

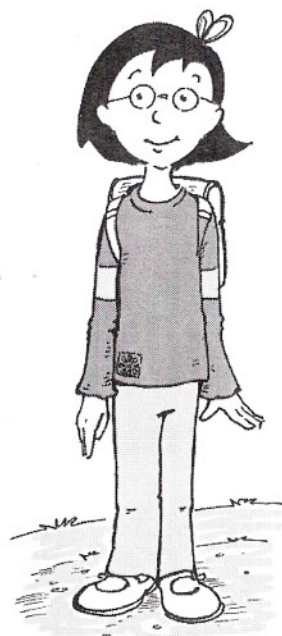
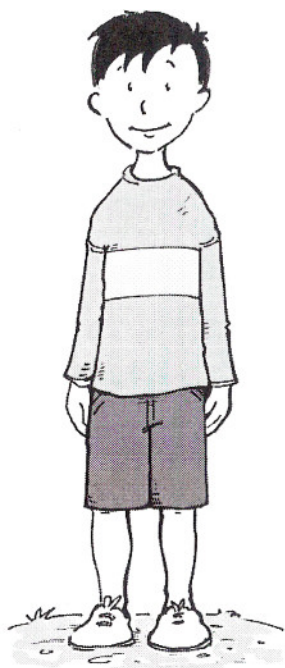
The Adventures of Luc and Lucie

Christmas Eve

Episode 5

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Christmas Eve

They were all putting the finishing touches to the Christmas tree. Dad had just arranged the lights and was about to press the switch. Usually something went wrong but this year the little white lights came on perfectly, casting a reflection onto all the decorations that Luc and Lucie had been hanging on the tree. There were old decorations belonging originally to their grandparents and parents when they were children: a clown now dressed in faded clothes, a snowman holding a broom, a camel laden with packages and a sheep with frayed wool. There were also the new ones Luc and Lucie had bought in the big department store in Paris: glittering golden balls, soft silver ones patterned with colours and long twisted glass ones in the shape of icicles.



“Well that’s a relief,” said Mum. “I’ll go and sort out tonight’s meal now. It’s already eight thirty. Here are the shoes Luc and Lucie. Now put them carefully under the tree.”

“And I’ll see if I can find that star which should go on the top,” said Dad.

No sooner had the parents gone than a voice said “Hi Luc, Hi Lucie.”

They looked up to see the parrot perched on the top of the Christmas tree.

“Or should I say Happy Christmas?”

“No,” said Lucie “not till tomorrow”.

“I know all about that” said the parrot puffing up his feathers. ...

“All right,” interrupted Luc. “ You certainly know all about our family. Midnight Mass is really special for us this year because the family with the newest baby is always invited to represent Joseph and Mary and Jesus at the crib at the front of the church. So it’s going to be Uncle Jean, Auntie Lucile and Christophe - but I expect you knew that, too!”

The parrot said nothing.

Dad came back . “Here’s the star,” he said and fixed it on the top of the tree.

“Ow,” squawked the parrot, as one of the corners poked into his leg.

The children managed to suppress their giggles as Mum called “Luc and Lucie go off to your rooms and lie down for a couple of hours. We’ll all be up very late tonight. Make sure you don’t come back into the sitting room until after we get home from Church.”

Although they weren't really tired, they thought they'd better do as she said.



“See you later,” said the parrot, limping along the mantelpiece.

About eleven o'clock Grandad Vernet came round. As the village confectioner, he always made the Christmas log for them. Because there were so many people for dinner this year, it was better than ever. It was huge, and simply covered in cream, very delicately swirled and with a sprig of holly with bright red berries in the centre.

In the dining room the table looked spectacular. There were oysters, pâté and salmon. There were cold meats such as chicken, ham and beef, bowls of salads, a huge cheese platter and in the centre of the mantelpiece, in the place of honour, the Christmas log. At both ends of the table candles flickered and, as a special treat for Christmas, Dad had made a log fire which glinted on the bottles of wine and champagne on the side table.

At eleven thirty, led by, Dad with a torch, they all walked through the darkness to the church.

It was very frosty and their breath hung in the air in the torchlight.



Seated at the front of the church by the crib were Uncle Jean, Auntie Lucile and Christophe with a real donkey on one side and a sheep on the other. This was another village tradition. Dad had even fixed spotlights to shine on the faces of the carved angels on the nearby pillars. It made midnight mass very exciting and real.

