

Meldy Keeps a Diary

By Mr and Mrs Sproulle

There was silence in the Wagley household. The twins were reading, the parents were on their computers and Meldy was restless.

She had read and re-read her books and couldn't see anything else in the house that interested her. She just lay on the floor of her room and stared at the ceiling. Suddenly she jumped up.

"I know, I'll keep a diary! I'll use the one Granny sent me for Christmas!" She darted across the room to her bookshelf. "Yes, here it is! I'll start writing now."

She found a pen and opened the diary at today's date. There was a problem: that left a lot of blank pages as a chunk of the year had already gone. She went back to January and started writing anyway.

First she wrote 'holiday from school', then 'school', then 'weekend'. She couldn't remember much that had happened but soon realised how boring the weeks had been. When people read this in hundreds of years, she thought, they will get fed up really quickly! "I know! I'll make things up."

Half an hour later, it was looking much more interesting. 'He spoke to me', 'He gave me a present and I will treasure it forever and ever!' Now, that was more like it.

The twins looked up from their books. "It's too quiet," Popster said. "What's she up to?"

If Meldy was quiet for a long period they knew from experience that there would soon be some excitement on the horizon. "Let's investigate," said Kick.

They crept to Meldy's room and peeped through a crack in the door. Then they retreated to the top of the stairs.

"Looks like she's writing something in a book," said Popster. "Maybe she's keeping a diary."

"What on earth can she be writing about?" said Kick. "Her life isn't exactly what I would call 'exciting'!"

They made a pact - they must read that diary, or whatever it was. You see, at that moment their life wasn't very exciting either. Their friend from next door was away for a while and although they wouldn't admit it, they missed him.

It wasn't long before they got a chance. Meldy had gone into the garden to look for the squirrels so they went round to Meldy's room.

"You keep a lookout!" instructed Kick, so Popster hung around by the stairs.

Kick quickly nipped into the room, searched the bookcase and saw the diary. On it was written 'Meldy's Diary Top Secret Keep out!'. She scanned the pages, put it back and left the room.

"She's got a boyfriend!"

"That's not possible!" exclaimed Popster. "Who is it? What did she write?"

"Oh, you know, 'I'll treasure his present for ever and ever! And he smiled at me!' You know the sort of stuff."

They did know the sort of stuff.

When Meldy returned to the room to write about the squirrels, she noticed something was wrong. The diary was upside down on the shelf. She would never replace it like that. The twins must have been reading it.

That evening at dinner the parents asked the girls about their day.

"Well, Meldy's been writing in her diary!" said one twin.

"And she's got a boyfriend!" said the other.

"I knew you'd been reading it! That's not fair! I don't go reading your stuff. Well, now I will!"

Here her sisters smiled as they didn't keep diaries. They had secrets they wanted kept secret.

Their parents scolded them saying what they'd done wasn't nice and also it wasn't fair. But Meldy had already come up with a plan.

She knew the twins would have another go at reading her diary so she would write it in code. She must talk to Becca who probably knew a lot about such things.

“Codes? Yes, I had to use a code in some of my records since I didn’t want my sister to find out how much money I make selling sweets at school.”

“But how can I do it?”

“You could use a word reversal code. Then, Meldy would become ‘Ydlem’.” They had a good laugh at this.

“Becca then becomes Acceb!” cried Meldy who was getting into the game. “And Tamzin becomes Nizmat! I’ll call her that when I see her next!”

“But, Meldy, you can see the problem, can’t you? If it’s that easy your sisters will figure it out. They’re not stupid in spite of what you say! If you use the reverse alphabet code, A becomes Z. Also, B becomes Y, C becomes X and so on. But my reverse split alphabet is probably the best as I can’t imagine that they’ll be able to figure that out.”

“How do you do that?”

“I’ll show you.” Becca wrote out the alphabet on a piece of paper then the reverse split as below:

A B C D E F G H I J K L M	/	N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z
M L K J I H G F E D C B A	/	Z Y X W V U T S R Q P O N

“Now Meldy becomes AIBJO. That will really confuse them! You don’t need to write numbers do you?”

“I don’t think so. But how do you know all this?”

