

Chapter 5 The Deception

“Trebiana! Are you daydreaming again!” Trebiana Tipperley’s teachers were used to this by now. Trebi was not a popular member of the group and her classmates avoided her where possible but she did have one loyal, worshipping friend who was constantly praising her singing.

“Trebi, that was brilliant!” or “Trebi, you’ll be a star!”

“That’s the plan,” she’d reply and this loyal friend would simper and coo. No one else in the class was willing to do that so they were all ignored.

Trebi’s grandmother, Tansie Tipperley, lived on Woodhayes Lane, not far from the Wagleys. She loved her granddaughter but was blind to her faults. Trebi would make negative comments about the other villagers when she came and her grandmother wouldn’t contradict her.

Two years ago, Tansie had suggested that Trebi sing in the Wood Tofton Music Festival. At first she had laughed at the idea but her granny had persuaded her.

“It will be good experience for you,” she had said. “Your career has to start somewhere.”

On that occasion the audience had agreed with her personal opinion. She had been highly commended, star of the show.

One year later it was a repeat performance. Many said she was even better this time. Once again, the star of the show.

Now the next music festival was approaching and she had already chosen something that would show off her undoubted talent. She had approached the piano-player who accompanied her before but disaster of disasters, he could not make that date. Distraught, she consulted her granny.

“Why don’t you ask Eustace Berrington? He’s very good, you know.”

“But he’s friendly with those Wagley twins. He wouldn’t do it.”

“Why don’t you ask? It can’t hurt and I’m sure he’d be ideal.”

Trebiana marched down the road and up to Eustace’s front door. As she approached, the door opened and there he was, brushing himself off. “Are you Eustace Berrington?” she demanded.

‘You know very well who I am,’ he thought but all he could say was, “Yes, er, hello Trebiana.”

“They tell me you are a very good pianist.”

“I try my best.”

“Well, I need you to do something for me.”

“I, er, what do you want?”

“I need you to accompany me at the Musical Festival this year. Will you?”

“Er, yes. If you like.”

“Good. I will send the music over tomorrow, then we can practise. I want to win again this year.”

“You were very good last time.”

“Well, everyone thought so, it went very well. See you soon.” With a toss of her head she was off.

Eustace walked round to the Wagley’s and pondered what had just happened. ‘She never said please or thank you but it is a great opportunity for me. She really is very good.’

Then he thought some more. ‘The problem is, she knows it. She’s arrogant. But I’ll still do it.’

He met Antoinette with an awkward handshake and an embarrassed smile. She was pleased to meet him.

“Kick and Popster have told me a lot about you,” she said. “Perhaps you can play for me sometime?”

“And she’s the best!” added Popster. “She’s sung to ... to audiences all over.” ‘Good save,’ she thought, ‘I nearly said Royalty. But I suppose eventually we need to tell him where Antoinette really comes from.’

“I would like that!” replied Eustace. “Talking about playing for people, the strangest thing just happened.”

“What was that?” asked Popster.

“Trebiana Tipperley came and asked me to play for her at the music festival.”

“You said no, I hope,” replied Kick.

“Well actually, I said yes.”

“But you can’t!” said Kick. “Don’t you see, Antoinette can sing this year. It’s not too late for her to enter. She’s better than the Trebster.”

“But I gave my word.”

“Eustace, you can’t trust her. If she finds someone better, she’ll dump you.”

“But ...”

“Kick and Popster,” said Antoinette, “I think Eustace is right.” She turned to him before continuing, “he gave his word. That is important. If she backs out at least he has a clear conscience. The world would be a better place if more people kept their promises.”

“Sorry, Eustace,” said Kick. “Antoinette’s right of course.”

“Kick, you can accompany Antoinette,” said Popster.

“Me?” replied Kick.

“Remember, what you did when we were in ... France. You did really well.”

“Yes Kick,” added Antoinette, “you can do it!”

Parsley Plinkoff received a phone call from his friend’s laboratory. “Parsley, I have some results for you,” he said.

“Yes? Yes?”

“It’ll be quite a surprise for you.”

‘I knew it! I knew it!’ thought Parsley. ‘Those two French girls really are aliens!’

“The subject is descended from the Emperor Napoleon, through a female line.”

“What? Are you sure?”

“Yes, no doubt about it.”

“But but”

“Talk to you soon, Parsley, bye!”

Parsley replaced the receiver and put his head in his hands. What did this mean? Could aliens replicate DNA? Then he remembered the conversation with Lady Pastena Drinktyre.

