

THE ADVENTURES OF PATRICIA AND ANNABELLE

BOOK III - PERIL IN NORMANDY

Chapter One – New Life

I had a strong feeling of evil when looking at a brightly coloured postcard of Sydney Bridge, Australia. I slowly turned it over as if I'd been raking up leaves in the garden, only to disturb a green mamba which reared up at me.

A few minutes earlier I'd been enjoying my breakfast with the Martins in the Rectory. Being Saturday, Annabelle and I were in our dressing gowns. Mine is jade green with scarlet and gold dragons on it and Annabelle's is deep pink picked out with silver shells. She'd been making soldiers, dipping slices of bread and butter in egg yolk. I'd been trying to spread hard white honey on toast when I heard letters plop on the mat. It was my turn to collect and distribute the post and I went to collect them, not knowing the adventures into which they would lead us.

My name is Patricia Foster and I'm eleven. Last term I'd finished forever with my junior school in London. I was slowly getting over the horror of my fights with the Crips gang, five of them to only one of me, with Jill Spencer as my only ally. I'd been expelled from school by my old enemy, Miss Blackman, then Acting Head, and been triumphantly reinstated by the Governors. I'd heard that Helen, the leader of the Crips, was excluded permanently from school but if the rest of them were still there they would be after me and I wasn't going back. Instead I was to go to Annabelle and Susan's school at Dorchester. Susan Thomas is a great tennis and table tennis star and one of our gang of four. Peter Johnson is the other one. His Dad is Police Sergeant Douglas Johnson. They live in the police house in the Martins' village. Sgt Johnson is engaged to my smashing Aunt Sarah and I had thought until today that I would be living at the police house.

I wondered what they would call me at my new school. At my old school everybody, teachers and kids alike, called me 'Foxy' because I'm red haired and very crafty. My three friends call me Patricia because I won't allow anyone to shorten it to Tricia or Trish or Pat. I like being called Foxy. I am like a fox always ready to scent danger. My old school, even before the Crips gang started, was enemy territory. Before going into the gym I'd listened out. If there was unnatural silence I didn't go in because somebody, lurking behind the door, could hit me with a hockey stick as soon as I opened it. I had so longed to be at a happy school free from threats.

My lovely Mum and Dad died in a car crash when I was seven. Since then I've been brought up in London by my Nanna and Aunt Sarah. She's a real

live Scotland Yard detective. I'm going to be a detective when I grow up. Sarah says I will be very good at detecting because I use my eyes and work things out logically. Being a detective has already brought me into scary adventures but, however frightened you are, you have to stay cool and think your way out of danger.

What would my new life in Dorset be like? My Nanna was too old to live on her own, even with Sarah's and my help. She and Grace Perkins, her best friend, were going into a warden controlled flat in Dorchester. Sarah sometime would be marrying Douglas Johnson (I wished they'd fix the date. I've never been a bridesmaid and I can't wait to wear one of the beautiful turquoise dresses they said the bridesmaids would be wearing).

Mrs Martin gave an embarrassed cough as breakfast started. I noticed Annabelle looking apprehensively at her as if she knew what she was going to say but didn't know how I would react.

"I have a suggestion to make which I hope won't offend you, Patricia. It takes me twenty minutes every morning to clean Annabelle's room but only five to clean yours. Her room is cluttered up with animals, toys, dolls, teddies, photos and music. I have to put them carefully on chairs while I dust and change the bed. When she was only two I accidentally dropped her teddies on the floor and she wouldn't speak to me for two whole days. I don't mind the work at all as she loves all her precious ones to bits. Now you will be living permanently at the Rectory, that is if you want to, would you like to bring your things down from London and put them in your bedroom here? Nanna and Sarah think it's a good idea!"

Did I want to live at the Rectory? It was a wonderful dream come true. I'd be with my super friend Annabelle all the time and we'd go to school together. The Rectory is warm and homely because the Martins are so thoughtful and caring about other people. A few days earlier Mr Martin spoke to me.

"There is so much coming and going in the Rectory that we're worried that you won't have enough privacy, Patricia. Annabelle has made this card for you to put on your bedroom door. It says 'Nyet' meaning 'no' in Russian. When you hang it on the door, we'll know you don't want to be disturbed."

I took the card and practised the lovely word 'nyet' by snapping it at Monty, Annabelle's ginger and white kitten. He arched his back and growled at me. Mrs Martin mothers me and Annabelle cooks me great breakfasts and makes cakes for me as well as Susan and Peter, and I love every bit of it.

"Yes please" I managed to gulp out.

Then I gave each of them a great bear hug. I was choking with happiness.

"Oh good" beamed Annabelle. "When we go to London you can introduce me to Sabaoh, your elephant, and all your other favourites."

