

## **Who, When, Wow! Mystery Edition**

### **The Mystery of Rennes-le-Chateau**

**Carly.** Psst! Hey! It's your favorite secret host here, from your favorite secret podcast. Today I checked out a legendary European mystery that spawned a famous book series AND one heckuva movie starring Tom Hanks, aka Woody from Toy Story. So don't go anywhere, I'm Carly Q, and this is Who When Wow, Mystery Edition!

(THEME SONG)

**Carly.** When I came into the office today I tried my best to act normal and natural.

**Brendan.** Morning Carly!

**Carly.** Nothing just normal and natural

**Brendan.** Ohhkay?

**Carly.** When in reality, I was scrutinizing every last detail of every single interaction.

**Linda.** Hey Carly Q. Have a good day!

**Carly.** Thanks, is there, some reason I wouldn't have a good day?

**Linda.** Uh. No. Wait, what?

**Carly.** Yeah exactly. As you may recall, last week I got a pretty crummy surprise: namely, an anonymous letter left on my desk saying someone was onto us. Yikes! Luckily, Lewis and I realized that instead of just being scared and intimidated by this, we should work to figure out who sent us the letter and why.

**Carly in the background.** Uhh, never mind Linda! You have a good day too!

(Soundbite of basement door closing.)

**Carly.** Whew that went okay right?

**Lewis.** Carrrrrrly Q! Is that you?

**Carly.** Lewis! You're down here already?

**Lewis.** Of course we have work to do!

**Carly.** All week I'd been compiling a list of potential suspects. Coworkers and other staff members here at BUTTHED, the guy who owns the bodega down the street from me, and of course at the top of the list, the mailman. Since, you know, it was a letter. But so

far none of them have panned out! And I was feeling All caps frustrated we hadn't cracked the case yet.

**Lewis.** What about the bodega guy?

**Carly.** Nothing! I even tried buttering him up by buying a bunch of butter but he wouldn't budge. I don't think it's him!

(Soundbite of rat squeaking.)

**Carly.** My rat friend Nibbles was helping out with our strategy session too. That's exactly the problem Nibbles! I have to be careful how I ask, because I don't want to accidentally give away too much information to someone who doesn't know.

**Lewis.** Seems like the BUTTHED bosses don't know. It's been a week since we got the letter, and everything's been quiet.

**Carly.** And I'm certainly grateful for that. But I'm still extremely frustrated this mystery is still unsolved!!

**Carly.** But just then.

(Soundbite of a thumb drive drops down the vacuum tube.)

**Carly and Lewis.** A new time-sealed file!

**Audio File.** Event: 1967, (BEEP) The Accursed Treasure of Rennes-le-Château (BEEP) secret society.

**Carly.** A Secret society? Accursed treasure?? Are we THRILLED or is it just me?

**Lewis.** Nothing lifts my spirits like a good bit of bad treasure. You know, people say I'm a treasure!

**Carly..** pulled out my handheld digital assistance device --

**H-dad.** H-dad online and ready to party!

**Carly.** And plugged in the clues from the file.

**Carly.** 1967, secret society, thing with a French name I can't pronounce.

(Soundbite of typing sounds.)

**H-dad.** The Accursed Treasure of Rennes-le-Château is a book published in 1967 about the town of same name, a small village in Southern France. It's rumored to have hidden treasure and a connection to a secret society called the Priory of Sion.

**Lewis.** This all sounds, vaguely familiar.

**H-dad.** Elements of the town, its history and the Priory of Sion were used as source material for the popular 2003 novel by Dan Brown called The Da Vinci Code. Book emoji!

**Lewis.** Yes! I knew it. I saw the Tom Hanks film adaptation like 100 times.

**Carly.** And who doesn't love a good Tom Hanks film?

**Lewis.** Haters of an American cinematic legend, that's who! Life is like a box of chocolates, There's no crying in baseball, Wilsonnn! Classics.

**Carly.** Okay H-dad, got any more info on,

**H-dad.** Tom Hanks was born in 1956 in Concord, California.

**Carly.** No, more info about the treasure!

**H-dad.** Oh, right. The town's treasure is rumored to be in or around the town's church, and is said to include millions of gold pieces and significant medieval documents.

**Lewis.** Did he say millions?

**H-dad.** A series of excavations in the late 1950's and early 60's found no evidence of treasure, but tens of thousands of tourists still descend on the town each year to look for it.

**Carly.** Wow I wonder where it is. Maybe in the bell tower? Or the steeple? Or the chapel? Or the rectory? Or the tabernacle?!

