

Friend or Foe

by Sho Botham

‘He’s not easy to describe,’ said Polly, ‘he’s a giant of a man but with the gentleness of a lamb.’

‘What’s his name,’ asked Patricia.

‘Pascal,’ said Polly.

‘Oh that sounds romantic.’

‘Well it’s not, he’s not, I’m not,’ said Polly, ‘it’s nothing like that and don’t go getting ideas that it is. It most definitely isn’t.’

‘Okay, okay,’ said Patricia, ‘I get the picture. You and Pascal are not an item.’

‘And never will be,’ added Polly.

‘Shame,’ said Patricia, ‘with a name like Pascal, just think of all the little Polly-Pascals you could have.’

Polly glared at her friend with one of her best stop-‘em-dead-in-their-tracks stares.

Down by the river a group of school children were practising skimming stones across the calm, meandering water. Each stone was breaking the surface as it landed before bouncing off to repeat its party piece a few feet further on.

A woman pushing a pram with one hand walked by glancing at the children as she spoke on her iPhone.

'They don't know,' she said into her phone. 'They haven't released that information yet. Maybe I'll find out more when I go into work tomorrow. I'll let you know if I do. Must go and get the baby fed and down for her sleep. Bye.'

Pascal was struggling to get his large frame into his car.

Patricia watched him from behind the oak tree opposite the car park.

Looking quickly right and left, she ran across the road and up to Pascal just as he was about to close the car door.

'You're Pascal, aren't you?' she said more breathlessly than intended.

'Yes I am,' he said, adding, 'why, who are you?'

'I'm Polly's friend.'

'Ah, Polly,' he said, a smile spreading across his face and a faraway look entering his eyes.

'What can I do for you?' he said.

'Nothing, nothing at all,' said Patricia, looking at Pascal with a strange glint in her eye. 'You have no idea how good it is to meet you here.'

Pascal, tilted his head to one side and looked at her inquisitively but Patricia was already heading back towards the oak tree and looking upwards at the CCTV cameras watching the car park. She was smiling and thinking to herself, Polly can't pretend I was with her if I am on camera talking to Pascal. What a shame she can't use me as an alibi this time. Patricia headed in the direction of home with a spring in her step.