

# Chapter 1: The Return of Marie Antoinette

Date: Friday evening, August 27, 1855

Place: Veronique's bedroom, The Palace of Versailles, France



Alice



Victoria



Napoleon III

## The Diary of Veronique Fleur-de-Lys

Dear Diary,

Do you believe in ghosts? I don't. Or at least I didn't. But that all changed tonight. Dead French queens usually don't appear on a horse in the middle of a royal gala and steal priceless diamonds. I may only be 14 years old, but I know that's not normal. Believe me, as a princess in the French royal family I've seen my share of odd things happen at royal events. I've seen people eat too much. I've seen bad dancers. I've seen weird hair styles. But I never thought I'd see Queen Marie Antoinette holding a stolen diamond! That was quite the stunt given that she died 70 years ago! And if I don't get it back, France might have a second Revolution and the lives of my family could be in mortal danger. That's why I'm writing down everything I see and do this weekend, just in case I have to disappear.

First, I should introduce myself. My name is Veronique and welcome to my diary. I am the niece to the Emperor of France,

Napoleon III. He's my favourite uncle but he's more like a father to me. So that makes me a princess, but I prefer just being a regular 14-year-old girl. I guess that makes my dog Milou a princess too. Milou is a big brown Briard and she follows me everywhere. In fact, she's sleeping on my bed right now.

My parents adopted me when I was four. I don't know who my real parents are because I was left on a convent step as a baby. The only thing my parents left was a little note saying my name: Veronique. Veronique Fleur-de-Lys. (a fleur-de-lys is French for the lily flower) Maybe that's why I like reading mystery books, because I'm a bit of a mystery! Anyway, I was raised by some very caring Catholic nuns.

My new father found me when he was making a royal tour of the convent. I was just a little girl and nervous about meeting a real prince. When he paused his tour to say hello to me, I accidentally tipped over a bucket of soapy water and soaked his shoes. Mother Superior took a bird, but Prince Bonaparte found me charming. So that's how I met my new family. Shortly after, I moved into a nice house along the Seine River in Paris.

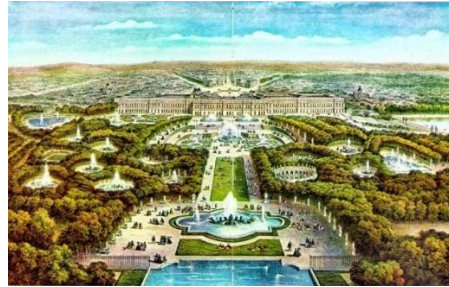
Now I attend school where the boys tease me a lot. My mother says it's because I'm so pretty. She wishes she had long beautiful brown hair like mine. Now there's a few things you should know about me. First, I'm not very good at math problems but I do like painting and drawing. And while I don't like dressing up in fancy clothes—the fabrics make me itch—I do like attending royal parties hosted by my uncle, Napoleon III. It's hilarious watching nervous adults say the oddest things trying to impress him. He's my favourite uncle and he usually gives me a wink and a smile when someone says something odd. We have the same sense of humour. Usually these parties are in Paris, but tonight I'm 20kms away from Paris at the palace of Versailles.

I should also introduce my best friend, Alice. We have a lot in common. Her mother is Queen Victoria, so that makes Alice an English princess. In the old days our countries used to fight, but today our parents are good friends. We visit each other a lot during school holidays and enjoy going to the beach. In fact, we spent last summer touring the beaches of Normandy and collecting seashells. We had a contest to see who could find the biggest one. Alice won. She always wins! And when Alice and I aren't together, we write letters to each other. She is 14 years old too, but I'm two months older...and I playfully remind her constantly that I'm "older and wiser!" She is tall for her age, much prettier than I am, with long brown hair too. We are good friends because she is kind, keeps my secrets, is very good at math, and reads lots of scary stories like Dracula and Frankenstein. She loves chocolate too, looks in the mirror a lot, is crazy for boys, and thinks every British palace is haunted by ghosts. So as you can imagine, Marie Antoinette really scared the tiara off her head tonight. To be honest, she scared us all. I calmed Alice down, though. We're sharing a big room in the palace just a few doors down from where Marie Antoinette use to sleep!

