

Chapter 12 What Has Paul Found?

The four boys were down the far end of the dimly lit tunnel. Their voices echoed back towards Meldy and Sophie.

"It's dark in here," said one. "This light is not working."

"We cannot see you," said another.

"We can't see you either!" cried Meldy.

"It is just like the secret tunnel into the palace," said Sophie. Meldy agreed. She remembered it quite clearly, so did the Empress whose freedom came as a direct result of that particular adventure.

"I wonder if Nicky has....?" started Meldy but a cry from the other end answered before she could finish. Nicky had obviously encountered a large spider.

The girls were about to enter the tunnel when they heard the boys running towards them, their feet making distinctive sounds as they pounded on the flagstone floor.

"Now we see you," cried Sophie as they approached. The sound of running slowed then came to a stop.

"It's curved," said Daniel.

"Let us run back while you count," suggested Paul, "then we can see how long it is." Off they went while the girls counted.

When the boys returned Raoul divided the number obtained by two.

"We ran both ways so now we know how many seconds it took to get to the end."

"But how does that help?" asked Meldy.

"Well, er....," started Raoul.

"I think it's miles long," observed Daniel.

"Meldy's right," said Nicky. "We don't know how far we can run in a second but...."

“Did you hear,” interjected Paul, “the sound was different in the middle?”

“What do you mean?” asked Sophie.

“When we ran our feet made a sound on the floor. I think it was different in the middle.”

“I did not notice,” said Raoul.

“Nor did I,” chorused Nicky and Daniel.

“Let’s go look,” suggested Meldy, “it could mean something.”

The six friends trooped through the tunnel while Paul, out in front, stamped on the floor in a very deliberate manner.

“I cannot hear anything different,” said Raoul.

“We are not there yet,” replied Paul while he stamped away. Suddenly he stopped. “Here it is! Can you hear?”

“Do it again,” said Sophie, “then move along a bit.” They all listened intently.

“I think it does sound different,” ventured Raoul.

“I can’t hear anything,” declared Nicky.

“I’m not sure,” said Meldy.

“Yes,” said Sophie. “I think it is different.”

“Does that mean,” asked Nicky, “there’s something underneath?”

“Treasure!” chorused the other five.

“Well it could be,” said Daniel, “but it could be something else.”

“We should tell the Baron,” said Sophie, “he will know what to do.”

“I will mark the spot,” said Paul as he reached down to pick up a small piece of wood. “Then we will not forget.”

They trooped out of the tunnel then walked through the basement and up the stairs into the castle. Aunt Francine saw them streaming out of the door.

“How did you get on down there?” she asked.

“Aunt Franci,” said Sophie, “we think we have found the treasure!”

“Sophie, that would be wonderful but why do you think it is down there?”

“It is the sound the flagstones make in the tunnel. Paul noticed it first and then we heard it too.”

“But,” replied her aunt, “that tunnel was flooded at the time of the rebellion. They would have had to drain it, bury the treasure, replace the floor then flood it again. It would have taken too much time.”

“But, Aunt Franci, how do you know?” ventured Sophie.

“Everyone knows, it is part of our history.”

The crestfallen children walked out into the courtyard.

“What do we do now?” asked Nicky.

“What if she is wrong?” asked Meldy. “They could all be. My mother said History is written by the winners.”

“But we were the winners,” replied Sophie.

“Who were the winners, and what did they win?” asked the Baron from behind them. “And why, may I ask, are you all looking so dejected?”

“Monsieur Le Baron,” said Paul, “we thought we had found the treasure.”

“But the tunnel’s been flooded,” said Meldy, “for ages and ages and the History books say....”

“Hold on,” he replied, “you think there is something in the tunnel?”

“There was a different noise,” said Raoul who proceeded to explain what Paul had heard.

“I wonder,” mused the Baron, “you may have something. Master Paul is an excellent chorister. In fact I think he is one of the best. He will have a highly developed ear that will pick up small variations in notes on a musical scale. Master Raoul, you have similar abilities. Did you notice anything?”

“Monsieur Le Baron, I think I did.”

“Well,” he replied, “there is a way to investigate without digging up the floor. Dowsing.”

“What’s that?” asked Nicky.

“Come with me. I think I know where we can find what we require.”

They followed the Baron across the courtyard to a workshop. Racks of tools, piles of wood and old bits of metal were scattered around while sunlight streamed in through some large windows. The children, fascinated by so much stuff, looked around while the Baron rummaged in one of the corners.

“Ah! This will do!” he proclaimed in triumph. He had found a piece of wire slightly thinner than a pencil. He put it in a vice then sawed it in half. The children watched as he straightened the two pieces then they followed him over to a forge.

“Stand well back,” he commanded, “I must heat them.” There was a loud pop as he lit the gas torch which was used to heat a part of each piece. He bent them with ease then they were quenched in some water which produced a hiss, a whoosh and clouds of steam. He was left with two ‘L’ shaped pieces.

“Come with me,” he said, “we will locate this treasure if indeed it does exist.”

Back to the house they went, the Baron with his newly made dowsing rods and the six children with their expectant faces glowing in anticipation.

“Monsieur Le Baron,” observed Sophie’s Aunt, “you appear to be very determined.”

“Madame,” he replied, “the children have informed me of certain anomalies in the flooring of the tunnel in the basement. I think it bears some investigation using these dowsing rods if, of course, you are in agreement.”

“If you wish, but I do not think there is anything there.”

“Thank you Madame. If you are correct then my brave young friends will have to redirect their energies, even if that means returning to their homes.”

Down the stairs they went, then across the basement to the door leading to the tunnel.

“Now, I do not wish to know where the flagstone in question is. If possible, I will find it myself.” Holding a rod in each fist so the longer part of each ‘L’ pointed forward parallel to the floor, he set off with regular stride along the tunnel with the six friends keeping a respectful distance behind.

Suddenly the two rods swung towards each other until they crossed. “There is something here!” he cried.

Paul was first on the scene. “But that is not where it should be,” he said. He turned to point at his piece of wood which was around two metres away. “It was over there.”

“Master Paul,” replied the Baron, “there are ways to ascertain the likelihood of any disturbance to the floor. If these flagstones have been moved, there might be signs of damage.”

He placed his coat on the floor. Then with his flashlight and magnifying glass, he lay on his stomach and examined the edges of the stones. There were mumbles and grunts as he peered intently.

“Yes,” he said, “there is some evidence of interference here.” He pointed to the spot in question and the children crowded in to take a look. They could not see very much. “There is a mark here that suggests the use of a crow bar. Also the cement used with this flagstone does look slightly different. See how the neighbouring stones have been more professionally laid.”

The Baron then repeated the exercise at Paul’s favoured location. He now spent longer on the floor but the verdict was negative. “I cannot see any sign of disturbance here. I think the other stone is the most likely location for the treasure, if of course it exists.”

“What do we do now Monsieur Le Baron?” asked Paul who seemed disappointed that his observation had not appeared to be valid.

“Master Paul, if the treasure is here then you will be credited with its discovery. I think there is no doubt about that.”

“We must move that stone,” said Sophie, “I know it is there.”

“First,” said the Baron, “we must obtain permission.”

“Let us go and find Aunt Franci,” suggested Sophie looking over at the Baron. “You ask her, she likes you so I know she will agree.”

All the children were thinking the same thing, 'there must be something there!'