

# 21. On the Lookout

Elliot's eyes sprang open very early on Thursday morning. It was the day of the State Opening of Parliament.

'What have you and your friends got planned today, Elly?' asked Josie as Elliot loaded the dishwasher with their breakfast things.

'Not much,' smiled Elliot, cheekily throwing a dishcloth at his mum, who threw it back with a giggle. He was only planning to talk his way on to a mission to steal the Crown Jewels and save their home. Not much at all.

Last night, a grimy, sweaty Hephaestus, having locked himself in his forge beneath the cowshed



since Monday, had finally emerged, proudly bearing a beautiful crown that was the spitting image of the Imperial State Crown. The blacksmith gave a demonstration of the 'improvements' he had made to the original, before reluctantly handing it to Aphrodite, who was eventually persuaded to take it off her own head and place it in Hermes's bottomless bag.

The Olympians had rehearsed their plan down to the very last second. They had been practising endlessly, enacting every moment in meticulous detail thanks to the security vans and guards that Hermes was able to create from wheelbarrows and mice. By Thursday morning, the Gods were confident nothing could stop them.

But no amount of begging could persuade them to take Elliot and Virgo along. As the Olympians prepared to leave for London, they were watched by two very grumpy onlookers.

'We'll be back by lunchtime,' said Zeus.

'You will get the Earth Stone, won't you?' asked Elliot. The Really Scary Letter's deadline was tomorrow. This was his only chance to find twenty thousand pounds, or he was going to lose his home.

'Of course!' grinned Zeus. 'We've got hours. I can get married, divorced and wed the bride's sister in half the time.'

'What a ridiculous outfit,' said Pegasus, who was decked out in full ceremonial regalia.

'Nonsense, you look splendid,' said Zeus as he mounted his steed dressed as a beefeater.

'I wasn't talking about mine,' snorted Pegasus.

'Behave yourselves, you little monkeys,' giggled Aphrodite to the children as she and Athene squabbled over who was driving, with Hermes and Hephaestus squashed in the back. 'Hold tight everyone, here we goooooooo!'

Elliot and Virgo watched with faces like thunder as Aphrodite's car raced down the track towards the nearest roadworks for the low-way.

'Chocks away!' cried Zeus as Pegasus soared into the sky, remembering at the last minute to wear the invisibility helmet, vanishing himself and Pegasus into thin air.

'So,' grumbled Virgo, as she and Elliot walked back through the gate and commanded it to close, 'do you want to go over that homework Athene left us?'

'No,' sulked Elliot, kicking a stone in frustration. 'It's not fair, we should be going too. I . . . we need that stone. Today.'

'I know,' said Virgo. 'We were managing perfectly well ourselves. In a kind of releasing-a-



Death-Daemon sort of way.'

They gave each other a sullen glance. But one look at each other's miserable face was enough to make them burst out laughing.

'Come on,' said Elliot as they reached the shed. 'Perhaps if we get this algebra done, sergeant Athene will give us the night off.'

Out of nowhere, a rolled copy of the *Daily Argus* landed at their feet.

'I wish my paper round was that easy,' said Elliot, picking up the newspaper and unfurling its pages.

'The one that Aphrodite has been doing for you every day?' scoffed Virgo.

But Elliot didn't answer. He was reading the front page.

'Uh-oh,' he whispered at last. 'Virgo, listen to this . . .'

## CROWNING GLORY

**BY CICERO, NEWS EDITOR**

**The *Argus* can't see any reason or rhyme**
**Why Zeus and his gang are resorting to crime**
**Word reaches our paper that those crazy fools**
**Are planning to pinch one of England's Crown Jewels**
**This morning they travel to fair London town**



**To sightsee, then nick the Imperial Crown**
**Hephaestus has made one from silver and gold**
**And Hermes will swap this new crown for the old**
**Her Majesty won't have a gracious response**
**To find that it isn't her crown on her bonce**
**This terrible heist truly beggars belief**
**The King of the Gods is a dirty old thief . . .**

'This is not good,' said Elliot.

