

## Chapter 19 He's got measles!

Meldy and Nicky had been taken to a busy street somewhere near the River Couronne. They could see wagons being loaded and unloaded with people milling around but Myrtille's hand was hovering nearby with a chloroform soaked rag so they didn't try to call out.

They were driven into one of the warehouses and herded up some stairs into an office. The door was locked behind them and almost immediately they heard noises in the gloom.

"Who's there?" asked Nicky.

"Who are you?" asked a boy's voice.

"Raoul?" asked Meldy.

Paul was there as well. The three friends greeted each other and Nicky was introduced. After describing their respective experiences, they went over to the door and peered through a glass panel. Down below they could see some men working on a wagon of the type used by the Bureau de Sanitaire.

"What are they doing?" asked Nicky.

"They are drilling holes in the floor," replied Paul.

"My uncle used to work for the Bureau," said Raoul, "and they would never drill holes in one of their wagons."

"But why would they want them," asked Meldy, "Surely the manure will fall out? Now they've got some wires and they're threading them through the holes. And that's a battery, my dad's got one just like it."

"Look out!" said Nicky, "Someone's coming."

There was indeed someone coming. The door was unlocked and in walked Madame du Malcontent. "Ha!" she said, "you do not look so heroic now. Soon we will have the rest of you."

"What rest of us?" asked Meldy.

"You know very well. We will get Sophie Court Manteau and your sisters because you know what they have done."

"You won't get my sisters," countered Meldy, "because they're not here!"

“Ha! We know exactly where they are! Do not worry, they will soon be in here with you.”

“No you won’t cos they’re AWP’s!” said Meldy.

“What is an AWP?”

“Amazingly Wonderful People! Not like you, you’re a PTP.”

“And what, may I ask, is that?”

“A Piece of Toilet Paper!” This was followed by a chorus of laughter from the four children.

“You pathetic insolent.... No, I will not demean myself by responding to your taunts. Soon I will be Empress and then Antoinette Court Manteau and your sisters will have to sing and play for me!”

“No they won’t!” insisted Meldy.

“I think they will. Why? Because we have you four. When I tell them what will happen to you if they do not cooperate....”

“You would not dare touch us!” said Paul. “If you do Commissioner Duplessis will lock you up for ever and ever!”

“For hundreds of years!” added Meldy.

“For thousands of years!” decided Raoul.

“For millions of years!” concluded Nicky.

“Stop this you insolent brats!”

“They’re heroic insolent brats!” replied Nicky, “cos they’ve all got medals! You won’t get Sophie or Meldy’s sisters cos they’re much too clever for you!”

“We shall soon see. I predict they will be in here with you before this day is over. Anyway, now I must leave. A future Empress has a lot to do.” Half way out of the door she turned, gave a sneering type of laugh and left. The door was relocked.

“What a horrid hag!” said Meldy.

“A mangy manure pile!” added Nicky.

“A smelly stoat!” laughed Paul.

“And a wicked weasel!” said Raoul. They continued to think up names until they ran out of ideas. Some started to explore their prison while others went back to the door and peered through the glass. The men below had finished working on the wagon.

“We could break the door,” suggested Raoul.

“But they’d hear us,” replied Meldy.

Nicky, bored with his exploring, ambled over to the window. There were a lot of wagons up and down the street bringing in or taking away goods. The noise level was such that they could shout at the top of their voices but no one would hear.

“Now they are hitching up some horses,” said Meldy from the door. “Where are they going?”

“I do not think they will tell us,” pointed out Paul.

Nicky had walked round to a desk that was pushed against the wall. He managed to slide it away so he could look at its other side.

‘There’s a drawer,’ he thought. ‘I wonder what’s inside?’ It slid open very easily. ‘Just a load of pens.’

The clattering sound of horses hooves came from below as the wagon with the holes was driven out of the warehouse. Nicky rummaged through the pens until his eye fell on one in particular. Then a chapter from a recently read book came to mind. It might just work. They had to escape so what had they got to lose?

“There’s a red pen,” he said. “Why don’t I pretend to have measles?”

“Measles?” said Raoul, “that is really bad. Oh, I see! We can scare them.”

“Yes!” cried Meldy. “I know, I’ve had measles so I’ll draw the spots on your face.”

Nicky lay on a mattress and they tucked him in with a blanket. Meldy dabbed the spots at suitably spaced intervals.