While I'm still in a bit of shock, let me see if I can describe what happened. My uncle—Napoleon III—has been hosting the 1855 World Fair in Paris the entire month of August. It's a showcase of science, technology, food, art and culture. Most countries from around the world send a display. This week, Queen Victoria travelled from London to Paris to visit the fair. This is a big deal and the newspapers have been reporting about her visit all week long. My uncle is always worried that the newspapers will write something bad about him. You see, the newspapers don't like the French royal family. My uncle says the newspapers like to make trouble so they can sell their stories.



Louis XIV (The Sun King)



Versailles 1715

To celebrate the new French-British alliance, my uncle decided to hold a party for Victoria at Versailles Palace. The palace of Versailles was built 200 years ago by an old French king named Louis XIV (that's the roman numeral for 14...that's right, he was the 14<sup>th</sup> guy named Louis to be king of France.) He was known as the "Sun King" because he thought he was at the center of the universe and gave life to everything. Crazy, right? Yeah, totally. Anyway, Louis XIV built the biggest palace in all of Europe. Even today, 200 years later, Versailles is still the biggest palace on the planet.

Now the history of my country gets complicated, so pay attention. You're never going to believe this, but a lot of French kings had the same name: Louis. I wish they could have thrown in a "Charles" or a "John" or a "Henry" like the British did. But we didn't. So, for this mystery, you need to understand that there were three kings named Louis during the 1700s. Louis XIV (the Sun King) died in 1715, but his family stayed on the throne. After him, Louis XV(15<sup>th</sup>) was king from 1715 to 1774. Then, Louis XVI(16<sup>th</sup>) was King from 1774 to 1789...Louis XVI, you should know, was also the last king France. Consequently, Marie Antoinette...his wife...was to be the last queen of France.



Queen Marie Antoinette of France

Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette were the last king and queen because of the French Revolution in 1789. You see, the poor and hungry French people did not like how the three Louis had spent all their tax dollars on the construction of Versailles. So, in 1789, an angry group of French people formed a club called the Jacobins. They were hungry. They were poor. And they were armed with torches and pitchforks. Inspired by the American Revolution in 1776, they decided to form a better government. (A Revolution is when the people rise up and violently change the government. It's the opposite of an election.) So, in 1789, the Jacobins marched into Versailles, captured the king, Louis XVI (Louis XIV's great-great-great grandson) and his wife Marie Antoinette, brought them to a Paris prison, and chopped off their heads. Isn't that terrible? They erased the whole French royal family and most of their friends. But some friends were lucky and escaped the Jacobins and their awful "reign of terror."



The capture of Marie Antoinette, 1792

Now every country needs a leader, or nothing gets done. So the Jacobins replaced the king with an army general named Napoleon Bonaparte. Napoleon looked like a good choice at first, but he soon became worse than all the guys named Louis combined. He wanted to control all of Europe and led France into 15 years of war. In 1815, Napoleon was captured by the British General Wellington at a place in Belgium called Waterloo. Peace returned and France decided to bring back the royal family. Since all the Louis had no heads, the French people decided to choose someone from the Bonaparte family, someone less crazy than Napoleon I. So, they chose my uncle, Napoleon III. And that's how I suddenly became a princess! How is that for luck? I went from orphan to princess all in one year.



Napoleon Bonaparte



Battle of Waterloo



Napoleon III

As for the beautiful palace of Versailles, well the French people decided to keep it as a museum. Like I said, there is no place like it in all of Europe. It's very big and very beautiful. It's opened every day so tourists can walk in the gardens or visit the 3 different palaces on the property. When I was a little girl, my uncle Napoleon brought me here to paint in the large garden. He loves to paint too. He paints with watercolors and so do I. I love him so much. He's handsome, smart and funny. He spends time with me and taught me how to row a boat and fly a kite. And he builds the best sandcastles. I keep the paintings from our special summer trips on my bedroom walls.

