

Chapter 2 An Alien World

Parsley Plinkoff stood by his office window. A clatter of hooves marked the passing of a squad of Household Cavalry and a gentle tap on the door told him his morning coffee had arrived.

“I’m going to miss this,” he sighed. “If only I could find something, anything at all. Otherwise, well, it’s the unemployment office for me.”

A couple of years earlier, amid stories of aliens and strange signals from outer space, the government had panicked and set up the ‘Alien Identification and Investigation Bureau’ or A.I.I.B. for short. Much was made of the need to identify ‘Extra Terrestrial’ threats but, try as he might, he had not found any. He received lots of phone calls which, on closer examination, turned out to be from the same enthusiastic group of alien hunters.

He turned back to his desk. One particular file caught his eye. ‘The Cotswold Cabbage Scare’. It was said that cabbages had been seen moving around in a field so he went to investigate. What did he find? Nothing. He had taken all kinds of sensing equipment but no suspicious activity had been detected. He had expected a better result from DNA testing but that had shown they really were just cabbages.

The papers had had a field day. What was the headline in the ‘Saturn’? Oh yes, ‘Cotswold Cranks Concoct Clever Cabbage Con’. He still remembered the words of the attendant article, ‘now we can safely sleep with a whole government department to protect us from Capella’s Cabbages. But, what about all those other alien vegetables? Sprouts from Saturn? Potatoes from Pluto? When will they protect us from them?’ His friends had ribbed him for weeks but he was still convinced aliens were out there somewhere. All he had to do was find them.

Popster Wagley was in an economics lesson when she was summoned to the Head’s office. Her friends whispered “ooh you’re for it now” but in reality they knew Popster would not be in trouble. If she was then most of the school would be as well.

She knocked and was ushered in. There sat Meldy, red faced, sitting on one side of a table while the Head and two staff members sat on the other. Popster rushed over to her little sister, put an arm round her then looked, enquiringly, at the teachers.

“Penelope, Esmerelda has been making wild claims and she was rude to Lady Pastena. We have asked for an explanation but thus far none has been forthcoming.” Popster knew at once what had happened. She had also wanted to tell her friends about her adventures in the Departement de Londres but had been cautious. Meldy must have finally fizzed over like an agitated carbonated drink.

She turned to her sister who had adopted a pleading expression. Silently she was asking for help but Popster knew she could not give it. Maybe at some future date but not now. Instead, she gently shook her head as if to say 'later Meldy'. Turning back to the teachers she tried her best to diffuse the situation.

"I'm sorry Miss. She's not been sleeping well and she's been having nightmares. We have been worried about her."

"It's not like her," replied the Head. "That period in France seems to have done her no good at all."

"But it has improved her French," added one of the teachers.

Meldy wanted to say something but her sister gave her an affectionate squeeze. The staff members noticed and remarked later how good Popster was with her.

It was decided that Meldy should go home early. She would then have a long weekend and return, suitably refreshed, on Monday morning.

When that day came, Meldy had a plan. She knew some of her classmates would laugh so she'd show them her medal. That would prove it once and for all. Sure enough, between lessons, one annoying girl started teasing her.

"Been visiting the Emperor Napoleon again?" she asked.

Two loyal friends stood up for her but they were called weird as well. Meldy had had enough. Out came her medal.

"The Emperor awarded me this for bravery," she cried. "Look at it and weep you cowardly creep!"

"It's beautiful!" said some but others claimed it was a fake. The annoying girl insisted it was a stage prop or something similar. Then the history teacher entered the classroom.

"What's going on?" she demanded.

"Please Miss," said one, "Meldy's got a fake medal and she says she got it from Emperor Napoleon."

"No Miss," replied Meldy, "it was Emperor Napoleon the Tenth!"

"Well, let's have a look. If it really was, there must be some evidence such as an inscription. Meldy, bring it here."

Meldy went to the front of the class and showed her the medal, her most prized possession.

“It certainly is very impressive Meldy. Silver. The laurel leaves are of very high quality. I have never seen anything quite like it.” She turned it over and read the inscription on the back.