“You have to moan,” said Paul, “sick children always moan.”

Once the spots were in place Meldy hammered on the door and screamed as loudly as she could. Raoul and Paul stood as far away from Nicky as possible.

“Silence! Stop that racket!” shouted an angry voice outside.

“Nicky’s sick! I think he’s got measles!” cried Meldy.

There was silence. She heard someone ask, “what do we do now?”

“You go and have a look,” said one.

“Why me? Why not you?” asked the other.

Eventually the door was unlocked and a kidnapper appeared. “You three stand over there!” he ordered. He walked over to Nicky who was moaning very convincingly.

“It is definitely measles,” he said. “My younger brother had red spots like that.”

The other man, who had been hovering nervously in the doorway, reluctantly walked to the middle of the room.

“Yes, it looks like it.”

“Are you scared?” said the braver of the pair who was nearest Nicky. “Come and check. We need to be sure!”

He moved towards Nicky. Meldy saw her chance and dashed for the door. She grabbed the handle and in an instant she was out on the landing at the top of the stairs. The nervous man was quick to stop Raoul and Paul from following.

“She will not get far,” he declared. “Madame Myrtille is downstairs.”

Meldy started to run down the stairs but Myrtille had heard the commotion and was already at the bottom. She had that triumphantly sneering look on her face again, the sort of look that said, ‘ha! you cannot get away so do not try!’

Meldy had to act fast. She turned and ran back up the stairs only to see one of the men at the top. Looking down, she saw what looked like a pile of cloth on the floor directly below and, hoping it would provide a soft landing, catapulted herself over the hand rail. She only had an instant to wonder if the landing would actually be soft. Luckily it was.

Clambering out of the soggy clinging mass she made a dash for the open door. Myrtille, quickly realising her intention, was not far behind. “You will not get away!” she shouted. The voice was a bit too close for comfort.

Meldy could run. She might have been a bit short but her running skills had been improved by gym classes and on school sports days. Myrtille was not in very good

shape and her shoes were not designed for such activities, so, as a result, she was not closing the gap with her prey. In fact it was getting wider.

Meldy could also scream. She shouted and screamed as loud as she could.

“Help! Aidez moi! Help!” she shouted.

A large burly man appeared from behind a nearby wagon.

“That woman’s kidnapped me and my friends!” she cried.

“Hey Jules!” he called to his mate, “this girl is in trouble!”

Another large man appeared. Meldy saw Myrtille falter, stop, then turn and run in the opposite direction.

“That does it!” shouted Jules as he pointed to the retreating woman, “she is the guilty one!”

They chased Myrtille down the lane and back into the warehouse.

“Up there!” cried Meldy, “my friends are up there!”

The two male kidnappers were coming down the stairs and instantly realised they were in trouble. One carried on while the other tried Meldy’s escape route but the two burly men weren’t having any of that. They quickly grabbed them both.

Raoul, Paul and Nicky came down the stairs. “Look out, he has measles!” cried Jules.

“No it’s only red ink!” cried Meldy. The two kidnappers looked crestfallen when they realised they had fallen for such a simple trick. Their leader Myrtille, on the other hand, had made good her escape so she was not done yet. She would live to fight another day.

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The twins were sitting in their room looking out at the palace gardens.

“I hope Meldy can see birds and greenery from her window,” said Popster.

“And squirrels of course. I wonder where she is now?” mused Kick.

“I’m right behind you!” cried a very familiar voice.

Both of her sisters screamed.

“Sorry I scared you!” laughed Meldy, “I haven’t heard you scream for years! Not since a squirrel jumped at you!”

“Meldy! You’re safe!” They hugged her so tightly she started to complain.

“You’re hurting me!”

“We’re just so pleased to see you!”

“So you did miss me!”

“Of course we did! But Meldy, you should not have taken off with Nicky like that.”

“But it’s a good thing we did. We know who the bad person is. It’s Mytille du Malcontent the witch lady.”

“We know,” said Kick. “She dropped her bracelet in the square.”

“That must have been Nicky or me. We fought them when they grabbed us!”

“You could have been hurt,” pointed out Popster.

“Yes but I promised Lady Pastena....”

“She didn’t expect you to go to all that trouble,” said Kick.

