you!”

“Ooooh, I just love it all! Thank you! I’m going to show that to my entire family,” Miss Leah said.

“Don’t forget Baby Jesus when you pack, Miss Leah,” Lulu said, holding the doll up to her ballet teacher. “He’s for you to keep! Merry Christmas.”

“Merry Christmas, Lulu,” Miss Leah held the doll close. “What an absolutely perfect gift.”



An original story by Lauren Teague

For more, visit literallylaurenteague.com.