That was ten minutes ago and I'd been in a daze of happiness ever since. I loved Sarah, got on well with Sgt Johnson and Peter is one of our gang but the police house isn't 'home' the way the Rectory is. Annabelle is tops. She has black lustrous hair, dark eyes and ever such a kind smiling face. She has

a wonderful voice and often wins singing competitions but she's totally unfazed by her successes. She says she's a bit of a dunce at school and that she's not clever like Susan or Peter but she's the centre of our gang and brings us together by the magic of her overflowing happiness and her care for us all. She's a 100 carat gold darling!!

Have you noticed when you are at your happiest you suddenly get knocked down. That's what happened to me when I read the postcard. It was addressed to Susan, Annabelle and me and on it was a brief message. "Wish you were here. One hour would be enough".

It wasn't signed but I knew it was from our bitter enemies, Wilfred Welf and Jim Purchase. It was typical of them to use the kind message, which Sarah puts on the cards she sends me from all over the world "Wish you were here" and add the sinister unspoken threat as to what they would do to us if they caught us. Well, I thought. They've escaped from the police to Australia and we weren't likely to see them again, famous last words! I should have looked much more closely at the postcard. Instead, I thrust it into my dressing gown pocket and forgot about it. I certainly wasn't going to upset my friends by showing it to them. My detective instincts were having a day off. If I'd looked more closely perhaps my friends and I would have escaped great dangers.

I also had a letter with a London postmark on it. It was from my old mate Jill Spencer. I read it with great concern then I showed it to Annabelle who slowly read it aloud to me in her study bedroom. She wrote "Hiya Foxy, me old chipper. The Wylies (Sir John Wylie is the village squire and Lady Mary is his wife) have asked all of us down for a week's holiday at Wylie Hall 'cos I helped you at school. Mum won't go but sister Fran, brother Ivan and my little brother Tom will be coming. We can't wait!! I'll have to mind Tom as ee's into himself. It'll be great to see you again. I'm going to miss you rotten at school. Helen's going before the juvenile court and she's permanently excluded but the rest of the Crips gang will be back, much to Bossy Mossy's disgust. Nobody could prove which one of them kicked and thumped you. They're all out to find who took the piccys shown to the Governors, which got Helen in deep trouble.

At first they didn't suspect me 'cos they thought we was sworn enemies. Wasn't it clever of us to call each other 'orrible names whenever we met! It fooled the Crips all right.

Then my Mum did something stoopid. She's taught me to take really good pics with my fabulous camera. Without asking me she sent one to our local rag and it won a kids competition but the Crips saw it. They think it's either a kiddo named Janey or me got Helen into trouble. The Shadows follow me day and night. They only want to find a link with Dorset and I'll get a chiv (a knife) in me back. It's really bad 'cos I know the young postman tells them about the letters we get. He's brand new on the round. The old postman wouldn't say anything to anybody. You can't even phone me. It's a party line and the old trout next door listens to every call. I can 'ere 'er 'eavy breathing. Can you 'elp? Love Jill"

“Who are the Shadows?” asked Annabelle.

“They’re the boyfriends of the Crips. They’re five boys in a gang. They’re as mean and horrible as the Crips. I’ll take this letter to Sir John and he’ll think of a way”.

“I’ll come with you. She sounds desperate” commented Annabelle. “I want to ask him something about the letter.”

We walked through the village together. It was a cold, crisp morning three days before Christmas. I’d done up all my prezzies and I hoped the gang would love them. I heard the sound of deep baying and then a familiar head thrust itself over the Warr’s gate. It was my gorgeous black Alsatian friend, Sam. He couldn’t wait to be taken to Wylie Park to be with Caesar and Caspar, two other Alsatis. With great difficulty I slipped a leash over his head. I was dragged along to the Lodge at the gate to Wylie Park. I slipped his leash and he raced off to meet his friends, who were frantically barking for him. The three of them raced round and round only pausing to roll ecstatically on their backs while beating the empty air with their great paws.

Annabelle and I walked in companionable silence up the long drive between the avenue of beech trees. They stood desolate, pointing their bare arms at the molten sky. She looked like Little Red Riding Hood in her red cloak while I was muffled in my duffle. Somehow she sensed I didn’t want to talk. I drank in the glory of Wylie Hall. Four pillars and a stone roof were the portico to the massive black door, with its serried ranks of silver knobs, which is the main entrance to the Hall. Crouching on the roof are a lion, a griffin, a leopard and an eagle. Figures were moving inside some of the windows.

