

Chapter 7 Through the Gateway

The five children were hiding in the shrubbery but they knew they had to leave. Discovery would otherwise be inevitable. Even as they watched, search parties were being organised.

“Paul and Raoul, you lead the way,” whispered Meldy. “You know how to get up there. I’ll follow behind and look out for them. If I say run then run!”

“Why can’t I do it?” asked Daniel.

“You can if you want but we have to go now.”

The five crept back into Nicky’s garden and left via the gate. No sign of adults on the lane but they still had to be extra vigilant. Moving along in single file, they kept close to the hedges in case they had to dive for cover. On their way past the Tipperley house they bumped into Terpsichore.

“Hi there!” she cried as she swept them with an enthusiastic gaze. “Great, there’s five of you. Would you two like to be my helpers as well?”

Paul and Raoul looked confused so Meldy jumped in. “They won’t be here very long so they can’t do the panto.”

“Oh, that’s too bad, I was so hoping to get seven like in the fairy tale.” She aimed her most encouraging smile at the visitors, “with you two I would have had six. Well, I’ll let you go, you look like you’ve got to be somewhere.”

“Bye Terpsichore,” said the three recruited helpers while the two visitors looked confused.

“What did she want?” asked Paul as they headed off down the lane.

“Oh, to act in some play,” replied Meldy.

“As her little helpers,” added Nicky. “I didn’t want to tell her she’s only going to have Bunny!”

“Oh, that’s right,” said Daniel. “We won’t be here.”

The five carried on while the rear guard kept glancing back. No sign of parents.

‘They must think we’re still hiding in the gardens,’ thought Meldy.

Into the village centre and past the cafe they went. Dot and Sarah were tidying some tables outside so greeted them.

“Off on an adventure are you?” laughed Dot.

“Er, just exploring,” replied Nicky.

“You found Paul and Raoul then,” said Sarah.

“Thank you for looking after them,” said Meldy. All the while they kept moving, round the corner and out of sight.

“They’re up to no good,” laughed Dot. “Did you see the guilty looks?”

“You noticed that? Yes, I wonder what they’re up to. Running away from home perhaps?”

“Quite likely and young Miss Wagley is at the bottom of it I shouldn’t wonder.”

The road in front changed to a track which in turn morphed into a shrubbery.

“Through here,” said Paul. “It is the way we came down.”

“It doesn’t look like a path,” said Daniel.

“Paul is right,” replied Raoul, “it is this way.”

“Come on,” said Meldy, “we can’t go back now.”

After they had pushed their way through they found evidence of a path. On up the hill they went until they were well clear of the village.

“Are you sure this is the right way?” asked Daniel.

“It must be,” said Meldy. “Soon we’ll be at the top then it’s left to the quarry.”

“But they might be waiting up there,” he pointed out.

“Then we’ll have to give them the slip,” said Nicky.

“But...” started Daniel.

“Daniel, this is our big chance to find the treasure,” said Meldy. “You want to help don’t you?”

“Yes but I.....”

“It is left here,” called out Paul from the front. “What is the time now?”

“We can still do it,” said Nicky.

They went past the quarry and there was the tree ahead. Then they heard voices.

“Did you see any sign of them on the track?” asked a woman.

“That’s my mum,” whispered Nicky.

“No. What about the route past the quarry?” asked a man. Meldy instantly recognised her father’s voice.

“We should check,” said Nicky’s mother, “I’ll go look.”

The five dived behind some bushes and waited with bated breath for her to pass by.

“She’ll come back,” whispered Nicky, “what do we do now?” He checked his watch, time was ticking away. It would tick away some more yet. They remained in hiding and saw Mrs Berrington return empty handed.

“There’s only five minutes left,” said Nicky.

Four minutes, three minutes. Suddenly, Daniel stood up and moved towards the track. “Good luck,” he whispered then ran back the way they had come.

“Meldy, Nicky! They’re there! Run!” he shouted. In no time the two adults flashed past in an attempt to catch up with him.

The four remaining children, initially confused, now saw what Daniel was doing.

“He’s leading them away!” hissed Meldy. “Come on!” They rushed from their hiding place and sprinted over to the tree.

“Stand here!” she commanded as she pushed them into position.

“Get ready,” said Nicky as he checked his watch. “It’s not long n.....”

A squirrel, oblivious to what had just happened below, dozed all alone in its dray.

Daniel managed to evade his friend's parents and, having found his way back down the hill, arrived in the centre of Wood Tofton. Walking past the cafe he bumped into the Baron.

"Good afternoon, Master Daniel. Where are your friends?"

"They've gone."

"Where did they....," started the Baron but then it dawned on him. They had gone through the gateway so that meant he had got it wrong. It had opened earlier than expected. "You did not wish to go with them?"

Daniel stood there looking awkward. The Baron, feeling sorry for him, offered to take him home.

"I'm scared. They'll be angry with me."

"Who will be angry?"

"My Mum and Nicky's Mum and Dad and...."

"Why, what did you do?"

"I snuck into Nicky's house and got him out when they weren't looking."

"Well, I can see they might not be pleased about that. Why did you do it?"

"We wanted to find the treasure."

The story came out in dribs and drabs. While he was explaining they bumped into Terpsichore.

"All on your own Daniel?" she asked.