So this is why the French royal family has returned to Versailles this week. My uncle decided to have the party for Queen Victoria here. The idea was to have the party in the biggest room in the whole palace: the famous Hall of Mirrors. Louis XIV (the Sun King) had the room built for fancy balls and parties. Since his French empire was big, the Sun King wanted a big room to impress visitors. It's still big today! It's 240 feet long, 34 feet wide and the beautifully painted ceilings are 40 feet high. Couples who dance waltzes are lit by 20,000 candles suspended over their heads by beautiful crystal chandeliers. On one side of the room the walls are covered with 357 mirrors, which are very expensive. On the other side of the room are 17 large glass doors that let you look out at the spectacular garden.



The Hall of Mirrors, Versailles Palace

But it's not just a garden. The Sun King wanted the largest garden in the world. The garden was designed and built for the king by André le Notre, the best garden designer in all of France. Work started in 1661 and took about 40 years to finish. The garden is 800 hectares. An army of soldiers changed the path of a river to power its 50 fountains. It has 200 000 trees and a grand canal (a man-made lake really) shaped like a cross that is 1.5 km long and 5.57 kms all the way around. You get the idea. Versailles, the Hall of Mirrors and the gardens were all designed by Louis XIV to convince visitors that he was the most powerful person on the planet. The Sun King.

My uncle Napoleon III is not a fancy king like the Sun King. And he doesn't want to rule all of Europe like his uncle Napoleon Bonaparte. My uncle tries to help the poor people as much as he can. But this week he wanted to show off his country as millions of tourists came to Paris to see the 1855 World's Fair. Tonight's party was by invitation only. There were about 200 guests. There were royal families from around Europe, famous artists-painters, writers, dancers. And of course, the special guest of honour: Queen Victoria.



Paintings of the gala done by artists for newspaper publication during Victoria's visit to the Hall of Mirrors, August 1855



