

## Chapter 11. Parsley Must Return

Pierre Plinkoff was in a deep pain wracked sleep when a loud alarm jolted him awake. Struggling out of bed, he staggered to the door and looked out into the corridor.

“What’s going on?” he asked a passer by.

“Bad weather is coming.”

“So?”

“We have to get out there now. Hurry up!”

‘What fresh torture is this?’ he asked himself as he got dressed. When at the bottom of the stairs he grabbed a cheese filled croissant then piled into one of the waiting operative transport wagons.

“Where are we going?” he asked the person next to him.

“Heavy rain is coming. We have to clean as much as possible from the streets before it washes down the drains.”

“Is that a problem?”

“It gets into the rivers. That is a problem. Do not worry, you will get the rest of the day to sleep.”

Pierre worked as hard as he could until fingers of dawn streaked the cloud-filled sky. On the ride back to the hostel, he sat next to Claudette.

“Come and have some coffee,” she suggested so they sat and talked in the social centre.

“I have noticed,” she said, “you seem preoccupied.”

“Is it that obvious?”

“Yes, it is to me.”

“Claudette, I have a confession. I did a bad thing.”

“Well, if you confess, then I think you are not a bad person.”

“Look at the picture of the girls and boys with their medals.”

She turned to look at the six smiling faces.

“You see the girl, second from the right, the English girl? I helped someone steal her medal.”

Claudette sat there. Silently. He began to think he’d made a big mistake.

“Why?” she finally asked.

“She and some of her friends played a trick on me. They pretended to be aliens. I got into trouble with my boss and lost my job. I wanted revenge. All I got was a nagging feeling of guilt.”

“You must put this right. That is Lady Esmeralda Wagley and she won that medal for heroism. What are you going to do about it?”

“When I get back, if I get back ..”

“It is her medal, awarded by our Emperor but you know that already so you must return it!”

“But I don’t know how to get back.”

“You must do this otherwise....”

“I wish I could but it’s not that easy.”

“Why not? Cross the border and go back. You came here did you not so you know what to do. Put this right, then return.”

He looked around. No one else was listening. “Claudette, I’m from another world, actually a parallel world. I came here by accident. How, I don’t know. Esmeralda Wagley, in the picture, came the same way. Sophie Court Manteau is with her sister in my world at this very moment.”

“Her sister is Antoinette Court Manteau, the singer.”

“Singer? I don’t know but she is called Antoinette.”

“My instinct,” mused Claudette, “was to walk away and have nothing more to do with you. However, you have confessed. That is good. We have to find a way of getting you back so you can return Lady Esmeralda’s medal.”

“You are a good person, Claudette.”

“I think you are too so I will help you. If the Court Manteau sisters are in your world, then I think their cousin, Alain Court Manteau, will know something about it. He is at the University but is often out in the streets doing research on manure flies.”

“Flies?”

“Yes, he thinks people will soon be eating their grubs.”

‘Grubs for grub?’ thought Pierre. ‘No, thank you.’

Later, as he lay in bed, he thought about the facts of the case. One important point stood out. The girl, Esmerelda Wagley, had been wronged. Firstly by him, because he’d participated in the theft of her hard-won and justly deserved medal, secondly by the school who’d sent her home on extended leave. Her crime? Telling the truth. He decided that if he ever made it back he’d set the record straight. He’d given his word to Claudette and, well, he’d given her his word. Period. He’d have to go straight to Lady Pastena and tell her the truth.

Then he realised it could mean admitting involvement in the theft of the medal. He’d try to avoid that somehow. Surely they couldn’t connect the theft to Cheddar or himself? Anyway, he’d have to persuade Cheddar to give it back. They could drop it off at her house, in the dark, no one need ever know.

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Cheddar Cheasley was looking at a backpack being held up by Inspector Crooklock. Cheddar recognised it instantly but was it wise to say so? Was it wise not to say so?

“Mr Cheasley, I have asked you a question. Do you recognise this?”

“Well Inspector, it does look familiar. I’ve seen many such items in my years of hiking over hill and dale.”

“And did you bury bodies in those locations as well?”

“I protest!” said Cheddar’s Solicitor.