The last visit I’d made was before my horrible term at school. Then I only had a brief time to gulp in its splendour. Now I would be living at the Rectory and I had an open invitation to treat Wylie Hall as my second home. I knew the Wylies would show me round the Hall and the estate. I fantasised that I was the Queen of the Castle making preparations for a stately masked ball for the quality of England.

“I think it will snow before Christmas” murmured Annabelle breaking into my reverie.

“How can you possibly tell?” I was astounded.

“You forget that I’m a country girl. The air is getting colder and look at that livid sky. It’s still and heavy as if something is sure to break”.

I looked curiously at Annabelle and she turned her beautiful, open full faced smile on me. Living in London I’d seen a few greyish flakes scurling in the air but never pristine banks of pure white snow. Toboggans were hanging in the Martins’ garage so I guessed they used them when it snowed.

We climbed the steps to the great door. I leant on the bell and pounded the knocker repeatedly. After two minutes clatter my friend Robert opened it. His impassive mask slipped and he bared his teeth at me.

“I should have guessed. It could only be Miss Impatience herself”.

“You need the exercise. You’re getting as fat as butter”. I knew that would rile him. Robert had been in the S.A.S. and he thrills us by teaching us how to stalk and hide in the estate woods. He’s superfit.

“Gemma is in the Great Hall, Annabelle”.

Gemma is his four year old daughter. She adores Annabelle. She’s good friends with me.

“As for you, I could give you a thirty metre start in a hundred metres race and still beat you.”

“After lunch?” I retorted.

“Done”.

We walked through the panelled room, passing family portraits. The early ones were of men in powdered wigs and ladies in low cut deep red and black dresses. I noticed John’s Dad. He’d been a soldier in the First World War and his red tunic was ablaze with medals and decorations. As we descended the wide shallow staircase, I thought I’d like to slide down it on a tea tray.

The Hall was festooned with decorations, holly and silver and gold strips with balloons hanging from the chandeliers. In the middle of the hall was a seven foot tall fir tree standing in a red draped earth container. Mary was putting wooden crib figures at the bottom and stars and camels, made by the Sunday School children, on the branches. The top was waiting for cut outs of the Holy Family and a great silver star.

I grabbed Gemma and held her up.

“Up you go to the top of the tree” I teased.

She squawked and wriggled out of my arms and ran to hide behind Annabelle before peeping out and making rude faces at me.

Mary slipped a disc of King’s College Choir singing “The First Nowell” onto the music centre. Annabelle sang along with them at first softly but then she reached full power. Mary switched off the centre and moved to the piano. Annabelle stood by her to sing. The room filled up as guests, cooks and gardeners came from all directions to join in the carols while Sir John distributed music sheets. Finally John’s baritone and Annabelle’s soprano sang in duet “Good King Wenceslas”. We clapped and clapped until they gave us two encores.

“Elevenses in the Buttery in half an hour, mulled wine or Amontillado (a sherry) for the older and spicy fruit cup for the younger visitors” he boomed. “Pate on hot buttered toast and sausage rolls for nibbles”.

He is six foot tall and stands like a soldier. The Buttery is next to the kitchen in which they are cooking turkey. You smell it and drool in anticipation. I wished Susan was with us. She’d be first in the Buttery.

“We have a private report to make to you” I whispered to John.

“Library, two minutes” he replied in his clipped military way of speaking.

Annabelle and I climbed the winding staircase to the top floor and went into my favourite room, the Library. It is packed with books in sections with labels like history, places, novels and religion. There’s a large section of detective

stories, including my favourites, Sherlock Holmes and Hercule Poirot. I made up my mind I would read them all in time. I sat in a black swivel chair. On its back is "P" which stands for Patricia.

"I've got my own chair. You haven't" I gloated to Annabelle. I lay back luxuriously and closed my eyes. The next second I was whizzing round and round until I tumbled off and sprawled onto a big white rug just as John came in.

"It's only Patricia having one of her turns" giggled Annabelle.

"Oh very witty, I'll have you" I thought but then stopped in my tracks. It served me right, swanking to my best friend.

"Situation?" asked John tersely.

I knew he'd want the problem explained in the minimum of words so I handed him Jill's letter. He read it twice, glasses perched on his nose, and then pushed a buzzer for Robert.

"The two of us will talk it over with Douglas Johnson. We can work out a plan to bring the Spencer children down here. The problem will be to deliver a letter to Mrs Spencer so that she can decide whether she is happy with our suggested arrangements for transport. We daren't use the telephone."

He stopped and thought then he said,

"Why don't we get Mary to disguise you so you can slip unnoticed into their home and give the letter to Mrs Spencer? Mary is wonderful at disguising people. If she does you up now we'll see whether you can fool Susan and Peter when they come over for lunch?" He looked at us with a twinkle in his eye.

