

## Chapter 1



# Not Today

Everyone started yelling at once. ‘What do you mean?’ exclaimed Ian. ‘She was exonerated!’

‘She’s a consultant for Interpol!’ argued Bernie.

‘Which is why she is so dangerous,’ countered the man. ‘I’m a senior investigator working with the French National Police. I have been tasked with interviewing her.’

‘You people wouldn’t know a terrorist if one stuck a bomb up your . . .’ Agent Okeke was stabbing her

finger in the investigator's face as she screamed this at him in French.

'I can't do it. I can't do it,' muttered Friday.

'She's been cleared by Interpol,' said Bernie. He was getting so agitated he was waving his hands in the investigator's face trying to emphasise his point. 'She has level-three security clearance.'

'There's been an incident,' snapped the investigator. 'A member of her immediate family has been arrested.'

'Which one?' asked Friday.

'That is classified,' said the investigator.

'What for?' asked Bernie.

'That's also classified,' said the investigator. 'This girl is a known terrorist associate. We have to presume she is involved.'

'She didn't know her university tutor was part of a terrorist sleeper cell!' exclaimed Bernie.

The investigator shook his head. He wasn't going to be swayed. 'She can't be allowed to walk the streets while a cloud is over her head.'

'But it's not forecast to rain today,' said Melanie, looking up at the sky.

Everyone looked up. They couldn't help themselves. It was such an odd thing to say.

‘What?’ said the investigator, still looking at the clouds. His mind was on terrorist threats, so his train of thought had gone to acid rain and radiation clouds.

Then something metallic clattered to the ground. It had a distinctive heavy sound. Everyone knew even before looking, that the handcuffs were on the footpath. They were lying next to a twisted paperclip and a small metal shiv. Friday Barnes was running across the road. Brakes screeched as motorists tried to avoid hitting her. Then obscenities were being hurled about in French. Some were swearing at Friday. Others were swearing at the cars that had stopped suddenly.

‘Quick, don’t let her get away!’ ordered the investigator.

The uniformed officers leapt into the road in pursuit and *BAM!* They were immediately sent flying by a cyclist. The bicycle hit the first police officer, smashing him into the second police officer, then flipped over and landed on top of them both.

‘You idiots!’ yelled the investigator.

One of the officers was so tangled in the bicycle frame it was hard to know where his limbs began and

the bike ended. The other had blood pouring out of his head.

‘Someone call the police!’ yelled the cyclist. He was lying in the gutter clutching his ribs, but he didn’t look too bad. Unlike the police officers, he was wearing a helmet.

‘Oh, they *are* the police,’ said Melanie.

‘Then call an ambulance!’ shouted the cyclist.

‘She’s getting away!’ yelled the investigator.

Friday was not an athletic person, but she really did not want to go to jail, so she was highly motivated. In the three seconds it had taken for the police officers to be knocked flying, she had made it all the way across the road and disappeared into an alleyway. The Paris Police Headquarters was on the Left Bank. An unreconstructed part of Paris that was a rabbit warren of tiny streets and even tinier alleys. If you wanted to disappear in seconds, this was the ideal place. Friday was gone from sight.

‘Do I have to do everything?’ demanded the investigator, still yelling at his injured colleagues.

‘So far, you’ve done nothing,’ Ian pointed out.

The investigator glowered, then ran after Friday. Although he did have the good sense to look both

ways while waving his police badge at the traffic to make sure he wasn't hit himself.

Bernie, Melanie, Agent Okeke and Ian were left standing on the footpath, looking at the two injured officers and the cyclist.

'What are we meant to do now?' asked Ian.

Bernie started to remove his necktie. 'Apply first aid, I suppose,' he said, as he crouched down and used his tie as a bandage around the wounded officer's head.

'You should use that as a tourniquet,' said Agent Okeke. 'Around his neck.'

'It's not his fault,' said Bernie.

'Stepping in front of a bicycle was,' said Agent Okeke.

'We've got to go after Friday and help her,' said Ian. He stepped into the road and was narrowly missed by another cyclist.

'*Bouge, l'imbicile!*' yelled the cyclist as he sped past.