“Well, I think this item is more than familiar to you Mr Cheasley. It belongs, or it once belonged, to your friend Mr Plinkoff.”

“Has he turned up yet, Inspector?”

“No, and you know very well why he hasn’t.”

“My client knows no such thing,” said the Solicitor.

“I think he does and I intend to prove it,” said a very determined Inspector Crooklock.

Cheddar was beginning to feel the pressure. “But I didn’t kill him. Honest. He’s my friend so why would I do it? It just doesn’t make any sense!”

“Mr Cheasley,” replied the Inspector, “You, honest? You stole a girl’s prized possession.”

“You have no right to speak to my client in this manner,” said the Solicitor.

“Alright Mr Cheasley. Why would he leave his backpack, filled with his personal possessions, up on that particular hill? One reason and one reason alone that I can see. He had no more need for them because he is D - E - A - D. Where else could he possibly be? People don’t just vanish into thin air.”

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Eustace had seen the twins out in the lane and had asked them a question.

“Where do Antoinette and Sophie come from?”

“France. Don’t you remember?” replied Kick.

“Whereabouts in France?”

“Near Toulouse, in the south,” said Popster.

“Do they live miles from anywhere as in rural?”

“Well yes, it is a bit rural,” replied Kick. “Why do you ask?”

“I’ve noticed something rather odd about them.”

“What’s that?” asked Popster. She was wondering if they’d slipped up somewhere or maybe Meldy had said something.

“Well, they seem to be frightened of cars and vans. They get very nervous when they approach then relax again when they’ve gone. Also, they seem happy to stay around here. They don’t want to go into the city like most normal visitors.”

“Do they have to go sightseeing?” asked Popster, “not everyone wants to. Maybe they just like our company. And yours too of course, Eustace.”

“No, I suppose they don’t have to but Stephanie is just the same. Don’t get me wrong, I really like them. Antoinette sings, well, you know, incredibly well. They just have, how can I put it, this ‘other world quality’ about them.”

The twins exchanged glances and Eustace noticed.

“Tell me, what’s going on?”

“Eustace,” laughed Kick, “if we tell you we’ll have to kill you!”

“That bad is it?”

“It’s alright Kick,” said Popster. “I’m sure we can trust him. Eustace, the reason you think they have an ‘other world quality,’ is....they actually are from another world.”

“What?”

A full explanation was then given. Eustace let them talk. After they had finished he was silent for a minute or two. “If anyone else had told me this I would have laughed at them. I know you both well enough to know you wouldn’t make it up.”

“We were there,” said Kick. “We experienced it.”

“So Meldy really was awarded that medal?”

“Yes, and we got medals too,” said Kick.

“With laurel leaves,” added Popster. “As Meldy says, they don’t give them to just anybody!”

“Exactly. Only true heroes get them,” laughed Kick.

“Well, I never doubted that. So, when they leave, will they go up into the woods?”

“Yes,” said Popster. “We might need you to keep a look-out. Save them from prying eyes, as it were.”

“Funny, when Antoinette sang, I thought she was out of this world. And, as it turns out, she really is!”

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A few days after Parsley’s conversation with Claudette, she came over when he was helping to remove a particularly large pile of manure.

“See that man with his hands in your manure pile? That is Alain Court Manteau.”

At the first opportunity, Parsley went over. “Monsieur Court Manteau?”

“Yes?”

“I have seen your cousins in England.”

Alain looked at him intently. “So they arrived safely?”

“Yes, they did. Someone suggested I talk to you. I want to return home. I came here by accident but there is something I must do.”

“I see. Come to the University and talk to Professor Lecomte in the Physics Department. He may be able to help you.”

He did go to see the Professor. It turned out that a return trip was possible very soon. Antoinette, Sophie and Stephanie were to be brought back so if he stood in the Place de Napoleon, in the right place and at the right time, he would be returned to Wood Tofton.

That same evening, he saw Claudette in the social centre. “I’ll be going back soon,” he told her.

“It is for the best,” she replied.

“Claudette, once I’ve returned the medal to its rightful owner, I ...”

“Yes?”

“If I return, will you, er, be pleased to see me?”

“If you have given back the medal, then I will be pleased.”

“Then I will do it and come back.”

“Good. Then I will be here.”