

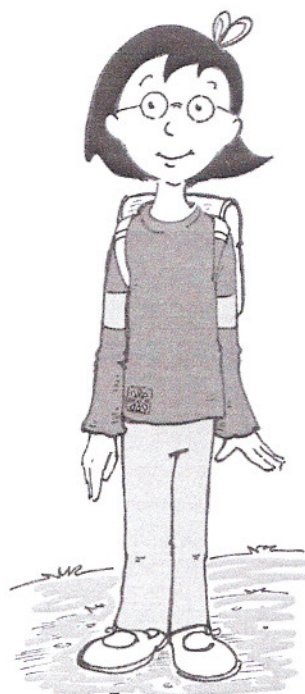
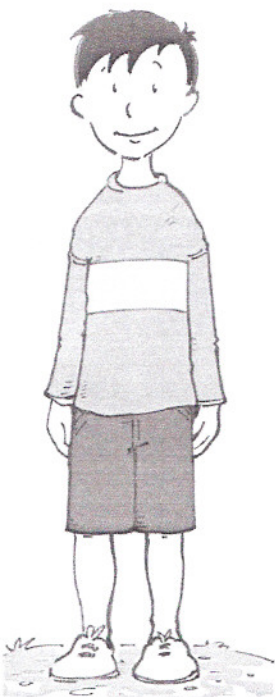
# The adventures of Luc and Lucie

## Tunisia

### Episode 13

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## TUNISIA

"Look there's the mosque."

"In the middle of the Medina, the old city."

Luc and Lucie peered excitedly out of the window as the plane circled again and again, in a perfect blue sky, above Tunis, waiting to land.

It had all been a frantic rush: end of term, Christmas celebrations at Charmante la Forêt as usual, then packing and today, December 27th almost in Tunisia.

"It'll be great to see Granny and Grandad again. Will we see our cousins too?"

"I hope so," said Dad "but they live in Sousse not in Tunis."

"Whereabouts will *we* be staying?" Luc asked, still looking out of the window "Whereabouts is Montfleury?" Grandad worked in the hospital and their flat was nearby.



"Well," said dad pointing to an area with trees. "I think it might be there. That building might be the hospital and that might be the University."

"You two were last here when you were three years old," said Mum. "Can you remember anything at all?"

Luc shut his eyes. "I can remember noise and bright colours," he said.

"I can remember smells - really strong and spicy," added Lucie.

Pirate was perched on the drinks trolley. He had decided that was a much better option than being with the luggage in the hold, particularly as there was a wide variety of nuts available - he had already pecked open a number of peanuts much to the surprise of the stewardesses.



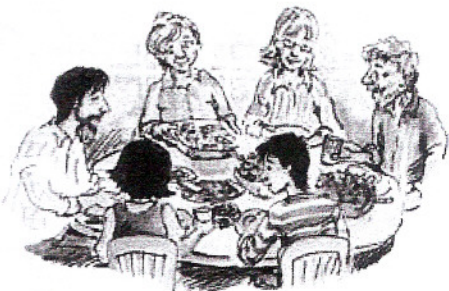
Lucie looked up at him with some apprehension. "I wonder what will happen during the next few days," she thought. "Will we manage to rescue Sélène?"

Pirate had been busy since October and had found out that Sélène was definitely somewhere in the Tunis area and as soon as they arrived he planned to fly off to get all the details.

As the plane turned for its final descent, the children could see the rows of columns and ruined buildings spread over the hillside where the once great ancient city of Carthage had dominated the Mediterranean before Tunis was even thought of.

It was no time at all before they had landed, been through customs and been whisked away in grandad's car along the broad highway to Tunis. The grandparents' flat was in a big, old building which looked unexpectedly, very French.

Granny was waiting with a meal prepared for them. There were salads, fish, couscous and pomegranates and pears. They





all talked non-stop. When granddad asked "What exciting things have you been up to Luc and Lucie?" they longed to tell him about the quest and what they hoped to do in Tunis but of course instead they described their visit to London at half-term and how they had tried out their English. They didn't mention that Pirate had come too and had flown right up to the top of Nelson's column and perched on his head. He said he'd had a great view from up there, but they'd also had a great view from the London Eye. Finally, they told Granny and Grandad all about the Tower of London and Westminster Abbey and St. Paul's Cathedral. When they were in the middle of describing the changing of the Guard at Buckingham Palace, the telephone rang. Grandad answered it. He said, sounding surprised, "Yes they've just arrived. Luc and Lucie it's for you."

"It's Mohammed," he said.

"What does he want?" asked Luc. Lucie dashed to the phone.

"He has been in Tunis for 5 days already and can't wait to meet us. You know Granny he has been coming to Tunis every year so he knows the city very well."

"We'll be looking round the Medina tomorrow," replied granny.

"We could meet him there."

So it was arranged that they would all meet by the goldsmith's shop near the Zitouna Mosque at eleven o'clock the following day. Today seemed to be very long and after the huge meal Luc and Lucie began to feel sleepy and went to bed.

