

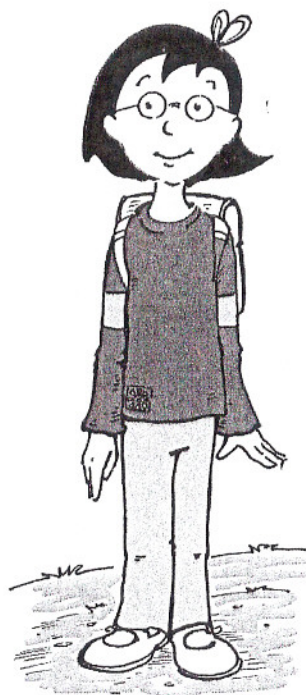
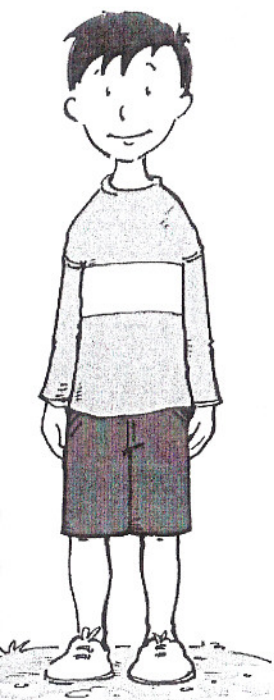
# The adventures of Luc and Lucie

## Charmante la Forêt

### Episode 7

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## Charmante La Forêt

Saturday 1st May and it was raining. Luc and Lucie looked gloomily out of the window at the drops falling from the branches of the trees outside. Even Picasso, the dog, had curled up in his basket in despair.

A gusty wind suddenly bent the trees and the branches tapped against the windows. Mum, busy working on the computer, looked up at the noise, stopped and got up to make some coffee. She saw the children gazing out of the window mournfully.

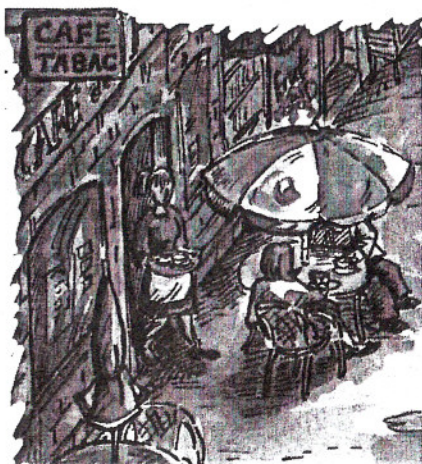
"Children, I know it's not a nice day but I've got to finish these letters. Instead of looking so miserable, could you put on your anoraks and go to the baker's for me. We need a baguette, a pain rustique and, as we're going to the concert in the church tonight, you could choose a fruit tart and then we can invite Eloise and her parents back here afterwards." The children reluctantly put



on their anoraks and took the money and the basket. It wasn't the most thrilling of weekend activities. Picasso perked up at the sign of a walk. Josephine, the cat, merely opened an eye and went back to sleep.

The ground was soggy underfoot as they walked down the lane. Picasso kept dashing off into the wet grass and then coming back and shaking himself over them all the way to the square in the centre of the village.

Round the square were all the buildings that mattered: the town hall (mairie), the church, their school and of course the shops: a baker's/confectioner's, a chemist's, a butcher's and a small supermarket where you could buy just about everything else. Their mother often said how lucky they were still to have so many shops when some villages had none. There was also the Café/Bar de la Place, outside of which, throughout the summer, the old men sat and watched their friends playing boules on the sand under the plane trees in the middle of the square. Nobody,



of course, was sitting out today - in fact there was no sign of anyone, anywhere.

Inside the baker's there were signs of life. Monsieur Henri Dubois was behind the counter serving the butcher's wife. He had taken over the business from their grandfather who had just retired.

"Hello Luc and Lucie," he boomed "What can I do for you?"

"A pain rustique, a baguette and then mum said we could choose a fruit tart," said Luc without enthusiasm.



"Come on, cheer up," replied Monsieur Dubois.



"I know it's a dreadful day but just look at these beautiful tarts I've got here. Would you like lemon or apple or cherry....?"

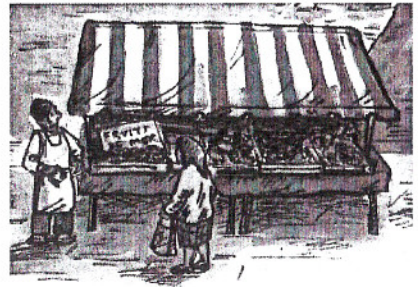


The apple tart looked absolutely delicious, each tiny slice of apple overlapping the one next to it making a wonderful circular pattern, dusted with sugar and then browned very gently.

