

Chapter 22 Breakfast with the Emperor

Meldy woke early. She lay there for a while listening to birdsong then began to get hungry. She thought she could smell aroma of breakfast wafting up the stairs or maybe it was just her imagination. Either way, she really wanted something to eat.

She got ready as quietly as she could because the twins were still asleep. Tiptoeing out of the door she crept down the first flight of stairs. Knowing which steps to avoid certainly helped, some of them creaked.

In the corridor near the breakfast room, there were the smells she was now so familiar with. Walking through the door she faltered, uncertain, the back of the Emperor was in view. What should she do? Should she sit at his table? He turned and smiled, a pleasant friendly smile.

“Come in, Esmeralda, you look hungry.”

“Thank you your, your...”

“Do sit down. What can I get for you?”

“Porridge with a spoon of treacle, please.”

“I have never tried treacle on my porridge, is it good?”

“I always have it at home. My mother makes really good porridge then I asked Sylvie if she could make some and....”

“So you introduced the Court Manteaus to porridge?”

“Yes your, your....”

“Esmeralda, do not worry about calling me your Majesty at breakfast. Anyway, it does not seem right after all you have done for us.”

“I really like my medal. It’s so beautiful. I will treasure it for ever and ever!”

“You deserve it Esmeralda. You know, not many people get that particular one, it is very special.” Here he paused. “Esmeralda. That is not English, what is your real name?”

“Esmerelda. My friends call me Meldy.”

“Meldy. I like that. May I call you Meldy?”

“Yes please.”

“Where are your sisters?”

“I left them upstairs.”

“My daughter informs me you will eventually be going home.”

“I suppose so. I do miss my parents but I’ll miss my friend Sophie and all the horses. The food always tastes so good here, much better than at home.”

Meldy suddenly thought he would ask her about her home. What should she say? She wasn’t sure if he knew about parallel worlds and things like that. Luckily the twins flounced in at just the right time. They too faltered when they saw him.

“Come in Catherine and Patrice. Meldy was telling me how she likes her porridge. Now, you are English and I know Patrice is not an English name. What are your real names?”

“I’m Penelope your Majesty but my friends call me Popster.”

“I’m Kathleen but my friends call me Kick your Majesty.”

“Let us dispense with the ‘your Majesty’ when we are having breakfast together. You three have done us all a great service. Years ago you would have been given titles but now we do not do that.....but why not? I can do it if I want. What is the point of being an Emperor anyway? You will now be called Lady Esmeralda, Lady Catherine and Lady Patrice.”

“Sophie should also be called Lady,” pointed out Meldy, “but what will Paul and Raoul be called?”

“Of course Lady Sophie and, well, the boys will be called Chevalier. Chevalier Raoul and Chevalier Paul.” At this point Princess Augustine entered. “Augustine,” he said, “I think we should refer to the sisters as ‘Ladies’ to reflect their valuable contribution to our country.”

“What a good idea father.” Turning to the sisters she said, “now, I assume in your history Princesses always had ladies in waiting. We are going to the palace today to see what damage has been done by the occupation. As my ladies in waiting,” here she had a twinkle in her eye, “would you like to come too?”

“Yes please!” cried a very enthusiastic Meldy, “and can Lady Sophie come?”

In the University Physics department, Professor Lecomte was moving some files back into his office. Albert Camion had used it as a studio and there were splashes of paint on the walls, the floor and the furniture. Luckily, he had been so absorbed in painting portraits of the ‘so called’ heroes of the Transitional Council that he hadn’t felt inclined to interfere with the Professor’s work. Alain Court Manteau then came in to discuss the Wagley sisters and the future necessity of sending them back to their parallel world.

“We will need to make some adjustments to the Matter Transportation Machine,” said the Professor, “then it will have to be tested. Why not bring the sisters here? They can have a look at the equipment that was responsible for their presence in the Departement.”

“That is a good idea,” replied Alain.

“Who would have thought,” mused the Professor, “that they would play such an important role in restoring the Emperor? We have a lot to thank them for.”

“Yes, we certainly do,” agreed Alain. “Changing the subject, I hear the Princess is pushing for one of our students to be on the Advisory Council. She wants to alternate between male and female representatives.”