I thought it would be enormous fun but I would have to make good and sure the Shadows wouldn't recognise us if they were hanging around. I didn't want a chiv in my back! I guessed we'd fool Peter. Boys aren't usually observant, although Peter is an expert bird watcher but I couldn't imagine us deceiving lynx-eyed Susan. I nodded in agreement.

"Yes, I'll do it" said Annabelle. "I love dressing up. I'm a bit nervous but the Spencers do need a real holiday".

"Your Nanna, Patricia, and your Mum and Dad, Annabelle, are coming over with the church choir tonight to sing carols so I'll need to ask their permission."

"I'd like to ask you something" piped up Annabelle. "Would you like our gang to help you entertain the Spencer children? Patricia and Jill are good buddies and Peter, Susan and I would be happy to help". I thought affectionately, how typical of my lovely friend, always thinking about other people.

"That's a marvellous idea. You can sleep in the castle but you will have to be beware of the ghost. One bedroom is haunted by a wicked Cavalier. He tries to run you through with his sword but can't quite manage it".

I looked sharply at John to see whether he was joking but could make nothing of his poker face. Ghosts indeed!!

We ate our elevenses, four piping hot sausages and fruit punch in wide green glasses. Wow!! Then Mary took Annabelle and me to her studio.

"I'm going to start by changing the way you both walk. Annabelle, you skip along. I'm going to make you into a dumb blonde who wiggles as she walks. Patricia, you scuttle as if you have a train to catch. You'll be even dumber than Annabelle. You have to shuffle behind her looking vacant."

"That won't be difficult for you" grinned Annabelle. "Only joking!"

Mary slipped a blonde wig on Annabelle and a brown one on me. She applied make up and blusher liberally.

"What will you call yourselves?"

"Donna" said Annabelle.

"Shay" I said, thinking of a horrible girl at my last school.

We peeked in the mirror and dissolved with laughter. Mary gave Annabelle a tight little skirt and me white leopard skin trousers and we both had tops. Annabelle stuck a hand on her waist and swayed towards me.

"Cool Shay, chick?"

"Funky, Donna".

"Not a bad start but there's a lot of work to do. It's fun now but it will be deadly serious if you have to fool the Shadows. Successful disguise is as much mental as physical. You are now Donna and Shay, not Annabelle and Patricia, and you need to imagine how they would think and act. You should choose accents to disguise your voices from your friends but, unless somebody talks to you in London, you shouldn't talk at all. Your characters are Donna who only thinks about how she looks and Shay who thinks Donna's marvellous."

We practised and practised until lunch. When we went back to the Hall Sam snarled at us and Gemma hid behind Robert. That was a good start but the real test would come when Susan and Peter arrived.

We sat at a separate table with John and Mary. We saw Susan and Peter approaching across the park. Susan was wearing white trousers and a maroon sweater underneath her brown fleece. She was gesticulating to Peter to make some point. He looked neat, as he always does, in a brown jacket and well pressed green trousers. His passions are cricket, football, chess and bird watching. He's an outstandingly good dancer as his mother, who died when he was little, was a dancer. When Annabelle and he dance together they move gracefully as one. He's a kind, sensitive boy who daydreams a good deal. He doesn't often show it but he adores Annabelle. He and I have become good mates since I trapped Williams, who bullied him at school, and got him expelled. Peter, Susan and Annabelle grew up together in the Martins' village. I've had to work hard to get accepted into their gang.

John gestured to Susan and Peter to join us at table. Susan looked at us as if she couldn't believe her eyes.

"I'm Susan, this is Peter but who are you?"

Annabelle dug me in the ribs.

"Did you 'ear 'er, Shay, me old faggott? Don't she talk la di dah! Shay's me tosher. She ain't as dumb as she looks. Nobody could be! Ow!"

I kicked her under the table.

I took two bits of bread and pushed them across the big bowl of leek and onion soup on our table.

"Look Donna, boats!"

"Cat got your tongue, boy?" Annabelle asked Peter, who blushed furiously.

"You can tell 'e goes to one of them posh schools, Shay. I 'eard they even write their nimes on their undies. 'Ave you got 'Peter' on yer knickers?"

Peter choked on his soup. Surreptitiously I glanced at John. He wore his habitual poker face but he was gnawing at his moustache, which he only does when he can barely control himself. I'm getting to know him! Mary continued to smile serenely.

One up to Annabelle. Now it was my turn. Susan picked up a plate of sandwiches and I grabbed it out of her hand, put three on my lap and tossed sandwiches at everybody. Susan wasn't expecting it and one smacked her on the head. At first I thought she was going to hit me but instead she gave each of us a long thoughtful look. Then she turned to Peter.

