

Mariposa is eating breakfast at The Golden Astrolabe Hotel.

Mariposa is happy.

Yesterday she had gone into the research centre as usual as the research staff were trying to help her find somewhere for her to live. That process is due to continue today.

During yesterday morning Edith had asked to see her and had offered her employment at the research centre, having checked the work permit situation.

Mariposa had accepted. Edith had said to spend time sorting out her accommodation as that is important and takes priority.

Mariposa finishes breakfast and goes to her room, collects her bag and goes outside to wait for John to arrive. Mariposa appreciates John providing transport for her and does not want to keep him waiting.

As Mariposa has been dismissed by Enormous Telephones she has not logged onto her now former employer's email system since, so she has not seen an email telling her that she has been reinstated, is required to return immediately to company headquarters in her own country, instructed to pack and be ready to be collected by a company driver to take her to the airport to catch the flight that is booked for her. Be ready to be collected at 9 o'clock at The Golden Astrolabe Hotel on what is now called 'today'.

9:05 am

Georgina is on duty in reception at the research centre.

John and Mariposa had arrived about ten minutes previously and had greeted Georgina and Georgina had greeted them.

Georgina notices a large car enter the car park.

Three people get out of the car, a man and two women. They walk towards the entrance to the building.

The three visitors enter the building.

"Good morning, how may I help?" asks Georgina.

"Good morning," says the man, "We would like to speak with Ms Mariposa Prynter please."

"One moment please", says Georgina as she presses a button on the intercom unit on her desk.

"Good morning madam, there are three visitors in reception asking to speak with Ms Prynter."

"Thank you, I'll be out shortly", replies Edith.

Edith's office.

Flashback.

"So ma'am, I wonder if we should agree that, if something arises in reception and I am concerned about it and I want to inconspicuously let you know of my concern, then I will address you as 'madam' rather than as 'ma'am'", asks Georgina.

"Yes, that's a good idea, we'll do that", replies Edith.

Flashback ends.

Edith quickly telephones the computing laboratory.

"Ah, John, I'm glad it's you. There are three visitors in reception asking to speak with Mariposa. Georgina is concerned. I am going to go to speak with them. Can you and some of the others come to reception please just in case there is a problem. But leave Mariposa there, but not alone. Thank you."

Edith stands, gathers herself, walks to her office door, opens it, goes into the corridor, closes the door, pauses, gathers herself, steps forward confidently and goes through the swing doors into the foyer.

"Good morning, I'm Edith Gatford, Secretary-General, how may I help?"

The three people turn to look towards Edith. Edith notices they are all dressed in navy blue uniforms with the word 'security' in white capital letters on them, but no other insignia.

"We've come to speak with Ms Mariposa Prynter", says the man.

"Where are you from please?"

"Enormous Telephones, her employer."

"May I ask why you want to see her?"

Edith notices the man's face tighten, he is clearly annoyed.

"We need to speak with her."

Edith notices John, Caroline Appleby, and Edward enter the foyer and stand in a row in front of the swing doors that lead to the computing laboratory, John nearest to Georgina and Caroline in the middle. The visitors do not notice them.

"My understanding is that she no longer works for Enormous Telephones."

"She's been reinstated."

"Has she agreed to that?"

"Look, we need to speak with Ms Prynter herself. We are on a tight schedule, we need to get her to the airport to catch her flight back to her home country. She is needed

urgently at company headquarters. It is our job to find her and get her to the airport and onto her flight and that is what we are going to do.”

Edith notices Caroline go back through the swing doors. Edith decides to cause delay.

“Do you have any identification that you can show me, I am sure you appreciate that I need to be careful.”

“How do you mean?”

“Well, I have a duty of care in relation to what happens here. You say that you are from Enormous Telephones, but your uniforms just say ‘security’. I need to check your credentials.”

“We are here on behalf of Enormous Telephones.”

“On behalf of?”

“Yes.”

“So are you actually employees of Enormous Telephones?”

Edith notices that Caroline has returned and is again stood between John and Edward.

“This is irrelevant, Are you going to produce Ms Prynter or do we need to go and find her?”

“Well, that is a situation that I need to consider”

“Well, you’ve got two minutes to consider it.”

“Ah.”

A pause.

Edith looks beyond the visitors.

“Is Ms Prynter in the building?”

“No ma’am”, answers Caroline.

The visitors turn and look towards Caroline.

“Don’t give me that, we saw her driven away from the hotel in a car and we wondered if she came here and the same car is in the car park, and that man there was driving”, says the man.