"Apple," they both said together.

"That's better," said M. Dubois, packing it carefully into a cardboard box. "Look, I made rather too many madeleines today so you can each have one of those as a treat."

The children cheered up and noticed, as they came out of the shop, that the rain had stopped and the sun was shining again. The stall holders were shaking the rain off the brightly coloured awnings. The flowerseller was re-arranging the little plantpots and bunches of lilies of the valley.



"It must be the 1st of May," said Luc looking at them.

"Yes," said Lucie "let's buy some for Mum and Dad." So they did.

"I think we'd better eat the madeleines now," said Lucie. "Mum won't like us eating them just before lunch."

They perched on the bollards and watched the old men of the village emerge from the bar and start to play boules in the square. They took the madeleines out of the bag and bit into them. Lucie mumbled with her mouth full, "There's something in mine."



"In mine too," said Luc.

They each took out of their mouth a scrap of paper.

"There's some writing on mine," said Lucie. "It says in the stony smile."

"and mine says there's a clue," added Luc.

"Here we go again," said Lucie "and it doesn't seem to matter which one you put first. It doesn't make any sense either way."

The whole afternoon the children spent upstairs in Luc's bedroom examining the writing on the two scraps of paper to see if they could find some sort of connection with the five cardboard

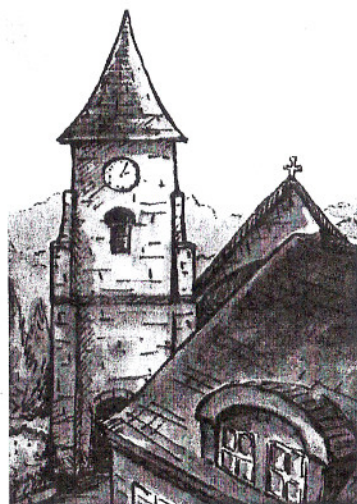
squares they already had. Mother was very relieved that they had found something to do. None of the designs on the squares seemed to have any link with a smile, let alone a stony one, whichever way round they turned them.

Needless to say there was no sign of the parrot, so they couldn't ask his advice.

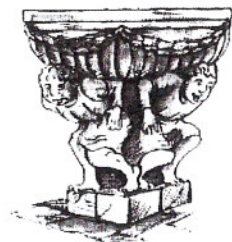
They weren't looking forward to the evening much either. A local choir was performing in the church and, as their parents knew the conductor, Eloise's father, they all had to go.

After supper, for the second time that day they put on their anoraks and set off down the lane. This time both Picasso and Josephine looked quite happy to be left at home both curled up asleep after their supper.

It was a very old church - Romanesque their father said. As they went through the porch and down the central aisle it felt cool and damp. They settled down



in the second row of chairs and their eyes began to wander around. The evening sun, low in the sky, shone through the brilliant stained glass of the windows, dappling the flagstones. In front of them was a wooden pulpit carved with all kinds of fruit and flowers and, opposite, the font where last Christmas, their little cousin had been christened. It was a strange sculpture - the basin full of water supported by two stone figures dressed in the clothes of medieval workmen. Luc had never noticed them much



before but as he was waiting for the concert to begin he looked at them closely - one was crying and one was smiling.

"Look Lucie," he whispered, "Do you think....?"

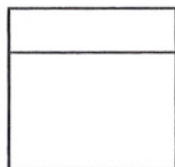
"That the smiling figure could have anything to do with...."

"Shhh," said their Mother "the concert's about to start."

It seemed like the longest concert they'd ever been to, even though it only lasted an hour. They couldn't wait for it to be

over but the choir was very popular and sang encore after encore. At last they took their final bows and filed out. The audience began to break up and leave the church. Luc and Lucie got away from their parents who were now deeply involved in conversation with the conductor and made for the font. Lucie's hands were smaller so she carefully inserted her fingers into the mouth of the smiling figure and they touched a square piece of card.

"Got it!" she said. She took it out and they looked at it.



"Yet another straight line," said Luc. "I wonder if there's a letter on the other side. I can't wait to find out."

"We've found another one," whispered Lucie to Eloise as she came over to talk to them. We must find somewhere warm when we go home to see if there's a letter on the back."

Barely able to conceal their excitement, they went over to join their parents, not noticing the single green feather which spiralled silently from somewhere above, nor the pair of evil pink eyes, peering round the base of the font, following their every move.