"I saw Blackie trotting down the lane which leads away from the Rectory. Nobody was with her so I hope she doesn't get out onto the main road".

I felt Annabelle tensing so I tried to distract Susan by grabbing a chocolate biscuit off her plate.

"Nice try, Patricia" said Susan. "Don't worry Annabelle. Blackie hasn't really escaped".

We took off our wigs. Peter was thunderstruck.

"What an idiot I am".

"It was as good as a play" said John. "Well done, Annabelle and Patricia. I was choking with laughter when you made that simply outrageous remark to poor Peter. Susan, how did you guess?"

"We were expecting to meet Annabelle and Patricia here and when I looked properly they were the same age and size. Then when you said nothing, Sir John, when they behaved so badly, I guessed you were up to something. I thought I'd set the test about Blackie. When I did, I saw the panic in Annabelle's eyes and my vague suspicion became a certainty. They're fabulous disguises but I know Annabelle can act as she's been in so many musicals. As for you, Patricia, when you come to our school I'll tell Miss Shaw, our drama teacher, to give you all the stupid parts. You do them so well!"

I thought "that learned me" for pinching her food.

"My friend Susan is so clever" exclaimed Annabelle admiringly. I looked at Susan. She shrugged her shoulders modestly but couldn't help a slow grin spreading all over her face and then she looked triumphant! Annabelle's constant encouragement means as much to her as it does to Peter and me. She builds us all up and we love her for it.

"I like you as you really are" murmured Peter to Annabelle.

"Why thankee kindly good sir" replied Annabelle mimicking a Dorset dairy maid as she smiled at him.

Lady Mary rapped on the table for attention.

"I will tell you both what it's about. We asked the Spencers to come here for a holiday and Jill wrote this letter." She read it aloud. "We decided to disguise Patricia and Annabelle so they can take up a letter in reply without fear of being recognised by the Shadows, who are watching Jill. Trying to fool Susan and Peter was a hard test and you both did well. Tomorrow I'll come to the Rectory and prepare you both before Robert drives you in the Rolls to your home, Patricia, to pick up your stuff. Then you can check your disguises and after you have packed your things, Patricia, you'll both be catching the tube to the Angel, Islington to follow Jill home. Practice your accents in case the Shadows chat you up. Here are our detailed thoughts for the transfer of the

Spencer children to our home for Mrs Spencer's comments. She'll be able to meet the children down here in case they're apprehensive about coming to a strange house. Robert has already arranged a special delivery from London to Mrs Spencer. She will be telephoning him at 7 am from a public call box to his London hotel to hear from him the arrangements for your seeing Jill at the tube station".

We finished our lunch.

"Would you like to come out on the terrace?" asked John.

Mary was strolling by a sundial when a person wearing a balaclava moved up behind her, grabbed her bag and ran towards the main gate. Susan and Peter immediately started to run after the thief. I stayed put and wrote down what I saw in the police notebook I always carry. After a moment's hesitation Annabelle found some paper and started to do a sketch. Robert waited for Susan and Peter to get some way ahead and then ran after them.

He overtook them and came up close behind the thief who turned towards him. In the thief's hand was an iron bar. Robert stopped. The thief dropped the weapon, took off her balaclava and went to Mary and returned her handbag. All the guests clapped. Peter, Robert, Susan, Mary and 'the thief' came to the terrace.

"Now that was very instructive" said John. "Susan, Peter, what would you have done in Robert's position when the thief turned towards him? By the way this is Jane. She's training to be a solicitor."

Peter, "I would have tried a rigger tackle".

Mary did a quick sketch and handed it to him. The thief lay sprawling but Peter was unconscious as the bar had hit him on the head.

Susan, "I would have waited and then followed the thief at a safe distance".

"Annabelle, may I see your sketch?" asked John.

It was an outline of four people running and a closely detailed picture of the sun-dial. John was amazed.

"Why did you draw the sundial?"

"It's so pretty".

He roared with laughter at her. I gave John my notebook in which was written "Theft, 2.20. Thief 5 foot 7 approx. Slim build, red jeans, white top and grey balaclava. Runs like a woman. Wearing dark gloves".

"Excellent" boomed John. "You didn't waste time trying to catch the thief, who might be armed and dangerous, when you had no weapon and good description for the police, Patricia. Peter, remember most people who won the Victoria Cross for bravery died doing so. Susan, good thinking. Sundials! Really Annabelle!"

Then it was time for two races, both of which John videot. Susan and Peter ran first. Susan went off like a rocket but Peter was close behind. Susan was only 10 metres from the finishing tape when she glanced round to see where Peter was. He caught up with her and they hit the tape together.

