

# **The Secret of the Golden Orbs**

**A Fairy Tale of Suspense**



**R. Patricia Capitain**

**Illustrated by  
Gary Frederick**

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Also by R. Patricia Capitain  
*The Princess on a Cloud*  
*Through a Glass Darkly*

*For Sven, James, Justin, Brandon, Christoff, Luca, and Tyler,  
Seven marvelous boys who spice up my life*

*Read – Learn – Enjoy*

*We have begun to raise daughters more like sons...  
but few raise their sons more like our daughters*

Gloria Steinem



## Acknowledgements

I enjoyed writing *The Secret of the Golden Orbs* even more than writing the first book of *The de la Montagne Trilogy*. This time I knew what it entailed to write and publish a book compared to writing short stories or newspaper articles.

Between writing *The Princess on a Cloud* and *The Secret of the Golden Orbs*, I co-wrote a murder mystery, *Through a Glass Darkly* (no longer available in print). It was a fun project which taught me creative co-operation with fellow writers and to be patient when not everything comes together perfectly right away! For that I have to thank my muse, Anne (Bunty) Loucks, whose death this year has created a large void in my life.

My six grandsons, to whom I have dedicated this book, are a continued inspiration for me. Watching them grow, often eerily resembling their parents, took me back to the days when I was a young mother reading books or telling stories, “from the mouth, Mommy,” as my sons used to beg. Now it is their turn to either read or tell stories to their offspring, and I am glad they still do so, despite the arrival of iPads and e-books.

Two years ago, just after I had finished writing *The Secret of the Golden Orbs*, my publisher folded after over 40 years in the publishing business. Self-publishing, publishing on demand, iPads and e-books had replaced much of traditional publishing and how we read and enjoy books now.

I am thankful that Gary Wolfe, the owner of New Author Publishing, has published *The Secret of the Golden*

*Orbs* as it made it possible for me to communicate person to person rather than with an unknown entity out there in the cyber world. Readers who have waited almost four years to find out what has happened to Princesses Cordelia and Emma and the rest of their family and friends, will finally get an answer.

Gary Fredericks, once again, created the illustrations. He did a wonderful job, and I thank him wholeheartedly, as I know he has moved from illustrating children's books to creating larger works and has done this as a special favour to me. He has a wonderful talent for capturing the mood of a written scene and transforming it into a picture that depicts the story I wrote.

Christine Stesky, my editor, has a keen eye for finding irregularities within the text, pointing them out with a gentle touch, and giving me enough time for her suggestions to sink in. But she was also flexible, when I didn't agree with her but stuck to my original text. I thank her for all the support she gave me.

My family encouraged me to continue with the writing of the yet unnamed Book III of *The de la Montagne Trilogy*, while I waited for a new opportunity to get the second book out to my readers after my first publisher folded.

My gratitude goes to my readers who have been patiently waiting for this book to appear. I apologize for the long wait... it was out of my control. I thank them for waiting almost four years for the second book and promise to have the third book ready much sooner.

October 2016

The 1000 Islands of Ontario

# List of Characters

## *The Royal Family*

King Franciscus and Queen Frederica  
Princesses Cordelia and Emma  
Forest King

## *Servants*

Nanny  
Upstairs Maid Jessie  
Butler James  
Cook Andi  
Housekeeper Rosita  
Stablemaster Hottomax

## *Others*

Dr. Birdwing  
Jason Birdwing  
Prince Brandon  
Princess Gwendolyn  
Matron Ruth  
Matron Ursula  
Stableboy Frederic  
Royal Cloud  
Unicorn  
And many orphan girls and boys

## Dear Reader,

Quite some time has passed since you first read *The Princess on a Cloud*. You must be wondering what the princess-girls, Cordelia and Emma, have been up to in the meantime. And for those of you who did not read the first book, you will soon catch on as I have left clues within this book about the girls' adventures. Well, as you will soon find out, they have grown up a bit, just as you have. During that time, the girls have had a few adventures and had to take responsibility for their actions. They corrected a situation that had gone seriously wrong on their account. They got themselves into a few scary scrapes when they ignored rules. They became witness to an almost unbelievable scientific discovery. They managed to wring a promise from their parents that will make a big difference in their daily lives.