“It’s in French. It says it is the ‘Order of Napoleon the Second’ and there is a name and a date in Roman numerals. “Esmeralda Wagley and the date MCMLXXI. That’s 1971.”

Meldy could see confusion written on her face. “Napoleon the Second was only Emperor for two weeks and died when he was 21 years old. I have never heard of this decoration but it looks very convincing to me. Was it awarded to a relative of yours?”

“No Miss! It was awarded to me! I’m Esmeralda Wagley. I was re-christened when I got to the Departement de Londres because they don’t have the name Esmerelda.”

The teacher scratched her head, thought for a minute then said, “Meldy, I think you should accept the facts. You were not even born in 1971.”

“But they use a different calendar there! I did get it from the Emperor! I did! I did!”

Most of her classmates started to laugh. Realising the situation was getting out of hand the teacher took Meldy and her medal to see the Head.

This time it was recommended she should have a longer break from school.

Later that day Meldy was hiding in her room. She had not been seen since she was collected from school so eventually her mother went up and tapped on her door.

“Go away!” came from within.

Mrs Wagley went in anyway and asked her if she’d like something to eat.

“No. I’m not hungry.”

“Well, come down when you’re ready. Your father’s home and he was asking about you.”

She left the room. Fifteen minutes later Mr Wagley tapped on the door. This time Meldy didn't say anything. He came in, sat down and asked how she was doing.

"They laughed at me!" she sobbed, "no one believes me. Even my best friends think I'm making it up."

Mr Wagley comforted her for a bit then said, "Meldy, at first even we had trouble believing there was a parallel world out there. Then Stephanie and Amelie both told us in such vivid detail where they'd come from. That helped us accept it and provided us with some answers. We finally knew where you'd gone."

"Why didn't people believe me when they know I always tell the truth?"

"Meldy, some things are so incredible that they're very difficult to believe. They could just need more proof in order to be convinced."

"But I showed them my medal."

"Yes but they came up with an alternative explanation because they could not accept the truth. The important thing is that we all know you are not telling lies. We are proud of you. Who knows, maybe others will soon see how special you really are."

"Thanks Daddy. I'm sorry I've caused you so much trouble."

"You haven't caused us any trouble. The important thing is to talk to us. Oh, Popster wants to see you, is that alright?"

"She could have told them about her medal too."

"She really wanted to but she's at a difficult stage in her education. She's got some important exams this year and has to work very hard."

"But I would have helped her if she was in trouble."

"Yes I know you would. She does feel bad about it. Will you speak to her?"

"Alright."

A few minutes later Popster came in.

"I'm sorry Meldy. I really wanted to tell them the truth but they wouldn't have believed me either. Some things are just too fantastic."

"But you're older. They might have listened to you."

“I’m your sister so they would have assumed I’m biased. You know Kick and I are proud of you. We saw what you did when you saved the Princess from her kidnappers. It could have been dangerous because they were really nasty and I must admit I was scared when we thought we might be trapped in the ossuary with all those creepy bones. How many of your classmates could have done what you did?”

“Well I had Sophie, Raoul and Paul with me so it was easy.”

“Not easy, no. Courageous yes. You even got us out of the Odious Bourg’s when I thought we’d be stuck there slaving away for months. We both think you’re amazing and we’re proud to have you as our sister.”

Meldy hugged her then replied, “I’m proud to be your sister as well. You both really looked out for me when we were there. Remember that time in the police station? When we saw that map on the wall? And I said I was frightened?”

“Yes, I won’t forget that in a hurry. That was when it hit me. We weren’t in our world any more. We were somewhere totally different.”

“You said you were frightened too. I wanted to look after you then. I had never heard you say that before.”

“Kick said the same thing and I think it brought us all closer together. We have to stay close Meldy, we can’t let them drive us apart.”

“I don’t want them to Popster. You’re the best ever sister.”

“What about Kick?”

“She’s really good too but you’re the best!”

Twenty minutes later, the family had already started their evening meal when they heard Meldy coming down the stairs. She slunk into the dining room with an embarrassed downcast look and went to her place.

“Come and sit by me,” said Kick. As Meldy did so, she put her arm round her and gave her an affectionate squeeze.

Soon Meldy was chattering away as if nothing unusual had happened.