“Like I said, I have to keep my thieving sister’s hands off my cash. But don’t lose this piece of paper - it’s the key! Hide it in a safe place, away from the diary or your secrets will get out.”

When Meldy got home she went up to her room. She picked the name Eustace and used the code to turn it into ISUTMKI. Writing would be slower now but at least the twins would be foxed. She smiled as she imagined how annoyed they would get.

Next day at school Becca asked how she had got on.

“I worked it out but it did take longer.”

Tamzin appeared and wanted to know what had taken longer.

“Hello, Nizmat!” called Meldy.

“Hello, Ydlem and Acceb!” replied Tamzin. “Here comes Ycnemelc!”

They had to explain to Clemency what they were up to but she soon caught on and said, “I want to write my diary in code, too! I don’t want anyone reading it!”

Soon lots of the other students wanted to know about codes. Becca, or Acceb as she was now called, had to devise a different code for each one as they all wanted it that way.

When she was alone with Meldy, she said, “I could have charged them and made some money. Anyway, they’re bound to forget how it was done and then I can charge them!”

Meldy followed her unique code for a number of weeks. She had thought up a way to detect when the twins opened her diary, she had used a tiny piece of paper which would fall out when anyone opened it.

About a month later they were all at dinner when Meldy said, “Bad luck with my diary, Kickster!” She called them that when the twins were together. “You couldn’t figure out my diary, could you!”

“Why should we want to read your stupid diary?” they said.

“Then why did you try to read it? My security system detected you!”

Mrs Wagley spoke up. “I’m sorry, Meldy, it was me. I was worried about you. When the twins said you had a boyfriend...”

“Me? A boyfriend? I wish!”

“Well, that’s what you wrote last month,” said the twins.

“Who is he?” asked Mrs Wagley. “Perhaps you would like to invite him round?”

“Oh, Mummy! That’s so funny! I made it all up to wind up Kickster. I don’t have a boyfriend but my friend, Becca, told me how to use codes. And it’s come in very useful.”

Meldy carried on writing and as the year progressed she had written quite a lot. Then one day Mr Wagley came in to breakfast and opened his mail. “Another credit card bill,” he said, “He always checked his bills as he didn’t trust them to get things right.”

“What did we do on the 17th? There is an item here I don’t recognise,”

Meldy jumped up. “Perhaps I wrote something in my diary.” By now she was keeping records of shopping trips rather than encounters with imaginary boyfriends.

She found her diary and looked for Becca’s piece of paper, the one she needed to crack the code. Meldy looked everywhere but couldn’t find it so went back to the breakfast table, looking very upset.

“I’ve lost my secret code sheet and I can’t remember how I did it!” she wailed.

“Becca will help you,” said Mr Wagley so Meldy went off to school to ask her friend.

When asked, Becca thought for a minute. “I told a lot of people about codes and I can’t remember which one I used with you. I did tell you not to lose the sheet! Anyway, if you pay me £5, I’ll decipher the code for you.”

“But I don’t have £5!” wailed Meldy.

“I’m only joking! I wouldn’t charge a special friend like you. Look at your diary - which words can you pick out that you recognise as people’s names or places. Anything will do.”

Meldy had her diary with her so she looked through it. “I wrote Eustace as ISUTMKI.”

“Ah! T in Eustace is in the same position as the T in ISUTMKI. That makes it easier.” Becca scribbled away for a few minutes, then she said. “Yes, you

used my reverse split alphabet code. With the others I used the offset reverse split alphabet code.”

Meldy was amazed. “You’re so clever. Thank you ever so much!”

Becca smiled and said it was nothing. “Perhaps I should write a booklet on codes and sell it to students at the school,” she thought to herself.

Meldy rushed to her room and translated her diary entry. She was able to tell her father that he had gone to a hardware shop in town on that day.

“Thank you, Meldy. Now I remember! I bought some paint, that’s it.”

Meldy returned to her room and lay on the floor. She looked at patterns on the ceiling for a while then thought about diaries. Did she really care if other people read hers? Yes, she did!

Now she would find a super hiding place where no one would ever look. But codes? Maybe not. She needed to know what she had written - without working it out!