"Now," said John to me. "You won't make the mistake of looking round but Robert is very fit and very fast so you'll have to decide when you start off, 30 metres ahead of him, are you going to run flat out or keep something back for the last 10 to 15 metres for acceleration to the tape!"

I hadn't a clue. I've done plenty of gym at my school but run only to catch a bus or to get away from the Crips. I thought I would just have to see how I got on. It seems funny racing when there's nobody running next to you. I thought I did pretty well but could hear Robert close behind me. I accelerated but he went past and won with two metres to spare.

Then we all had lemonade except Robert who drank two glasses of champagne.

"Well run, Patricia. You can't expect to beat the Regiment. Now you three, would you like to learn what we mean by 'throwing the switch'! What about Annabelle? Do you think she'd be interested?"

"No" I chuckled. "She muttered something about having no time for childish games and said she was going to do some painting by the terrace window. She stomped off in a fair taking".

Robert said "I'll take Peter first. Now I'm coming towards you and you think I'm going to attack you".

Robert loped towards Peter. Peter tried to hit him and was pushed to the ground. Then it was Susan's turn. She turned to run but too late and he caught her. Then it was my turn. I yelled at the top of my voice

"This man's a robber. Help me."

Then we clustered round Robert and he summed up.

"Peter. A young person can't take on a man. Susan, right idea but you should have run as soon as you became scared. Early cave men didn't wait around when they saw a sabre toothed tiger. They shifted. Their instincts were much more highly developed than ours. Patricia, good, but where's your police whistle?"

I went red. I'd left it in my bedroom. Fine detective I was!

"One more tip" said Robert. "If possible run to the side because the attacker might have a mate behind you."

It was such fun learning SAS tricks but I knew that one day it would be for real. What I didn't know was that day wasn't far ahead.

"Let's find Annabelle" said Peter.

She was painting next to Mary. They were looking through the great French windows at the crimson sky. Annabelle had painted a tree with giant hands holding up a Rolls Royce in which were four frightened people. The tree was saying loudly "Be kind to Annabelle!" She's so imaginative! We all painted happily until tea and then took Sam home. I'd borrowed a thriller from the Library and when I got home to the Rectory I put up my 'Nyet' sign and settled down to a good read. The others know that sometimes I like to be anti-social. Besides, I needed to plan for tomorrow and reading puts me in the mood to work things out.

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Chapter Two Horror in a House

Mary came to the Rectory at 11 o'clock the following morning to make us into Donna and Shay. Robert then drove us in the Rolls to my old home in London. The great car purred along. I thought we were only going about 30mph until I looked at the dashboard and saw we were doing 70.

The car stopped outside my home. Annabelle murmured to me "We'll go for a drive for half an hour. You'll want to spend some time going round your home on your own. I've borrowed Peter's super camera and here it is in case you want to take some pictures for keepsakes". She is so imaginative about other people's feelings!

My heart was full. I looked sadly at the overgrown garden. I'd made a good resolution to help Nanna clear it and now I never would. I went into my bedroom and could almost hear my Mum singing to me and my Dad reading stories to me when I was a little girl. In the lounge I remembered my agony when Nanna told me I would never see my Mum and Dad again. I snuffled. Then, alone in the empty house, I bawled!

When I'd got over it I went into the kitchen. I thought how excited I was when Nanna and I made fairy cakes for Aunt Sarah while waiting for her to take me to a panto. Then I heard a quiet knock on the front door and there was Annabelle. I took her round and she took photos of me in every room and standing at the front and back doors. She'd brought make up with her and we both made each other up and put our wigs on. I lifted the dust covers off my shelves which were full of toys, animals and books and we packed them very carefully into big cases. She particularly liked my elephant, Saboah, who my Dad brought back from Kenya. He's in charge of all my animals, including my very battered one-eyed teddy, Kipo. I also introduced her to my dolly Trixabelle, who has blue eyes and golden hair.

Robert carried the cases to the car and said he would meet us outside my house at exactly 9 o'clock that evening. We went to the local café for chips and milk shakes and I showed Annabelle round the shops but we didn't go near my old school.

We took the tube to the station nearest to Jill's home where I soon spotted Jill. She was looking at a cinema hoarding and then she walked slowly through the station, passed us and went up her road. She didn't look in our direction but I knew she'd spotted us. A boy's voice grated in my ear. It was Lee. He was with Donk, another of the Shadows. Donk is so called because, like a donkey, he kicks people.

"Oo are yer chicks?"

"I'm Shay, she's Donna. We're up from Brum to meet our fellas. They'll be along any minute".

"Nah. You come wiv us".

Each of them caught us by the arm.

"No, let go of me. Our fellas won't like it" squealed Annabelle.