"Miss Cory, Master Daniel is indeed on his own. Now, I think we will need to avail ourselves of your excellent social skills."

"Of course. I am only too happy to help if I can. But where are the others?"

By now they were approaching Nicky's house and Daniel was dragging his feet. Terpsichore noticed and took hold of his hand.

"I think I need to explain a few things," said the Baron. "First of all, Daniel's friends have gone away to a parallel world. Daniel, why did they go?"

"To find the treasure."

"Finding treasure sounds really exciting," said Terpsichore, "but wait a minute. I don't understand. How on earth could they have gone to a parallel world if in fact there is such a thing?"

"There definitely is," said the Baron, "It does exist, believe me."

"How can you possibly know?"

"Because that is where I come from but, by my choice, very few people are aware of this."

Terpsichore stopped and stared. For a few seconds she was stuck for words. Then she slowly nodded as if realisation was dawning.

"I thought something was odd, in a nice way, about you. The good manners, the speech patterns and the way you seemed to share some sort of understanding with Daniel's friends."

"You are correct, I do indeed share it as you say. They have all been to my world and now Raoul and Paul have gone back with Daniel's friends. Some day, Miss Cory, I would very much like to tell you a story. A story of those very brave children."

"I would really like to hear it. Now of course I have lost some of my assistants. Snow White and her two little helpers does have a certain humorous quality I suppose."

Mr Berrington was leaving Meldy's house when he saw Daniel and his escort.

"Daniel!" he cried, "where's Nicky?"

"I am sorry Mr Berrington," replied the Baron. "It would appear that my assumptions and thus the information I gave you were not correct."

"No it was not. We blame you for this situation."

“Mr Berrington,” interjected Terpsichore, “the Baron has kindly explained everything to me. The possibility of adventure was just too great.”

“But....”

“Mr Berrington,” she continued, “when you were Nicky’s age, didn’t you long for adventure? If someone had said to you, ‘let’s go on a treasure hunt,’ would you have said, ‘no, I’d rather stay in my room?’ I’m sure you wouldn’t. Especially if your special friend, a friend you trusted, a friend who had helped you recover from a serious illness....”

“Well, er, I suppose...,” his expression had changed from annoyance to concern as he remembered how things had recently been with his son.

“Do not worry Mr Berrington,” she added, “Nicky will be back soon.” She squeezed Daniel’s hand that had remained clasped in her’s and added, “he will want to come home to tell his friend Daniel all about it.”

Terpsichore and the Baron now had to meet Meldy’s parents and Daniel’s mother. The Baron worked his charm on the women and Terpsichore did the same on Meldy’s father while the twins rolled their eyes in the background.

“Dad!” they exclaimed once the visitors had left, “you’re such a pushover! As for you mum, you should have seen the expression on your face when he complimented you on your new jacket.”

“Yes, alright. The question is, what do we do now?” asked their father.

“Well you two can’t go,” said his wife, “you’ve got to revise for your exams.”

“We’ll only be gone a week and we know it all anyway,” said Kick.

“Plus there’s no telling what scrapes Meldy will get into with Sophie,” added her sister.

“What about the panto?” asked Mrs Wagley.

“They haven’t even set a date for the performance yet,” said Kick.

“Besides, they could do it in January or even February,” added Popster.

“By then Terpsichore will get her helpers back,” said Kick.

“But Brunny will be gone,” pointed out Mrs Wagley.

“Five or Six, what does it matter?” replied Kick. “She’s too big to be a little helper anyway.”

In the Place de Napoleon a carriage was waiting.

“I do not think they are coming,” said Antoinette Court Manteau.

“Oh but they are,” replied her sister Sophie, “I know they are. Just you wait and see!”

They waited for a few more minutes. “They are here!” squealed Sophie with delight. “What did I tell you?”

“Then let us go and get them,” replied Antoinette, “I have to be at the palace soon.”

The groggy visitors were led away from the statue of Napoleon and squashed into the carriage.

“You all have ID cards so at least we do not have to visit the police station,” said Antoinette.

“But I haven’t got mine,” replied Nicky.

“Nicky!” said Antoinette with mock severity, “How could you have been so careless?”

“But I didn’t know where we were going! Daniel said ‘treasure hunt’ and we had to hurry and....”

“Wait a minute!” interjected Antoinette, “treasure hunt?”

The five friends looked at each other. “Oops,” said Meldy, “now we’ve done it!”

“Alright, what is going on here?” asked Antoinette in her sterner older sister voice.

Sophie shrunk down in her seat. “Well you see Antoinette....”

“Sophie, I do not see. To me, a treasure hunt means a trouble hunt. Last time you all got together you were kidnapped, remember?”

"I was not," pointed out Sophie from her corner.

"But you could have been Sophie. Now, tell me everything. Is it anything to do with the invite to Aunt Francine's?" Antoinette sat back and patiently listened to their story.

"So I was right. You were plotting something in the garden the other week. However, I do not think the treasure will still be there."

"But it could be couldn't it?" asked Meldy.

"I bet it is there!" said Paul.

"Yes," she mused. "Well, I suppose it might be. If we find it, so much more could be done."

"Antoinette?" asked Nicky.

"Yes Nicky?"

"You said we. Are you going to help us?"

Antoinette regarded their eager upturned faces. "I think I should, if only to look after you. There is no telling what could happen if you are left on your own."