

### Chapter 13. Parsley gets it Sorted

Parsley Plinkoff sat in the Wagley's sitting room while Mr Wagley went upstairs to find Meldy.

"There is a gentleman downstairs. He specifically asked for Lady Esmeralda Wagley."

"Who is he, Daddy?"

"He said he used to be the head of the Alien Investigation Bureau."

"Does he think I'm an alien?"

"Come and hear what he has to say."

"Alright, if you want."

"You're the birdwatcher!" she said as soon as she saw him. "You were looking for nightjars and I said 'don't you mean nightingales' and you told me to go and do my homework."

"I am very sorry, Lady Esmeralda. I was spying on you because I thought you were an alien. I was wrong. Once again, I am really sorry."

"You put those cameras in our garden."

"Cameras? What cameras?" asked a confused Mr Wagley.

"Please, I will explain. Mr Wagley, I heard about your daughter's claims at her school ..."

"Who told you?"

"It was once my job to investigate such things. I had the authority to ask awkward questions and gain access to otherwise confidential information."

"But my daughter? An alien? Really?"

"Of course I now know she isn't but she said some things which sounded, well, unbelievable to say the least. She talked of rescuing a Princess in a parallel world. She said she had been awarded a medal by Napoleon the Tenth ..."

"But it's true! I did! And I was!"

“Lady Esmeralda, I know that now. You see, I have been to the Departement de Londres.”

“How do we know you’re telling the truth?” asked Mr Wagley.

“I worked for the Bureau de Sanitaire. I was sent there by Commissioner Duplessis. I met Alain Court Manteau and ...”

“Daddy! He must have been there! I never told anyone about them!”

“Yes, Lady Esmeralda. I saw your picture on a wall in the Bureau hostel where I was staying. The flies loved me and the other operatives were really grateful !”

“The flies,” mused Meldy. “Now I miss them, at least they didn’t bite. Oh, I nearly forgot. You said my picture was on the wall?”

“Yes, with your sisters, Sophie Court Manteau and the two boys.”

“Raoul and Paul. They sang in the Royal Chapel choir.”

“My friend told me what you all did and said you are heroes. She told me to return to Wood Tofton and put things right. Lady Esmeralda, I helped steal your medal. I am sorry. I did wrong.”

“Well we got it back,” said Meldy. “That is, the police still have it for ...”

“Evidence,” interjected Mr Wagley. “Also Cheddar Cheasley, your accomplice, is in custody.”

“In custody?”

“Yes, for murdering you. They found your backpack on the hill and think he did it in order to keep the medal for himself. So, what do you intend to do?”

“I’ll go to the police to exonerate Cheddar.”

“Think carefully about what you’ll tell them. Visits to parallel worlds won’t go down very well as Meldy can testify.”

“Also, I’ll make sure your school, Lady Esmeralda, will welcome you back.”

“That would be appreciated,” said Mr Wagley. “But how?”

“You leave that to me. I’ll see to it, don’t you worry.”

Later, Mr Wagley took Parsley to the Police Station to see Inspector Crooklock. Constable Honestly, at the desk, was initially sceptical.

“Have you any identification?” he asked Parsley.

“It’s all in my backpack.”

“How do we know it’s yours?”

“It has my identification inside.”

“But it might not be yours. You have no right to search through it.”

“Look, Constable,” said Mr Wagley, “my daughter identified this gentleman as the person who was seen wearing it. Why not take an executive decision. Mr Plinkoff will tell you what identification is in there and where to find it. Then he doesn’t need to touch it.”

The relevant identification was found and the ownership of the backpack established. However, when Inspector Crooklock appeared, he still had his concerns.

“Sir, you and Mr Cheasley broke into Mr Wagley’s house. A crime has been committed.”

“Inspector, no harm has been done. We have my daughter’s medal and Mr Plinkoff has promised to pay for the damaged window. He fully accepts the error of his actions and, as I’m sure you’ll agree, too much valuable police time has already been taken up.”

“If I may ask, where did you go, Mr Plinkoff?”

“Er, I suffered a lapse of memory. I put it down to guilt. I’d done something bad and I knew it was wrong I found myself at a friend’s house and I slept for days and days....”

“I hear,” added Mr Wagley, “guilt can do strange things Inspector.”

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Lady Pastena’s housekeeper came to see her in her garden room. “Your Ladyship, Mr Parsley Plinkoff is asking to see you.”

“Thank you. Show him in.”

By now, Parsley had cleaned up and changed into something smarter. Inspector Crooklock had told him not to leave the area until his investigation was concluded. A visit to Lady Pastena was allowed.

