



Alice-Miranda
Keeps the Beat

Jacqueline Harvey



PUFFIN BOOKS

Chapter 1



Alice-Miranda's fingers tapped rhythmically on the desktop as the song played over and over in her head.

Caroline Clinch glowered beneath her blunt fringe. 'Enough!' the woman barked, causing the entire class to jump in their seats. 'That is terribly distracting.'

'And *that* wasn't,' Jacinta whispered, garnering several giggles from her classmates.

Alice-Miranda looked up. 'Oh, sorry, Mrs Clinch. I hadn't realised.'

‘I don’t know what’s going on with you lately,’ the woman replied, shaking her head. ‘You’re always tapping your foot or drumming your fingers. I would suggest you take up a percussion instrument, but music teachers are a bit thin on the ground around here . . . Mr Trout might be able to point you in the right direction.’

‘Thank you, Mrs Clinch – that’s a marvellous suggestion. I’ll look into it,’ Alice-Miranda replied with a winning smile.

Cornelius Trout was the Music teacher at Winchesterfield-Downsfordvale and also accompanied the Winchester-Fayle Singers, who had recently lost their conductor, Harold Lipp, the Drama and English teacher at Fayle School for Boys. Mr Lipp had moved to Los Angeles to be with the love of his life, Frau Grizelda Furtwangler, a talented and highly strung musical director. They had met on the set of *The Life and Times of Nellie Williams*, a film which starred a number of the students from both schools, though it was Caprice Radford who had won the biggest child role. Since then Professor Winterbottom hadn’t been able to find a suitable replacement for the man and Mr Trout didn’t feel up to taking the group on

his own, so the Winchester-Fayle Singers had been on an extended hiatus.

Alice-Miranda grinned to herself. She wasn't about to say so, but she'd already found a teacher. The whole thing had come about quite serendipitously and she was enjoying herself more than she could ever have imagined, but had decided to keep it a secret until she had something worth sharing. It wasn't easy to get away two afternoons a week without anyone noticing, although it helped that Millie was at tennis lessons on the same days and Jacinta had picked up gymnastics again. Despite no longer competing, Jacinta reasoned that it was a good way to stay fit and had also enrolled at an acrobatics school in Downsfordvale on Saturday mornings.

Mrs Clinch stalked to the whiteboard at the front of the classroom. 'So, what number to the power of three will give us a solution of 512?' she said with her marker poised in the air. Her eyes narrowed as she spotted the tiny girl with chocolate curls gazing out the window. 'Alice-Miranda, do you know the answer?' the woman asked with an arched eyebrow. While she liked

the child well enough, she thought it wouldn't hurt for her to be caught out just once.

Alice-Miranda looked at her and smiled. 'Yes, I think so, Mrs Clinch. I believe that it's eight. Eight to the power of three is 512?'

Caroline paused, her lips quivering. 'Yes . . . yes, it is,' she said before turning back to the board and rolling her eyes. 'Well done.'