

Chapter 5 The Police Intervene

Evelina had appeared on a tandem acting all sugary sweet. “We miss you Esmeralda,” she had insisted.

“I’m not going back. You’re mean and I don’t like you!”

“Esmeralda, Meldy, how can you say that! You know we did not mean it. We were only playing with you, you know, like you and those squirrel stories.”

“Miss Evelina,” said the Uncle, “Esmeralda has made some serious allegations. We are taking her to the police station but you are welcome to come and explain your side of the story.”

Evelina’s face darkened. ‘Oh dear,’ thought Meldy, ‘she’s going to start screaming!’

She didn’t. She glared at the Uncle, said “we will not buy anything from you ever ever ever again!” then turned to pedal back to her lair.

“I’m sorry,” said Meldy, “I got you into trouble.”

“Do not worry,” he said, “they owe us money but are unlikely to pay so it is for the best.”

When they arrived at the police station the Uncle accompanied Meldy to the reception desk. The police officer on duty asked why she had returned so soon.

“We’re being treated like slaves and we have to sleep in the stables and my sisters have to do all the work and the girls do nothing except scream and....”

“It is all true officer,” said the Uncle. “They have not provided the girls with suitable clothing, I even saw her sisters carrying heavy loads which they should not have to do.”

The officer on duty went to collect Captain Duplessis who came and sat with them while Meldy repeated her story. After listening in silence she said, “Right. We have to get your sisters out of there.” She had a word with one of her Lieutenants, thanked Raoul’s Uncle Oskar then took Meldy out into the yard while Raoul trotted along behind.

“Lieutenant, you should take the big wagon with the four heaviest horses,” directed the Captain. “Take two officers with you.”

“Can I come too?” asked Raoul, his Uncle Oskar nodded. Meanwhile, the chosen horses were hitched to the wagon and the Lieutenant climbed onto the bench to take the reins while the other two climbed in the back.

“Raoul and Meldy, you can sit up here if you like,” she said. They leapt at the chance and climbed up beside her. Once out in the street, the four horses set off at a canter and the driver rang her bell to clear the route through the other traffic. Meldy and Raoul hung on as the wagon occasionally swayed and lurched. Halfway there, some workers from the Bureau de Sanitaire greeted them and their driver returned the salutation.

On arriving at the Odious Bourg’s family lair, the driver climbed down and rang the bell beside the locked gate. While they waited, the other two officers uncoupled the horses and turned them around. They were then re hitched facing the wrong way.

“What are they doing?” asked Meldy.

“You will see,” replied Raoul who obviously knew something of the ways of his local police force.

The horses were shuffled forward and backward so the rear of the wagon was aligned with the gate. Meldy now realised it was to be a battering ram.

“What do you want?” asked Madame from the other side of the gate.

“We have come to collect Mesdemoiselles Kathleen and Patrice Wagley,” replied the Lieutenant.

“I do not understand, what have they done?”

“For the final time, we have come to collect Mesdemoiselles Kathleen and Patrice Wagley.”

“But....”

“Break it down!” she commanded.

The four horses moved forward so the rear of the wagon crashed into the gate.

“Stop! Please, do not damage it! I will open up!”

The wagon was backed away and the gate was opened. The police marched into the yard behind the house and Meldy followed with Raoul. They could see the two nasty sisters glaring from the back door.

Meldy ran over to the stables followed by the Lieutenant while the other two kept an eye on the odious family group. Meldy was first up the ladder only to be met by a closed trap door.

“Kick! Popster!” she cried, “Open up, we’ve brought the police!” She heard a shuffling of feet then the door opened to reveal a rather worried Kick. As soon as she saw it was actually her sister, she reached down to haul her up. The Lieutenant followed and, once inside, she examined the cramped and inhospitable quarters.

“Meldy, we were so worried!” cried Popster.

“Meldy!” cried Kick, “you really did it! You’re a star!”

‘I did didn’t I!’ she thought as she wiped away a tear.

“You two have a remarkable sister,” said the Lieutenant.

“Yes we know officer,” said Popster. “We stood on the trap door because they were trying to get at us.” She looked over to see a boy’s head peering in.

“Who’s this?” she asked.

“That’s my friend Raoul,” said a proud Meldy. “He got me out!”

“Thank you so much Raoul,” chorused the twins. “One day we hope we can return the favour!” added Kick.

The family tried to claim the sisters were making it all up and they really had a nice room in the house but the police did not believe them.

“We will be in touch,” said the Lieutenant to Madame, “so do not try to leave the city!”

The last view Meldy had of Evil ina and Nasty lina was one she would not forget in a hurry. If looks could kill, well, she would have been in a very bad way.

Back at the police station, Captain Duplessis had reopened the sister's file while they sat in her office. "I am sorry," she said, "but they fooled us completely."

"Well," replied Kick, "it worked out alright. We worked hard for a week and we gained some useful skills. It was not the relaxing holiday we hoped for before we were, er, kidnapped but...."

"Also Meldy made a new friend," added Popster, "and she had quite an adventure."

"I realised I've been giving her a hard time and I'm sorry," said Kick. With that she gave her little sister a big hug.

'Two hugs from Kick in one day,' she thought, 'she's not really that bad!'

"Now," said the Captain, "I think I know of a family who would be perfect for you. They are important citizens and are very well connected. Here are some tokens so why not go to the cafe and I will see what I can do."

On the way they met Raoul's uncle Oskar. They thanked him once again for his help before he left with his nephew. "We were so lucky they came when they did," said Popster, "we could have been stuck there for weeks!"

"Let's see what's on the menu today," said Kick, "I'm starving!"

