

### Chapter 3 The Baron settles in

Baron von Kühlschrank was to be part of a pantomime without having a clue what it actually was.

‘It involves singing,’ he mused, ‘but I need to find out more. I will ask Lady Esmeralda.’ She was reading what looked like a script.

“Lady Esmeralda. Please can you help me. What is a pantomime?”

“You don’t know?”

“No. That is why I have to ask.”

“But why are you doing it then?”

“Because I think they need me and in that event it is my duty to help.”

“But if they don’t know you, how did they know you were what they needed?”

“Well Lady Esmeralda, you know me and you know I can be of assistance do you not?”

“Yes I suppose I do, and you are a secret agent.”

“I am sorry to disappoint you once again but I am not. But I am still no wiser about pantomimes.”

“Well, I don’t know how to explain it but this one’s all about Snow White and her helpers. They live in a forest. She ran away from her evil stepmother, you know, just as evil as Myrtille du Malcontent.”

“Ah yes, Myrtille. She is truly evil. It is such a shame she cannot be in this pantomime. She would be perfect for the role but I hope she will be in prison for many years yet.”

“Good, that’s where she belongs. You’ll be the pirate king. You live on treasure island. Snow White and her helpers, that’s me and my friends, will come to steal your treasure but it’s not really yours because you stole it first. You take us prisoner. You know all about prisons so you’ll be good at that.”

“And do you get the treasure?”

“Of course we do. We use it to buy the woods so we can all live happily ever after.”

“Intriguing.”

“Oh, and the principal boy will be your son. He falls in love with Snow White. Misia’s going to do that, oh, that’s her.”

Misia had heard about the Baron from the twins so she came over to have a look. Meanwhile, the Baron was still rather confused.

“Oh Meldy,” she said. “I’m sorry, I...”

“Misia,” said Meldy, “this is Baron von Kühlschrank.” Turning to the Baron she said, “Misia’s our neighbour and her brother Daniel’s one of my helpers.”

“Don’t tell him that,” laughed Misia, “he thinks you’re one of his! But I’m pleased to meet you Baron von Kühlschrank.”

“Miss Misia,” said the Baron as he bowed, “I am honoured to meet you.”

Misia looked a bit surprised. To her, the Baron looked a bit like a fish out of water. Old fashioned manners, unusual dress and a very distinctive accent.

“What brings you to Wood Tofton?” she asked. “Surely Mrs Tipperley hasn’t been advertising in your country?”

“Advertising? In my country? Well er....” He exchanged glances with Meldy. Misia picked this up. She was one of the small group that knew about the parallel world.

“So you came from the woods?” she replied with a movement of her head in the general direction of the gateway.

“Ah Miss Misia, you have correctly indicated the relevant location of certain mysterious arrivals and departures.”

“How long will you be with us?” she asked.

“I am not sure. But now I am in this pantomime you see and....”

Misia laughed. “I know Mrs Tipperley is persistent but surely she wasn’t waiting for you up there?”

“No, she was waiting for me down here.”

At that precise moment Tansie Tipperley was marching across the hall towards them.

“Baron von Kühlschrank? Ah, good. You have met Artemisia.” Turning to Misia, she said “we are so lucky to have found him. We’ve just heard from the man who was supposed to play the pirate king. He came highly recommended but you’ll never guess what.”

“No,” said the Baron, “I am afraid I cannot solve this riddle.”

“He won’t be coming. Very rude. Well, it’s typical. You just can’t trust anyone these days!”

“Mrs Tipperley,” replied the Baron. “I wish to take issue with the word ‘typical’. My word is my bond. I have said I will play this part in your pantomime and I will cross raging torrents in my attempts to achieve a high level of perfection.”

“Oh! Baron von Kühlschrank!” she simpered, “I didn’t mean you. Anyone can see you are a true gentleman, a man of honour. I am so, so sorry if I...”

“Madame,” he replied, “I did not think for one moment.... But let us close the book on this matter.” At this point he took her hand as if to shake it but he kissed it instead.

Tansie Tipperley seemed to sway and go weak at the knees. She blushed a deep shade of red.

“Oh, Baron!” was all she could say.

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Word travelled fast in the village. Tansie Tipperley could not stop talking about the gallant visitor. He had spent the first night at the inn before the residents of Wood Tofton had chance to offer him accommodation.

“He can stay with us,” said Tansie but she was a bit concerned as to the possible effect on her niece’s studies.

“I have to work on my dissertation,” said Terpsichore, “but he’s obviously highly educated. Maybe he could help me in some way?”

Meanwhile, Misia was talking to her mother. “He’s really charming. And he’s a Baron. The Wagley sisters all like him. They say he’s a very talented individual.”

“Where did they meet him?”