If you have already sneaked a look inside the book, you will have noticed that the illustrations are in black and white, not in colour, as they were in the first book. If you don't like them as much, I understand completely. I don't either. But all is not lost, for I have an idea. I invite you to get out your favourite colouring pencils or crayons or watercolour paints, and colour the six pictures yourself. You can make them come to life in all the shades of the rainbow. I can just imagine how beautiful the horn of the unicorn could look in brilliant shades of purple and blue, or green and yellow, or orange and red. And just imagine how scary the cave could look if you entertained spooky thoughts while colouring it!

When you are done colouring, how about scanning your favourite picture and emailing it to me? I would love to see how you transformed a plain black and white picture into a magical coloured illustration. You will find my email address at the end of the book.

Sometimes I visit libraries and schools and talk to children about reading and writing. They often have questions about how to come up with an idea for a story and how to write it, or how a story becomes a book. If you ever have questions about writing, you may email me, and I will do my best to help you find the answers.

I wish you lots of fun reading about Cordelia's and Emma's new adventures. While you read or colour the pictures, I promise to write the next book.

I hope that books will always be your friends and that you enjoy reading them no matter in what form they come to you: Maybe they were a gift in hardcover or paperback, maybe you downloaded them on your iPad, maybe you borrowed them from the library or a friend—whichever it is doesn't matter, because the story is always the same.

Now I will go back to writing the next book, while you can start reading what Cordelia and Emma and their family and friends have been up to. Have fun!

Your friend, as always,  
*R. Patricia Capitain*

## CHAPTER I

### A Castle in the Clouds

Once upon a time, in the Kingdom de la Montagne, lived a quirky royal family. Their castle stood on top of a high mountain. On foggy days, the castle seemed to float among the clouds. The townspeople whispered to each other how spooky the castle looked. When the sky grew really dark, they feared ghosts would descend from their mountain caves and kidnap their children, never to be seen again. But when the fog cleared and the sun shone again, they would laugh and call each other names, such as scaredy-cat or coward, for being so foolish.

While other royal families had a king, a queen, and an heir or heiress, the Kingdom de la Montagne had a king, a queen, and *two* crown princesses. Cordelia was the daughter born to the royal couple, and Emma was the daughter they had adopted. The princesses looked almost identical. Only their parents, their old Nanny, and the kitchen maid, Jessie, could tell them apart. Even their father—the king—was often wrong!

But that was not the only thing that made the de la Montagne royal family different from other royal families. Not by any means! King Franciscus and Queen Frederica had not made many changes in the way they lived in their castle from the way their ancestors had done. They still used carriages and horses most of the time, when there were much faster conveyances available such as trains,

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cars, and planes. The Royal Couple loved the graceful lifestyle of the days of the past and hoped that their daughters would do the same. But their subjects, who lived in small hamlets and towns surrounding the castle, did not all share their Royal Family's dislike of modern practices. These forward-thinking people were only too happy to use the latest in technological advancements, if they could afford them.

One Sunday Princess Cordelia woke up very early and watched the sun rise behind the old maple tree in front of the bedroom she shared with her sister, Emma. The birds' morning concert was almost drowned out by Emma's snoring. A flash of bright-orange flitted by the open window—a flock of orioles who were starting on their migratory flight south.

"Emma, are you awake?" Cordelia asked softly. No answer. "Emma, wake up," she called a little louder. Still no answer, but this time Emma murmured something and pulled the blanket over her head.

"Oh, no, don't go back to sleep, now, Emma," Cordelia shouted and jumped up. She plunked herself down on Emma's bed and squeezed her sister's nose until she gasped for air. "Good, you are awake. You slept enough, Emma, and you snored like a walrus. Get up, sleepyhead!"

"For goodness' sake, Cordelia, will you stop this racket and let me sleep some more?" Emma mumbled.

"Oh, come on, Grumpy, get up. I have been awake for hours already, and I need to talk to you about something."

"Later, Cordey. Leave me alone!" Emma said.

