

Chapter 8 Alain has a theory

Next morning, Sophie and Meldy went out into the garden. They sat on a seat for a while then Meldy asked, "Can we go to see the horses?"

"Of course."

They walked along the side of the house to the back where there was a passage into the central courtyard. From here they gained entry to one end of the stables. The stable boy, who Meldy had seen earlier with the foal, jumped up as they came in.

"Georges, this is Esmeralda. May we see the horses?"

"Yes, Miss Sophie."

Meldy looked down the row of stalls. She could see eight, some of which had heads looking out at them.

"Where's the foal?" asked Meldy.

"In there," he said as he pointed to a stall in the middle. "She is called Amandine and her mother is called Papillon."

"Papillon means butterfly," said Sophie as Meldy stood watching the foal.

"How old is she?"

"Eight weeks tomorrow," replied Georges. "She is a pure bred Percheron like all of our horses."

"Georges," asked Meldy, "I heard someone singing last night. Was it you?"

Georges coloured. "Yes, Miss Esmeralda. I hope you did not mind."

"Mind!" exclaimed Meldy, "I loved it! What was that beautiful song?"

"It is from my home in France. I hope to visit it again someday."

"Why did you leave?"

Georges looked at Sophie who seemed to encourage him to answer. "It is a poor part of the country. My family is large and I have to have work. Miss Sophie's family are good to me and I am happy with the horses. They are my family now."

Later, Sophie asked Meldy a question. "Can you climb trees?"

"Of course I can!"

"I have some green apples. Come with me and we will have some fun!"

They went over to the base of the wall and climbed one of the trees. Sophie was quite agile but Meldy managed to follow by using the same footholds. Once at the top of the wall they stopped and peered over.

"What are we doing?" asked Meldy.

"Wait, and you will see."

They waited. Then a line of choir boys appeared led by their choir master.

"They are going to practise in the church," whispered Sophie, "we often play a game." The nature of this game soon became apparent. "Wait until the choirmaster has passed then throw these at the boys. They will throw them back so get ready to hide!"

The choirmaster passed below and they could hear him singing to himself. Then came the boys. They were looking up expectantly, as if waiting for the missiles.

"Now!" whispered Sophie.

They threw the apples. Some of the boys threw them back. A few shots were accurate and Meldy ducked as an apple whizzed over her head. Sophie was not so lucky, a missile hit her on the arm that was raised to throw another apple. At the end of the procession, one of the boys waved at them. Meldy recognised him straight away.

"It's Raoul!" she whispered.

"Who?" asked a surprised Sophie.

"Hello Raoul! Are you in the choir too?" Turning to Sophie she said, "he rescued us from the Bourgs!"

By now the choirmaster had realised something was happening. "Quiet at the back!" he cried. Raoul waved again and the boys continued on their way.

"I hit two of them!" laughed Sophie. "It is a good thing we did not hit Raoul!"

"I hope he doesn't get into trouble," said Meldy.

The twins had gone to the morning room to see Antoinette. Alain was already there.

"Of course you have already met my cousin," said Antoinette.

This time he was smartly dressed and stood up when they entered the room. "Please, call me Alain," he requested.

"How is your research going?" asked Popster.

"I have been watching some maggots in the manure. They are finding lots of nourishment somewhere. What if that can be of use to us? That is another area of research."

Antoinette laughed. "I do not think horse manure will agree with me."

They talked some more then he asked the twins a question. "What do you miss most about your home in England?"

"Apart from our parents, friends and our school, I miss my phone," mused Kick.

"We have a phone here," indicated Antoinette. There was the large box like device on the table in the corner with a wire that went into another box on the wall.

"Ours were mobile phones," said Popster.

"Mobile? As on wheels?" asked Alain, "You mean you could move them around with you?"

"But these would fit in a pocket and you could access the internet," said Kick. "They used wireless technology and were good almost anywhere!"

Alain was confused. "What is the 'internet'?" he asked.

"It connects all the computers and mobile phones together," explained Kick. "Virtually everything you could ever want to know is there. You can watch videos, films and listen to music as well."

Alain had no idea what a video was but listened with interest to their explanation.

“Also,” said Popster, “you can see your friends when you call them.”

Laughter erupted from the sofa. Antoinette couldn’t contain herself. “Catherine and Patrice! Your imaginations are incredible! How do you think of all these things?”

Alain had been studying the twins as they spoke. He turned towards Antoinette, thought for a moment or two then walked over and closed the door. He checked the windows were secure then came back to his seat.

“Antoinette,” he said, “there is much more to this. Catherine and Patrice do not strike me as people who would imagine such things.”

“But it is impossible!” cried Antoinette. “That phone in your pocket, and what about the wires? And seeing people on the other end?”

“Antoinette,” replied Alain, “many things we have today were thought impossible just a few years ago. Like the security cameras that are constantly spying on us.”

“That’s true,” added Popster. “Our parents aren’t that old but they can remember the first mobile phones. They were as big as a suitcase.”

“I still cannot believe it,” said Antoinette, “it is too fantastic!”

Alain lowered his voice. “Antoinette, you must never repeat what you have heard to anyone.”

“Repeat it? How can I do that when I do not understand it?”

He turned to the twins. “Where exactly are you from?”

“England,” replied Popster.

“But they do not have things as you have described across the border.”

“But we are from England!” insisted Kick. “But there’s something really strange going on. In the England we know, London is the capital and not Liverpool.”

"I noticed," said Antoinette, "that you did not know where the capital is. I thought that was strange and then you did not know about the border."

