

## Meldy's New Biology Teacher (by Mr Sproulle and Mrs Sproulle)

On the first day of the new term, the twins came home from school in an excited state.

“We’ve had the new Biology teacher!” said Popster, “She’s young and very enthusiastic. Everyone likes her!”

They would have gone on to compare her with Ms Frogmore Frinton, their old teacher, but a warning glance from Mrs Wagley stopped them. She knew Meldy was going to miss the old teacher who had retired last term.

Meldy sat there quietly toying with her food. Maybe this teacher was young and enthusiastic but to her she was an imposter. Her real teacher, who should have carried on teaching at her school, was doing something else now.

“Well I won’t like her!” she said to herself as she reluctantly chewed on some broccoli.

Mr Wagley looked across the table at her and tried to think of something to say. He decided to let events take their course, he would step in if it proved to be necessary.

Next day at school her best friend Becca approached her.

“I’ve seen the new Biology teacher. She’s very young and the other classes seem to like her.”

Meldy paused before replying.

“It’s not fair! Ms Frogmore Frinton was the best teacher! I don’t think I’ll like Biology any more!”

“But it’s your favourite subject!” replied an anxious Becca. She didn’t like to see her best friend like this.

“History’s my favourite subject now! I really enjoyed the lessons on the Romans last term.”

“Yes but...,” Becca stopped as she knew Meldy could be stubborn at times.

When their Biology lesson started, the students trooped in eager to see the new teacher. Meldy hung back and let the others go in first. Everyone else had sat down by the time she sidled reluctantly in to sit at her desk. She sat with her arms folded and a determined look on her face.

“What’s your name?” asked the teacher in an assertive but pleasant voice.

“Esmerelda Wagley,” mumbled Meldy.

“Could you speak up, please?”

Meldy repeated her name but didn’t look up.

“I’m Ms Fleurbush,” she said as she checked Meldy’s name on her list. She saw a collection of excellent marks next to her name then looked back at the sullen student hunched at her desk.

‘What’s happened to her?’ she asked herself.

The other students soon warmed to their new teacher but Meldy resisted all attempts to involve her in the lesson. When the lesson ended Meldy was asked to stay behind.

“Esmerelda, I was told you were the best student in the class but today you look like you’d rather be somewhere else. Is anything the matter?”

“No,” said Meldy.

“I want you to enjoy the lessons. You used to before, what’s changed?”

Meldy couldn’t tell her the truth. It wasn’t her fault that Ms Frogmore Frinton had left.

Ms Fleurbush reluctantly let her go. She worried that something else was going on but she didn’t know what it could be.

That afternoon Meldy’s form tutor approached her.

“Meldy, I want to talk to you.”

Meldy knew what it was about so was prepared for what followed.

“Ms Fleurbush is very concerned about you. You were the best student in Biology last term and now you seem to be bored with the subject. What went wrong?”

Meldy’s tutor suspected what was wrong but wanted to hear it from Meldy. At the same time, Meldy was groping for words as she wondered whether her tutor had guessed what the problem was. She couldn’t think of much to say but she had to say something.

“I’m fed up with Biology!”

“Don’t you like your new teacher?”

“She’s alright, I suppose,”

“Just alright? I’ve heard very good reports from the other students.”

Meldy was silent. What else could she say? She had realised she was being unreasonable but she was reluctant to back down now.

“Meldy, Ms Frogmore Frinton spoke very highly of you. She once said that you were very concerned about the environment and you had the ability to do something about it. Have you lost interest in that as well?”

“I don’t know,” she said.

“Well, I’ll be seeing Ms Frogmore Frinton on Saturday.” She stopped as she saw the expression on Meldy’s face. “She’s bound to ask how her students are getting on. I hear there is a hedgehog in the hedgehog house you gave her.”

“Is there?” asked Meldy. Her tutor noticed something of the old Meldy returning.

“I know Ms Frogmore Frinton very well and I know she will be upset if she finds out you are not trying your best in Biology or any of your subjects.”

“You won’t tell her, will you?” she begged.

“Not this time but will you promise to try harder in future?”

Meldy promised and returned to her classes.

That evening her father asked how she’d got on at school.

“You know the present we got for Ms Frogmore Frinton?”

“Yes, that was a really nice thing to give her.”

“Well, there’s a hedgehog living in it!”

“That’s wonderful!”

Just then her mother came in and asked what was so wonderful. He explained about the hedgehog in the hedgehog house.

“You must be so pleased, Meldy,” said Mrs Wagley.

“I wish we could have got her two then she could have two hedgehogs.”

“Maybe they would be too close together. They might fight.” said Mr Wagley.

“I never thought of that,” said Meldy. She pondered for a bit. “Daddy, can I tell you something?”

“Of course, Meldy.”

Mrs Wagley returned to her study while her father waited expectantly. Just then the twins came bouncing in. They sensed they had walked in on something and turned to go.

“Sorry, Kickster,” said their father. He had adopted Meldy’s method of referring to the two of them as a unit. “I need to talk to Meldy.”

Kick and Popster went back outside.

“Now, Meldy, come and sit here. What did you want to tell me?”

She looked around to see if anyone was listening. “I got into trouble at school today.”

“Meldy, what happened?”

“I haven’t been trying very hard in Biology.”

“Don’t you like the new teacher?”

“Oh, Ms Fleurbush is very nice and all that but she isn’t Ms Frogmore Frinton.”

“You really liked her, didn’t you?”

“Yes! She always had time for us and would tell us about so many interesting things. She knew all about penguins, fish, polar bears, gorillas, ostriches and lots more. Lessons with her didn’t seem like lessons.”

“Do lessons with Ms Fleurbush seem like lessons?”

“I don’t think she’s so interesting but I know I must try harder.”

“Has she spoken to you about it?”

“Yes. Today my tutor spoke to me as well.”

“What are you going to do about it?”

“I’ll try to do better.”

“I know you will, Meldy. Come back and talk to me again if you have any more worries.”

Meldy did try harder. Soon she was back at the top end of the class. Ms Fleurbush was pleased to see that she was making a lot more effort.

The weeks went by and Meldy became used to Ms Fleurbush’s teaching methods. She had worked on quite a few environmental improvement projects and when the chance came to manage a wetland improvement project on the East Coast she approached the Head of the school.

“We could keep the students up to date with progress using Zoom,” she suggested.

“It would mean finding a replacement for a few weeks after the holidays,” said the Head. “I know just the person!”

So it was approved and the replacement agreed to cover her lessons.

Meldy came into class after the weekend and there sat Ms Frogmore Frinton. She was overjoyed!

“Ms Frogmore Frinton! You’re back!” she cried.

“Just for a few weeks,” said Ms Frogmore Frinton. “I wanted to see how you were all getting on.”

“How’s your hedgehog?” asked Meldy.

“He, or she, seems very happy in the new house. It was so nice of you all to get it for me.”

Later, Ms Frogmore Frinton had another talk with her. “Meldy, what happened at the start of the term? I’ve been looking at your marks. You always used to do much better.”

“I’m sorry I let you down. I didn’t try my best.”

“Well, that seems to be over now. I always had great hopes for you, Meldy. I think that, in the future, you can really make a difference.”

When Ms Fleurbush came back there was an envelope on her desk. In it was a card with a picture of a squirrel. The card said:

‘Dear Ms Fleurbush,

Thank you for telling us all about the wetlands project. It was really interesting. I’m sorry I didn’t work hard enough at the start of this term, I will try harder in future.

Your student,

Esmerelda Wagley.’