"No, not later. *Now*, Emma!"

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“Good grief, Cordelia, what’s so important that you have to bug me in the middle of the night?” Emma opened one eye first and then the other. Slowly, she lifted herself up on one elbow and yawned—a yawn as wide open as her walrus snore was loud! Cordelia grinned. She had won!

“So, where’s the fire?” Emma asked.

“Do you always have to be so dramatic? There is no fire, of course, but I want Nanny to retire. I mean—seriously—do we still need a nanny at our age? We are fourteen years old, the age you become an adult in other countries and cultures. We do not need Nanny to tuck us in at night...”

Emma flopped back down on her pillow. “Oh, goodness gracious me, Cordey, you woke me up just to tell me that we don’t need Nanny anymore?”

“Yes, and it is very important.”

“Why all of a sudden?”

“Because this week is Jessie’s birthday. She’ll be eighteen years old,” Cordelia said.

“Jessie, who?”

“Jessie, the kitchen maid. She was my friend when I worked here as a scullery maid, remember?”

“Oh, come on, Cordey, how could I ever forget that you, Crown Princess Cordelia de la Montagne, were a scullery maid in your own home, because you were tired of having maids serve you from morning ’til night. Oh, yeah, you also had Nanny to read you stories every night. And... let’s not forget the governess, and the tennis pro, and the riding instructor. Geez, Cordelia, you really had it tough!” Emma boxed her sister’s arm good-naturedly and grinned.

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Now I ask you, dear reader, would anyone ever think that a princess had to work as a maid in her own castle? But that's just what Cordelia had done. It all started when the Forest King's personal cloud had flown Princess Cordelia to the Midsummer's Eve Ball he gave for orphans and lonely children every year. It was at that ball, where the girls had met for the first time, and where Cordelia had noticed how much Emma resembled her. It was almost spooky... so she had suggested that they switch places and live each other's lives.

At the end of the ball, the cloud had flown the orphan girl Emma back to the castle to take the place of the crown princess, while Princess Cordelia returned to the orphanage to take Emma's place. She had lasted only one day in the role of an orphan, before she regretted the switch she had made with Emma. But when she tried to get back home, she had to face a big problem: Neither the guard, nor the footman, nor the moat master recognized her, as she now had short hair with grass stuck to it from having slept on the forest floor the night before. The plain, ugly clothes clearly identified her as a runaway girl from the orphanage. Instead of being restored to her rightful place as the Crown Princess of the Kingdom de la Montagne, she was offered a position as scullery maid in the castle. And even that job she got only because the kind Cook Andi took pity on the poor orphan girl! But enough of that, let's get back to what is happening.

Cordelia didn't smile when Emma teased her about the easy life she had lived as the pampered crown princess. She pushed Emma's hand off her arm rather roughly. "Stop

boxing me, Emma,” It is easy for you to mock me about my past, but it was not funny, then. And one more thing: I was not tired of being the crown princess, I was simply bored, bored, bored before I was invited to the ball and met you. I had nobody my own age to have fun with. And remember... you, too, were bored and became sick after pretending to be me for not very long. Or did you forget why I—who was the scullery maid, then—was sent to entertain you when you were the poor, downhearted Princess Cordelia?”

“Yeah, of course I remember. And just so you know it, I really was sick... but not in my body, just in my heart and soul. I wanted my old life back, even if I had to be an orphan. You know what, Cordey, I think we both learned that the grass isn’t greener on the other side, eh?”

Emma no longer grinned. Looking serious now, she continued: “Anyway, what about Jessie? What does she have to do with Nanny’s retirement?”

“Well... I just thought that, if Nanny were to retire, Jessie could become an upstairs maid, and on our fourteenth birthday, she could become our lady’s maid. It would be fun to have her around. She could be like a big sister to us,” Princess Cordelia said.

“Oh, now you want *another* sister? I’m not good enough anymore?” Princess Emma drew the blanket back over her head.

“Oh no, you won’t,” Cordelia said and pulled the blanket off again. “I wish you would stop saying such untrue things. Of course I want you to be my sister. It’s just that Nanny is really old now, and Jessie is more our age.”

