

Chapter 11 A Woman Arrives in the Place de Napoleon

On the night of Meldy's dream there was a storm. A loud clap of thunder woke them and they held their breath waiting for more. Eventually the storm passed and they all drifted back to sleep. In the morning Meldy woke to a clatter of hooves in the yard below. She looked over at her sisters who were whispering about something. When she sat up, Popster came over.

"Meldy, in your dream last night, what did the fountain look like?"

As Meldy conjured up images, Popster could see the concentration on her face.

"Well, it wasn't round, it had a lot of sides to it. The strange thing was there were pipes sticking out of a tower like thing in the middle. Water came out of the pipes, you know, like from taps. I wondered why they didn't turn them off. Like at home when we get told off for leaving the taps running. Why?"

"Meldy, I had a similar dream and I saw Stephanie as well. I couldn't really trust it as I'd seen her picture and you had talked about her. That's why I asked about the fountain. It was exactly as you've described it."

"I had a dream as well," said Kick, "but I don't remember what it was. You know the sort of thing. As soon as you wake up, it's gone."

"I have those," replied Popster, "I almost wish my dream had been like that."

"Why?" asked Meldy.

"Because," said Popster, "one dream could be just that, two must mean something much more."

Just before breakfast, Kick had a question. "What did your dreams mean? As you said, Popster, it must mean something. Could it have been based on reality? Were we actually there do you think?"

"I suppose it is possible," replied Popster. "It could have been a half way house between the two worlds. Anyway, let's have some breakfast."

Later, once they had eaten, the three of them were left with Antoinette and Sophie.

"Meldy," said Kick, "why don't you two go outside?"

"Can we, Sophie?" asked Meldy.

“Yes, let us go,” she replied but she didn’t look very happy.

Once they had left, the twins told Antoinette about their dreams. Meanwhile, Sophie had asked Meldy a question as they walked into the garden.

“Esmeralda, are we friends?”

“Of course we are Sophie.”

“Friends tell each other things. They tell each other secrets.”

“I suppose they do....”

“Yes, they do. You have a secret and you are not sharing it with me. Antoinette whispers to your sisters and you know what they are talking about. Why are you not telling me?”

“Sophie, you’re my friend, honest you are! They told me not to tell because they said no one will believe it. They made me promise so I can’t break it.”

“Well I sometimes break my promises, I am sure you do as well.”

“My sisters will be angry if I do. Your sister knows more about it, why don’t you ask her? Or you could ask your cousin Alain. I don’t understand it anyway so I can’t explain it.”

Sophie ambled round the garden idly pushing at things with her feet.

“We could go and see the choirboys,” she suggested. They climbed the tree and propped themselves on top of the wall. They waited. Then they waited some more. No choirboys.

“Are they on holiday?” asked Meldy.

“They must be,” replied Sophie.

They were about to climb down when Raoul appeared with his mother.

“Raoul!” cried Sophie, “up here!” Both mother and son looked up.

“Miss Sophie and Miss Esmeralda!” said Madame Delpierre, “it is very nice to see you both looking so well. Raoul has something to tell you!”

“We heard yesterday! I have a place in the Royal Chapel Choir! I am so excited!”

“Wonderful! We are so happy for you!” cried Sophie.

“You deserve it,” added Meldy, “you’re a brilliant singer, everyone said so!”

“Raoul, what do you say to them?”

“Oh, thank you very much for all your help! Without you it would never have happened!”

“And without you we would still be at the Odious Bourgs!” replied Meldy.

Meldy and Sophie then went to the stables where Georges was cleaning out one of the stalls. The girls offered to help because Meldy, who had done the same thing at the Bourg’s, knew what to do. Within five minutes, she had slipped and fallen so she went back to the house so that Amelie could help her clean up.

“You got really dirty,” laughed Amelie.

“It does smell doesn’t it,” replied Meldy. “I think Sophie pushed me.”

“If she did then that was naughty of her!”

“I was just thinking of pushing her so she must have read my mind!”
laughed Meldy.

“When you are clean, I will teach you how to curtsey.”

“I nearly fell over when I did it on Empire Day,” replied Meldy. “I thought it was easy but it isn’t.”

“Do not worry, I will show you.”

After some practise curtseys, Meldy thanked her then asked a question.

“Amelie, did you share secrets with Stephanie?”

“Yes we did, that is most of them. Some you cannot share.”

“Why? Don’t friends always share secrets?”

“Not always. You might have promised another friend not to tell or you might upset someone by saying something they do not want to hear.”

“But if it’s a special friend, a special special friend, would they ever be upset?”

“They could be, Esmeralda, they could be. You have to be very careful because friends can fall out.”

Meldy hugged Amelie and went back outside. She decided she would share her secret anyway because Sophie was her special friend and she was sure she wouldn’t be upset by what she heard. She couldn’t see her in the yard but found her sitting on a garden seat, swinging her feet and watching the birds.

“I got really smelly!” laughed Meldy.

“I pushed you, I am really sorry,” replied Sophie.

“It was fun, wasn’t it!” said Meldy. “Sophie, remember when you said I was keeping a secret? I’ll tell you what it is if you promise not to tell.”

“I promise!”

“But you said you sometimes don’t keep secrets.”

“This time I will. I promise. Hands on head and fall over backwards!”

“Hands on head and fall over backwards? What does that mean?”

“That is what we always say when we promise to keep a secret.”

“Oh,” replied Meldy, “we say cross your heart and hope to die.”

“Hope to die? Do you really want to die? What is your secret, it must be something really bad!”

Meldy blurted out, “I’m from another world!”

“But, what do you mean?”

“I came from England but it was a parallel world England or something like that.”

Sophie pondered this startling revelation.

“Then how did you get here?”

“I don’t know. Nobody does.”