Bernie grabbed Ian by the shoulder and yanked him back onto the sidewalk, out of the bike lane.

'Calm down. Friday will be alright. But she's got a better chance of getting away if she's on her own,' said Bernie. 'She's small and good at going unnoticed.'

‘The brown cardigan is more effective than military-grade camouflage,’ agreed Melanie.

‘We can’t just leave her out in the city of Paris on her own!’ said Ian. ‘It’s getting dark. She’s got nowhere to go. No-one to help her.’

‘Friday is a genius,’ said Bernie. ‘She’ll figure something out.’

‘She’s a five-foot-two fifteen-year-old with non-existent social skills, no money, no phone, in a foreign city on the run from terrorism charges,’ said Ian.

‘She’s handled worse before,’ said Melanie. ‘She did four years at Highcrest Academy. She’s got survival skills.’

## Chapter 2



# What next?

Agent Okeke drove Melanie and Ian back to the art institute.

‘Why are we coming back here?’ asked Ian. ‘Our operation is over.’

‘Captain Barnes will be at HQ all night answering questions and trying to get to the bottom of these accusations against Friday,’ said Agent Okeke. ‘They would love to grill you two as well, but they can’t because you’re minors and foreign and they don’t have any evidence against you.’

‘We should be trying to help Friday,’ said Ian.

‘There’s nothing we can do,’ said Agent Okeke.  
‘Until she makes contact.’

‘You think she will?’ asked Ian.

‘I wouldn’t,’ said Agent Okeke. ‘But she is a child, and she seems irrationally fond of you both. If she does make contact, the best way you can help her would be to do nothing.’

‘Nothing?’ said Melanie. ‘That doesn’t sound helpful.’

‘It’s not,’ said Agent Okeke. ‘But it’s not unhelpful either. If you try to meet up with her, you’ll lead the counter-terrorism investigator straight to her. They’ll be watching you, tapping your phones and hacking into your computers. The counter-terrorism unit has the authority to violate anybody’s privacy and they love doing it. They’ll be waiting for her to reach out to you.’

‘So, you’re saying,’ queried Ian, ‘Don’t try and find her?’

‘No, idiot,’ said Agent Okeke. ‘I’m saying – when you try to find her, do it subtly.’

‘Will you help us?’ asked Melanie.



‘I can’t. I’ve just assaulted three fellow officers,’ said Agent Okeke. She had been a little overenthusiastic while arresting the art thieves earlier in the day. ‘I can’t be seen to aid a fleeing terrorist. But you can. You’re kids. You’ve got nothing to lose.’

‘Except spending the rest of our childhoods in juvenile-detention facilities,’ said Ian.

‘Big deal!’ said Agent Okeke. ‘What’s school if it’s not a juvenile-detention facility? Everyone has to go to school.’

Agent Okeke pulled up in front of the art institute. Ian and Melanie got out.

‘Thanks,’ said Ian.

‘Whatever,’ said Agent Okeke, before speeding away.

‘She’s really warming up to us,’ said Melanie with a fond smile.

‘What do we do now?’ asked Ian.

‘Well, I’m going to take a nice long nap,’ said Melanie.

‘You’re kidding?!’ said Ian.

‘Agent Okeke just told us the best way to help is to do nothing,’ said Melanie. ‘Nothing is something I excel at.’

‘So you’re just going to do as you’re told?’ asked Ian.

‘I do when it was something I was planning to do anyway,’ said Melanie.

‘Aren’t you worried about Friday?’ asked Ian. ‘Who knows what’s happening to her right now.’

‘Ian, I know you love Friday,’ said Melanie. ‘But no-one loves her more than me. You’re just *in love* with her. I *best friend* love her. I spend time with her twenty-four hours a day. Just not having her here with me make me uncomfortable. I miss her with every fibre of my body. But making myself sick with worry won’t help her. Being well rested, appropriately dressed and having a no-limits credit card in my pocket is the best way I can help Friday when we find her.’