“I bet you wish you could have seen us fool them! Nicky was brilliant! He moaned so much they really thought he was ill. They’re terrified of measles here.”

“Measles?” said Popster, “where is he? He might infect Princess Augustine and there’ll be no Coronation!”

“Don’t be silly. I drew red spots all over his face and that’s how we escaped!”

They hugged Meldy again. “That was really clever of you!” said Popster.

“Well there’s no harm done I suppose,” said Kick.

“At least now we definitely know who the enemy is,” said Popster.

In another room, Amelie was looking after the boys.

“Nicky was brilliant!” said Raoul. “He is in our gang now.”

“That is indeed an honour,” said Amelie, “a great honour. Is that not right Nicky?”

“It wasn’t me at all. It was Meldy, Paul and Raoul. They are the brave ones!”

“Those men were really scared of your moaning,” said Raoul.

“It was Paul’s idea. I didn’t think of it.”

“Well you all make a great team,” added Amelie. “Lady Sophie will wish to see you when you are all cleaned up.”

“Can we see our parents?” asked Paul.

“Of course but the police think it best if you stay here until after the Coronation. We do not want you to be kidnapped again.”

A telephone rang in the corner of the room. Amelie answered. “Commissioner Duplessis is here. She wishes to speak to you all.” A few minutes later, the three adventurous boys were taken downstairs and Meldy joined them.

“Lady Esmeralda, we meet again,” said the Commissioner with a pleasant smile.

“Bonjour Commissioner, did you miss me? This is my friend Nicky. We drew measles spots on his face!”

“Very resourceful, well done. My colleagues at the police station were very impressed with your trick.”

“It was Nicky’s idea. Oh, can he have an identity card please?”

“That will not be a problem. He is known by the Court Manteau sisters and is unlikely to be a security risk! Now, I must ask you about Madame du Malcontent. What can you tell me about her?”

“She looks like a witch,” said Paul.

“We did not see her broomstick though,” added Raoul.

“She thinks she should be Empress,” said Meldy.

“And she’s mad!” added Nicky. “You know, away with the fairies!”

“Did she have any distinguishing features?”

“She can’t run very fast,” laughed Meldy, “and she has long straight black hair with a silver streak....” here, Meldy closed her eyes and moved her hands to visualise this feature. “It’s on her right hand side.”

“She has a hooked nose,” said Paul.

“And she stares,” added Raoul. “That was really creepy.”

“What colour are her eyes?”

“Green I think,” said Nicky. “I bet they glow in the dark!”

“And she’s thin,” said Meldy. “And tall.”

“How tall?”

The friends struggled to put a figure on this.

“Anything else?” asked the Commissioner. “It is highly likely she will adopt a disguise of some sort. She will know you can describe her to the police so she could cut or even dye her hair.”

“What was that thing she did with her hands?” asked Raoul.

“Yes, that twisting thing,” added Paul.

“That’s it!” cried Meldy, “she keeps twisting her ring with her right hand.”

“Interesting,” said the Commissioner. “Could you see what they were doing in the warehouse?”

“They had a manure wagon,” said Raoul, “and they were drilling holes in it. There were some wires.”

“And a battery,” added Meldy.

“Ah, it is as we thought. They are planning to disrupt the Coronation. Were there any markings on the wagon?”

“I think I saw a swan,” said Meldy. “And a number. I can’t remember what it was.”

“It had a ‘five’ in it,” said Nicky.

“Well it does not matter. They will have changed it by now.”



Commissioner Duplessis was about to leave when Sophie rushed in.

“Esmeralda! They have rescued you all!”

“Lady Sophie,” said the Commissioner, “actually we did not find them, they found us. Once again, your friends have displayed resourcefulness in the face of danger.”

“You should have been with us Sophie,” said Raoul, “we fooled them. They were too stupid for us!”

“Can we have Nicky in our gang now Sophie,” asked Paul. “He moaned and moaned so much he really scared them!”

“Of course. Will you moan again Nicky?” asked Sophie.

Nicky moaned so much his face started to change colour.

“You sound ever so ill,” laughed Sophie, “shall we call a doctor?”

“I think,” mused the Commissioner, “that Londres will be safer now that you are all free and working with us against this criminal gang!”

“She’s really evil Sophie,” said Meldy, “you should have seen her.”

“Well you can visit her in prison,” said the Commissioner with confidence, “we will soon have her behind bars.”