“Are you going back? I hope not. You are my special friend and I like you.”

“I like you too. You are my best friend here just like my best friend back home.”

“But if she is your best friend I cannot be your best friend as well.”

“Yes you can Sophie, because I’m in another world now. Your mother is like my mother here but I also have a mother at home in England. You are definitely my best friend in this world.”

“Antoinette said Princess Augustine will try to get the law changed so we will all be able to travel to England. You can visit your mother then.”

“If we go to our village my sisters say she won’t be there.”

“Why not?”

“She’s in the other England that’s next to it.”

“There are two of them?”

“They say there are a lot more but we can’t see them.”

“Are they in the dark?”

“I don’t think so. What’s that bird?” Meldy wanted to change the subject because her sisters had been right. They had said Sophie wouldn’t understand and to tell the truth, neither did she.

Next morning, in the Place de Napoleon, a young woman was lying on the grass near the statue. After a few minutes of confusion she struggled to her feet, stretched and walked towards the small gate in the fence. She looked around, found her bearings then headed off down one of the roads that led away from the square. It wasn’t long before a blue grey police wagon pulled up beside her.

“Identity card please,” said one of the police officers.

The woman produced her card and the officer checked her name against a list.

“You have been reported missing. We suspect you might have been kidnapped. You must come with us.”

She was taken to the police station and interviewed. They didn’t believe her so they gave her a polygraph test. That told them she was telling the truth. Soon, Captain Duplessis came to see her.

“Stephanie Saintclaire, welcome back to the Departement. You were reported missing so we assumed you had been kidnapped. Your story is, quite frankly, incredible so we will say that is what happened. We have heard the same story before so we need to make some more enquiries.”

“Thank you Captain. I did not wish to leave my job. Now I want to get back as quickly as possible, assuming they still want me.”

“We will take you. Perhaps a word from one of my officers will help.”

Stephanie chatted to the policewoman as they rode towards the Court Manteau’s house. “We have been there quite recently,” she said, “I do not think they have replaced you. Oh, they have some English guests staying there. Three sisters, two are identical twins just a bit younger than you.”

“Identical twins?” replied Stephanie with sudden interest, “what about the third one?”

“That is Esmeralda. She is the lively one. She is good friends with Sophie Court Manteau.”

‘Esmeralda,’ thought Stephanie, ‘that is very close to Esmerelda. It must be the Wagley sisters. Please, please, let it be them!’

The twins were in the morning room with Antoinette when Amelie went to answer the door. They heard a shriek so they ran out to investigate. There was Amelie embracing another woman and they were both sobbing.

“What’s wrong, Amelie?” asked Popster.

Amelie turned. In spite of the tears she was looking very happy. Popster immediately recognised the other woman from both her dream and Amelie’s photograph.

“Stephanie!” she cried.

“Which one of you is which?” asked Stephanie as she wiped her eyes. “Kick and Popster or Popster and Kick?”

Popster was speechless. Kick managed to stammer, “but, er, what, er, how do you know us?”

“I met your parents in Wood Tofton.”

They stared. Then they glanced at each other to see whether they had both heard the same thing. They wanted to ask so many questions but they just couldn’t because no words would come. Their parents, their friends, they all seemed so far away.

They hadn’t noticed Antoinette slipping away to leave them alone with Amelie and Stephanie. Of course she wanted to know what had happened but sensed that the twins should be left for a while. She would hear all about it later.

Amelie suggested the three of them went upstairs because she had to stay and finish her duties. She walked away singing, the twins had never heard that before. Stephanie followed them up to their attic room then told her story.

“I was walking across the square, the Place de Napoleon, and I do not remember what happened next. I woke up in some woods and found my way down a hill into a village. A girl went past on a horse, I thought that was nothing unusual then I saw the cars. Big shiny ones and then I was confused. I met Artemisia....”

“Misia! She’s our friend,” said Popster.

“Yes, I can see why. She realised something was wrong and took me home. I stayed with her family until this morning. I took another walk in the woods and here I am.”

“But what about our parents? How are they?” asked Kick.

“When you did not return from your walk they started to get worried. Then the police were called. They searched but, of course, found nothing.”

“If only we hadn’t gone into the woods that day,” said Popster.

“But we did,” replied Kick. “Don’t you see Popster, if Stephanie can get here, surely we can get back there! There’s something going on in the Place de Napoleon that needs investigating.”

“Yes,” replied Popster, “you’re right, but how do we do it? Stephanie, what did our parents say?”

“They asked me where I was from but they did not believe what I said...”

“Just like here,” said Kick, “they wouldn’t have believed us either if it hadn’t been for Alain.”

“I showed them my shoes.”

“Your shoes?” chorused the twins.

“Yes. The label says they were made in the Departement de Londres. I told them to look on their internet thing and find the shop. They could see they were nearly new but they could not find it. Your mother said they were better made than any she had ever seen. To me they are just shoes.”

She continued, “your father spoke to a friend who thought that if I had left my home you could have somehow gone there in my place. They did not understand it at all but I think it made them feel better. I told them you would come back one day.”

“Thank you Stephanie,” said Popster, “we have been very worried about them.”

“Of course. I must write to my mother in France because she will also be worried. By the way, do you remember meeting me at the fountain?”

“Yes!” exclaimed Popster. “Meldy and I had the same dream but we thought that was all it was, a dream.”

“I cannot explain it but it was no dream,” replied Stephanie. Just then, Meldy rushed in.

“Stephanie! I’m really glad you’ve come back!”

“Meldy,” she said while hugging her, “I am so glad to see you again!”

The three sisters sat and talked to Stephanie for another hour before she stood up.

“I must go and help Amelie. She will have worked very hard while I was away.”

After she had left Popster remarked, “Amelie was right. Stephanie really is amazing.”

To be continued