'No, it is not,' agreed Virgo, whacking another mole with a notepad as it hastily retreated from the shed. 'The standard of journalism at the *Daily Argus* is utterly reprehensible – it has moles everywhere, but this level of press intrusion—'

'Who cares?' snapped Elliot. 'If we're reading this, then so is every other immortal in the world, including Hypnos and Thanatos! They'll know the plan to swap the Imperial State Crown at the Tower! We have to warn the Gods!'

'All right, they won't have got far – we'll call Hermes,' said Virgo.

'No, we won't,' said Elliot, pointing at the forgotten iGod on the sofa next to a copy of *Salve!* magazine.

'Not again! And they've taken all the transport with them. Unless we take Hermes's bike? The AA finally towed it back.'



'The AA?' asked Elliot.

'Amazonian Autorepairs,' said Virgo. 'Those girls are ferocious with a spanner. Can you drive?'

'I'm twelve, you prune,' said Elliot. 'Charon?'

'He's on strike until this evening,' said Virgo, pointing at the paper. 'The Argonauts are launching a cheaper service. Come on! You know how things work here, how else can we get to London?'

'The train!' cried Elliot. 'If we run, we might just catch the 6.42 from Little Motbury!'

'Hurry up, then,' shouted Virgo, as the gate opened for her to race down the track. 'Let's go!'

'Wait for me!' said Elliot, grabbing his rucksack in such a rush that he neither remembered to shut the new fence nor noticed the winged figure lurking in the shadows, which quickly dissembled into a rat and sniggered behind them all the way to the train station.

Patricia Porshley-Plum had a problem. She was not accustomed to problems – problems were something she paid other people to deal with, thank you very much. But if she wanted Home Farm – and she really did – she was going to have to overcome this one. And the problem was that dirty great fence.

Five days after their luncheon (lunch was for common people and anyone who called the midday meal 'dinner' deserved to be shot), Patricia Porshley-Plum needed to see Josie Hooper again to conclude last Saturday's arrangements. Patricia could feel that land – and the hundreds of thousands of pounds it could yield her – within her avaricious grasp. She just needed to get to Josie one more time to put everything in place.

Patricia was a firm believer in the basic right to privacy. So she always made sure her telescope was positioned where no one else could look at it – she loathed nosy parkers. Through the telescope, she had been watching the developments on her neighbours' land over the past few days with considerable concern. No one had come to the farm for months, she knew that the Hoopers didn't have two brass farthings to rub together and yet suddenly they could afford teams of workers to undertake landscaping and refurbishment. Had they come into some money? Had they already paid off their debt? And who were these strange new relatives? She hadn't seen them at the funerals of . . . whatever the grandparents were called, so why show up now? Something strange was going on.

That pesky – if rather dashing – chap had fobbed her off on Monday, so Patricia had been





determined to go back that night and get hold of Josie herself. But when she arrived at Home Farm, a huge wooden fence had sprung up around the property. She knocked, called, shouted and kicked the wretched thing, but the gate wouldn't open – Patricia even thought she heard the faint sound of a raspberry being blown.

Patricia wasn't one to let anything stand in her way. After all, she'd not become chair of the parish council by backing down when she lost the election. Grit, determination and the strategic use of a shotgun had won the day that time – and Patricia would win the day again.

So she did what any respectful neighbour would do. She hitched her tweed skirt in her knickers and tried to climb over the fence, but immediately erupted in bright blue boils.

On Tuesday, she tried to take a pair of bolt cutters to the gate. The moment they made contact with the lock, Patricia discovered she could only speak Swahili for the rest of the day.

On Wednesday she had tried to chainsaw the fence, but was rewarded with twenty-four hours of ear-splitting wind, which nearly burnt a hole in her sofa.

But finally on Thursday, with only a day before Home Farm was lost, her moment arrived. As



Elliot raced out of the farm, he was so intent on catching the train, he didn't notice that he'd left the fence open. But Patricia Porshley-Plum never missed a trick.

Before Elliot reached the station, Patricia had Josie dressed and in her car. And as Elliot and Virgo's train started the journey to London, Patricia had Josie Hooper right where she wanted her.