

## Chapter 10 Parsley Starts Work

Pierre, formerly Parsley, Plinkoff woke up early and wondered where he was. The bed was hard and a small window let in a glimmer of dawn. Someone was banging on his door.

“Petit déjeuner!” they shouted.

“That means breakfast!” he thought, “I’d better hurry!”

Ten minutes later he was in the breakfast room. Strong black coffee and a mound of croissants were on the tables.

‘Cheese for breakfast?’ he thought as he looked at a nearby platter.

“Have some, you will need your strength,” said the man next to him.

“Thank you,” he said. ‘Oh I see,’ he thought. ‘They think I’m one of the workers. One hardly needs strength for an office job.’ He didn’t have any cheese.

Soon a group of them were taken out into the city streets in a horse-drawn wagon. ‘This is all very well,’ he thought, ‘travelling with the workers, but I need to establish a distance between myself, as management, and the men and women who are the operatives. Yes, I’ll call them that. Sounds better than workers.’

The operatives around him had started to sing. He didn’t know the tune or the words so a neighbour tried to teach him.

“It is easy,” said the man. “It is our song. We sing it every day on our way to work.”

Pierre thought, ‘Well, I won’t be travelling with you for long. I’ll soon have my own carriage like that one over there.’ A particularly fine example was passing just at that moment.

Their wagon stopped and they all piled out. This section of the street was spread with lots of horse manure and an open cart had already arrived. The operatives selected their shovels and started to clean it up. Pierre was about to start issuing orders when a large well-dressed man pointed to the remaining shovels.

“Take one of those and do what they are doing,” he said.

“But, I thought, I didn’t....”

“What did you think?”

“I thought I was to be a manager.”

The man gave him an indulgent smile. “You are an immigrant. Immigrants have to prove themselves. When you have done that, then we will see.”

“Oh, I get it. A day or two as an operative then I can be in an office?”

“More like a year or two. Or maybe three or four. The longer you stand here doing nothing the longer it will take to promote you.”

Reluctantly Pierre started to use his shovel. Soon he was worn out because he'd never worked so hard in his life. Sitting in offices all day was nothing like this. Then there were the flies. They must have set up a Pierre Plinkoff welcoming committee because they buzzed relentlessly around all exposed parts of his body.

‘At least I’m doing something useful,’ he thought ruefully. ‘All the flies are on me. They’re leaving the others in peace.’

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Parsley Plinkoff’s disappearance was causing Inspector Crooklock some concern. He decided to request a search of the woods behind Woodhayes Lane, much to the surprise of the residents.

“What are all those policemen doing up there?” asked Meldy.

“Something about a missing person,” replied Popster.

“You don’t think?” asked Kick.

“You mean the ‘you know what’,” replied Popster.

“Yes, the ‘you know what’,” said Kick.

“But I don’t know what,” said Meldy.

“Think about it Meldy,” said Popster. “We all know what’s up there but no one else does.”

“Oh, I see, the Gateway!”

Antoinette and Sophie appeared so they joined in.

“Someone is missing,” mused Antoinette, “do you think they were up there when Stephanie came?”

“It is possible,” replied Kick, “but who was it?”

Later, Stephanie came to see them with some news.

“They found a backpack on top of the hill. Daniel identified it as belonging to one of the burglars. There is no sign of him. Dr Masterton thinks the other burglar will be charged with his murder.”

“But what if he’s gone to the Departement de Londres?” asked Meldy. “If he has they’ll never find him.”

“Good point Meldy,” said Popster, “but we can’t tell the police because you know what’ll happen then.”

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Pierre Plinkoff lay on his bed in his room. Every muscle ached, even muscles he never knew he had. ‘Two more weeks of this will kill me, let alone two years!’ he thought.

“Come, Pierre!” said a voice outside his door. “You cannot lie there! Come down to the social centre.”

“I can’t move!” gasped Pierre. Before he knew what had happened, five men appeared in his room, picked him up and carried him down the stairs.

“We have all suffered,” said one. “Ignore it and it will go away.”

“Do you promise?” moaned Pierre as he was carried along a corridor. Soon other people joined in the procession, singing as they went. Once inside the social centre, he lay on a couch while someone went to get him some herbal tea.

“Pierre,” said a woman. “It will get better. I remember my first day. Lots of pain but soon everything was alright.”

“You’re Claudette, aren’t you,” he said. “How many years have you been here?”

“Almost two. My daughter is at the University so I need the money. What did you do before this?”

“I ran a government department in England.”

“What did it do, this department?”

He hesitated. “Er, we were looking for aliens.”

“Les petites femmes vertes.”

“The little green women?”

“Yes, you found some, I think.”

“Not yet but I’m convinced they exist.”

“They do exist. People have seen them.”

Pierre, while talking to Claudette, noticed a picture on the wall. It showed twins and four younger children, all holding medals. Two of the girls looked familiar. Very familiar. Then it came to him. They had featured in the video captured in the Wood Tofton garden.

“That picture on the wall,” he asked. “Who are they?”

“They,” said Claudette, “are heroes. They rescued Princess Augustine from the rebels who tried to overthrow our government.”

“But they are just children.”

“Yes, but exceptional children! Three of them come from the Departement, the two boys and girl on the right. She is Sophie Court Manteau, the youngest daughter of our Chef de Sanitaire.”

“And the other girls?”

“They are the Wagley sisters from England. They came here to help us. We are very grateful to them.”

“They were all awarded medals?” He knew the answer before Claudette replied.

“Yes, they were awarded our country’s highest honour: The Order of Napoleon the Second.”

“With laurel leaves?”

“You know about those? They are only awarded to the bravest of recipients.”

Pierre thought back to the dinner party with Lady Pastena. She had told them about this girl who turned out to be Esmerelda Wagley. So she was telling the truth.

“Er, did they receive any other honours?” he asked.

“Yes, they did. They were all given titles by our Emperor, Napoleon the Tenth. The boys were made Chevaliers and the girls were made Ladies. The youngest four discovered a secret passage into the Palace, found the Princess and almost managed to get her out. The twins then helped when an alternative escape route was needed and they conducted her to a safe hiding place.”

“So the twins are heroes, too?”

“Yes, of course, but the youngest four, because of their bravery and sense of adventure, were crucial in the rescue of our beloved Princess.”

“Is the Emperor popular?”

“He listens to his daughter. She has recommended many changes since the rebels were overthrown. Commissioner Duplessis ...”

“Oh yes, I met her in the police station.”

“She led the team that rescued him. She admits that it was these six children who provided the, how do you say? Yes! The intelligence that allowed the rescue to be a success. She was injured in a sword fight.”

“A very determined woman.”

“Yes, very determined. Later on she stood with a handful of her officers and faced down a large group of angry rebels. They were trying to reach the Princess but she ordered them to disperse. Brave. She could have been killed.”

“Did they disperse?”

“Eventually. My own daughter was part of a counter demonstration. Because of the danger, they marched from the university and scattered the rebels.”

“What happened then?”

“They ran. Like rabbits. It could have been nasty but those brave children played a crucial role, we will never forget them.”