“I hear that your cousin Antoinette is to sit as a youth representative.”

“Yes, she will do it for six months but she wants someone with less, shall we say, privilege, to take over after that. I think the Wagley twins have had a very positive effect on her.”

“I think they will be missed when they return to their world.”

“Yes,” mused Alain, “they certainly will.”

Two vehicles were made ready for the trip to the palace. The Wagley sisters and Sophie were to ride in the open carriage with the Royals while the rest of the Court Manteau family were to follow behind in a closed carriage.

Meldy and Sophie were really excited to be riding with royalty but the twins felt a bit self conscious because they attracted a lot of attention. Some onlookers stared, some clapped and others cheered.

Things changed when they turned into the Grand Boulevard going south towards the River Couronne. Meldy thought she could hear some people saying, 'c'est les soeurs Anglaise, Les Wagleys!' and the cheers became more frequent.

At one point the Emperor stopped the carriage. He had seen a former palace employee, now unemployed. He told him to report back the following morning to restart his old job. His young daughter gazed at Meldy and Sophie. Her mother said, "would you like to ask them something?" The little girl paused, looked embarrassed, then asked, "Lady Sophie and Lady Esmeralda, can I have your autographs please?"

Meldy was very surprised to be asked but readily complied as did Sophie. The girl then turned to the twins. "Are you famous too?" she asked.

"They are my sisters, and they helped rescue Princess Augustine." She looked across to the Princess. "Yes, it is true," she agreed.

She then asked for Kick and Popster's autographs as well.

Once the coach had moved on, Meldy turned to the Princess. "Princess Augustine, what did she mean about my sisters?"

The Emperor turned to them. "Meldy, Kick and Popster, you are all famous now. Your pictures have been in the paper and I have heard many people pointing you out as the 'English Wagley sisters'. I think they are touched that you have helped us when our borders have been closed. Now I think most people will be open to better relations."

Princess Augustine added, "I agree. It is as if you were sent as 'good will ambassadors'. Many of the people are applauding you as well as us."

"And Sophie too," added Meldy.

"Yes of course, Sophie too."

When they arrived at the palace, a police wagon was just leaving and two officers were guarding the entrance. Once inside, they saw suitcases of various sizes stacked in a corner.

"What are all these?" asked the Princess.

The answer came. "The police have been seizing stolen palace property from Transitional Council members and their supporters. This has all been checked over then returned."

The Princess looked at the stack of suitcases. "We will need to sell some of this to start our hardship fund for the farmers. I think France will provide a ready market. Now we can contact Prince Louis again, he can handle the sales."

"So he really was in France?" asked Popster.

"Yes, he went to look after our mother. Whether or not they thought they would have an easier task with just my father and myself, we will never know."

"But," said the Emperor as he came up behind them, "they did not take into account Ladies Sophie, Esmeralda, Catherine and Patrice plus Chevaliers Paul and Raoul."

Alain had contacted the twins to arrange a visit to the university physics department and they travelled in a closed carriage. Antoinette had gone to the palace so they asked Amelie to come with them.

Alain met them on campus and they were taken to the Professor's office. "Welcome to our University," he said when the door was shut behind them. "It is an honour to meet you at last. Now we must work towards returning you to your world."

"Thank you Professor," said Kick.

"Alain Court Manteau has told me about it," he said. "Most interesting. The idea of a passageway between our two worlds seems, quite frankly, incredible."

"But here we are so it must be there," said Popster.

"Of course. Somehow, we need to test our equipment. We will run some trials, then we will send something there and bring it back."

"Why not send a box of maggots?" suggested Alain. "We have plenty of them and we can check whether they come back alive."

“That is a good idea. I had thought of rabbits but my daughter was outraged!”

“Of course,” said Alain, “we cannot be certain that they will actually go to the woods behind Catherine and Patrice’s house.”

“That is true but we cannot risk sending three people until we know the system operates correctly.”

“I will go!” said Amelie.

“Amelie,” said Popster, “it’s too dangerous!”

“What do I care about that? You are my friends and you have done a lot for our country. Now I want to help you in return!”

