

Chapter 8 New Beginnings

Parsley Plinkoff woke with a start. He stretched, rubbed his eyes and tried to look down through the trees towards Wood Tofton. Something was wrong. The trees were different, the grass was a lot neater and there was a row of terraced houses which shouldn't have been there. He turned round and saw a statue but he wasn't keen on statues so he didn't go and look.

'I'm back in London,' he thought, 'how did I get here? Oh well, I'll go back to my flat.'

He picked up his signal detector together with his binoculars, walked across the grass and through a small gate in a low fence. He was now on a road which seemed to circle the square.

'That's odd,' he thought. 'No cars.' He could see what looked like a main road in the distance so he thought he'd aim for that. He saw a horse-drawn wagon pass by. Nothing unusual there. Then another, another and yet another. That was unusual.

'It must be a film set,' he thought as he approached what now looked to him like a high street. There were shops and people going about their daily lives. He looked for a street name and found one that said 'Boulevard du Nord'.

'Nord means North,' he thought, 'looks like they've changed the names for a film.' The people on the footpath were wearing clothes in a dated style but they didn't fit with the age of horse-drawn vehicles.

'Something very strange is going on here,' he thought. His attention was drawn to a large box like wagon passing by. The sign on the side gave a name then something in French which he didn't understand. It also said 'Departement de Londres'. That he did understand. Now he knew where he was. So the girl at St Hildegard's had been telling the truth. He must have found the portal to her parallel world. Sitting on a nearby seat, he wondered what to do next.

Daniel's mother, Dr Masterton, examined the wallet that Daniel had found. "There's a driving license. This belongs to a Mr Cheddar Cheasley. Where did you find it?"

"Some men dropped it outside Meldy's house."

"Why didn't you give it back to them?"

"I thought they were crooks."

“Daniel. You shouldn’t have kept it. We’ll go next door and give it to Mr Wagley. He must know who this Mr Cheasley is.”

Daniel sheepishly followed his mother to the Wagley’s house. He wasn’t sheepish for long.

“Daniel! That’s brilliant!” enthused Mr Wagley. “You saw the burglars and now we have a name as well!”

“Burglars?”

“Yes, they took er, some of our things.”

“Daniel,” said his mother, “I’m sorry I doubted you. You were right, well done.”

Popster studied the picture on the driving license. “He looks like the man I saw in the lane. I’m also convinced he was the one who returned in a wig.”

“So he was casing the joint,” concluded Mr Wagley. “We need to inform the police.”

Popster went upstairs to see Meldy and Sophie. “Meldy, we know the identity of one of the thieves who stole your medal. Daniel saw two of them and one dropped his wallet.”

“Do you think the police’ll find it?”

“Things are looking up, Meldy. They might well do.”

“These men should be in prison,” said Sophie. “Stealing things from children.”

“I agree,” said Popster. “Meldy, no one believed you at school but these men obviously did otherwise why would they steal your medal? They must have known it was real.”

“Well, before they go to prison they should tell St Hildegard’s I was telling the truth!”

Cheddar Cheasley was at home looking at his medal collection which now included Meldy’s Order of Napoleon the Second.

‘It’s the best of the lot,’ he smugly thought. ‘So impressive, my friends will be really jealous. I just won’t let them see the other side. I don’t want them asking questions about Esmeralda Wagley. I can tell them the wrong date, like 1820, certainly not 1971.’

He decided to ring Parsley. There was no answer so he left a voice message. “Let’s meet to discuss the object.”

There was, however, a cloud on the horizon. He’d mislaid his wallet and couldn’t think where he’d left it. ‘Oh well,’ he thought, ‘it’ll turn up.’

Two hours later a man stood at his door with that same wallet. “Mr Cheasley? Mr Cheddar Cheasley?” he asked.

“You’ve found my it! Thank you! I wondered where I’d left it.”

“So, it is your wallet? I’m Inspector Crooklock and this is Constable Honestly.”

“Honestly?”

“Yes, Honestly. Mr Cheasley, we have a warrant to search your flat. We have reason to believe you were recently involved in the theft of a valuable medal.”

“That looks like it,” said the Constable looking at the medal collection.

“I didn’t steal it, I bought it from a man in the street.”

“So, you’ve never been to Wood Tofton?”

“No, where’s that?”

“You dropped your wallet at the scene of the crime and were seen leaving. Constable Honestly, have a look for that tracksuit. We’ve got a good description so this is our man.”

Parsley was sitting on the Boulevard du Nord in the Departement de Londres. Passersby often greeted him, saying “Bonjour Monsieur.”

‘I’m going to have to ask for help,’ he thought. ‘I can’t sit here all day.’ Eventually he saw someone approaching who looked like an official of some sort. Blue-grey uniform, shiny black belt and hat. He and asked for assistance.

“Can I see your identity card, Sir?” the official asked. Parsley hesitated.

“I am a police officer. You can trust me.”

“I don’t have one, Officer.”

“Where are you from, Sir?”

“England.”

“Well, we will take you to the police station. Nothing to worry about Sir. We just need to ask some questions.”