Ian hadn’t really thought about how much Friday meant to Melanie. They were both lonely girls in different ways. They had formed a symbiotic relationship. They were like algae and fungus combining to make lichen. They thrived together, but it was hard for either one of them to cope alone. He realised that Melanie wasn’t necessarily as happy and easy-going as she always outwardly appeared to be. He didn’t know what to say in response.

Melanie just smiled at him, the same way he had seen her smile at her dim-witted big brothers. ‘Good-night,’ she said. She gave Ian a hug. Then went inside to walk up the five flights to her dorm room.

## Chapter 3



# Finding Friday

Melanie never set an alarm. There was no point. Alarms didn't work on her. She woke up when she was ready to wake up. Or when Friday woke her up by shaking her vigorously by the shoulder or talking animatedly in her ear about whatever crisis was going on while she slept. This morning she was being woken by a different voice. A voice that just kept saying the same word over and over.

‘Melanie . . . Melanie . . . MELANIE . . .’

Melanie's brain started to process this information. She remembered that her name was Melanie. The voice may well be talking to her.

'Whadyouwan,' she mumbled into the pillow.

'Melanie, wake up. We need to rescue Friday, remember?'

Melanie's brain was grinding slowly up through the gears. Friday wasn't just a day of the week. It was also her best friend. Her friend needed rescuing? This idea sounded familiar. Then Melanie remembered an image from the previous afternoon, the image of Friday running down an alley and disappearing into the back streets of Paris.

'She's just getting croissants,' said Melanie, turning over and trying to blot out the voice with the pillow.

'No, she's on the run from the police, remember? She's a wanted terrorist.'

'Oh,' said Melanie. It all came flooding back now. She was worried about Friday, which was bad, but she was even more upset when she realised there was no way she could get out of waking up. You can't hit the snooze button when your best friend is on the run from the counter-terrorism squad. With some groaning, Melanie eventually sat up.

‘Good,’ said Ian. He had a laptop. Now that Melanie was sitting up, he put it on her lap so he could show her the screen. ‘I stayed up last night working out where she could be.’

Melanie rubbed her eyes. The screen seemed unnecessarily bright for so early in the morning.

‘An average fit adult can jog at about ten kilometres an hour . . .’ began Ian.

‘Friday isn’t of average fitness,’ mumbled Melanie.

‘No,’ agreed Ian. ‘And there are no straight lines in Paris, so she’d move slower than that. Even so, it’s been eleven hours since she ran off. That means Friday could be anywhere within a one-hundred-and-ten-kilometre radius by now.’

‘That’s a lot,’ said Melanie. Her mind was horrified by the thought of walking so far in any time frame.

‘Although,’ continued Ian. He was sounding quite manic. Staying up all night had not agreed with him. ‘Even if she was fit, there’s no way she could run for eleven hours straight. Not after yesterday and the chase through the sewers.’

‘Apart from anything else,’ said Melanie. ‘She would need a shower. Sewers are gross and even fugitives must observe some level of hygiene.’

‘Right,’ said Ian. He didn’t agree with Melanie’s statement, but Melanie often made strange statements, and it was usually better not to ask follow-up questions. ‘She has no money that we know of . . .’

‘Unless she’s robbed a bank,’ said Melanie.

‘That would be out of character,’ said Ian. ‘Also, banks are closed at night and therefore harder to rob. But even without money, she could have hitched a lift, or jumped in the back of a van or snuck on to public transport.’

‘So you woke me up at this horrible hour to tell me that Friday could be anywhere?’ clarified Melanie.

‘But this one-hundred-and-ten-kilometre radius circle is a good area to start with,’ said Ian, choosing to ignore Melanie’s logic. ‘I’ve marked that on this map.’

Melanie looked at the map of Paris on the screen in front of her. There was a big red circle that pretty much encompassed the whole thing.

‘She’s somewhere there,’ said Ian. ‘We need to find her before the police do. It seems like a large area. But if we split up and start with the main train stations, that’s probably the best way to proceed.’

‘No,’ said Melanie.

‘You can’t go back to sleep,’ said Ian.

‘No, I mean – no, I’m not going to spend the day searching half of a square one hundred kilometres,’ explained Melanie.

