

## Chapter 2 To the Police Station

The three Wagley sisters were in a town square, in a familiar yet not so familiar setting. The twins thought it must be London but why was there a statue of Napoleon proudly on display? Kick, whose French was better than Popster's, had gone over to read the inscription on the plinth.

"It says Napoleon and something about 'La Victoire Waterloo'. But Napoleon lost at Waterloo. What's going on here. I don't understand."

"If this is a private garden they can have any statue they want, I suppose," replied Popster.

"We shouldn't be here if it's private!" cried Meldy, "we'll get into trouble!"

"No we won't," said Kick, "there's no one around anyway so.... what's that?" A blue grey horse drawn caravan like vehicle with bars on the windows had pulled up near the entrance. Two people got out and came towards them. They were wearing blue grey uniforms with shiny black belts and peaked caps.

"I told you!" said Meldy as she retreated behind her sisters.

"What do they want?" asked Kick.

"There's a woman," said Popster, "at least she doesn't look hostile."

"Are they the police?" asked Meldy from the rear as they all backed away.

"Attention! Arrêtez vous!" cried the man.

"They want us to stop!" whispered Kick. They stopped.

The two newcomers then spoke in English.

"Who are you? Show us your identity cards!"

"We don't have any!" replied Kick.

"Then we will take you to the police station," said the woman.

Three frightened sisters were led to the vehicle, ordered to climb in the back and driven out of the square onto the main road. A bell was rung and the other traffic, all horse drawn, pulled over to let them pass. Kick looked out of her small side window. She could see shops and people shopping,

walking and talking. All the vehicles they passed were pulled by horses. Popster stared out of her window.

“Look at all the horse manure!” she cried.

“I don’t need to look, I can smell it!” replied Kick.

“Why are there so many birds?” asked Meldy. “They’re everywhere! They hang in the air then they dart off again. What are they doing?”

Kick peered out of the back window. “I don’t know!”

“Are they catching flies?” asked Popster. “Manure must mean swarms of the things!”

“You’re right!” replied Meldy, “they must be flycatchers.”

“Rather them than me,” said Kick with a nervous laugh.

“Silence!” said the policeman through the front hatch.

Soon they arrived at what they assumed was the police station. They were driven into a yard then the back door of the vehicle was opened and they were ushered into the rear of the building. Once inside they were taken into a white painted room with some chairs and a table. They were told to sit down and were left alone.

“I wish I knew what all this is about,” said Kick. “Why are they treating us like criminals?”

“I’m not a criminal and I want to go home!” cried Meldy.

“I knew we shouldn’t shelter under trees in a thunderstorm,” added Popster.

“Well,” said Kick, “we’ll have to face facts. It looks like we’re in a strange country. We have no idea where we are and even how we got here. Also, we might be stuck here for a few days. I wish things were different but that’s the way it is.”

Popster was about to add something when the door opened and a young woman entered. She wore the same blue grey uniform but she smiled more readily than the others. Her dark hair was tucked up into her peaked cap.

“So, you do not have identity cards?” she asked.

“No we don’t,” said Kick.

“Then I will ask you some questions. Where are you from?”

“We’re from England but we don’t know how we got here,” replied Popster.

“And we don’t even know where here is,” added Kick.

“Well, this is the Departement de Londres and you must have gained entry by land or sea. You do not seem to have English identity cards so you cannot return. Some of our young people do go the other way but that is illegal and we do not know what happens to them. It is best not to try. You do not have to worry, we will find you accommodation and something to do.”

“You mean work?” asked Kick, “what about our little sister? She’s too young to work.”

“Something will be organised. What are your names?”

“My name is Penelope,” said Popster.

The woman produced a list and scanned it. “That is not an approved name. The closest I have is Patrice so that is what you will be called.”

“And you?” she asked Kick.

“Kathleen.”

Again she scanned the list. “I have Catherine. You will be called Catherine.”

