

Wisplurkers

Episode 013. Toby's new pet

After calling in the take-away on the high street, Toby walked the few yards to the park, where he could eat his lunch in peace. Although the sky was now empty of clouds and it promised to be a dry, warm afternoon, there were only a few people in the park and Toby found a bench in a quiet corner. He unwrapped the carton of chips covered in the rich, onion gravy and attacked them with the wooden fork. He was starving.

He lifted the strange beetle from the depths of his blazer pocket and sat it beside him on the bench. It stayed quite still, without moving its blue and black body or its long spindly legs. Its bulbous, boggling, yellow eyes seemed to be watching him, as Toby tucked into the chips, the gravy running unchecked down his chin.

"Hey Malcolm, d'you want a chip?"

He stabbed a thick, chunky chip and transferred it to the bench in front of the beetle. Malcolm seemed to rear back on two of his legs and then cautiously it approached the chip. In one swift movement, almost so quickly Toby didn't see it happen, the long purple tongue darted out and delivered the chip to a row of sharp teeth. In an instance it was gone.

"Wow. That's cool," Toby said with admiration. "D'you want another?"

In the end Malcolm ate more chips than Toby, but Toby didn't mind sharing. His new pet was better than anything. No one he knew had a beetle quite like Malcolm.

Once the carton was empty, Malcolm seemed to squat down on his legs then close his eyes and doze off. In sleep he began to make a strange muttering sound, and for a second Toby imagined his new pet was actually making sense, talking words. Toby shook his head, to clear it of such daftness. Carelessly throwing the empty carton, wooden fork and paper into the bushes behind the bench, he thought of all that had happened that morning.

The empty house was weird and so was the disappearance of the Grimleys. The burning down of the old telecommunication centre had to mean something. He remembered when Lloydie, Matt and he rode on their bikes to the building on the edge of the town back in winter time. It had been sort of creepy. He should have investigated it then.

If he was going to be a Private Eye, then he'd make this his first mystery to be solved. He would have to go back to the Grimleys' house and take another look round. Perhaps next time he'd not go alone.

He needed a partner. Didn't all great detectives have partners?

On all the detective shows and films he'd seen on television, they always had some sort of identity. He'd have to have an ID card? Definitely. He'd get Lloydie to help him print one off on his computer. No problem!

Anything else? A notebook and pen. He could use one of his school books to write down any clues. None of the teachers ever bothered looking at the back pages.

Fingerprints!

He'd definitely have to have a magnifying glass. There was one in the desk drawer in his Dad's study at home.

What else? Hadn't he seen, on the TV shows, the police using powder and a large brush when looking for fingerprints on things? This might not be so easy. Toby's forehead creased in thought and Malcolm snoozed on, muttering and chuntering in his sleep.

Then Toby remembered seeing a large container of talc on the glass shelf in the bathroom behind his Mum's leg wax kit, and the Harry Potter mug holding their three toothbrushes. The talc, and one of Mum's make-up brushes from her dressing table, would have to do. She had so many she'd not miss one. Toby was satisfied that was all he'd need, to start his career off as a private investigator.

A sudden noise brought his mind back to the present. It was his mobile in his blazer pocket. A text message from Lloydie.

RU OK. WOT MT HOUSE. LYON CROSS. TTYL.

He sent a message back. MT HOUSE GR8. LYON SO WOT. BACK 1 PM. CU

Toby sighed. School was such a waste of time and effort, but he supposed he'd have to go back for the afternoon period. He glanced at his watch. Twenty minutes before the bell. No need to rush!

He gathered up the still sleeping Malcolm and carefully returned him to the dark depths of his pocket. He stood, and was just bending down to pick up his bag from the dusty ground at his feet, when three figures came between him and the sun making Toby suddenly shiver.

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Wisplurkers. By Maggie C.

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