‘She wondered if aliens could take over people’s minds,’ he thought. ‘That must be it. I need to monitor my spy cameras. See what has happened in that garden in Wood Tofton.’

Parsley went to his computer and had a look at the footage. He spent some time watching squirrels and birds then finally a boy appeared. Another boy and two girls followed and they all sat round the table. He recognised Meldy and the French girl, Sophie, but not the two boys. They started to speak so he listened intently.

“Fellow beings of Exotron Five,” said a boy, “our great leader has chosen us for a special mission. Ydlem,” he continued, “they were not happy when you said what you said at your school. They nearly found out about our secret mission.”

He stopped the playback and made some notes. ‘So, the girl Meldy is really called Ydlem, Ah, I see! She’s called Meldy here because it’s Ydlem backwards!’ He continued the playback.

“I begged them to forgive you and they did because of your past work,” continued the boy.

“Thank you, Afwar,” replied the girl he knew as Meldy. “You are a noble team leader. By the four moons of our beautiful planet I promise not to reveal any more secrets.”

He stopped the playback again. ‘So, the boy Afwar must be called Rawfa here on Earth. The strange names parents come up with these days! Alien parents must be no better. And Exotron Five has four moons? Wow! I’d love to go there!’ He restarted the playback.

“Touc,” said the boy, “how are things in France?”

“We have many friends there,” replied the girl he previously knew to be Sophie. “They are eating seven cheeses and the croissants come in three sizes. Soon another message will come with our great leader’s daughter. We must be ready to make her welcome.”

He stopped the playback. ‘Well,’ he said to himself, ‘seven cheeses. Three sizes of croissants. Good, this is a code. It has to be. What does it all mean? And they are expecting another visitor. Someone really important. What message will she bring?’

He listened to some more. He heard a boy called Leinad talking about chocolate bars and pizza. ‘More code words?’ he asked himself.

He stopped the playback and thought about what he had just heard. At that precise moment the phone rang.

“Mr Plinkoff?”

“Speaking.”

“The Minister wishes to see you. I’m afraid it looks like bad news. One isn’t supposed to do this but, as a fellow believer in aliens, I thought I’d better warn you.”

“We are many and our day will come,” replied Parsley.

“Yes, we are many but, for now, think very carefully about your department. You have to justify its existence. Be in her office at 3 pm on Friday.”

He had two days to save his job.

Eustace Berrington was rehearsing with Trebiana Tipperley and was getting rather frustrated.

“Play those bars faster!” she’d demand or, “build in a pause here for my vibrato.” Then it was, “play the last verse again but reduce the tempo slightly. You can do that, can’t you?”

Eustace had had enough. He banged the keyboard lid down and stood up. “I think we’re done here!” he exclaimed.

“What?”

“I’m fed up with your attitude, Trebiana. Yes, you are very good but you can be a real pain. To think I’ve passed up the chance to play for Antoinette!”

“Who?”

“Antoinette. She’s a human being, unlike you.”

Trebiana felt the anger rising but pushed it back down. She needed to find out who this competitor was. “So, she’ll be in the contest as well?”

“Yes. And she’s brilliant. She’s from France.”

“Where did you find her?”

“She’s staying with Kick and Popster.”

“I might have known. They never did like me so they had to go all the way to France. They couldn’t find anyone good enough round here. Well, why don’t you run off and play for her?”

“Because,” said Eustace. “I gave you my word. Antoinette said, because I made a promise to you, I was duty bound to keep it.”

“Well, I don’t want you sabotaging me to help her win.”

“You don’t know her. She’d be annoyed with me if I did. She just wants to sing, that’s all. She insisted I help you to the best of my ability.”

“Is she human? Sounds like she’s from another world.”

“She’s human. What else would she be? I sometimes wonder if you are.”

Trebiana paused. Eustace had agreed to play for her and had stuck to the agreement. She realised she needed him. “Eustace, sit down,” she said. “So maybe I can be a little bit annoying. But I know where I want to go and I’m determined to get there.”

“Well, you’ll have to learn that you won’t get far if you annoy everyone. Think about it, Trebiana, you have a gift. You have an excellent voice. Do you really want to go through life making everyone dislike you?”

“Wow. You’ve been thinking a lot about this, haven’t you.”

“Yes, I have. I want to help you do the best you can. Period. But I will not be pushed around like some, like some pile of dirt.”

She stared at him. ‘Now I’m for it!’ he thought but all she said was, “I think I’ll go now.” With that she headed for the door.

‘Well, that’s the end of that,’ he said to himself. “Now, I’ll see if I can play for Antoinette.” He marched out of the gate and for once felt surprisingly positive.