“Was Ms Prynter here earlier?” asks Edith.

“Yes ma’am.”

“But she has since left?”

“Yes ma’am.”

“Where has she gone?” demands the man.

Caroline does not reply.

“Do you know where she has gone?” asks Edith.

“No ma’am.”

“Don’t give me that, she only arrived here a few minutes ago! She must still be here, it doesn’t make sense”, says the man angrily.

“Did you see her leave?” asks Edith.

“Yes ma’am, with a female driver.”

“So there we are. She arrived with a male driver and has now left with a female driver.”

“This is the only entrance, we would have seen her go.”

“Yes, it is the only entrance, but it is not the only exit. Health and safety regulations.”

“Look, we don’t want any unpleasantness so will you stop delaying and produce her or do we need to go and look for her?”

“Well, in the circumstances, to avoid any unpleasantness as you put it, I can offer you one of our guided tours of our facility, so if you and one of your companions would like to go on the tour then your companion can have a look at the female-only areas and your other companion can wait here so as to know that she is not going out of the foyer while you are touring the other side of the building. The tour is thorough and takes quite a time, but I suppose that if you choose not to have the briefing on our scientific work included then it won’t take as long.”

The man gives Edith a fierce look.

“We’re wasting our time here, come on, let’s get going.”

The visitors leave.

Edith’s office.

Edith, John, Caroline Appleby and Edward are present.

“So did you tell Mariposa what was going on?” asks Edith.

“Yes ma’am”, replies Caroline.

“Did you suggest she leave?”

“No ma’am. I simply told her what was happening.”

“What did she say?”

“She said that they had dismissed her and she is not willing to be reinstated, she has a job here and anyway they sacked her once and they are not going to get the chance to do it twice. Caroline Ruralby offered to take her to a place of safety as she put it, just in

case there might be problems and Mariposa accepted and they went out through the emergency exit by the computing laboratory.”

“I know that you never tell untruths so I was able to offer the guided tour knowing that I could rely on what you had said.”

“Thank you ma’am.”

“Would I be right in thinking that you asked not to be told where they were going?”

“Correct ma’am, that way I could truthfully say I did not know.”

“So how do we find Mariposa to tell here they have gone?”

“Well, we don’t actually know that they have gone away completely ma’am.”

“Hmm, I suppose not.”

“So we had best not try Mariposa’s mobile phone in case they might have some way of tracking it, but she is with Caroline Ruralby so we can ring her. Perhaps best to get a new pay as you go phone to ring her, just in case.”

“Indeed”, says Edith, “I’ll get on to the Managing Director of Enormous Telephones, he might not know what is going on, so I shall tell him then he cannot later deny knowing about it. I’m not going to let him think that somehow he is insulated from what is going on.”

Edith is talking with John.

“So, at lunchtime I went to the supermarket in Rhyming Fiction and bought a basic pay as you go mobile telephone and I rang Caroline Ruralby. I did not ask where they are and Caroline did not say, but they are both safe.”

“Good.”

“Later I rang the Managing Director of Enormous Telephones and got through to his personal assistant. I told her what had been going on and she ummed and ahd but when I asked if she would rather the Managing Director learned about it all from a report in the trade press she put me through and he said that he had found out about the dismissal and ordered the reinstatement and for Mariposa to return to head office, and he purported shock at the way it had been handled by what seem to be contractors. We got talking and he told me that after he got back from the conference he had started an investigation as to how he had been misled that augmentable phrases had been invented and the list of them generated in the research division of Enormous Telephones, but that apparently news of this had travelled faster along the informal grapevine than through the management hierarchical structure and someone trying to cover his or her tracks had got Mariposa, her manager and three junior researchers in the research department dismissed and he was now trying to put matters right.

“Maybe he did not know about the aggressive security staff, but he certainly does now.

“Having talked to Mariposa and got her permission to do so, I told him that she now has a job here and that she does not accept being reinstated.

“Of course, I did not mention the bit about Mariposa’s love interest, though that is probably a significant part of her thinking.”

“What was his reaction?”

“Well, perhaps surprisingly, he said that he didn’t blame her, she had been shabbily treated by being dismissed and that frankly if an employer had done that to him then he wouldn’t go back either. So, we ended the call on a seemingly agreeable basis.”

“So I suppose that Enormous Telephones will not want any publicity about it all and so the contractors will get their money anyway and that that is the end of that then.”

“Hopefully!”