

## Chapter 5 Daniel's Birthday

One morning the Baron went for his walk into the village. On his way he ducked down as usual under Tansie's hedge and then continued. When he returned he was about to do the same when he heard someone screaming. This was followed by loud barking. Looking over the hedge he saw Tansie and her niece Terpsichore being menaced by a large dog. The niece was trying to shield her terrified aunt.

The Baron strode into the garden. Terpsichore was keeping a wary eye on the dog so it was the latter's reaction that alerted the women to his presence.

"Do not worry," he said as he assessed the situation. "I think this dog is confused. Its collar tells me it was recently tied up."

He moved between the women and the animal and then, with lowered eyes and soothing voice, spoke. The dog, uncertain what to do, stopped barking and tried to size up the new arrival. The Baron let it sniff his hand then he patted it. It enjoyed that so he gave it a scratch. It liked that even more.

"Where does it live?" he asked.

Tansie was still whimpering but Terpsichore knew. The Baron offered to take it home and the now subdued dog trotted off with its new friend. It turned out to be a guard dog that had somehow escaped. The owner was most apologetic but was surprised at how easily the Baron had 'tamed' him.

On his way back he stopped in to check on Tansie. Terpsichore came to the door.

"How can we ever thank you?" she asked.

"Miss Terpsichore, there is no need. I just did my duty as a fellow human being."

"My friends call me Cory."

"It would indeed be an honour, Miss Cory, to be included amongst your friends."

"Please it's Cory not Miss Cory," she laughed. "What do I call you?"

"Well, I would very much like you to call me Bruno. So, you do not believe the rumours about me?"

“Certainly not. The Wagley sisters are honest and I’m convinced they wouldn’t lie. Why should I believe a bunch of idle gossip? And you saved my aunt, she’s terrified of large dogs. She was bitten as a small child....”

“I understand. Please give her my regards.”

“Thank you again Bruno.”

He walked off down the lane and thought to himself, ‘I will not crawl past that hedge again. After all, I am not a snake in the grass or a confidence trickster!’

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Meldy and Nicky were talking to the Baron. “It’s Daniel’s birthday today,” said Nicky.

“Ah yes, Master Daniel,” sighed the Baron. He had noticed the birthday boy was feeling a bit left out lately. Meldy and Nicky spent a lot of time together and now Brunny was there she rather monopolised his sister Misia.

‘I will get him something,’ he thought, ‘but what? And how can I obtain anything anyway?’

That afternoon he walked into the village, stopping to talk to Tansie Tipperley on the way. “Ah! Baron von Kùhlschrank! It’s so good of you to call. Do come in, I was just making some coffee. I am so sorry, I never thanked you for rescuing us from that vicious dog.”

“It was my pleasure, Mrs Tipperley. It was indeed fortunate that I was more vicious.”

“Oh no Baron! You vicious? I can’t believe....”

“I have heard what some people are saying.”

“Idle minds my dear Baron, idle minds.”

“I think you are right. Now, I am looking for a birthday present for a rather special boy.”

“That would be Daniel Masterton?”

“Yes, I think he needs cheering up.”

“You are very astute.”

After taking his leave, he carried on into the village. As he approached the cafe he saw Dot altering something on the menu board outside.

“Miss Dot, good afternoon to you.”

“Good afternoon Sir,” she replied.

“Miss Dot, I would like you to call me Bruno. Sir seems much too formal.”

“But Sir, it wouldn’t be right. You being such a fine gentleman and all.”

“But Miss Dot, it would be right. You are a successful businesswoman and you display impressive entrepreneurial abilities. All you need is some solid financial backing and you could be anything you wish!”

“Oh Sir, do you really think?”

“Yes Miss Dot, I really do think. But now I have a problem. I must find a present for Master Daniel Masterton and have no idea what to get him.”

“Daniel, yes. He’s such a nice lad. I wish he had a few more friends. I can’t think what he.... Wait a minute, I have just the thing! My lad’s a bit older and he got given a metal detector but it’s still in it’s box because he already had one. I bet he’d love that, what lad his age wouldn’t?”

The Baron couldn’t see how a metal detector could be small enough to give to children but he bowed to her superior knowledge.

“Well Miss Dot, if you think...”

“Yes, I do. I’m sure he’d love it. I’ll send Sarah over to pick it up.”

The Baron lingered over his coffee while Sarah disappeared down the road. Fifteen minutes later she reappeared with a large box.

“There you are Sir,” said Dot.

“Miss Dot, how can I accept.... I must give you something in return...” he could see from the pictures on the box what an impressive looking device it was.

“Now don’t you worry about...” here she stopped. She was staring at a very impressive gold coin that was sitting on the Baron’s outstretched palm.

“I want you to accept this Miss Dot.”

“Oh but I couldn’t. It must be ever so valuable!”

“It will bring you luck. That is something every business person needs.”

Sarah was staring at it as well. “It’s beautiful,” she said. “I saw one like it in a museum.”

“And now it will have a new home,” said the Baron as he laid it on the counter. “Goodbye Miss Dot, Miss Sarah, we will meet again very soon I hope.”

“But Sir, you shouldn’t have,” said Dot as she continued to stare.

“I think I should have Miss Dot,” he replied as he left.

On his way back up the lane he bumped into Tansie and Terpsichore.

“What have you got there?” they asked.

“It is a very compact metal detector.”

“What will you be detecting with it?” asked Terpsichore.

“I intend to give it to Master Daniel for his birthday.”

“I bet he’ll love it. What boy wouldn’t?” she replied. He was invited into their house and they wrapped it up for him.

“Where did you get it?” they asked.