The woman who had appeared after Parsley left in such a mysterious fashion made her way down to Woodhayes Lane. She was going to see her friend, Misia Masterton. Misia’s mother answered the door.

“Stephanie!” she cried with enthusiasm, “Come in. So, you’ve returned from France? Misia is away on a field trip but she’ll be back tomorrow. Are you hungry? Let me get you something to eat then why don’t you visit Kick and Popster. They have two French girls, Antoinette and Sophie, staying there at the moment. You’ll like them.”

‘Good,’ thought Stephanie, ‘they arrived safely.’ “Thank you Dr Masterton,” she said, “I will go and see them.”

Parsley sat in a room in the Main Londres Police Station. He had been interviewed and had told the junior police officer about his career in the British government.

“What is British?” she had asked. “There is only English, Scottish, Welsh and Irish, is there not?”

“English government, then. I ran a department with responsibility for a number of staff.”

“What did this department do?”

“We searched for extra-terrestrial life.”

“Did you find any?”

“No but we were about to make an amazing breakthrough. Information had been obtained of a very exciting nature which would have resulted in a ground-breaking”

“Yes I can see you are a politician. If you were about to make this break-through, why did you leave?”

“Well, I can’t say I remember anything about it.”

“We will enter ‘kidnapped’ on your immigration form. You do have the option of returning to England, if you wish.”

Parsley knew that was not an option. In his world the Departement de Londres did not exist so where would he go? How big was this particular Departement, where was the border and what would he find if he crossed over? Better stay here for a bit.

“I’ll stay, if that’s alright with you,” he said.

“Good. We need people like you in our country. We will find you suitable employment.”

‘Suitable employment,’ he mused. ‘Yes, a nice government department to run, language won’t be a problem because they all speak good English...’

A senior police officer appeared. “Good morning Mr Plinkoff, I am Commissioner Duplessis. Welcome to the Departement de Londres. My staff will provide you with an identity card. We will call you ‘Pierre’, I think. Parsley does not exist as a name because it is a herb.”

“But I like the name Parsley.”

“We cannot allow any name which is not approved. You can tell your friends to call you Parsley if you wish but your official name will be ‘Pierre’.”

“Well, if you say so, Commissioner. By the way, what happened to the, er, electronic device I had with me when I came?”

“Very interesting. Our laboratory is investigating it at this precise moment. It has been making some rather strange noises. What is it used for?”

Parsley struggled to suppress his excitement. “Well er, I designed it to detect extra terrestrial beings but it er, doesn’t seem to work.”

“I am sorry but our customs regulations do not allow for the import of such devices.”

“Oh well, I suppose you can keep it.”

“Thank you, I am glad to see you are adaptable. We will find you some work which will make good use of this admirable character trait.”

The Commissioner had to leave the office for a few minutes so Parsley was left alone with his thoughts. ‘She was very polite,’ he mused, ‘I think that’s because of my experience in government.’

Someone took him down to the cafeteria and while there he got to study a map of the Departement de Londres. ‘So, it’s just the south east corner of England,’ he mused. The boundary between the two countries was clearly marked from the mouth of the Thames down to the Isle of Wight. The border circled round to the north of London like a bump on an otherwise logical boundary.

While he ate, he thought about the changes he could make in his new department. ‘They’re bound to find me something interesting,’ he thought. ‘I’ll set up regular meetings with my staff, then we’ll have twice yearly team building exercises. I need to make a good impression, get things done.’

Eventually he was collected by a junior police officer. He was told that his new position would be in the ‘Bureau de Sanitaire’ which sounded very impressive. One hour later, he was taken in a police wagon to a hostel.

“You can stay here until you find your feet,” he was told. He thought the two police officers had exchanged a smirk but ignored it. His assigned room was compact with washing facilities a short walk down the hall.

“Just like being a student again,” he thought. “I’ll soon find something better but this’ll do for now.”

Stephanie had gone to visit the Wagleys and was sitting with the three sisters and their two other visitors from the Departement.

“Stephanie, can you stay with us, please?” asked Meldy..

“I am so sorry to hear about your medal, Meldy,” she replied.

“I’ll have to go back with you and earn another one.”

“I wish and wish and wish you would,” added Sophie.

“I don’t think our parents would like that,” said Kick.

“But they could come too,” enthused Meldy.

“Yes Meldy,” said Antoinette, “they would be very welcome. Many people are keen to meet them. Parents of important young people are seen as very special.”

“Like Madame Delpierre, Raoul’s mother,” added Stephanie. “Because her son helped, like you, to rescue Princess Augustine, she is now an important member of many groups and committees in the city of Londres.”

“I wish he could have sung at the music festival,” said Sophie. “Everyone would have loved him!”

“Not Trebiana,” added Popster. “Just imagine how she would have felt if a boy of Meldy’s age was preferred to her.”

“Ouch!” said Kick. “She would have been furious.”

“Who is this Trebiana?” asked Stephanie.

Once the situation had been explained Stephanie thought for a few moments.

“I think she might be sad. Perhaps she needs a friend so why do we not pay her a visit?”