

## Chapter 4. The Twins Start Work

The twins had woken with a start. The bell was ringing and they had to jump to it.

In a short while, they descended the ladder and strolled across the yard to the house. "What a tip," whispered Popster. There were piles of stuff along a corridor and a room leading off was strewn with books, magazines and a tray of dirty plates. There was a stair in front of them, its threadbare torn carpet hanging on by virtue of some bent stair rods.

"GIRL!! GIRL!!" Screamed someone from up these same stairs. The twins climbed and followed the noise to its source. On locating the right bedroom, they poked their heads round the door. Somewhere in the pile of sheets, pillows and rumpled blankets was Evelina.

"I WANT MY BREAKFAST!!" she screamed.

"What do you expect us to do?" asked Kick.

"Go and get it. Mummy is in the kitchen!"

"Can't you walk or something?" asked a very annoyed Kick.

"MUMMY!! MUMMY!! MUMMY!!" she screamed with so much volume that they had to put their fingers in their ears. The Mummy in question could then be heard running up the stairs. Meanwhile, there was more wailing and screaming coming from the next room.

"BREAKFAST!! BREAKFAST!! I WANT MY BREAKFAST!!"

A panting mother appeared behind the twins. "What is it Lina darling?" she wheezed.

"They will not get my breakfast!"

"But you must," was all she said.

"We don't think she should be so rude," said Kick.

"But you must bring their breakfasts, that is part of your job."

"We're not supposed to be slaves," pointed out Popster. "We're supposed to be companions."

“Companions? I thought a companion would help someone who needed it. When you have done that you can eat.” So Evelina had been right. They must do as they were told or they’d starve. It was as plain as the noses on their faces.

They trotted back downstairs with the mother and she ladled out helpings onto two plates. They carried them back upstairs for Evil and Nasty. In both cases the plates were grabbed out of their hands and they retreated to the distasteful sounds of slurping and scoffing.

Back in the kitchen, the mother gave them a plateful with three spoons. “Come back when you have eaten,” she said. We want you to clean the lounge.”

Silently the twins carried their slop back to the stables. Meldy had been asleep but she awoke when she heard them complaining.

“They’re evil!” said Kick.

“Whose evil?” asked Meldy in between yawns.

“Those sisters,” said Popster.

“I heard screaming but I rolled over and went back to sleep.”

“Lucky you!” sighed Kick. “We have to go back and tidy up the house.”

“That’s not so bad is it?”

“You haven’t seen it have you!” replied a rather irate sister.

“Kick let’s be fair,” said Popster. “It’s not Meldy’s fault we’re stuck here. She didn’t suggest going for a walk up the hill.”

“No, I suppose not. What I want to know is, how do we get out?”

“I don’t know,” replied Popster, “but we’ll find a way.”

“Ever the optimist aren’t you. How will we do it and where will we go?”

“Back to the police station. I’m sure they weren’t expecting us to be treated like this.”

Meldy had heard the conversation and knew she had to get them through that locked gate. Her sisters could find that more difficult but hopefully the family's attention would not be on her most of the time.

After eating their breakfast, the twins cleaned up at the nearby pump then returned to the house. There was no sign of the daughters so they went into the lounge.

"Looks like there's been a book fight in here," said Popster as they surveyed the chaotic scene.

"Well," replied Kick, "why not pick everything up and put it on the table over there. We could file the books by author."

They stacked the books on one end and the magazines on another. They had never heard of most of the authors but they divided the alphabet into six segments then piled books in each. Then they reordered them alphabetically before taking them to the empty shelves. They had just finished when Evelina ambled in. Without so much as a word she strolled over to the bookcase and scanned the results of their efforts.

"You have them organised by author," she whined, "we want them organised by title!"

"But everyone organises books by author or subject," said Kick, "not title."

"We are not everyone. Do it by title." With that she waltzed out and left them to it. Once they knew she had gone, Popster minced around the room in imitation. "We want them organised by title! We want them organised by title!" They collapsed laughing on a sofa and in so doing released a cloud of dust. Coughing, they jumped up in rather a hurry.

"Well," declared Kick, "I'm surprised they can even read and anyway, I'm not hauling out all those books again!"

"Why don't we devise a cross referencing system," suggested Popster.

"How do you mean?"

"We need some paper," she said looking round the room. "Here we are." There was a dog eared pile on a desk in the corner. "I'll call out the titles and you write them down in order."

"Isn't it easier to do what she wants?"

“Maybe but that means she’s won and we have to do some other job. If she doesn’t like it we’ll stay here and do it her way so we don’t have to clean out the oven or something even worse.”

“Brilliant! You’re so devious!”

“I’m learning fast.”

They set to their task and a suitable list was made. “I wonder if anyone has read any of these?” asked Popster. “They all look new except for the book fight damage.”

When they had finished, Evelina reappeared. She had a quick look at the bookcase then with reddening face and clenched fists she turned on the twins but before she could explode, Popster dived in.

“Miss Evelina, we have cross referenced all the books so you now have it both ways, author and title.”

“But I told....”

“Yes Miss Evelina, I quite understand but we thought when all your friends come to read in your comfortable lounge they will find....”

“But I said....”

“Of course,” interjected Kick, “we heard you but our extensive experience with libraries tells us that organisation by title is less common than by author.”

“Your extensive experience?”