"But London is the capital in our world, and there is no border other than the sea. Also, I don't say this to offend you, rather to explain the way our world is, but Napoleon lost at Waterloo. He was defeated by the British and Prussian armies."

"But that is not true!" cried Antoinette.

Alain was quiet for a moment then said, "Antoinette, in our world it is false. But in their world it is true. Do you not see what must have happened?"

"No I do not."

"That is why I told you not to repeat this conversation. Do you like Patrice and Catherine?"

"Yes, I do and I am glad they are here with us now although of course I am sorry they were taken away from their home."

"Well, what I have to tell you will come as a shock. They must have come from another world. Maybe a parallel world to ours, I do not know for sure. Their home does not exist in our world and our homes do not exist in theirs. I never would have believed it if the evidence was not right here in front of my eyes!"

"We have no idea how we got here but we obviously did somehow," said Kick.

"I do not see how anyone could explain it in a satisfactory manner," replied Alain, "but I think it did happen. It is not possible that you would make all these things up. I could see the sincerity in your faces."

"So what can we do?" asked Popster.

"I am sorry but I do not know," he replied. "However, I will make some discreet enquiries. There has to be a rational explanation out there somewhere."

"Thank you Alain," said Popster, "we would really appreciate that."

After he had gone, Kick suggested that they should rehearse the folk songs. Soon Popster sensed Antoinette was not concentrating.

“Antoinette,” she asked, “you seem to be pre-occupied.”

“It is true, I am. I was thinking how awful it must be for you to be so very far from your home and then to be so badly treated by that Bourg family. I cannot imagine what I would do if I was in a different world.”

“That’s very kind of you,” said Kick. “There is excitement in a new place and new friends but also there is sadness, a feeling in the pit of your stomach. Our father had a saying, ‘You don’t know what you’ve got till it’s gone’. Now we both know exactly what he meant. I am sorry to say we left our home on a bad note, we had an argument with our parents.”

“They must be really worried about you. I like your father’s saying, I must write it in my diary. I often used to argue with Antoine but now he has gone I really miss him and I know Mother does as well. She tries to hide it but I can tell. She was really lucky to have found you and now I am very pleased that she did.”

“You mean you weren’t pleased at first?” laughed Kick.

Antoinette gave the sisters a hug. “I am afraid I made that very clear!” she said.

Out in the garden Sophie started to collect more missiles. “They will be coming back soon so we will get ready. We will not throw anything at Raoul.”

They climbed into the tree and waited. When the choirboys came back they let the choirmaster pass as before then pelted the boys. Unfortunately an apple thrown by Meldy bounced off the pavement and hit him. He spun round just in time to see the girls disappearing below the top of the wall. His charges were looking as innocent as the day they were born. Annoyed, he stopped at the street entrance to the house and, lifting the large brass knocker, rat-tat-tatted on the heavy green door.

Amelie answered, of course she had to summon Madame.

“Madame, two girls in your garden have thrown things at my choir. One of the projectiles hit me. I would be grateful if you would have words with the perpetrators.”

Amelie was sent out into the garden and two sheepish girls were brought in to see the choirmaster.

“Sophie, is this allegation correct?” asked Madame.

“Yes, Mother.”

“So, you have encouraged our guest Esmeralda in this activity?”

“Yes, Mother.” Some of the choirboys were smirking behind the choirmaster.

“I am disappointed in you, Sophie.”

“Please Madame, please Sir,” said Raoul who stepped forward from the rear, “they are not completely to blame. If I may speak honestly, as we are always encouraged to tell the truth, is that not so, Sir? Every week we throw things at Miss Sophie and she throws them back. It has become a, what can you call it? A ritual. Now, I think we must stop this ritual. Thank you, Madame, Sir, for allowing me to speak.”

“Well,” said Madame, “how can we argue with such thoughts so eloquently expressed? I agree, honesty is best. Now Sophie, you and Esmeralda will not do it again so we can forget all about it.”

She continued, “Amelie, has not Sylvie recently made some cakes? I am sure the boys would love to try them, if that is agreeable to you Monsieur?”

The choirmaster agreed but Meldy thought he did not look very pleased. The choirboys all enjoyed the cakes and Raoul came over to talk to the girls. Once they had left, Meldy asked Sophie what they would do next week.

“We will wave to them. Then we will think of something!”

That evening, in their room, the sisters were talking.

“We hear you got into trouble today!” laughed Kick.

“Throwing apples at choirboys!” added Popster.

“But I said I was sorry,” replied Meldy. “And you’ll never guess what, Raoul was in the choir.”

“Raoul? You didn’t hit him after all he did to help us?” asked Popster.

“No but he stood up for us. I like him.”

“Well we certainly owe him but we do have to be careful,” said Kick. “I’ll just check the corridor.”

“Why are you doing that?” asked Meldy.

“Today,” said Popster, “we told Antoinette and Alain about the internet and our phones. They couldn’t believe it because they don’t have such things here.”

“But I thought they were everywhere!”

“Alain thinks we may have travelled across to a parallel world,” added Kick.

“But, but, I don’t understand!”

“Nor do we, Meldy,” replied Kick. “Even in our world it was considered impossible. Now we know why the police thought we had been hallucinating. No one, except Alain and Antoinette, know the truth.”

“So Meldy,” added Popster, “don’t speak of our world to anyone. You can say you miss Mum and Dad, so do we, but don’t talk about anything technical like the internet. It might make our lives difficult. Do you see that?”

“Yes, I suppose so. But if it’s true, how will we get home?”

“Meldy, we don’t know. Getting here should have been impossible. But the impossible proved to be possible. We just need to repeat the process in some way. Meldy? Are you listening?”

Meldy had fallen asleep.

To be continued