The church was packed and as midnight struck the service began. Everyone joined in some carols: *Minuit Chrétiens*, *C'est L'heure solennelle* and *Il est né le divin enfant*, and, during the singing, incense crept round the church, the donkey brayed and the sheep bleated a little. The baby mumbled and cooed but didn't cry.

Then it was over. They were back at home and the celebrations began.

First the champagne. Dad started to pour some into all the glasses lined up on the table and as he was moving along the line the parrot, having recovered

his good humour, swooped down and drank the whole of the first glass. When Dad had finished pouring, he looked back, puzzled, at the empty glass. "I'm sure I filled that," he muttered to himself.

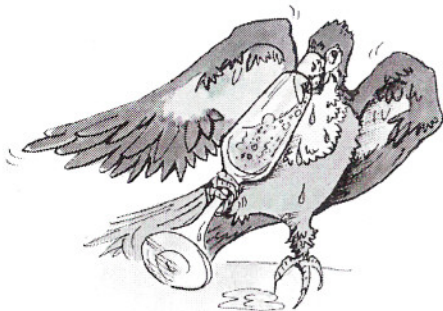
Luc and Lucie tried to hide their grins. "Could we have some please?" they asked.

"Just a little," said Mum, "as it's Christmas."

Then they started on the food. Luc's favourite food was pâté and Lucie's salmon and of course they both loved the creamy, chocolatey Christmas log.



After the meal it was time for the opening of the presents. Luc and Lucie went into the sitting room with fingers crossed. In January they were going on a ski-ing



trip with the school to the Alps. They had been twice already and had always hired skis but they were beginning to take it all seriously and their dream was to have skis of their own. They could see under the tree two long parcels wrapped in Christmas paper.

They looked at each other wistfully but they didn't dare hope they were skis as they knew how expensive they were.



“All right, you can open them now” laughed Dad at last.

The children excitedly tore the paper off and there they were - new, clean, shiny skis and as an extra surprise they each had ski-boots.

They flung their arms round their parents in real delight.

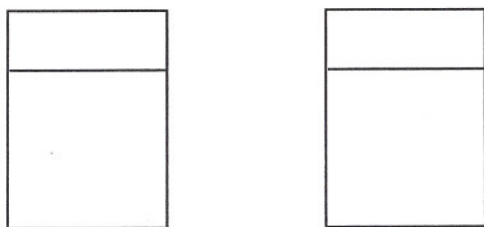
“Look what else you've got,” said Mother and when they opened the presents from Grandad and Granny and their aunts and cousins they found bright blue and red ski anoraks, ski trousers and some hand-knitted woolly pullovers, hats and gloves. Everyone in the family had contributed and they had absolutely

everything they needed.

They produced their presents for Mum and Dad: some of her favourite perfume for Mum and a Jazz CD for Dad. They had made some chocolate truffles for Grandad. He was delighted that they were carrying on the tradition and Granny was equally pleased with the little lemon tree they had grown from a pip for her and was as anxious as they were to see whether it would really produce lemons. All the other relatives then came in and there was a flurry of paper and shrieks of delight as all their presents were opened. Josephine and Picasso were not left out. Soon Picasso was driving them all mad with his new squeaky toy bone while Josephine was stretched out contentedly by the fire wearing her new green collar, on which her name was picked out in sparkling gems.

It was now approaching two thirty: Grandad and Granny decided it was time for them to go and then their Mum decided it was time for Luc and Lucie to go to bed. They went upstairs carrying all their presents with them and settled down to look at them again.

“ I wonder what make the skis are,” wondered Luc. As he turned them over he found a tiny cardboard square stuck to the back of each pair.



“ Oh goodness,” said Lucie quietly “I just can’t think what it all means.”

“Keep on trying.” The children looked round and saw Pirate. He was perched on the door, having some difficulty in balancing - perhaps due to the champagne .”Can you open the window for me?”

Luc released the catch and the window swung open. It was so still outside. They could see lights through the trees in the neighbours’ houses and hear laughter and voices calling “Happy Christmas” as people made their way home to bed.

“Oh, it’s so cold,” sighed Lucie “I do wish it would snow.”

“As it’s Christmas your every wish is my command,” responded the parrot and, as they looked out into the night, the first snowflakes of the winter began to fall.