**Lewis.** Okay you're just naming parts a church.

**Carly.** Yeah, and?

**Carly.** We tried to get more info out of H-dad, but,

**H-dad.** Analyzing. Analyzing. Analyzing.

**Carly.** So we decided to break til lunch time. Luckily the rest of the morning flew by, and all of the sudden.

**P.A. Voice.** Attention, Butthead employees: it's butter sculpture lunch break! Help yourself to an extra stick of butter with your food, then use the leftovers to make a butter sculpture! Biggest, butteriest sculpture wins.

(Soundbite of footsteps coming down the steps.)

**Lewis.** That's lunch!

**Carly.** I grabbed Nibbles and H-dad, and we took off for the elevator.

(Soundbite of elevator ding.)

**Carly.** Hey Odie!

**Odie.** Basement companion! So nice to see you. Lewis, its well.

**Lewis.** Odie.

**Carly.** We've got a real juicy mystery today. Ever heard of the hidden treasure at Rennes-le-Château?

**Odie.** I believe I have. This is a very intriguing story. As I recall, it revolves around a number of colorful characters. The central one is Pierre Plantard, the co-writer of a book about this place.

**Lewis.** The Accursed Treasure of Rennes-le-Château!

**Odie.** That's right! But there's other important people in this story too, particularly a local hotel owner named Noël Corbu, and his tale of a 19th century priest who initially discovered some of the treasure.

**Carly.** This is great, I LOVE a good treasure hunt! Can you send us back to 1967 when the book was published?

**Odie.** I can, and I suggest you start at Noël's hotel, L'hôtel de la Tour and go from there.

**Lewis.** Sounds like a plan.

**Odie.** Then a quick refresher on our time travel rules. No changing the past, be back by the end of lunch. And to ensure your safety on the return journey, you may want to consider bringing me back a freshly baked croissant.

**Carly.** You got it!

**Odie.** Oh, and remember that the elevator's translation function will help you understand the local languages.

**Lewis.** Oui! That's French for yes.

**Odie.** Oui indeed! Then just remember, When you're at the Chateau, mind the tempo.

(Soundbite of wind chimes.)

**Carly.** Tempo? What tempo?

**Lewis.** Huh?

**Odie.** Okay here you go.

**Carly.** And how do we miiiiind iiiiiiit??

(Soundbite of elevator travel noises.)

**Carly.** We made it to Rennes-le-Château, what a charming little town.

**Nibbles.** Ou lala ook at the view! Say magnifique.

**Carly and Lewis.** Woahhh.

**Carly.** We were on the top of a hill, surrounded by rolling fields in every direction and a clear blue sky overhead. Bonjour sky! Bonjour rolling hills! The town was all very old timey with brick buildings and big stone walls.

**Lewis.** I think I`d be bored living in a place like this, but I sure do love coming to visit.

**Carly.** Me too!

**Nibbles.** Me three! Rats in these old town really knew how to make the place theirs. I bet there's some real good sewers.

**Lewis.** Gross Nibbles.

**Carly.** Okay, we've gotta learn more about the hidden treasure slash secret society here. Let's start at the hotel! We walked through the town and found the hotel, which was a large, beautiful stone house. Nibbles hid in my backpack as we found a charming husband and wife team manning the front desk.

**Marcel.** Bonjour! Welcome to L'hôtel de la Tour, do you need a room?

**Carly.** No, actually we were hoping to speak to the owner. Noël Corbu?

**Simone.** Oh, no no no, Noël sold this place three years ago. The owner is now Henri, but he is not in right now. Can we help you instead?

**Carly.** Sure, we just have some questions to ask.

**Marcel.** You must be journalists reviewing that new book that came out, no?

**Carly.** Uh...yeah! That is us! Literary critics extraordinaire, here to write about that very book. What can you tell us about it?

**Marcel.** Well, one of the authors, Pierre Plantard, he is a very interesting figure. He was here often the past few years, doing "research." Much of his book was based on Noël's tale.

**Lewis.** And what exactly was that?

**Simone.** Before this was a hotel, it was a villa belonging to the town priest, back almost 80 years ago. Now how does a priest afford a fancy villa like this, you ask?

**Carly.** I didn't ask, but I do wanna know!

**Simone.** In the early 1890's, the priest had become mysteriously wealthy. Wealthy from what? Noël had a theory.

**Lewis.** Yes! We love theories.

**Simone.** When he bought the villa fifteen years ago, he claims to have learned a big secret: that back in 1892, the priest had somehow found part of a vast treasure hoard while renovating the church, including gold and certain ancient documents.

**Carly and Lewis.** Whoaaaaa.

**Simone.** But according to Noël, the priest had only found *part* of the treasure, meaning there's more still out there waiting to be found...

