

## Chapter 12. The Visitors Leave

“Meldy,” said Stephanie as she entered the room, “we must leave in two days.”

“Can’t you stay a bit longer? Please?”

Antoinette came in behind her. “Meldy, we will come back soon.”

Sophie was trailing along behind her sister. “Meldy, you can come and visit us because Maman said she is happy to have nice girls like you staying.”

Kick wandered in and heard the last comment. “Surely she wasn’t talking about Meldy?”

“Yes, she was Catherine!” replied Meldy.

“You used my Departement name, Meldy! I haven’t heard that for quite a while.”

“Yes,” said Antoinette, “the name I knew you by when you came to stay. What good friends you have been to us. What wonderful friends.”

Popster appeared with a drink of water. “Talking of friends, should we visit Trebiana? I know she’s not quite a friend but she might like visitors.”

“Popster,” replied Kick, “what if she asks Antoinette any awkward questions? Such as where do you live, or can I come and visit?”

“Yes, true,” said Popster, “we scraped by with Eustace but we don’t know her that well, do we?”

“Maybe after we have gone,” mused Antoinette, “visit her and apologise. Say how much I enjoyed singing with her and say I hope to sing with her again some day soon.”

“I thought you were wonderfully wonderful,” enthused Meldy.

“I agree,” added Sophie. “Super wonderful!”

“Can something or someone be super wonderful?” asked Stephanie.

“I don’t see why not,” said Kick.

“Just the right words to describe Antoinette and Trebiana singing together,” added Popster. “In fact,” she smiled, “it was out of this world.”

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Parsley Plinkoff sat on a bench with Claudette. There was a full moon and earlier it had been a warm, sunny day. Now it was a balmy evening.

“Professor LeComte explained his machine to me,” said Pierre.

“That is the Instantaneous Matter Transportation machine?”

“That’s the one. How did you know that?”

“Remember, my daughter is in the Physics department. She gets very excited about it.”

“Well, it seems there is a passageway, or wormhole, between our two worlds. It runs from the woods behind the Wagley sisters’ house to the Place de Napoleon. When the Professor’s machine is operated, purely by chance, anyone standing in one of these locations will be transported to the other. It was the Wagley sisters that first alerted the Professor to its existence.”

“You are saying they came here by accident?”

“Yes, I am. Just as I did.”

“Well, I must say it was a happy accident when they came to us.”

“But an unhappy accident when I came?”

“Happy for the Bureau de Sanitaire. You are now a very productive employee.”

Parsley laughed and thought about all the hard work he’d done since he’d been there.

“I must say I feel better than I ever have before. Also, the aches have gone just like you said they would.”

“You look much healthier, too. Apart from some skin peeling off your nose, that is.”

“Claudette,” he mused, “when I go back I might not be able to return for a few weeks. I might hit problems. One can never tell. I promise to return as soon as I can.”

“You do not have family there?”

“No, I was an only child and my parents are no longer alive. I like the life here. No fumes from cars and trucks. Horses everywhere. I like that, I think I’d like to work with them someday.”

“I have heard of cars and trucks. Seen them in pictures of course but I have never been anywhere near them.”

“Best to keep it that way. Horses are so much better. And so intelligent. I wonder what they would say if they could talk?”

“Watch out for little green women?” laughed Claudette.

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Stephanie had been keeping track and had calculated the approximate time of day when they should stand at the entrance to the invisible gateway in the woods. The professor’s machine, when operated, would open that gateway and the three of them would pass through the passageway to the Place de Napoleon in the Departement de Londres.

When the time came, Mr Wagley accompanied his daughters and the three visitors to the top of the hill. It was five o’clock in the morning so, luckily, no one else was around.

“You’ve come to make sure we don’t leave as well, haven’t you Dad?” joked the twins.

“Well, the thought had crossed my mind ...”

“Daddy, you are silly,” said Meldy. “The machine can only take four! Daddy, why are you holding on to me?”

“I don’t want you to be the fourth!” he said. “Maybe next time, we’ll see.”

Stephanie, Antoinette and Sophie said their goodbyes, then the Wagleys stepped back. They had to be sure of standing well away from the invisible gateway.

“Thank you, Mr Wagley,” called out Antoinette.

“What for? You are always welcome. Anyway, to hear a singer as good as you would have cost us a fortune. We got to hear you for free!”

“Antoinette,” called out Meldy, “please take care of Sophie for me.”

“I will, Meldy.” Both Sophie and Meldy were now getting rather tearful.

“Stephanie, give our love to Amelie,” said the twins. “She looked after us so well when we were staying with you.”

“Thank you so much for everything, we will...” Antoinette didn’t finish the sentence as the three visitors diffused into the air under the tree and disappeared.

“That was amazing,” said Mr Wagley. “I’ve never seen anything like it!”

His three daughters nodded silently. They didn’t feel like talking for quite a while.

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Parsley, formerly Pierre, Plinkoff was lying on some grass under a tree, but not just any tree. It was the same one he’d slumbered under a while before. He staggered to his feet, rubbed his eyes and yawned. Looking around, he recognised the location.

‘I’m back in Wood Tofton,’ he thought. ‘Now I have to set the record straight. No point in knocking on doors yet though. It’s quite early in the morning.’

He found a nice comfortable spot and sat down for a bit. Then he remembered his backpack, the one that he’d left somewhere in these same woods. He had a look round but there was no sign of it.

‘Maybe someone handed it in,’ he thought. ‘I’ll go to the police station later.’

When he judged the time was right, he walked to the track then went down the hill to Woodhayes Lane. Walking along this lane he came to the Wagley’s house. The same house he’d entered illegally a few weeks before.

‘I have to do this,’ he said to himself as he walked up to the door and knocked.

Mr Wagley answered to see a rather scruffily dressed man standing there.

“Yes, can I help you?”

“Am I speaking to the father of Lady Esmeralda Wagley?”

“Er, yes. But who are you? And what’s that smell?” He also asked where he was from but he had already guessed the answer to that question.

“Sir, I am Parsley Plinkoff, the ex-head of the Alien Identification and Investigation Bureau. I stand before you a changed man. I humbly beg your forgiveness for participating in a burglarious entry into your home.”

“A what?”

“Oh I’m sorry, I assisted in a burglary. I helped to steal a medal from your daughter, a medal which she had won for her bravery. I see the error of my ways and I have come to ask for your forgiveness.”

“Well then, I suppose you had better come in.”

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Trebiana Tipperley’s parents had come to see her. “How have you been getting on, Trebi?” asked her mother.

“Alright, I suppose,” she replied.

“And you did so well at the music festival,” said her father.

“Yes, she did,” enthused her grandmother.

Just then there was a knock on the door. That same grandmother went to see who it was. “It’s Eustace,” she said.

Trebiana was out of the door before her parents could ask her anything about him.

“He’s such a nice boy,” said Tansie. “He played for her at the festival. They seemed to fall out over something but then this French singer came and persuaded him to come back.”

“French singer?”

“Yes, a professional. She’s sung for Royalty in France, you know. She was full of praise for Trebi’s singing.”

“Which royalty was that?”

“Oh, they can’t divulge such things. A private party. Confidentiality. You can’t be too careful these days.”

“Of course, of course. So she praised Trebi’s singing?”

“Oh yes. Very impressed she was. They even sang a duet.”

“I wish we could have heard that.”

“Well she’s back in France now, so many engagements you know. Antoinette Court Manteau,” she nodded, “a name to look out for.”