“Yes Miss Evelina,” replied Popster, “someone as educated as yourself can display your literary tastes to good effect in this way.”

“But I do not think....”

“Ah,” said Kick, “I heard Madame calling for us.”

“I did not hear anything.”

“My sister has excellent hearing so I think we can trust her.”

“Oh, alright, if Mummy wants you then you must go I suppose. Give me the list.”

The twins made good their escape and went to the kitchen. Of course there was no sign of Madame but there was pile of dirty dishes so they decided to wash up.

“It struck me that we should cooperate with them,” whispered Popster, “then they might be caught off guard when we make a break for it.” Luckily there was some soap and hot water so they soon finished the pile of dishes. With them all neatly stacked on the draining board they turned just in time to see Madame enter.

“You have done the dishes,” she remarked.

“We thought....” ventured Kick.

She walked over and peered at the spotless pile. “Well, you have done a good job I suppose. We think your sister should help with the horses, they need cleaning out and she can feed them.”

“We’ll tell her Madame,” replied Kick. “She is not used to working but we’ll persuade her it just needs to be done. Shall we ask her now?”

“Yes.”

The twins strolled over to the stables. Behind them they could hear Evelina shrieking. “Ignore her,” said Popster, “By the way, why did you say we’ll persuade Meldy like that when you know she’ll enjoy doing it?”

“We don’t want them thinking that do we or they’ll find her something else.”

“So you are devious as well!”

They found Meldy in the stables watching the horses. “Meldy,” said Kick, “they want you to look after them.”

“Can I? Really?”

“But don’t look too enthusiastic. Make it seem like work.”

“But it isn’t. Is it?”

“Make it seem like it or they’ll dump something else on you.”

“Oh. I see.”

“You can start by using a shovel to clear up that mess. Put it on the pile outside.”

They left Meldy to it and climbed up the ladder. “I’m having a quick lie down before the next job,” said Popster. They were soon fast asleep but then the bell rang.

“Here we go again,” sighed Kick while walking back to the house.

\*\*\*\*\*

They had reluctantly settled into a routine of demands, odious tasks and the occasional screams when, a week after they arrived, a wagon loaded with hay and straw appeared. Madame had to let it into the yard but she quickly relocked the gate to scupper any escape attempts. Meldy noticed a boy of similar age sitting with the driver. He then stood beside the wagon while the man unloaded part of the cargo.

“Hello,” said Meldy, “who are you?”

“I am Raoul. Who are you?”

“I’m Esmeralda but my friends call me....”

“Boy!” shouted Natalina from the back door of the house.

“Yes Miss?”

“Stop talking to that girl! She has work to do!”

“Yes Miss,” he replied. When she had turned away he stuck out his tongue.

Meldy laughed and whispered, “I hate her!”

“So do I. She is Nasty.”

“We call her Nasty lina!” Now it was Raoul’s turn to laugh. “They treat us like slaves and and they’re not supposed to and my sisters are really tired but if I could get to the police station....”

“We can take you!”

“But they’d find out and you’d get into trouble!”

“You can hide in there,” he said pointing to a locker under the wagon.  
“Uncle Oskar says they do not pay so I am sure he will not mind.”

He opened the door. “I can move all this stuff and you can squeeze in behind. Quick, before she comes back!”

Meldy scrambled in then Raoul hastily rearranged the contents. Although well hidden, she could still hear noises from the outside. Soon Natalina returned and looked around. “Boy,” she demanded, “where is that lazy girl?”

“She went back to the stables Miss.”

Meldy then heard Raoul’s uncle asking Madame for payment. “Times are hard Monsieur,” she whined, “but if I can pay a bit on account....”

“Alright Madame, but I will expect more when I return next week otherwise....”

“Thank you Monsieur, of course that is very reasonable Monsieur. I will open the gate for you.”

‘We’re moving!’ thought Meldy who could hear the wagon clattering over cobbles in the yard. Suddenly she heard another Natalina shriek. “Mummy! That girl is not in the stables!”

“Are you sure? She is supposed to be there.”

“Is she hiding in that wagon?”

“I do not think.... But she might be.... Stop Monsieur!”

Meldy heard more voices then the locker door was opened. She held her breath while someone poked around then, after what seemed like an age, the door was closed. She felt the wagon shift on its springs as if someone had climbed on the back then it shifted again as they jumped off. There was a pause before it finally started to move again.

‘Please, please, please!’ whispered Meldy and, as if responding, the noise from the wheels changed. They were now in the road and she was free. After a few minutes they stopped, the locker was opened and the Uncle helped her out.

“Why, hello in there!” he said. “Come on, you can ride up front with us.” A dusty but happy Meldy climbed up onto the bench and they continued on their way.

“Raoul told me all about you three,” he said, “so we will take you to the police station. I will have a word because we cannot have them treating you like that.”

“Thank you Monsieur,” she replied. “Monsieur, what are they doing with that cart?” She had just seen some people with shovels behind a large open topped wagon.

“They work for the Bureau de Sanitaire,” he replied.

“Who are they?”

“They clean the streets so you will see them everywhere.”

“What do they do with all the....,” started Meldy who was interrupted halfway through the question. Someone was riding beside them on a tandem. It was Evelina!

“Esmeralda, there you are!” she cried. “Is it not a lovely day? We wondered where you were and we really miss you. Now, come, why not jump on the back and I will take you home.”