“So you want to get rid of Nanny because she is old, and you don’t need her anymore? That will make her feel really loved.”

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“What a mean thing to say, Emma. I love Nanny. Let’s face it, she almost died so we could stay together, when Mother and Father could not decide which one of us was their daughter, have you forgotten?” Cordelia said.

“Of course not. Are you mad? Nanny is my favourite person.” When Emma saw her sister’s face, she quickly added: “after you and Mother and Father, of course.”

“Well, that is a relief; I started to wonder where I fitted into your life,” Cordelia said grinning.

“Your waist is small enough to fit between my thumb and forefinger,” Emma kidded. But then she looked serious. “When you think that if we hadn’t met at the ball, and if you hadn’t seen how much we looked alike, we might never have found out that we were actually related! Hmm... interesting, isn’t it, Sis? And it was Nanny who knew the secret and was willing to die to keep the promise she had made never to reveal who I really was. I don’t think Father and Mother would give up their lives for me. After all, I’m only their adopted daughter, while you are their biological one!” Emma yawned without bothering to cover her mouth. It was something she did quite often, especially when her eyes became suspiciously wet.

Cordelia decided to ignore Emma’s comparison of how their parents felt about them... at least for now. “So, you agree, then, that we talk to Father and Mother about Jessie replacing Nanny?” she asked.

“Go ahead, ask them, but don’t be upset if they say no!”

“Why would they say no? It makes perfect sense. And it would be such a nice birthday present for Jessie,” Cordelia said.

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“Whatever...” Emma pushed her blanket on the floor and jumped out of bed. “Anyway, there’s something I want to talk to them about too,” she said while yawning again, but now her eyes weren’t filling with tears.

“What did you yawn? I did not understand a thing. Sometimes you have absolutely no manners at all, Emma!” Cordelia shook her head.

“Oh, stop being a fusspot, Cordey, it’s so annoying. But I do think you’re right about us being too old to have a nanny, and we’re also much too old to—”

Before Emma could finish what she was about to say, a sudden puff of air blew the curtains inside and their room grew darker. Then a voice croaked: “Goodness me, what’s happened to this window? I’ll eat a broomstick if it hasn’t shrunk since the last time I was here.”

The girls were surprised to see a fat, snow-white cloud stuck halfway inside their room. His squashed belly made horrible rumbling noises. Emma ran to the window. “Oh, for a pot of gold, if it isn’t our old friend, Mister bad-tempered Royal Cloud,” she smirked.

Cordelia elbowed her hard. “You are rude,” she whispered, but Emma ignored the jab. The cloud had almost doubled in size since they had last seen him, three years ago.

“What are you doing here, Royal Cloud? Did you miss us?” Emma mocked. The cloud ignored her teasing, as he struggled—rather unsuccessfully, mind you—to free himself.

“You shouldn’t have eaten such a large breakfast,” Emma snickered, despite her sister’s warning.

“Don’t you make fun of me, you skinny stinkbug. It’s not the food I ate—little as it was—it’s the pollution in the

air that bloats me so," he explained. His cheeks ballooned and looked like apples. He was working hard to push himself into the girls' room.

"What brings you here, Royal Cloud?" Cordelia asked.

"The Forest King sent me. His majesty wants to see you both."

"Why?" Emma and Cordelia asked at the same time.

"How should I know?" the cloud snapped. "Now, don't just stand there gaping like fish. Get me out of this ghastly trap."

Cordelia thought the Royal Cloud was rather rude, but she felt sorry for him and grabbed his ears to pull him inside.

"Ouch! You're ripping my ears off, you silly nincompoop. Stop pulling, and start pushing me back out!" The cloud was turning pink. He had probably popped a blood vessel.

"Why should we push you when you're already halfway in?" Emma said and pulled as hard as she could, but the window frame just wouldn't let go of fatso cloud! With her arms akimbo, Emma stood back and looked at the sight. It was just too hilarious *not* to laugh.

"It's almost Midsummer Eve. Maybe we're being invited to the ball again." Cordelia said.

Emma stopped laughing. "That would be amazing. I could see my old friends from the orphanage again."