**Carly.** Which is why people have been coming here looking for it.

**Marcel.** And there will surely be more now that Pierre has published his little book.

**Lewis.** So Noël first introduces the story of the treasure, and now Pierre is popularizing it with his book?

**Simone.** Yes, but the claims in Pierre's book go even further. According to him, the priest himself already found the most important part of the treasure: a pair of medieval parchments that prove the long and storied history of a secret society called the Priory of Sion.

**Marcel.** These medieval parchments, they are the cornerstone of Pierre's book. But I realize, I don't know why we are telling you all this about the book, when obviously you have already read it.

**Carly.** Right! Yes, of course we have. We're writing a book report of.

**Lewis.** Review

**Carly.** A review of it, so...of course we've read it! We've very intrigued by the, uh, stylistic choices, the formatting, uh..the, font?

**Lewis.** Love the font, the font's great.

**Marcel.** Uh okay?

**Lewis.** One more question. All of this secret society stuff aside, what about the actual *treasure* treasure. You know, like, the gold?

**Carly.** Yeah! Is it real? And if so, where is it?

**Marcel.** If we knew that, do you really think we would still be working here?

**Carly.** We all had a good chuckle at that. It was a good point! We thanked them for their time and left. Outside on the street Nibbles hopped out of my backpack.

**Carly.** What do you think Nibs?

**Nibbles.** It's sure some story! I'm not sure what to believe though.

**Carly.** Yeah me neither. These two guys Noël and Pierre, it really seems like somebody's making something up but I can't tell who!

**Nibbles.** Me neither!

**Lewis.** Simone said the priest found the treasure back in 1892. Could we go back then and see for ourselves?

**Carly.** I pulled out H-dad to check the file.

**H-dad.** Negatory! The time seal on this file covers the entire year of 1892. Giant red X emoji!

**Carly.** Well it was a good idea. But I'm thinking we should just go check out this church ourselves!

**Nibbles.** Good thinking Carly.

**Carly.** The church was just a few minutes away. And what a church it was! It was traditionally ornamented, with lots of stone statues all around and beautiful stained glassed windows.

**Carly.** An alter!

**Lewis.** Carly, you're just naming things in a church again. Like come on.

**Carly.** I'm just. That's what I'm doing. That's what I'm processing.

**Lewis.** Maybe we should split up. I'll take the main floor, Nibbles you check the basement, Carly you take the tower?

**Carly.** Great plan! We each went off to explore our parts of the church. I took a spiral staircase up to the top of the tower, which was just a simple stone platform surrounded by a wall so you wouldn't fall off. The view was totally stunning.

(Soundbite of birds chirping.)

**Carly.** Wow! What a view. But unfortunately, there wasn't much more to be found. There weren't any secret latches or hidden compartments in any of the stones, and there wasn't really anything else up there. So after a few minutes, I went back downstairs to find Lewis.

**Lewis.** Nothing down here! You?

**Carly.** Same!

**Carly.** Nibbles popped up from the basement.

**Nibbles.** Nothing downstairs except some delightful old French rats. I asked them about the treasure, but they don't know anything. They haven't even seen Ratatouille!

**Lewis.** Then I guess we're all empty handed.

**Carly.** Okay, let's recap. Noël buys the old priest's villa, and hears a story about there being buried treasure here that the priest found, including some documents that Pierre writes about in his book. But so far no more treasure's actually been found. Anything I'm missing?

**Nibbles.** I think that's it!

**Carly.** Then H-dad, have you finished analyzing yet? We could really use some more info!

**H-dad.** Affirmative! Pierre's book and the Priory of Sion secret society captured people's imaginations everywhere, spawning a series of books in the 1980s that later inspired the Da Vinci Code.

**Lewis.** And the Tom Hanks movie! Buzz you're a toy. No not that one.

**H-dad.** But the truth about Pierre's claims did not stay hidden forever. For further information, fast forward to 1993.

**Nibbles.** 1993?! I wasn't expecting to visit the 90's today.

**Carly.** Me neither. But let's go before the end of lunch! We rushed back to the elevator, punched in the coordinates for 1993, and a few moments later.

(Soundbite of elevator travel noises and thud.)

**Carly.** The village looked pretty much the same. There were a few new buildings, but the church was right there where we left it.

(Soundbite of crowd.)

**Lewis.** Not sure what we're looking for. Buuuut I'm guessing it involves that mess of people over at that tavern?

**Carly.** We hustled over right away. The crowd was so big, it looked like it might have been the whole town gathered together! As we walked up people were shushing each other.



(Soundbite of shushing sounds.)

**Carly.** We finally got close enough to see that everyone was watching a TV screen. And we arrived just in time to see a newscaster came on.

**Newscaster.** Authorities made an inadvertent discovery today after searching the home of Pierre Plantard for an unrelated court case: mountains of evidence that he invented the secret society the Priory of Sion and fabricated the famous parchments “proving” its existence, documents he claimed had been found in Rennes-le-Chateau.