“Miss Dot gave it to me. It was surplus to her requirements.”

“I hear you have made a very favourable impression there!” laughed the niece.

“I do not know,” he replied with some modesty, “but I think she is capable of managing a larger establishment, perhaps in the nearest town?”

“Do you really think so?” asked the aunt.

“Very much so. She has a way of making her guests feel comfortable and she takes an interest in them. Oh, and she makes an excellent breakfast and a fine cup of coffee.”

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By the time the Baron reached the Masterton’s, Daniel’s birthday party was in full swing. Balloons floated around the room and a conjuror had just finished her floorshow. The animated chatter that followed was punctuated by Brunny’s tinkling laughter.

“What a lovely book! I love books, I have loads and loads of them at home. When it rains I read all the time.”

The Baron sensed that Daniel wanted something a bit more exciting than books. “Master Daniel,” he said, “will you please accept....” Daniel’s eyes had already grown wide with wonder as he reached for the large package. The wrapping paper, so carefully applied, lasted but an instant.

“A metal detector! Wow! Thank you so much! Let’s go on a treasure hunt! Meldy and Nicky, are you coming?”

The device issued a chorus of beeps as it was pointed at various metal objects around the room. After the adventurers had left, his mother came over.

“Herr Baron, it was much too expensive! You shouldn’t have...”

“Dr Masterton, to see the joy on his face is worth more than you can imagine. Perhaps he should not have rewarded me so richly?”

Misia also came to thank him.

“I haven’t seen him so happy since before our father died. How did you know that was what he wanted? He rarely asks for things like other children.”

“What child does not want to go on a treasure hunt,” he replied with the broadest of smiles.

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Back in the Departement de Londres, Paul had been trying to locate his brother’s diary. “It is not where I thought it was,” he had told Raoul and Sophie.

“We must go soon or someone else will find the treasure!” they had said.

“But it has been there for hundreds of years,” he had replied, “surely another week will not matter.”

However, it was two weeks before he saw his brother using it. Then he saw him take it into his study but when he came out he didn’t have it. Now he knew where it was so at the first opportunity he snuck in to read it. He found two entries for the following Saturday, these were tests spaced twelve hours apart.

On the following day he told Sophie and Raoul and it was decided that the latter would stay over on the Friday night. They could then sneak out early the following morning. According to the diary, they had to be in place at six o’clock. Soon after that they would either be in the woods above Wood Tofton or still sitting near the statue in the centre of the Place de Napoleon. Time would tell whether this information was correct.

On the night before their adventure they had trouble sleeping. They were up early the next day and crept out of the house. When they reached the statue they were still tired and they were both stifling yawns. Soon they dozed off. Raoul was first to wake and he realised straight away they had left the square. No statue in sight, only trees and lots of them. He shook Paul to wake him up.

“We are here!” he cried as he stood up. An agitated squirrel skipped around above his head, flicking its tail and making a strange wheezing noise.

“Where is the map?” asked Paul once he was sufficiently awake.

“I have it here... or here.... No it is.... I am sorry I have lost it!”

“Now what do we do?”

“We will go this way. I think Sophie said...”

They walked off along a track past a quarry.

“Sophie did not say anything about this,” said Paul. “Look, this path goes down the hill. We can take it.”

“I do not think it...” started Raoul but Paul was accelerating down the slope. They followed this path even though it was a bit overgrown until they saw the first signs of a village.

“I am hungry,” said Raoul.

“So am I. We should have got some food before we left.”

“But they would have heard us. Nicky will give us some.”

Eventually they arrived in the centre of the village. “Is this where Meldy and Nicky live?” asked Paul.

“It must be.”

“I cannot see the big hedge. Are we lost?”

“I can smell food and I am really hungry!”

“So can I. I bet I am hungrier than you!”

Yes, there was food very close to where they stood sniffing the air. They followed the enticing aroma round a corner and there, directly in front of them, was a cafe. They knew this because they could read ‘Dot’s Cafe’ in large letters above the open door. With rumbling stomachs they positioned themselves in the doorway and gazed longingly inside.

A woman was busy behind the counter and another could be heard in what must have been the kitchen. The counter woman emerged and came towards the door while still addressing the kitchen woman. She turned and jumped when she saw the two boys standing there.

“Hello you two,” she said.

“Hello,” chorused the boys, “are we in Wood Tofton?”

“Yes you are.”

“Something smells good,” said Paul as he gazed hungrily in the direction of the kitchen.

“Would you like to try some?” asked the woman.

“Yes please!” they chorused.

“I’m Sarah. Who are you?”

“I am Paul and this is Raoul.”

“Well Paul and Raoul, do come in. Are you visiting someone here?”

“Yes, our friends Meldy and Nicky.”

“Well if you know them you must know the Baron. Such a charming gentleman. There aren’t many of them around these days, believe me!”

The two boys looked at each other. Could it be Baron von Kühlschrank?

Sarah noticed this and wondered what it meant. “Where are you from?” she asked.

“Er, well, we are from France,” said Raoul.

“You don’t seem very sure about it!” laughed Sarah.

“He is very hungry,” replied a quick thinking Paul.

“Well, wait a minute and I’ll get you something.”

Soon the boys were greedily devouring some breakfast.

“Aren’t you out a bit early?”

“We could not sleep,” replied Raoul, “we were in the woods and got lost.”

Dot came out of the kitchen to have a look. “You poor things! You must be really hungry. There’s more if you want it.”

After a few minutes the boys were finishing their first parallel world breakfast. They were engrossed in cleaning their plates so did not notice the arrival of another customer. This person was familiar, very familiar indeed.