"Hey, stinkbugs," the cloud yelled, "remember me? I'm still stuck!"

"We are doing our best. It's not our fault that you are too fat," Emma said. The cloud ignored the insult.

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“There isn’t going to be a Midsummer Eve’s Ball,” the cloud huffed.

“No ball? Why on earth not? There’s always been a ball,” Emma said.

“That’s the problem with sassy know-it-alls like you. You use words like *always*, even when you haven’t gone back to the orphanage since you left there, three years ago.”

“All right, you win. It’s true that I haven’t gone back, but what does that have to do with the Forest King’s Midsummer Eve’s Ball not taking place?” Emma said.

“You will have to ask his Majesty. He doesn’t tell me his business, and I’m just fine with that. Now, stop your gabbing and free me before I suffocate or another cloud spots me in this embarrassing situation.”

Cordelia felt sorry for the cloud. “It’s no use, we will just hurt you more. You must be sore already from all that pulling,” she said.

“What a silly thing to say. Of course I’m sore! More reason to hurry up. Just push me out, but watch out for my ears, will you!” the cloud grumbled.

After some serious pushing, there was a pop, and the cloud burst back out the window. And what a mess he looked! Truly wretched. Both his sides were scraped, and one of his ears flopped down like the broken wing of a bird.

“Finally! It took you long enough. Now stop wasting more time and hop on; we mustn’t keep the Forest King waiting.” The cloud let out a long sigh while he whipped from side to side next to the window sill.

The princesses slipped robes over their nightdresses and were ready to go. Emma hopped on first,

but when Cordelia jumped, her robe got caught on the window clasp.

“Help! Emma, I am stuck,” she shouted.

“Oh, be quiet, your Royal Clumsiness,” the cloud ordered. “Or is it your Royal Orphaness? I heard one of you used to live in the orphanage until she was adopted by your king. It’s true, isn’t it?”

“Sure is,” Emma said. “But it isn’t any of your business, and no reason for name-calling,” she added.

“How is anyone supposed to know which one of you is the real princess if both of you look exactly the same?” The cloud sighed again.

“We are both real princesses, and it would be good of you to remember that.” Princess Cordelia’s face had changed colour to a bright red, and her eyes sparked darts at the cloud.

“Oh such drama... and all that stuffiness... who needs it?” The cloud shook his head which made his huge body vibrate... enough for Emma to almost topple over the edge and cry out for dear life.

“Stop that racket and just get on, will you!” This time it was the cloud who shouted while he glided closer to the window sill until Emma could unhitch her sister’s robe, so she could jump on.

“Phew, that was a close call,” Cordelia said when they were finally settled in the fluffy cloud-belly. “Excuse me, please,” she said while tugging the cloud’s ear ever so gently: “I’d like to clarify something for you. It is true that my sister, Emma, lived in the orphanage. Her parents drowned and her grandmother died not too long afterward. We met at the Forest King’s Midsummer Eve’s Ball, to which we were invited because we both felt very

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unhappy. I missed having a brother or sister and felt very lonely, and Emma missed her family. When I saw how much Emma looked like me, I suggested that we swap places. The Forest King and his daughter, Fairy Hella, helped us change our hair, the only thing that was truly different. At the end of the ball I went to live in the orphanage, and Emma returned to the castle to take my place.”

At that point Emma interrupted: “Yeah, that’s exactly how it happened, only there was a glitch in the switch, so to say.”

“Would you please let me finish?” Princess Cordelia stopped Emma from taking over and continued: “I hated the orphanage, especially the matron, and left on the second day to return to the castle. Unfortunately for me, or, on second thought, maybe fortunately, nobody recognized me. I looked like a ragamuffin in my ugly orphan-clothes. I no longer had long, curly hair, but a short bob with grass stuck to it after sleeping a night on the forest floor. Imagine how desperate I felt when I could not get back into my rightful place. I ended up working as a maid in the castle while Emma pretended to be me.”

