

Chapter 23 Time to go home

The successful trial meant Professor Lecomte was confident the time had come to send the Wagley sisters back to their world. The Matter Transportation Machine was functioning well and an opportunity would soon arise. Monsieur and Madame Court Manteau were getting increasingly concerned about the sister's parents. Although they had spoken to Amelie about her visit they both knew they would still be worried.

Amelie was praised by everyone for her selfless bravery and promoted to housekeeper. Princess Augustine even gave her a beautiful bracelet to thank her for her service and offered her an important post on her staff. Amelie had been pleased for the honour but she had declined. She was really happy at the Court Manteau's just as she would be really sad to see the sisters leave their room for what could be the last time. Madame had insisted that Stephanie should live with them while she studied. She would still help out but Madame didn't want it to interfere with her studies.

Antoine would now be free to visit his home whenever he wanted once he went back to University in Liverpool. Later, he would be having discussions with his Chancellor and tentative links would then be established with the University of Londres with a view to start a student exchange programme.

One evening, as the family took part in an official function, the sisters sat in their attic room. The window was wide open and a dove was cooing somewhere nearby. Meldy, gazing up at the sky, could see swallows and swifts doing their best to reduce the abundant fly population.

"Meldy," said Kick, "The latest trial at the university showed the equipment is working well so it'll soon be time to go home."

Meldy continued to gaze out the window.

"I suppose so. I do miss Mummy and Daddy but I like it here as well."

"We like it too," said Popster, "but it's like being at summer camp. It's all new and exciting but you know it can't last."

"I've never been to summer camp so I don't know. But if it had lots of horses then I'd really like it."

"I'm sure we could find you one when we get back," said Kick.

“Yes please,” replied Meldy. She thought a bit then asked, “what will you miss when we’re at home?”

“Quite a lot,” mused Popster, “the friends we’ve made, riding around in carriages, but especially Amelie. I wish we could take her back with us.”

“I was thinking the same thing!” said Kick. “She’s just the nicest person you could ever hope to meet. She’s brave, loyal, never moans and is just the best friend ever.”

“Offering to take part in the trial like that, I didn’t see that coming!” said Popster.

“Eloise was nice too,” said Meldy.

“Who’s Eloise?” asked Popster.

“She’s Francois’s granddaughter. He looked after her a lot but he can’t now ‘cos he’s in prison.”

“Well he did try to kidnap the Princess,” said Kick. “That’s what happens when you do things like that. He should have thought more carefully before he fell in with those awful people.”

“I suppose so,” sighed Meldy.

“If they’d won we might never have got home,” mused Popster.

“Well I certainly won’t miss the Odious Bourgs,” added Kick, “I half expected to bump into them somewhere or other.”

“I wonder if they found some more unfortunates to do their bidding?” asked Popster.

“I hope not. Wouldn’t you just love to see them mucking out the stables?”

At that moment they heard someone hurrying up the stairs. It was Stephanie.

“The Princess has come to see you!”

They clattered down the stairs from the attic then continued down to the ground floor. Princess Augustine was waiting for them in the Grande Salle.

"I have come to say goodbye. Alain has said the Matter Transportation Machine is now working properly."

"Your highness, you know our secret?" asked Kick.

"What secret?" asked Meldy. "Oh, you mean where we're from!"

"Yes, I know. Do not worry, I do not think any less of you because I do not understand."

"Who told you?" asked Popster.

"Alain, because I asked him for the truth. I always suspected there was something different about you three. That was confirmed when one of you talked in your sleep. Something called the internet? Even Alain could not explain what that was."

"We are sorry your highness but we sort of forgot to tell you...."

"I forgive you, especially as I am forever in your debt. Now, an opportunity has arisen for you to leave early tomorrow morning."

"Thank you your highness," replied Kick. "We are so grateful for your kindness while we have been here."

"We will not forget you," she replied. "You have been travellers from another world who helped us in our hour of need. Who knows, we might meet again one day. I sincerely hope we do."

"So do we your Highness," replied Popster.

"Your Highness," enthused Meldy, "I want to come back again. I'll miss Sophie and all the horses. Oh, and I'll miss you too!"

"We will certainly look forward to that day Lady Esmeralda. Now, I have an exit permit for you. You should give it to Monsieur Court Manteau."

"An exit permit?" asked Meldy.

"Thank you your highness," said Popster. "Remember, we talked about this Meldy. If we just disappeared the Court Manteaus could be in trouble. We don't want that do we?"

"Oh, I see. No, they mustn't get into trouble."

"I think," said the Princess, "it is best if as few as possible go to the square to see you leave. Too many people might attract unwanted attention."

"Can Antoinette and Sophie come?" asked Popster.

"Yes, I think that would be alright."

When the hour of leaving approached, the closed carriage was made ready by Marcel. There were tears and hugs. Stephanie and Amelie said how much they would be missed and Madame thanked them for their support and help during what had been a difficult time for the family and the country.

"This is now your home from home," said Monsieur. "We will always be pleased to see you if and when you return."

"I could not imagine anyone I would rather have had in my home when I was away," said Antoine as he took their hands in his.

"Thank you all for your kindness," replied the sisters, "we will never forget you."

"Give my sincerest greetings to your parents," added Stephanie, "and thank Misia and her family for looking after me so well."

"Thank them from me too," said a tearful Amelie.

The carriage left the yard and passed through the entrance passageway. It made its way through darkened streets, passing some workers from the Bureau de Sanitaire who had made an early start to their working day. When they arrived at the Place de Napoleon, Alain was waiting for them.

"You have ten minutes," he stated as he checked his watch. "It is best to say goodbye well away from the middle of the square. Then you can take up your positions. Let me wish you well, it has been a pleasure knowing you all and thank you for everything."

There were more tearful goodbyes. "You are my best friend ever!" sobbed Sophie as she hugged Meldy.

"I'll miss you so much Sophie!" replied an equally tearful Meldy. "I'll write when I get....Oh, I forgot. Our post won't get here will it!"

An emotional Antoinette hugged the twins. "Thank you for all you have done for us, I know I have already told you but I do wish you could stay. We will not forget you and who knows, we might well meet again."

"I hope and hope we will!" replied Meldy.

"It is time," declared Alain. The sisters walked to the middle of the square. They turned round then Kick and Popster stood each side of Meldy and took hold of her hands. They lifted their arms in a wave to their friends who were now retreating in darkness at the edge of the square.

"Where are they!" cried Meldy, "I can't see them anymore, where are they?"

When they came round they were lying on grass under trees. Kick was first up.

"Wake up, we're back!" she urged, "I recognise the tree!"

Popster struggled to her feet rubbing her neck. "We've made it! Come on Meldy, let's go home."

Meldy groaned as she stood up.

"Are you sure we're back? I don't recognise....Yes! We are! I remember the smell of the wood and look, there's a grey squirrel." Up in a tree a rather confused squirrel was watching. It must have been wondering how on earth they had suddenly appeared out of nothing.

They took the path to the track, then walked down the hill to Woodhayes Lane. It wasn't far to their house. When they turned into their drive, walking together towards their own front door, the twins took Meldy's hands in theirs.

'At least the roof's been fixed,' thought Kick.

Their father just happened to be looking out of the kitchen window. "Darling!" he cried, "our girls are home!"

THE END. (For now!)