

### Chapter 3 The search Begins

Parsley Plinkoff was telling some dinner party guests about aliens. He found people loved to talk about Extra Terrestrials so he was in his element.

“One of us could be an alien!” laughed a non believer.

“Do not joke about such things,” said Cheddar Cheasley, “Parsley, what will you do if and when you find one?”

“Well,” he replied, “we will run certain tests which must remain secret. What I can tell you is we need to know whether they are a recognisable life form such as carbon based which of course includes animal, vegetable or mineral on our planet.”

“What about DNA testing?” asked someone.

“Will they have DNA? We simply don’t know. One thing I can tell you is my department will leave no stone unturned in our quest for the truth.”

“Will we really want to know if aliens are here?” someone asked.

Lady Pastena Drinktyre had been listening to the preceding conversation with interest. She knew nothing about aliens but she couldn’t stop thinking about something she had recently witnessed.

“I wonder,” she mused, “will aliens be like the little green men of fiction or could they take over people’s minds? They could brainwash us, make us believe in anything.”

“Very interesting,” reflected Parsley. “Lady Pastena, what makes you say that?”

“Well, I recently encountered something unusual at my old school. A girl, good family, bright, with two very clever older sisters said the most extraordinary things.”

Parsley perked up. Could this be the breakthrough he’d been looking for? Possibly not but he needed to find something, anything. “What was it?” he asked.

“She said she’d been made a Lady and awarded a medal by the Emperor Napoleon the Tenth. With laurel leaves. She was most insistent on the laurel leaves.”

“Laurel leaves,” commented Cheddar, “didn’t the Emperor Napoleon crown himself with laurel leaves made of gold? One surviving piece sold for some incredible sum just the other day.” His mind was working fast. As a medal collector he was more than curious. He knew there never was a Napoleon the Fourth, let alone the Tenth, but could this girl have found something of interest?

Parsley wondered, could there be aliens involved? Could she have actually visited a parallel world? She was apparently a bright girl. Could she have been working too hard? 'Either way,' he thought, 'this needs further investigation.'

"You say, er, she was most insistent on the laurel leaves. Had she been learning about Napoleon at school?"

"No, she was too young to have covered that period. I saw the look on her face when they took her to the head's study. She was deadly serious. There is no doubt that she, or whatever it was that had taken over her mind, believed it."

"It is obviously a good school, Lady Pastena, if you went there," said Cheddar.

"Naturally."

Parsley made a mental note of Lady Pastena's school. He would need to consult his superior in the ministry.

Cheddar also made a mental note. How could he track down this child and her medal? He'd think of something. This medal, if it existed, could be very valuable.

"There was more," continued Lady Pastena, "what was it? Oh yes, she said something about a parallel world, the Departement de Londres and Napoleon having won the battle of Waterloo."

"Had she been looking at those fake news sites on the internet?" someone asked.

"I did wonder but I don't think that's it at all. Her family are professionals. Her past work has been excellent. I find it difficult to believe that someone of her age would watch rubbish like that."

"It takes all sorts, I suppose," added someone else.

'It certainly does take all sorts' thought Parsley. 'I'll find out what's going on here. Parallel worlds could be included in my department. That means more funding, more staff and maybe even a knighthood.'

He decided to contact Lady Pastena the very next day.

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Meldy had gone round to visit her friend Nicky Berrington who lived next door. They were sitting in his tree house when he asked a question.

"Why aren't you going to school?"

“They sent me home.”

“Why? I wish I could get sent home.”

“They said I was rude to Lady Pastena Drinktyre but I wasn’t really.”

“Who’s she?”

“She’s a governor and she gives money or something. She’s always hanging around. We call her ‘Lady Putrid Dungheap!’”

They had a good laugh at this then Nicky asked another question.

“What did you say? It must have been really bad if they sent you home. Can you go back again?”

“I don’t want to. The girls in my class were laughing at me.”

“Boys in my class laugh at me. I was looking out of the window at a bird when the teacher asked me a question. I didn’t know the answer so I made one up. They all thought it was hilarious but I didn’t.”