“Parsley,” she said as he came in, “we wondered where you were. Sir Desward was getting very worried. We didn’t believe for a moment that Cheddar could possibly have been guilty of your murder.”

“Lady Pastena,” he replied “I have been to places, seen things which defy logical explanation. However, do you remember the dinner party when you told us about the girl from St Hildegard’s who made those seemingly fantastic claims?”

“Of course I do. She has been suspended from school. Quite right, too. We mustn’t allow ...”

“Lady Pastena, forgive me for interrupting but everything she said was true ...”

“But that’s ....”

“Fantastic, yes. You wondered where I was. Well, I’ll tell you. It’s a good thing you’re sitting down. I have also been to the Departement de Londres.”

“Well, Parsley, are you sure you haven’t caught the sun or something? It certainly looks like it.”

“No, Lady Pastena. I spent my time doing work of a socially relevant nature. Lady Esmeralda ...”

“I thought her name was Esmerelda.”

“She was renamed. Esmerelda was not on the list of approved names in the Departement de Londres. I was re-named Pierre.”

“Pierre, yes, I can see that.”

“I managed to find this while I was there.” He handed Lady Pastena a newspaper cutting. It showed Meldy, Sophie, Raoul, Paul, Catherine and Patrice with their medals.

“The two older girls are her sisters?”

“Yes, they were re-named as well.”

“It’s in French but it says they rescued a Princess Augustine from captivity?”

“Yes, that is why they are seen as heroes.”

“Well, Parsley Pierre. Yes, I think I’ll call you that from now on. Sir Desward knows you better than I do, you were in the same dormitory at school after all. I’ll speak to him and if he says we can absolutely trust you, then I’ll pay Lady Esmeralda a visit.”

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Later, Meldy was in her shrubbery with Nicky and Daniel when a large and expensive-looking car swished into the drive.

“Who’s that?” asked Nicky.

“She’s got a chauffeur,” said Daniel.

“It’s Lady Putrid Dungheap!” whispered Meldy. “What does she want?”

“Isn’t she the one you were rude to?” asked Nicky.

“Well, she was rude to me as well. She was really angry so she got me sent home.”

“She doesn’t look angry now,” observed Daniel.

Lady Pastena Drinktyre bid her driver wait while she marched up to the house. Mrs Wagley answered. Meldy could just about hear her mother’s muffled voice but she could clearly hear Lady Pastena.

“Mrs Wagley, I wish to speak to your daughter Esmerelda. Is she at home?”

“You’re in trouble, aren’t you?” whispered Daniel.

“I suppose I’d better go and see what’s up.” Meldy reluctantly shuffled towards the front door.

“Meldy, Lady Pastena has come to see you.”

“Good morning, Lady Pastena,” said Meldy in her best polite greeting voice.

“Ah, there you are, young lady. Can we go somewhere to talk?”

Once inside Mrs Wagley took them into the living room. “Would you like some coffee, Lady Pastena?” she asked.

“That would be splendid, thank you.”

“Now, young lady, or should I call you Lady Esmeralda?”

“I’m sorry, Lady Pastena.”

“It’s alright. Now I know the full story. Certain information has come my way, shall we say, that indicates the truth of what you were trying to tell me.”

“You believe me?”

“Yes, Lady Esmeralda, I do. I have heard all about your exploits in the Departement de Londres and I can only say how impressed I was by your courage. Ah, thank you, Mrs Wagley. I was just telling Meldy how impressed I was when I heard what she had done. Just the sort of ‘can do’ spirit that I always felt St Hildegard’s stood for.”

“Thank you, Lady Pastena,” said Mrs Wagley.

“The question is, how to proceed from here. We must get you back into lessons as soon as possible. One option is for me to address the whole school and inform them of certain relevant parts of the story.”

“Without mentioning the Departement de Londres?” ventured Mrs Wagley.

“Exactly. No one else in the school has done anything nearly as impressive as your three daughters, Mrs Wagley. I assume the twins are happy to be excluded from any address I might give?”

“At the moment, yes. They are so immersed in their studies, any interruption might affect their motivation.”

“Quite right. They are expected to do very well. Academically they are a real credit to the school.”

“Thank you, Lady Pastena.”

“Well, my Lady,” she said to Meldy. “I’ll work something out and send it on to you before I address the assembly. Of course, I would like your approval for the content of my speech. You see, I am not the Putrid Dungheap that I am sometimes labelled.”

“Lady Pastena, I didn’t ...”

“I know, young lady, I was young once.” With that she thanked Mrs Wagley for the coffee and departed.