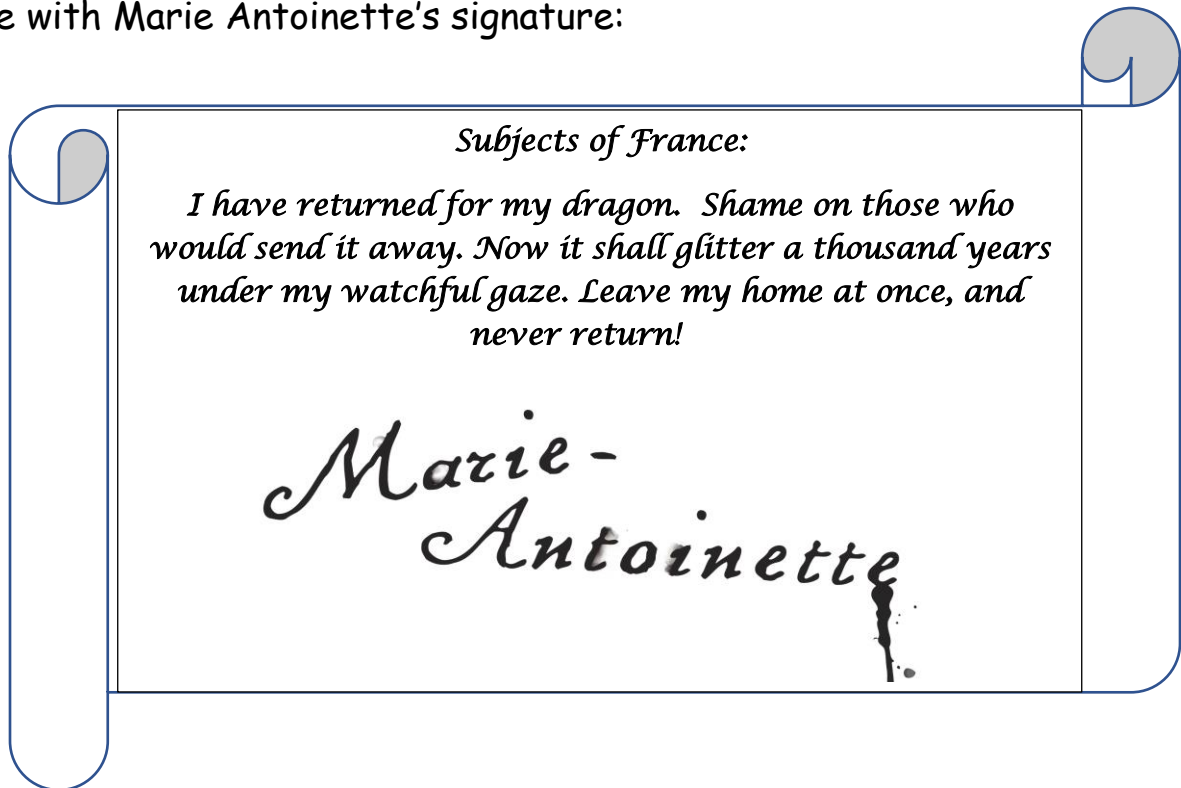
Tonight, the Hall of Mirrors was filled with a French cultural festival, showcasing the best artists from France. In addition to displaying art and jewelry, there was dancing, food and fireworks. But without a doubt, the star of the show was the famous White diamond—also known as the Ice Dragon—and my uncle was going to present it as a gift of friendship to Queen Victoria. A kind of gift from France to England. It is a sister diamond to the blue diamond, which also has a sun etched on its dazzling surface. My uncle let me hold it the other day. It's the size of a Christmas tree ornament and felt heavy in my hands. It was closely guarded all week while on display in the Hall of Mirrors. Visitors were amazed by its size and beauty. It has a lot of history attached to it. It was a wedding gift to Queen Marie Antoinette, and it was her favourite piece of jewelry. Maybe that's why she came back for it tonight.

The crime happened at the end of the gala this evening, just before my uncle was going to present the diamond to Victoria. There was a huge firework display over the garden. All the guests dressed in their fancy clothes gathered along the 17 glass doors in the Hall of Mirrors. The explosions reflected off the water in the grand canal and lit up the forest trees. Since it's summer, the doors were all opened tonight and the sounds of the 20-minute fireworks display were exciting and loud. Everyone had their back turned to the diamond while we watched the sky erupt in a fantastic display of red, white and blue fireworks to match the French and British flags.



Just as the last fireworks burst in the air, Emperor Napoleon shouted, "The Ice Dragon diamond is gone!" There were gasps from the crowd. Sure enough, the display table was bare. Then someone shouted, "Oh my goodness, look outside!" That's when all the guests saw her. A woman with long blond hair wearing a simple white gown riding a horse. "Oh my goodness!" my uncle said. "It's the ghost of Marie Antoinette! She's returned to Versailles!" The woman on the horse paused for a moment, looked back at us, held up a candle lantern so we could see her face, and then rode off into the foggy forest. Several women at the ball fainted. It was a sight I'll never forget.

Alice and I rushed over to the empty display case. There, on the velvet pillow where the Ice Dragon diamond had been on display was a note with Marie Antoinette's signature:



## Questions to help solve the mystery

- 1) Name 5 facts about Veronique
  
- 2) Name 5 facts about Alice
  
- 3) Why did Napoleon III hold the gala at the palace of Versailles and not in Paris?
  
- 4) Name 2 facts about Louis XIV (The Sun King)
  
- 5) Who were the Jacobins and what did they want?
  
- 6) After reviewing the facts of the crime so far, how do you suspect the diamond was stolen? (Keep your theory in mind as you read on)
  
- 7) Detectives often have to figure out a **motive**. Re-read the note left where the Ice Dragon had been on display. What does this note left at the scene of the crime suggest to you about what motivated the theft?