The cloud had listened to Cordelia’s story without interruption, but when the princess stopped talking, he scorned: “And you expect me to believe such an outrageous tale? No princess would ever choose to give up beautiful clothes and servants so she could live in an orphanage,” he huffed. “You may think I’m old, but I wasn’t born yesterday, you know!” And with that said, he took off. They flew over the moat and the forest—just skimming the treetops by no more than the breadth of a hand.

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Oh, you should have seen Emma's face, dear reader. It was red... red like a ripe tomato. Her eyes darted off sparks that would have started a forest fire had she not sat inside the cloud's belly, way up in the sky.

"You can believe what you wish, you stubborn goat, but let me tell you one thing: my sister would never lie... well, at least not unless it was a question of life and death," she screamed into the cloud's ear. "And the reason why we both look alike is easy to explain..." she continued, but the cloud no longer listened, he was too busy balancing himself with two travelers in his belly who wouldn't sit still.

Moments later, when they flew over a gushing stream that emptied into a lake between steep, cave-like crags in the mountains, Emma shouted: "Cordey, look down to your left. Isn't that our swimming hole?" Emma bent over the cloud's rim, in great danger of falling to her death. Before Cordelia had a chance to look at what Emma was so excited about, she saw something swoop down from a tall tree and disappear in the lake below.

"Did you see that, Emma? Did you see that bizarre *thing*?" she asked.

"No, what was it? I didn't see anything," Emma said.

"I don't know what it was. I did not see it very well, it happened too quickly. It was very peculiar—ghost-like... No, bird-like... No.... Oh, forget it, I cannot describe it. It just looked really weird. But I can tell you one thing for sure: I have never seen anything like it before." Cordelia seemed to be out of breath when she finished.

"Well, was it an object, or was it a living thing?" Emma asked.

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"I just do not know, Emma, I have no idea," Cordelia shrugged.

"Could it have been a shadow?" Emma asked.

"Yes, maybe," Cordelia nodded and became quiet. *How am I going to explain that it was certainly not a shadow I saw? She will just accuse me of making it up, and I am not even sure if the thing was dead or alive.* There was no time for her to think further, as the cloud slowed down. He almost hovered now, which gave Cordelia a chance to look into the opening of a cave. *Something or someone is looking at me. This is eerie.* She felt a shiver going down her spine.

"Prepare for landing," the Royal Cloud said, interrupting Cordelia's thoughts. A moment later, he swooped downward and landed so fast that the girls tumbled over each other when the flight came to a halt.

"Have you lost your mind? I nearly fell out. I could have broken my neck and died," Emma yelled, pinching the cloud's ear while struggling to get her footing.

"Ouch, you wicked weasel!" the cloud cried. "Get off me, you stinkbugs, before I teach you a lesson you won't ever forget!" The cloud looked pink all over. He had possibly burst another blood vessel during his angry outburst.

"With pleasure, Mr. Grouch!" Emma said and jumped into the tall grass, but not before she gave the cloud's ear a second pinch.

"You said the Forest King wanted to see us, but where is he?" Cordelia asked.

"Patience, patience, weasel-face! His majesty is never late," the cloud hissed.

## CHAPTER II

### A Visit with an Old Friend

**T** rue enough, out of nowhere, the Forest King appeared at the edge of the meadow. He waved, and the girls ran to greet their friend. He wasn't wearing his green, velvet robe, as he had the last time they had seen him at the Midsummer Eve's Ball. Now he was dressed like any other country squire, but he looked far more royal.

"Welcome back to the Kingdom of the Forest, dear Princesses," the Forest King greeted them. My, how you have grown! You are almost young ladies now. How was your flight?"

"Considering that the cloud isn't young anymore—" Princess Cordelia started.

"That cloud is by far too fat," Emma interrupted, loudly enough for the Royal Cloud to hear.

"It was a wonderful flight," Princess Cordelia said quickly. There was no need to hurt anybody's feelings, not even the cantankerous cloud's.

"In that case, let us have a little refreshment. There is much to talk about, and we had better do it quickly so you can get back home before anyone misses you." The Forest King took each girl's arm and led them to a table and chairs that had been carved from a tree trunk. He poured lemonade into tumblers and offered them scrumptious-looking scones.

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----- End of sample -----

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