

CHAPTER 1: ANNE AND THE REUNION'S DIARY

By: Daniel Josué Lizardo



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Madame Molina (yes, she likes people to call her like that) lives in Seneca Street. Not many people know about this street, actually, but it is really important for Anne. In fact, that's where our story begins. But... wait a second. I think I'm going too fast!

Anne Naranjo moved to Spain about a month ago. Technically she is Spanish, but she has lived in France all her life because her father worked there. Unfortunately, he lost his job and so the whole family decided it was time to go back to Spain, where Anne's grandparents lived.

When she arrived in Badajoz, she felt scared. I mean, people always feel a bit scared when they have to move, don't they? All that packing and unpacking, the fuss, the stress, the trip, the perspective of going to a different place, to a new house, wondering if you'll ever be able to make friends... these were the things that filled Anne's mind.



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The first thing Anne thought about Badajoz was “Wow, that’s hot!” It was October but it wasn’t even chilly and there were lots of people walking everywhere. “That’s nice”, she thought. She promised herself she would spend more time outdoors. In Chambéry there was no way she could go outside in the afternoon in October. It would be too cold for that.

The 17th of October was her first day at the new school in Badajoz. It was really hard for her. Apart from having absolutely no friends, she could hardly speak the language. In fact, the only words she could say were “hola” and “gracias”. And... oh dear, Spanish people spoke so fast... Luckily, there was Mademoiselle Soler, the French teacher, with whom Anne could talk in French. What a relief having someone to talk to...

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One day, after another study session to help her improve her Spanish, Anne decided to go for a walk and visit the old part of the city. Her dad had given her a map a couple of days before and she thought this was the perfect opportunity to use it.

Ancient Badajoz is amazing! It's in a high part of the city, so people have to go up steep and narrow streets to get there. Besides, the buildings are really old, so it feels like you've just got in a time machine and you've travelled some decades back. But curiously, there are also restaurants and bars full of people.



Anne was enjoying every second of her walk, but before she knew it, she was lost. She had been so hypnotized by the scenery that she didn't pay attention to the map. For a moment she felt scared. It was seven o'clock and it was getting dark. She tried to find the place she was in on the map, but she couldn't find it. Suddenly she heard a voice behind her:



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- Excuse me, do you need help? – it was an old woman. The lady was dressed in pink pyjamas with little Teddy Bears on it. She spoke to Anne in English because she had realized that the girl looked foreign. The lady had a special intuition for this kind of things.

- Yes, please – said Anne after a few seconds. Would you mind letting me use your phone for a moment?

- Certainly. But I must warn you, my phone is a bit old... - the lady smiled.



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When Anne got in the lady's house she thought it was magical. Something on the walls, on the floor made her feel warm and comfortable. The main room was a few metres below ground level, so there weren't many windows. But surprisingly it wasn't dark at all because the lady had scattered coloured candles everywhere.

- Please, do sit down – the lady pointed to a red armchair – The phone is right over there.
- Thank you – said Anne while dialing her dad's number.

In the meantime the lady had gone to the kitchen to give Anne some privacy. As Anne was putting the phone down, the lady shouted:

- I'm making coffee. Would you like some?
- Yes, please – shouted Anne back. She smiled and lay back in the armchair. Her father would pick her up in 20 minutes.



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A couple of minutes later, the lady came back into the living room holding two yellow cups of coffee.

- Here you are – she said, handing Anne one of the cups.

- Thank you – Anne replied.

- So... what's your name?

Anne talked and talked. She told the old lady about her life in France, about her recent arrival in Badajoz, why they'd had to move... She felt completely at ease with that woman. She didn't know the old lady at all, but for some reason it was easy for Anne to talk with her.

Then Anne asked:

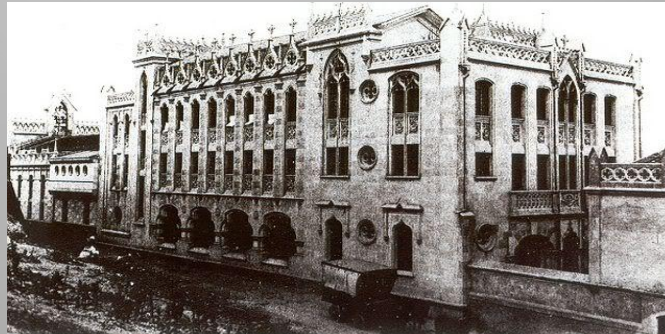
- What about you?

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- Oh, I'm sorry dear. My name is Madame Molina.

- What a beautiful name... That's funny, your name sounds familiar... I wonder where I've heard it...

- It's possible... I lived in France too. Je parle français aussi.



A decorative border with intricate floral and scrollwork patterns in a light gray color, framing the entire page. The border is symmetrical and features a central floral motif at the top and bottom.

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Anne smiled. She had just found a bit of France in Spain. For the following minutes they only spoke in French. Madame Molina had lived in France from a very young age until she had moved to Spain with her family at the age of 20.

- And why did you and your family move here? – asked Anne.

- Well, my grandmother, who was Spanish, was a writer and she loved to travel. In one of her trips to France she met a handsome Frenchman and they fell in love. So our family has been divided between these two countries ever since.

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There were many things in common between Anne's story and the old lady's.

- What was your grandmother's name?

- Her name was Emilia. My goodness, what a woman! She was a fighter, a hard fighter – said the lady passionately.

- Why do you say that? – asked Anne unable to refrain her curiosity.