‘It’s not square kilometres. The radius is one hundred kilometres of a circle. The total area would be pi times one hundred squared. Thirty-one thousand, four hundred square kilometres. Which admittedly is a lot.’

‘We don’t have to do all that,’ said Melanie, rubbing her eyes and swinging her legs out of bed. ‘We just need to think like Friday.’

‘No-one can think like Friday,’ said Ian.

‘No,’ agreed Melanie. ‘That’s true when it comes to problem solving. Her mind is like a supercomputer then. But with basic emotional things, she’s more simple than an amoeba.’

‘What do you mean?’ said Ian.

‘Think about it,’ said Melanie. ‘When they tried to arrest Friday yesterday, she was frightened. Really really frightened.’

‘I know,’ said Ian.

‘No, you don’t get it,’ said Melanie. ‘What frightens Friday most in the world?’



Ian thought about it for a moment before answering. ‘Blood. The sight of blood always makes her faint.’

Melanie shook her head. ‘That’s nothing. That’s just a primal response. The thing that frightens her most is being locked up.’

‘Well, no-one likes that,’ said Ian. ‘That’s the reason they do it. As a punishment.’

‘No, it’s more than that,’ said Melanie. ‘It’s visceral. It’s in her bones. Being locked up in juvenile detention when she was falsely accused – it traumatised her. Now every time Friday is in a confined space or someone stops her for a moment at airport security or a security guard wants to look in her bag – she has a full-blown panic attack.’

‘I didn’t know that,’ said Ian.

‘Don’t blame yourself. She’s a basket case so much of the time it’s hard to pick it,’ said Melanie. ‘But you weren’t there when she first came out of prison. She was damaged. She’s not fully recovered yet. Being put in handcuffs yesterday, that was literally the stuff of her nightmares. She would have reverted to pure primal fight-or-flight mode.’

‘What does that mean for us?’ asked Ian.

‘Think about it,’ said Melanie. ‘Friday would want to be somewhere safe. Somewhere comforting. Somewhere she belongs.’

‘But she doesn’t have a home,’ said Ian. ‘Her parents sold their house. Do you mean school? Do you think she’s trying to get back to Highcrest Academy?’

Melanie shook her head. ‘She hasn’t been there for over a year. It’s not the place that makes it feel safe. It’s what’s in the place.’

‘I don’t get it,’ said Ian. ‘Just tell me.’

‘Books,’ said Melanie. ‘Books are her security blanket. Her nanna. Her binky. She finds everything about books calming. The smell, the information, the Dewey decimal system itself – it’s all comforting to her.’

‘Like a mother’s womb,’ said Ian.

‘Exactly,’ said Melanie. ‘It’s her mother’s womb. Because her actual mother was never terribly interested in her.’

‘So, she’s at a bookshop?’ said Ian.

‘I doubt it,’ said Melanie. ‘They’re not terribly big. And they’re not open late. But libraries are.’

‘The library, of course,’ said Ian, reaching for the laptop. ‘I’ll look up the nearest one.’

‘No,’ said Melanie, slapping the screen shut. ‘The police can shadow our computers, remember?’

‘But we need to find the nearest library,’ said Ian.

‘Ian, we’ve been living in Paris for two weeks,’ said Melanie. ‘Didn’t you notice that the Nationale Bibliothèque is two blocks from here?’

‘It is?’ said Ian.

‘It’s a huge building,’ said Melanie. ‘I spent fifty per cent of every twenty-four hours asleep, and even I noticed it. What have you been looking at?’

‘Paris is very beautiful,’ said Ian.

‘You can’t take your eyes off Friday, can you?’ said Melanie.

Ian blushed. ‘We have been solving crime as well.’

‘Uh huh,’ said Melanie.

‘Do you really think she’s there?’ said Ian.

‘There’s one way to find out,’ said Melanie. She lay back down and snuggled under her doona.

‘What are you doing?’ said Ian. ‘Shouldn’t we be hurrying to the library?’

‘It doesn’t open until nine,’ said Melanie. ‘The best thing I can do to help Friday is to be well rested when we find her.’

Ian would have argued, but Melanie had already started snoring.