“Amelie,” said Alain, “think about this!”

“I have Monsieur Alain. My mind is made up. I want to go.”

“That is very brave of you Amelie,” said the Professor. “If the maggots return then you can be on the second test. Now, let us go and have a look at the equipment.” He led them out of the office and down some stairs to the laboratory floor then proceeded to explain the technology.

“We use these banks of capacitors to store the electric charge. Then, when we are ready, they are discharged in a few seconds. These large cables you see here conduct the electricity to the machine and they are shielded because they get very hot. The whole apparatus is controlled by this computer.” The twins saw a large and, to them, old fashioned device festooned with reels of tape and flashing twinkling lights.

“Material to be transferred is placed in this chamber,” continued the professor. “Obviously, we had no idea our machine could open a gateway to your world in the Place de Napoleon. We will place the box of maggots in that square and you must point out the exact location.”

On their way back to his office, Popster had a question. “Professor Lecomte, do you think it’s possible that other passageways exist in the city of Londres? Could they provide links to yet more parallel worlds?”

“A very good question Patrice. I do not know the answer to that but if you enrol as a student at our university you could do some valuable research in that area.”

“Yes Patrice,” said Alain, “have you considered studying physics?”

“Well,” said Kick, “I for one would be very tempted. I find the theories fascinating.”

Preliminary tests with maggots were promising. Alain examined them in the square before they left and returned them to the university four hours later. He counted them carefully and they had all survived. They were then returned to some suitably delicious manure as a reward.

Next came the human trial. The sisters tried to persuade Amelie not to take part in the test but she was adamant.

“This is something I can do. Something important. My mind is made up.”

Marcel, who had been told their story, took them to the Place de Napoleon. Stephanie and the twins showed Amelie exactly where to stand. In her pocket was a map. She had offered to tell Mr and Mrs Wagley their daughters would soon be returning home.

With Alain keeping a wary eye on the time, the Wagleys and Stephanie hugged Amelie.

“Come back safe and sound,” said Stephanie.

“Tell Mummy and Daddy I miss them,” said a tearful Meldy.

“We’ll never be able to thank you enough,” said the twins.

Amelie, as determined as ever, replied, “you have been wonderful friends. You comforted me when I was really sad. You assured me that Stephanie would come back and she did. This is something I can do. I will see you tomorrow.”

“We’ll be waiting,” said Kick.

They retreated to the edge of the square and watched Amelie vanish.

“Well that is that,” said Alain, “Now all we can do is wait.”

One day later the same group went back to the Place de Napoleon. They waited nervously while the minutes ticked by. Meldy was already starting to fret when Stephanie cried, “there she is!” They raced over to the spot where

she lay. Dazed and a bit confused, she sat up yawning and rubbing her eyes.

“Amelie!” cried Meldy, “are you alright?”

“I think so,” she replied as they helped her up.

They led her back to the waiting carriage and took her home. She lay back in her seat with her arm round Meldy then told them about her trip.

“Yes, I saw your parents. They were overjoyed to hear that you will soon return. I told them what you have done for our country and they are so proud of you. Such wonderful parents, you are so lucky.”

“Did you tell them I miss them?” asked Meldy.

“Yes, and they miss you too. I met your friend Misia and she asked about you, Stephanie. She hopes you will come back to see her someday.”

Madame Bourg Odiesse was trying to relax after spending most of the day cleaning the house. Her daughters Evelina and Natalina had claimed they were ‘too tired’ after mucking out the stables so she had done most of the housework herself. Now she had picked up the latest paper and was scanning through the picture section. It was all she could do to stifle a scream because there was a picture of those ‘lazy girls’ and the caption underneath read: ‘Ladies Catherine, Patrice and Esmeralda Wagley accompany his Majesty and her Royal Highness Princess Augustine to the palace in their elegant state landau. Cheers greeted them all as they made their way down the Grand Boulevard and the three visitors from England are obviously very popular....’

Madame Bourg looked round to make sure her daughters were nowhere to be seen then screwed up the offending page and threw it in the fire.

‘It should have been my girls in that carriage!’ she said to herself.

To be continued