

CHAPTER 6

Addric is excited at the thought of spending a few days in Scotland. To pass the time, he and Dheago spend most of the day in front of the television. It's one way of finding out about life on Planet Earth, but the six o'clock news is a horror show from beginning to end.

Elisabeth sleeps in later than usual, but no matter how she tries, she just can't concentrate. She has been moping around for most of the day, and it's obvious that she's in a bit of a tetchy mood.

'Gentlemen, it's time to get your act together,' she says. 'We are going to Scotland tomorrow. And there is every possibility that the weather will be a force to contend with.'

'It will not only be cold, it will be blustery as well, which means you will need suitable clothing.'

She hands Addric a copy of the latest fashion magazine and suggests that he study it closely.

'Check out the men's section in particular.'

'Okay,' he says.

'You should have a range of options at your disposal. And that means clothing suitable for all occasions, breakfast, lunch or even a formal or informal dinner table.'

Elisabeth goes to some pains to point out the difference and demands that they conjure up a readymade wardrobe just to be on the safe side.

'After all, you'll need something in your suitcase, apart from a toothbrush, won't you?'

'I guess so,' Addric says.

This is not like Elisabeth at all. She is about to flip out at any given moment. But to Addric's relief, she is in a better frame of mind the following day. He wasn't game to say so at the time, but she was starting to get on his nerves.

After a hectic start to the morning, they eventually make it to King's Cross Station with plenty of time to spare. The distinctive aroma of smoke permeates the air, and hundreds of people are making their way from one platform to another.

Addric has no idea what to think when a swarm of bizarrely dressed people pass by. It's only four o'clock in the afternoon, and they look as if they haven't recovered from a night on the town.

'They look so dark and strange,' he says to Elisabeth.

'They're a generation of youngsters inspired by modern music Addric.'

‘Those with shaved heads are called Skinheads, while those with even stranger hairstyles, ripped jeans and jackets festooned with safety pins are called Punks.’

‘If I didn’t know any better, I would say that they’re going through an identity crisis.’

‘That is what the older generation and people from outer space tend to think as well, Addric.’

‘Hmm,’ he thought, ‘Elisabeth is still a little overwrought. There is obviously more going on than I realised.’

If Elisabeth does have a dark side, Addric wasn’t aware of it before. But he is relieved to see Jolariel and Yusef waiting under the clock on Platform One. As to why they are wearing such unusual travelling clothes, he has no idea.

He has never heard of Sherlock Holmes, and has no idea that this is a style of clothing made famous by a legendary but fictional detective of days gone by. Sherlock always wore a distinctive coat and cape, but the accessory that most people remember is his dapper travelling hat.

‘Elisabeth, why are they dressed like that?’ he says.

‘Because they can, I suppose.’

‘Sherlock Holmes was rarely seen without his famous pipe or cape. But his hat is called a deerstalker, Addric, and it is usually worn by a country squire on a hunting expedition.’

Yusef and Jolariel couldn’t care less what people think. After all, they have seen it all and done it all and lived to tell the tale. And as far as they are concerned, they can wear whatever they like. If anyone does have something to say about it, well, that’s their problem.

‘Now that everyone is on board,’ Yusef says, ‘let’s get this show on the road.’

As they make their way to Platform Six, he takes it upon himself to fill Addric in on a few of the lesser known details of train travel.

‘We will be taking the overnight train, which means that we will be travelling on a high-speed express, the latest addition to the British Rail fleet.’

Addric is all ears and dying to know more, but it soon becomes obvious that Yusef has a particular interest in some of the more gruesome aspects of rail travel.

‘The passengers leave a lot to be desired, especially the young ones. Their language alone would have deprived them of an essential part of their anatomy in days gone by.’

‘But I have no idea what sort of qualification you need to be a train driver in this day and age. It’s a rollercoaster ride from start to finish.’

'The train careers around one corner after another, and when it comes to a screeching halt, half the passengers fly out the window and are never seen again.'

'He's just pulling your leg,' Jolariel says. 'Don't take any notice of him. His imagination can get the better of him sometimes.'

'Sounds like someone I know,' Dheago says to Elisabeth.

An hour later, they are still waiting around, and while she has the opportunity, Elisabeth decides to record a situation of historical importance.

'Line up gentlemen, as you are about to be immortalised.'

'Yusef, what does she mean by that?' Addric says.

'She is going to take a photo. And one day she will probably sell it for a million pounds and retire to a life of luxury.'

'I don't understand, Yusef.'

'It means that Elisabeth will have a photo of two aliens from Vela-Rishan, and two men from the long-lost continent of Lemuria.'

Addric is perplexed. Would Elisabeth do something like that? Not the Elisabeth he first met, but now anything is possible.

'She wouldn't, would she Yusef?'

'In her current state, Addric, anything is possible with a woman on the edge.'

'You've noticed too.'

'Hard not to,' he said.

They take a seat on a bench and Elisabeth ruffles around in her bag, removes an elegant silver box, pops a catch on the side and reveals a dozen perfectly rolled tailor-made cigarettes.

Addric has never seen a cigarette before and has no idea what she is about to do.

'What are those things?' he says to Yusef.

'They're cigarettes, a product that contains tobacco leaves and numerous other unpalatable ingredients.'

'Francis Drake, part-time pirate and one-time favourite of Queen Elisabeth the First introduced this habit to England in the 15th century.'

'Since then, it has taken off like wildfire, you could say.'

'In other word, Elisabeth is about to smoke a cigarette.'

'Addric, would you like to try one?' she says.

'No thanks, but I wouldn't mind a peppermint if you have one.'

This is another mysterious habit of the people of Planet Earth. Addric watches closely as Elisabeth removes a little wooden match from a matchbox and strikes it against the side of the box. A few moments later, they are not only puffing away but inhaling the residue.

'The modern world has many interesting pleasures,' Yusef says, 'and smoking is just one of them.'