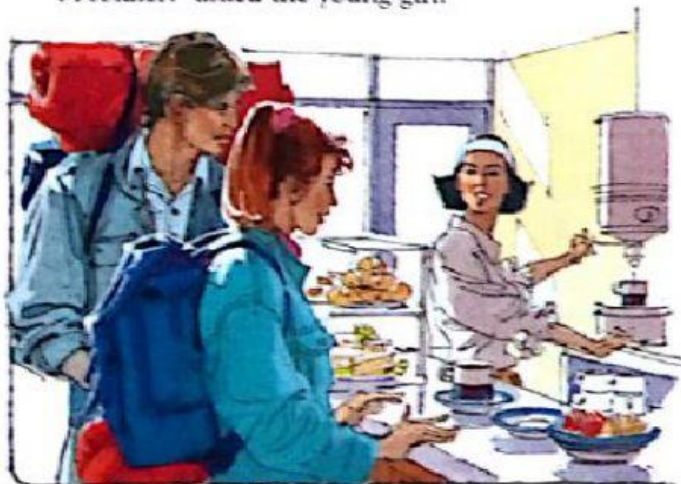


A Stranger at the Door

Sheila and Charles went into the small café. There was a young girl behind the counter. Sheila went up to her.

'Has a young man been in here this morning?' asked Sheila.

'A soldier?' asked the young girl.



'No, not a soldier – a student,' replied Sheila.

'We see a lot of soldiers here,' said the girl. 'But no students.'

Charles asked for two coffees. He sat down with Sheila at a table near the window.

'Paul's forgotten about our visit,' he said. 'We'll have a coffee. Then we'll walk to Hilltop Cottage.'

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Charles and Sheila waited in the café. Paul did not come. It was now after two o'clock.

They left the café and walked to a crossroads. Charles looked at Paul's map. Sheila pointed to a signpost.

'That's the road to Barconney,' she said.

They pulled their rucksacks onto their shoulders and walked along the road. It was a very hot day. The sun was shining brightly and they walked slowly.

After an hour, they came to a telephone box. On the left, there was a narrow lane into the woods.

'The telephone box is on Paul's map,' said Charles. 'This is the way to the cottage.'



They sat at the table and looked out of the window. Some soldiers were loading bags into the lorry. Other soldiers were standing on guard.

The girl brought the coffees.



'What's in those bags?' Charles asked her.

'Banknotes,' replied the girl. 'The money comes from London by train. Then the soldiers take it to a large army camp near here.'

'What do they do with the money?' Sheila asked.

'I don't know,' said the girl. And she walked away.

'They are probably old banknotes,' said Charles. 'After some years, the government destroys old banknotes and new money is printed. The money in those bags will not be used any more.'

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They walked up the narrow lane. Tall trees grew on each side. The branches were thick with leaves.

'It's dark in here,' said Charles. 'There's no sun.'

'It's nice and cool after the hot road,' replied Sheila.

'Anyway, Paul's cottage is higher up. It'll be brighter up there.'

They walked farther up the steep, dark lane.

'I don't like this place,' said Charles. 'It's too dark. What a place for a holiday.'

'Oh, come on,' said Sheila.



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Sheila and Charles arrived at the cottage. There were high trees all round it.

'There's something wrong,' said Charles. 'Look at the curtains. They are all closed. There's no one here.'

'Don't be silly,' said Sheila.

She went up to the cottage and knocked loudly on the door. They waited for some time.

Sheila pushed at the cottage door. It did not open. It was locked.

'Paul?' shouted Charles. 'Paul? Are you there?'

There was no reply.

Sheila knocked again on the door. They stood and listened.

'There's someone inside,' said Sheila. 'I heard a noise. Listen!'

They both stood in silence. Someone unlocked the door.

'It's Paul,' said Charles. 'Why is he taking so long?'

The door slowly opened. A tall man with a beard stood in the doorway. He was about forty years old. Sheila and Charles did not know him. He was a stranger.

'Who are you?' asked the stranger. 'What do you want?'

1. Read Chapter 2 and answer the following questions.

1. Why did Paul and Sheila decide to have a coffee?

2. Why were there a lot of soldiers?

3. What did the bags contain?

4. Why did they decide to look for the house?

5. Who appeared by the door?