“I bet they don’t laugh at you every time they see you.”

“No. That’s not fair. They must be really nasty.”

“Daddy said they couldn’t believe what I was telling them because it was so....Oh, I’m not supposed to say!”

“Is it a secret? Was it anything to do with when you all went away?”

“Yes. But my parents made me promise not to tell.”

“Did you tell them at school? Is that why they laughed at you?”

“Yes and I told Lady Putrid Dungheap. They had to call Popster to look after me.”

“Well, I think you can tell me because you told them all at school. Do your sisters know?”

“Yes. We were all there. Oh, it can’t hurt now if I tell you but you must promise not to say anything to your family.”

“I promise!”

“Hands on head and fall over backwards?”

“What?”

“That’s what they said in the Departement de Londres instead of ‘cross your heart and hope to die’.”

“The where?”

“The Departement de Londres. That’s where we went.”

“Where is it? I’ve never heard of it.”

“Nobody has. We went for a walk in the woods, got trapped in a thunderstorm and ended up there. They speak French. Londres is French for London and they don’t have cars, only horses. We rode around in carriages and went to the Emperor’s palace. We saved Princess Augustine then we helped save the Emperor and I got a medal for all that and they made me a Lady! Sophie was my friend there and I really miss her.”

“Can I see your medal?”

“You can next time you come round.”

“Did you miss me when you were there?”

“I missed you all when I was there and now I miss them all when I’m back here. Especially Sophie.”

“I’d like to go there and meet your friend. She must be really nice if you liked her.”

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Parsley Plinkoff was worried. Very worried. His minister had told him to get results or look for another job. She had been interested in the concept of a parallel world so had given him the authority to contact Meldy’s school but she had stressed the importance of secrecy. No one must know what he was up to.

Meanwhile, Cheddar Cheasely had done some research. St Hildegard’s had a school magazine and they accepted adverts so he wrote the following:-

‘Established collector wishes to buy interesting and unusual medals. Rewards given for information leading to successful purchases. Contact the number below or email me at.....’

Now, all he could do was wait.

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It was a sunny morning on Woodhayes Lane and a stranger could be seen looking into hedges and trees with his binoculars. Occasionally he would stop to make notes then continue slowly up the lane. Meldy and Nicky were in her shrubbery trying to build a den when they saw, through the branches, the stranger in the lane.

“What’s he doing?” she whispered.

“Is he a birdwatcher? He’s writing something in a notebook.”

“He doesn’t look like a birdwatcher,” replied Meldy, “his trousers are too smart. They look like suit bottoms.”

“Do we have any interesting birds round here?” asked Nicky.

“Maybe we do but we don’t know about them.”

“Should we ask him?”

“I’m not going to. You can if you want.”

They crept to the edge of the bushes. The birdwatcher hadn’t seem them and he was looking through his binoculars towards Meldy’s house.

“Hello!” said Nicky.

The man jumped as if given an electric shock. “I, er, was looking for nightjars,” he claimed.

“What’s a nightjar?” asked Nicky, “sounds like something my Granny puts her teeth in when she goes to bed!”

“No Sonny, it’s a bird. It sings so beautifully. They told me I could see them here.”

“Don’t you mean nightingales?” asked Meldy.

“No, little girl, I most definitely do not. I mean nightjars.”

Meldy was not going to let this go. “I don’t think....”

“Don’t you have homework to do or something?”

“I would but I’m not in school at the moment.”

“Why not?” he asked but in the distance someone was calling.

“Meldy? Where are you!”

“We should go,” said Nicky as they turned to leave.

“OW!!!” cried Meldy. She was caught in some brambles.

“Don’t move!” cried Nicky. “Your hair’s caught. I’ll free it for you.”

Nicky managed to do this then they melted away into the bushes.

The birdwatcher rushed over to the offending branch and scrutinised it very carefully. An observer might have thought he’d changed from a birdwatcher into a bug hunter.

“Bingo!” he said as he lifted up a strand of hair. “That was almost too easy!”

Now he had a DNA test to organise. She had to be an alien.