The Captain came to collect them within the hour. "Madame Court Manteau is coming," she said, "It is a great honour for you. Her husband is the 'Chef de Sanitaire' in the City of Londres which is a very important position. Their eldest daughter is called Antoinette and their youngest Sophie. Antoinette is musical and she knows both Princess Augustine and Prince Louis who are, of course, the daughter and son of the Emperor. You should address Madame Court Manteau as Madame and I am sure she will look after you properly. Of course, when you meet the Prince and Princess you should curtsy. So, if you will make yourselves useful I am sure all will be well."

"What if they don't like us either?" asked Meldy once the Captain had left the room.

"Well, you heard what she said," replied Kick. "It's up to us to make the effort."

"Turn on the charm Meldy," added Popster. "We've seen you do that often enough. By the way, I wonder what a 'Chef de Sanitaire' does?"

“Keeps things clean, supervises cleanliness or something like that,” suggested Kick. “That’s what ‘sanitaire’ means doesn’t it?”

“He could be a Doctor of Medicine or something similar I suppose,” said Popster. “Maybe head of hospitals in the city.”

“I know, I saw them cleaning up the horse muck,” said Meldy. “He must be their boss!”

“I don’t think so Meldy!” said Kick, “why should he be so important if he does that?”

“I don’t know, I was only trying to help!”

“Stop it you two,” interjected Popster, “let’s not start arguing again, we’ll find out soon enough.”

When Madame Court Manteau’s carriage arrived in the yard they were taken out to meet her. She was a lively woman with a friendly smile and an infectious laugh. However, her daughter Sophie, who sat beside her, said nothing.

The twins were impressed by the open landau while Meldy stared at the large horses. There were four of them, well groomed and black in colour. She noticed their feet, bigger than any she had seen before. Marcel, the coachman, secured the reins and climbed down from his seat so as to help them climb in. Once he was certain they were comfortably seated, he retook the reins and they pulled out into the street.

“I will speak English,” called out Madame. “I am Madame Court Manteau and this is Sophie.” At this point her daughter pulled a face.

“I’m Catherine, Madame,” said Kick.

“I’m Patrice Madame,” said Popster.

“And I’m Esmeralda Madame.”

“Say hello to Esmeralda, Sophie!”

“Hello Esmeralda.” Rather reluctantly Popster thought.

“I can see you two are going to be such good friends!” said Madame. The twins couldn’t see Sophie being good friends with anyone. She sat there, squat in her seat with her arms tightly folded. “My other daughter Antoinette

is at the palace. You will also meet Prince Louis and his sister Princess Augustine as they often come to our house.”

The sisters were again conscious of the all pervading smell. Meldy watched the birds as they performed aerobatics in their attempts to catch flies. Lots of other carriages were on the streets but none were as grand as Madame's. They also saw buses crowded with passengers and a variety of wagons carrying goods.

“Bonjour Madame!” called out a few people as they passed and the twins attracted many curious glances. They began to feel rather self conscious about their clothes which had sustained some damage during their time at the Odious Bourgs.

“Marcel! Stop the carriage!” cried Madame. They saw a middle aged man talking to a group of people who had obviously been loading a cart with horse manure but when he saw them he strode over. His silver buttons gleamed and his dark blue suit looked very impressive.

“Henri,” Madame said. “Look who I have found to be companions for the girls!”

“I wish you all good afternoon,” he said as he bowed in what to them was an old fashioned gesture.

The twins inclined their heads and smiled in return but reality was dawning. He was supervising the cleaning of the streets so this must be what the ‘Chef de Sanitaire’ did. Meldy was owed an apology.

“Good afternoon, Monsieur!” they chorused.

“This is Catherine, this is Patrice, and this is Esmeralda. They are sisters,” continued Madame.

“You surprise me my dear,” he said with a pleasant smile, “I would never have guessed.” Sophie had perked up and was obviously pleased to see her father.

“I bought you a present, my little Sophie!” he told her.

“What is it Papa?”

“You will have to wait until this evening. Do you think you can be patient?”

"I will try very hard," she said with distinct reluctance as her father turned back to his duties. Marcel then continued to thread the carriage through the crowded streets.

Meldy saw her chance and tried talking to Sophie. "What do you think it is, Miss Sophie?"

"I hope it is a puppy," she replied. She half smiled and Meldy smiled in return.

"I wish I had a puppy," said Meldy.

"Do you know how valuable horse manure is?" asked Madame, "it has always been fertiliser but now we are using it to generate electricity as well."

"How do they do that, Madame?" asked Popster.

"I think it produces a gas," she replied.

"Of course Madame," said Kick. "Methane. You can burn it and boil water."

"And the steam can drive generators," concluded Popster.

Madame looked impressed. 'Captain Duplessis was correct,' she thought, 'they do seem to be well educated!'

"Madame," asked Meldy, "do you know what all those birds are?"

"They are flycatchers," replied Sophie.

"Do you like birds, Miss Sophie?" asked Meldy.

"My sister thinks I am wasting my time," she replied, "because I sit and watch them in our garden."

"I did that at home," replied a wistful Meldy, "I thought those birds might be flycatchers but I didn't know which sort as they don't stay still long enough."

Meldy noticed Sophie looking at her. It was not hostile, more of a questioning curious sort of look. She smiled and Sophie smiled back.

The flycatchers chased the flies while the sisters continually swatted them but Madame and Sophie seemed to be immune from their attentions. Meldy was watching the birds and missing her own garden back in Wood Tofton. 'I

wish I could fly home!' she thought but she knew she would need very special wings.

To be continued