Then she turned to Meldy.

“My name’s Esmerelda but my friends call me Meldy.”

“We do not have Esmerelda. You will be called Esmeralda.” She left the room.

“I got to keep my name!” crowed Meldy.

“No you didn’t!” replied Kick, “Esmeralda sounds quite different! We’ll have to call you Maldy.”

“I like Maldy!”

“Mal means sick in French!”

“Oh. Well, I’m not sick!”

“You might get sick from all the flies!”

“That’s alright Meldy,” said Popster, “we’ll still call you Meldy when we’re by ourselves.”

Next, a tall man in civilian clothes appeared. He pushed his glasses up his nose and sat down. “How did you get into the Departement?” he asked. “Our boundary fences and walls are well maintained but some of our young people are getting out.”

“Getting out?” asked Popster.

“That does not matter. What does matter is how you got in. We will need to strengthen that part of our border.”

“Border?” asked Kick.

“Now you sound like parrots. Just tell me how you got in.”

“We were in a wood,” said Meldy.

“What wood?” he asked.

“We were at home and ...” started Kick.

The man had obviously decided that Meldy, or as she was now called, Esmeralda, would tell him the truth. He addressed the twins.

“You two be quiet. Esmeralda, tell me how you got here.”

“We live in Wood Tofton in England. We went for a walk in our woods and I was looking at the squirrels and birds and ...”

“Stick to the point!”

“Then we heard thunder. We walked back towards our house and then it rained. We sheltered under a tree. There were some loud bangs and crashes then we woke up in a square near a statue of Nap - Napol - Napoleon! I remembered his name!”

“Well, that is a name you will hear often.” He pointed to a picture on the wall. They hadn’t noticed before but it showed a man in a very elaborate uniform mounted on a large white horse.

“What a lovely horse! What’s his name?” asked Meldy.

“That,” he said with pride, “is our Emperor Napoleon the Tenth. He is on his favourite horse, Diogenes the Fourth.”

“But how come...er...why is he...? I don’t understand!” stumbled Kick.

“As you have probably noticed, cars are not allowed in the Departement. That is why he rides around on his horse. If you see him, as females, you must curtsy. Now back to your story. I do not believe it so start again.”

“But she’s telling the truth!” chorused the twins.

“Alright, we will give you a polygraph test.”

“A what?” asked Kick.

“A lie detector test.”

He left the room but soon returned with the young woman in the blue grey uniform. He was carrying a box-like instrument festooned with wires.

“Patrice,” said the woman, “we will use you. You look honest.”

“How can you tell when they’re identical?” asked Meldy.

“We have an instinct for these things, Esmeralda,” she replied. The instrument was placed on the table and Popster was hooked up to some sensors.

“We will ask you some questions and you will answer truthfully. We will see if you sweat.”

“What’s sweating got to do with it?” asked Kick.

“Liars always sweat.”

Popster was asked some simple questions such as, ‘did you see any horses?’ and ‘is Catherine your twin sister?’

“Of course she is!” said Meldy. “Who else could she be?”

“Esmeralda we are configuring our equipment,” replied the woman.

“It is ready,” said the man. Popster was then asked to repeat the story that Meldy had told earlier. The sisters waited apprehensively for the verdict.

“She is telling the truth,” said the man.

They were left alone for a while, then another woman appeared.

“I am Captain Duplessis,” she said. “Your story is very strange but you believe it happened so we will not dispute it. You were probably kidnapped then brought across our border. They must have abandoned you in the square and given you something which caused you to hallucinate.”

Kick and Popster exchanged glances. No point in arguing, they thought.

The Captain asked them about their interests and seemed reasonably friendly so Kick asked about the Emperor Napoleon. “Why is he on the throne? Wasn’t his ancestor defeated at the battle of Waterloo?”

The Captain stared at her. “What made you say that? You cannot possibly believe it! I strongly advise you not to repeat it or you will get into trouble.”