"Are these boys bothering you?" A middle aged man carrying a brief case appeared and spoke to us.

"Keep aht of it, Uncle, or you'll get this" snarled Lee and I saw an 18 inch blade in his hand.

"Ow! that 'urt" he yelled.

A woman had suddenly come up behind him and whipped his calves hard with an umbrella. As he turned, furious, the man swiped him with his brief case and knocked the blade out of his hand. Donk, who's thick, stood mesmerised and I shook his hand off my arm. The woman swooped on the blade and picked it up in a hanky.

"Guess the police will want this". At the word 'police' the two Shadows pelted off and the man and woman were suddenly no longer there.

Annabelle was a bit shaken as we tottered down Jill's road. My brain was whirring. I guessed John and Robert had arranged the extra protection but who were they? They were so slick. It's not easy to disarm even a boy who has a knife. I wondered whether Robert had met them in the London hotel where he stayed the night before.

We went down the road and then I heard Jill whistling. I took out a hand mirror and checked nobody was following. Then we dashed over the road and into a twitten, surrounded by laurel bushes, following the torch waving towards us. We saw Jill and turned into the back yard leading to her house. It was such a relief to get safely inside.

Mrs Spencer had long bright yellow hair. Jill saw us looking at it and explained "My Mum's in her Picasso mode."

"Would you like to see my paintings?"

She showed us green sea horses doing somersaults in huge waves.

"Mum, they must be hungry. You don't half go on about your old pictures. Lady Mary's a painter. Is she as scatty as our Mum?"

"Yes" said Annabelle. "Time doesn't exist when she's painting".

I saw a funny look come into Mrs Spencer's eyes. She'd turned down the chance of coming on holiday with her children. Later Jill told me she thought she'd be a fish out of water in a castle but now she realised she'd made a big mistake because Mary and her would have got on famously. Fran, Ivan and little Tom came in for supper and we had sardines on toast just how I like them, really hot buttered toast and lots of pepper on the sardines, and then slices of orange and walnut cake with mugs of Ovaltine.

"You'd better like the cike. I made it" murmured Jill as she looped her arm through mine.

"Ever so glad to see you" she said affectionately and we grinned at each other.

After supper Mrs Spencer read the very long letter from John.

“That seems to cover everything. Tell him I’ll do it. The Shadows have us under siege and watch everything we do and it’s all my fault. You have a nice holiday while I finish this painting for the gallery. They’re stingy but it does keep us off the dole. Now how are you two getting back? Did you have any trouble coming here?”

We told her what happened at the station.

“Well it’s goodbye to Donna and Shay. I’ll have to make you up in a different way.”

I thought it was a pity. I could get used to looking stupid, with my mouth hanging open, because I could fool ever so many people when I go ‘tecking. “I’ll make you up with a sari as an Indian girl and walnut your face, arms and hands Patricia. You, Annabelle, will be an Italian girl with a big floppy hat, a black wig, drooping ringlets and a long white dress”.

“Our Mum’s got lots of fancy dress costumes which we wear when we go to dances at the local Hippo” said Fran proudly.

I thought John hadn’t reckoned on us having to dump our disguises and it was sheer luck that Mrs Spencer was a make up artist as well as a painter.

When we were disguised we crawled up the twitten. Jill walked out through her front door and went past the exit whistling so we knew the Shadows were following her. A moment later Mack and Jonty loped past us. We were crouched in balls at the end and they didn’t look in our direction but once they’d gone past we rushed as fast as possible to the nearest tube station. Two kiddos called out “Where’s the fire then?” but we didn’t stop until we were safely on the train. We’ll get off near my home and approach it slowly, I thought. I’d been caught out once and I knew that Jo Jo, one of the Crips, had come for tea with me at my home before she turned horrible. She would have seen the ‘For Sale’ board outside our house on her way to school. Just suppose she’d asked the Shadows to break in and have a nose round to see whether there was any letter from Jill or simply to smash everything up. All these fancies went through my head so I told Annabelle we’d creep in the back way just in case but she looked scared. Ever since I met her I’ve led her into one adventure after another. They thrill me but poor Annabelle hates them.

I had the key of our back gate, which is in the fence in the rear garden. When I turned the key I found the gate was open. I hadn’t gone out that way but it still could be all right. Just in case, I crept down the path towards the back door and stopped dead. In my bedroom a pencil of light was shining. I was so angry!! “Think sister, think” I said to myself and glanced at my luminous watch. It was five to nine. I knew which way Robert would be coming in the car so quickly I went back to the gate and locked it. It wouldn’t stop a burglar going out at

the front but would delay him if he tried the back first. I left the key in the gate and jammed a dustbin underneath it.