- Well... my grandmother had always wanted to be a writer. However, she was not allowed to attend an official school because she was a woman. But that didn't stop her though and she decided to fight for what she believed were every woman's rights. You know, life was not easy at that time for women. A woman writer was virtually impossible. At that time women were not given any kind of prerogative or privilege and only the opinions of men mattered.

Fortunately, things are very different now, but we mustn't forget the people who have made these changes possible.



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“It’s true”, thought Anne. She had learnt about the discrimination of women around the world in History class at school. She remembered the teacher mentioning Mozart’s sister, a woman who was completely forgotten and smothered by her brother’s fame... Back then people only gave credit to men.

But Anne was sure many women had also written important pages in the History of mankind.

Madame Molina looked at Anne with her little shiny eyes and said:

- I’d like to show you something. Please wait here.

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The old lady went out of the living-room but she didn't take long. Seconds later she came back holding an old brown diary in her hands. It was covered in dust and it looked like no one had touched it for years.

Madame Molina sat down next to Anne and opened the book. The yellow pages were about to disintegrate, it looked so fragile... But Anne thought it was a very beautiful diary indeed. She was sure it had taken someone a lot of work to put it together. It contained lots of details and notes, some drawings in colour and a few black and white photographs.

- Look! – the lady showed Anne a photo on the first page – In 1937 twelve women from Europe got together for the First Secret Happiness Reunion. They picked that name because they said that if there were equality, the world would be perfect. And so that became their motto and philosophy. My grandmother, Emilia Pardo Bazán, was among these women.

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- Really? – Anne was amazed – And who else was at that Reunion?
- Humm, I'm afraid I can't answer that question precisely, but I do know that there were politicians, philosophers, actresses, mothers and daughters... Women like us.
- And what did they talk about?
- Well, as I told you, they dreamt of Equality. Not only gender equality, but also equality for people from different countries. So they wrote down seven rules they believed would lead them to true happiness. You know, these women were some of the most intelligent in the whole world and I'm absolutely sure the rules they created were special.
- And where are those rules? – asked Anne flicking through the pages of the diary. There's nothing here but photos and names...

- That's the problem. – said the old lady – You know, in 1941 they held their last Reunion. They had finished the rules, they wanted a revolution. They even called the press and the representatives of different governments to make a statement to the world. But they didn't succeed.

- What? Why not?



A decorative border with intricate floral and scrollwork patterns in a light gray color, framing the central text area.

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A small decorative flourish consisting of a scroll and a leaf-like element, centered between two horizontal lines.

- Basically because the politicians back then refused to pay attention to that kind of matter. They were not interested in anything that came from a woman's head. The press and the representatives of governments told so many lies about those 12 women that no one understood the power of their message and soon they were forgotten. The Seven Rules were stolen and burnt! It was a pity indeed. They came up with ideas to change the world, but they were simply ignored. I'm sure that there are some rules hidden somewhere in Europe, but nobody has ever found them. I came across this diary by chance in my grandmother's old house, but that's all I have. I believe those 12 women wrote down their notes on a diary such as this one, so maybe there are others similar to the one I have.

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Madame Molina was sad; Anne could sense it by the tone of her voice.

- But nowadays things are different! – Anne tried to cheer the old lady up. – Women have rights and they can have whichever job they want.

- Maybe that's true, but not all. In many countries women are still treated as mere objects or merchandise. Some are treated as slaves... No, Anne, there is a lot to be done yet.

Anne hadn't thought about it before. She had heard and watched some news on the TV, but she had never realized things were that horrible. It was hard to imagine there could be places in the world where women were treated as... nothing!

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- But – continued Madame Molina – don't think this happens only in poor or developing countries, my dear. There is discrimination in the so-called develop countries as well. How many women presidents or ministers do you know in the government? Every time a woman reaches a top position that becomes huge news. "For the first time a woman has become president of..." Can you imagine? "The first woman president of the USA", "The first woman on the moon" – she said, changing her voice as if she were a TV presenter. – Why? Why can't we think about women the same way we think about men? Because it's the world's tradition.

- So this is what those women really wanted to change – Anne had finally understood.

- Yes! They weren't happy with mere rights. They wanted Real Happiness.

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Madame Molina had just said these words when someone knocked on the door. It was Anne's dad.

- Hurry! – said the old lady - You must take this diary and find the rules!

- But... I can't. I don't even know...

Anne couldn't finish the sentence because Molina gave her the diary and closed the door immediately.

Her dad was a little surprised but he didn't say a word. When they arrived home, Anne went to her bedroom. She couldn't stop thinking about the diary. She started reading it. It contained notes on The Reunion and the people who took part in it. But Anne got a bit disappointed because the names were coded.

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“Minsk, 18th November 1937. Cloudy day, no rain.

All women are seated down, the First Happiness Reunion begins.

WHITE BIRD. Okay ladies, thank you for coming. This might be dangerous for us, so I beg you not to tell anybody about this.”

- White bird? What does this mean? – Anne didn't understand anything.

- I need to find the rules... But where can they be?

Suddenly, the diary fell down on the floor and an orange card came out of it. It had a “1” written on it.

You all know what it was, right?

Anne opened the card and read:

*THE FIRST RULE, MINSK 1941.
LOVE AND BEING LOVED IS THE BIGGEST FORM TO ACHIEVE
EQUALITY. NOT ALL THE REVOLUTIONS NEED RIOTS AND
VIOLENCE; WE WILL SUCCESS JUST WITH PEACE.*