(Soundbite of shocked crowd sounds.)

**Newscaster.** He even admitted to planting other false documents in various locations around France (including Le Bibliotheque Nationale) so they would seem to independently authenticate his claims.

**Carly.** I pulled Lewis away from the crowd

**Lewis.** Did you hear that?

**Carly.** Yeah, and I think I may have just put something together. Noël had this whole story about the priest and the treasure, right? Pierre must have heard that story, and then decided to incorporate it into his Priory of Sion hoax to give it more juice.

**Lewis.** Really?

**H-dad.** Really! Pierre made it seem like his parchments were part of what Noël’s priest had initially found, which instantly helped attract more attention to his claims.

**Lewis.** Wait, so Pierre just made it all up to get attention?

**H-dad.** Affirmative! Pierre was essentially a conman, hoping to use his fake story to jockey for wealth, power and influence.

**Carly.** Okay, but then what about the treasure? Is there actually any gold anywhere, or what?!

**H-dad.** No treasure has ever been discovered in Rennes-le-Chateau. Furthermore, scholars now believe the source of the priest’s mysterious wealth was simple fraud, illegal financial activities like keeping donations that were meant for the church.

**Carly.** Wow, so it’s just nothing?

**H-dad.** Noël appears to have exaggerated the claims of whatever he found in the priest’s villa, most likely to draw tourists to his hotel.

**Lewis.** Well I’ll be.

**Nibbles.** No treasure at all? I’m devastated!

**Carly.** You and me both, Nibs. But nothing a good croissant can't fix!

**H-dad.** Incoming message from BUTTHED HQ.

**P.A. Voice.** Attention Butthead employees: 5 minutes until the end of lunch. Finish your butter sculptures ASAP. And a reminder that the use of margarine is strictly prohibited!!

**Carly.** I guess that's time! Let's go get some croissants and get outta here. We made a quick stop at the bakery, then ran back to the elevator, and,

(Soundbite of elevator travel noises.)

**Odie.** Welcome back! Mmmm is that a warm buttery croissant I smell?

**Carly.** It sure is. Here you go!

**Odie.** Mmmm, delicious! Now tell me, how was your trip to France?

**Carly.** Perfectly pleasant, except.

**Lewis.** There's no treasure! It was all made up. Pierre and his whole Priory of Sion story was fake for sure, and Noël's tale of the priest's treasure was almost certainly fake too.

**Carly.** I had wondered who in this story was lying, and it turns out it was all of them. Even the priest! It's fakes upon fakes upon fakes over there!

**Lewis.** Such a complex case. And to think, the real truth about everything didn't come out until 1993, over 25 years after Pierre first published his book. It took a long time to unravel!

**Carly.** Wait, I just figured it out! That's what you meant with your riddle Odie!

(Soundbite of wind chimes.)

**Odie.** When you're at the Chateau, mind the tempo.

**Carly.** In music, tempo refers to time or the pace at which something happens. Lewis' point is exactly what you meant, that we should take note of just how long it took for the truth about this town to finally come to light.

**Odie.** Exactly right, basement companion. The fact is, sometimes things just take time.

**Carly.** Thanks Odie, great advice! Enjoy the rest of that crossian-- oop, you've already finished it.

**Odie.** And it was wonderful. Have a good day basement companion. You might as well have one too Lewis.

**Carly.** Lewis walked me back at my desk, where I told him I'd had a minor revelation. Odie's advice about the tempo. I'm wondering if it doesn't just apply to secret society treasure hunts, but maybe anonymous letter investigations too!

**Lewis.** Oh?

**Carly.** Just because we haven't cracked the case yet doesn't mean we never will. I just need to give it some time!

**Lewis.** True fact! I think that's right on the money Carly Q. Like I always say, life is like a box of chocolates. You never know what you're gonna get. Tom Hanks in Forest Gump.

**Carly.** I got that.

**Lewis.** Don't be so hard on yourself. We'll figure this out. Catch you later, Carly Q.

**Carly.** Yeah we will. Thanks Lewis!

(Soundbite of Lewis walking away.)

**Carly.** And with that, it was back to work. But what an adventure! Pretty wild to think how one priest illegally keeping some money in the 1890's led to a giant hoax, a flurry of treasure hunts, and a global book and movie franchise over a hundred years later. Life is like a box of chocolate. Sometimes you get that delicious caramel one and sometimes the cherry liquid. Gross. I'm still working through my list of suspects for the mystery letter, but I'll be solving more time-sealed mysteries in the meanwhile. So don't stay away! Until next time, this is Carly Q, signing off. And remember, you never heard this.