“What’s happening?” asked Annabelle.

“Burglars. Let’s go and find Robert.”

We scooted up the back avenue and then across to the front road, which is a one way street. We saw the Rolls come up and stopped it and I told Robert what I’d seen. He called 999 on his mobile and asked the police to meet him at my home pronto.

“I’ll go round the back. You ring the front door bell several times, Patricia. That’ll flush him out. Annabelle, you stay in the car and tell the police where we are.”

“Oh, do be careful, both of you” called out Annabelle anxiously.

It was weird treating my home as enemy territory but I rang the bell and banged the knocker. I heard the back door squeak then a voice from behind me said

“What’s going on Miss?” and I turned and there was a policeman.

“Robert’s at the back and it’s barred so the burglar will probably try to climb the fence at the side and escape that way.”

I saw a head in a mask with something in its teeth start to come over the five foot high fence then I heard a squeal. Robert grabbed his legs from inside the back garden and the policeman grabbed his arms. Something clattered down. The two men bundled him off the fence and the policeman ripped off his mask. It was Donk.

“I ain’t done nothin’” he whined.

“You broke into my house. I saw your light in my bedroom. I’m Patricia Foster and it’s my house. I know you, Donk.”

“You don’t look nothin’ like Foxy”.

“Oh but I am”.

“Anyway, it’s not your ‘ouse, it’s sold”.

“Nanna told me we’d exchanged contracts but it’s still our house until next Saturday” I told him triumphantly.

A police car drew up.

“You’re under arrest for burglary” said the policeman and cautioned him.

“When we have him in the car, Miss, let’s go round the house and see what he was up to.”

I saw a flash of fear in Donk’s eyes when he said this and I wondered what we’d find.

“Robert, Donk was with another of the Shadows, Lee, earlier. They usually hunt in pairs. If one of them was keeping cave at the back, he might still be there. It’s so dark he might not know Donk’s been caught”.

“Good thinking. I’ll ask the policeman to hang on”.

Once again we crept round the back. My eyes were becoming used to the dark and suddenly I saw him. Standing back from a lamp post wearing a mask was another figure. The moment he saw us he started to run away.

“Stop, police!” called out the policeman who’d come up but the figure continued running and Robert went after him. He stopped and whipped out a blade and I saw the policeman tense.

“Don’t worry, he’s SAS” I whispered.

Robert feinted with his right fist and as the boy lunged forward, swept his legs from under him with a scything movement of his left leg. When his mask was off I saw it was Lee and he also was arrested for burglary. (Sarah told me the lookout is as guilty as the actual burglar.) Robert went back to see Annabelle and to wait for me.

“I’m Sgt Knox. Excuse me asking Miss but you’re dressed like an Indian but you don’t speak like an Indian. I’m going to need a statement from you but we’ll need an adult to be present and anyway it’s too late tonight. Where do you live?”

I started to tell him but as soon as I mentioned the name of our Dorset village he stopped me.

“Do you know Sgt Douglas Johnson? He served with me in the Met.”

“He’s engaged to my Aunt, Detective Sgt Sarah Foster”.

“I know Sarah too. Do they know about this?”

“Sgt Johnson helped to plan it.”

“Excellent! I’ll ring Douglas and he can take your statement and Robert’s and fax them to me before we interview the gruesome twosome. I’ve heard of the Shadows. They’ve all got plenty of form.” (By form, he meant criminal records.)

I opened the front door with my latch key. It was spooky going round the house. I opened the kitchen door and the policeman shone his torch round. In the corner was a very large paper bag. Horrified I saw it start to thrash towards us. I pulled Sgt Knox back and banged the door shut. I heard a thump against the door and a hissing noise.

Sgt Knox looked pale. “I’m very glad you pulled me out a bit quick, Miss. I hate them things. The Shadows must have put it there”.

I said I’d noticed Donk looking fearful and I told him there had been no snake in the house when we were there in the afternoon.

“Right, I’m going to throw the book at them. Burglary, possessing offensive weapons, aggravated burglary with intent to endanger life (let them explain how the snake got there if they can. Even if it’s harmless it’s an offence to frighten people), attempted grievous bodily harm against Robert. That should keep the lawyers busy” he said cheerfully.

We went back to the car. Sgt Knox took Robert’s details and I noticed he took the number of the Rolls and checked the details on his police computer before he waved us goodbye.

“Are you sure you’re all right, Patricia?” asked Annabelle.

I nodded sleepily. I didn’t wake up until we got back to the Rectory. Mrs Martin fussed over both of us, gave us cocoa and packed us off to bed. My last thought was that I’d said goodbye to my old home forever but here I was in my new home surrounded by friends.