“Oh, you know, somewhere in Europe.”

“I heard that Mr Wagley is paying for him to stay at the inn. How come he doesn’t have any money?”

“Oh, there was something about a revolution.”

“I heard Tansie was going to offer....”

“I hope he finds somewhere else because we don’t want him staying there. You know what she’s like!”

At that precise moment, Tansie Tipperley was looking out of her kitchen window. She saw a young man striding up the lane.

‘It’s the Baron!’ she thought as she leapt into action. She had it all worked out. He should be staying with them. They could rearrange things and make him very comfortable.

‘My coffee morning will be next week,’ she mused, ‘He will be the honoured guest.’ She was out of the door and into the lane in record time.

By now he was some distance ahead so she quickened her pace. Suddenly he stopped and seemed to be looking into a hedge.

‘I’ll catch him if he stops just a bit.... What’s he doing now?’ He moved closer to the hedge and proceeded to squeeze through a gap to the point where there was no more sign of him.

Nicky Berrington had been in that hedge when he saw the Baron walking past. “Baron von Kùhlschrank,” he said, “do you want to see my tree house?”

“Is that Chevalier Nicholas in there?” he asked. “Ah yes, now I see you. It is a pleasure to meet you again. I would very much like to see this tree house but you must first introduce me to your parents.”

He managed to squeeze through the hedge, avoiding some vicious looking branches on the way. Mrs Berrington was in the garden and she looked round as Nicky triumphantly introduced his friend.

“Mrs Berrington,” he said as he bowed, “I am indeed honoured to make your acquaintance. You have a fine son in Chevalier Nicholas.”

Mrs Berrington had already heard about him. Nicky and Meldy’s disappearance and eventual reappearance had necessitated some explanations so she knew about the parallel world.

“Good morning your er, Baron. Nicky has told me about you. Thank you for saving the twins from that evil woman.”

“Mrs Berrington,” he replied, “it was fortunate that I could be of assistance. Did Master Nicholas tell you how brave he was when they were kidnapped?”

“Thank you Baron but I do wish he hadn’t gone off with Meldy like that.”

“Of course, yes, I fully understand. He should not have done it but Mrs Berrington, many are grateful that he did.”

“Mum,” said Nicky, “the Baron has nowhere to live and we have plenty of room. Why can’t he stay with us?”

“Master Nicholas,” interjected the Baron, “I could not possibly impose myself on your family like that. I will....” Here he was interrupted by a shriek from the hedge near the lane.

“What on earth?” cried Mrs Berrington.

“I will investigate this intrusion!” replied the Baron. With that he raced over and disappeared. Soon he reappeared with a rather dishevelled Tansie Tipperley.

“Mrs Berrington! Please forgive me! I had no right to interrupt your...”

“Yes but what on earth were you doing in our hedge?”

“What was I doing? Well, yes, er... to tell the truth I was looking for my cat. I thought he had gone into your hedge then I got stuck and....”

“Well if we see him we’ll let you know. He doesn’t usually visit our garden.”

Tansie looked at the Baron as if she wanted to thank him for saving her. He bowed in return.

‘There was no cat,’ mused Mrs Berrington after the visitor had left, ‘she was spying on us. Or more specifically, the Baron.’ She later decided to have a word with her husband. If he was agreeable, the visitor could stay with them.

He was then led away by Nicky. Once inside the tree house he made many appreciative noises and asked many questions. “I am very impressed Master Nicholas. Your father has done an excellent job.”

Mrs Berrington appeared at the bottom of the ladder. “Hello? Baron von Kùhlschrank? My husband would like to meet you.”

Nicky’s parents had already discussed him with the Wagley family. They knew he was trusted by some very important people in the Departement de Londres and the girls spoke highly of him. They also had an ulterior motive. Neither family wanted him staying with Tansie Tipperley so it was agreed he would stay with the Berringtons.

Next door, Kick was talking to her mother. “You should have seen Mrs Tipperley. She was all over him. At her age too. So embarrassing!”

“What about her niece Terpsichore? Did she like him?”

“Oh yes,” said Popster, “but at least she’s closer to his age.”

“Oh,” said their mother, “I saw Misia. Brunhilde is coming next week.”

Later, the twins went out into the garden. “What are we going to do?” asked Popster.

“What do you mean?”

“I’d forgotten about Brunny. She’s bound to ask the Baron where he’s from and her being German....”

“Of course. Well, we’ll have to prepare him.”

“With a suitable backstory you mean?”

Meldy appeared and wanted to know what they were talking about.

“Bunny’s coming back? I like her!”

“Why do you and Nicky call her Bunny?”

“Because she’s always hopping about.”

“So what do we tell her about the Baron?”

“Say he’s a secret agent. So he won’t be allowed to tell her anything!”