They were just settling down when Pirate appeared.

"It's all very complicated here," he complained. "My contact doesn't want to meet you directly. He says we have to go to the Medina. Near the mosque there are first some goldsmiths' shops and then some shops selling perfume. One of these will have a small purple elephant outside with its howdah full of perfume bottles. You have to say 'Hannibal' to the shopkeeper and he will give you more instructions."

"That's great, " said Lucie, "we've just arranged to meet Mohammed by the goldsmith's shop near the Mosque tomorrow." Luc had a sudden feeling of foreboding. "Who is this shopkeeper? Is he on our side?"

"Well," replied Pirate tetchily "I have it on good authority that he can be trusted but as I said, things are difficult to negotiate here. I don't know about you but I'm exhausted," With that he perched on the curtain rail and fell sound asleep. Luc and Lucie turned over in their beds and followed his example.

At half past ten the following morning, they were all entering the Medina, the oldest part of the city and a maze of narrow streets and alleys - a huge market really.

"Now," said mum "if we get separated shall we agree to meet in front of the Zitouna mosque?"

"A good idea," said granny "and to make sure everyone knows where we are grandad's made some photocopies of a map of the Medina. But I'm sure no-one will get lost." Then they plunged immediately into a riot of noise and colour and smells.

"Lucie, this is where they must have brought us when we were three," said Luc as they headed down the narrow street lined with shops and stalls. Goods were spilling out in front of them: shot silk - blue, green, red and purple; patterned rolls of heavy cotton in earth colours, light cotton in vivid violet and piles of pots,

recklessly squandered, rugs and carpets and wall hangings, beads and bracelets, antique tables and chairs, stacks of books, unfamiliar reverberating music, the sweet acrid smell of incense, and the pungent smell of leather. It was overwhelming. They just didn't know where to look.

Mum gazed enviously at an octagonal blue lamp. "That would look great in our hall," she said.

"Let's just wait until we've seen some more. We don't want to buy the first thing we see," said Dad laughing.

Lucie was fascinated by some strange wooden game played on a board with figures of carved soldiers and Luc was fingering a beautiful green ceramic fish. There were temptations all around and it was difficult to tear themselves away to meet Mohammed, but, by eleven o'clock, they saw the Mosque in front of them and there he was outside the goldsmith's shop. They rushed to greet him and to introduce him to their family.

Mum's eyes were already wandering towards the finely decorated filigree work ear-rings and rings in the shop window.



"That's my family's shop," said Mohammed. "My great grandparents used to live in the same building with their children until 1956 when Tunisia became independent. They moved then to Sidi Bou Said on the coast. My great grandmother is still alive, and she lives there with my grandparents. That's where I'm staying. My uncle runs the shop now with my grandfather. Come and meet them.

"Oh Hugo look at that beautiful jewellery."

"Come on Monique," said Dad "it's your birthday soon and I've been wondering what to buy you so let's see if there's something you'd like."

Inside the shop Mohammed introduced them to his family. Granny and Grandad followed them.

"Are you children coming to?"  
Granny asked.

"In a minute," said Lucie "I'd like to go over to look at that perfume shop - the one with the small



purple elephant outside." Luc followed her as she went over to the elephant's howdah and picked up one of the beautifully twisted glass bottles containing purple liquid. She took the stopper out and smelt a heavy musky scent. A man emerged from inside the shop.

"Do you want to buy that?"

"Not this one," said Lucie "something lighter."

"Perhaps this?" suggested the man, selecting a bottle containing a pale green transparent liquid. It smelt of jasmine and magnolia and Lucie loved it. It wasn't expensive so she said "Yes I'd love that one - Hannibal."

"What did you say?" said the man, startled.

"I said I'd love it - Hannibal," repeated Lucie.

"I didn't think you'd be so young," the man muttered then "Give it to me and I'll wrap it up."

He came back with a brown paper bag.

"I've put your bill in the bag," he said and disappeared out of sight into the shop. Lucie looked into the bag and drew out a neatly folded piece of paper. She unfolded it and read aloud.

*TGM to Carthage Salammbo. Downhill second left.*

*55 rue Hannibal,*

*January 4th Guards away but guard dog.*

*Kreios's boat waiting below.*

*Contact when Sélène is ready for embarkation on 0456 379584*

"What are you looking at?" asked Mohammed, joining them.

"Well," said Luc showing him the note. "It's a long story. Do you remember the parrot, the quest and the puzzle at the summer camp and again when we met you in Paris? Now we have to help a girl, Sélène, to escape from captivity. It looks as though we have to try on January 4th but I don't understand TGM."

"It's the Tunis-Colette-la Mars railway which runs from Tunis to the coast. I came in on it this morning."

"How can we phone?" said Lucie "we haven't got a mobile."

"I have one," said Mohammed. "Let me help you."

"That would be great," said Luc "but it's apparently going to be quite dangerous."

"So you think I can't handle it...."

"No, no," said Lucie "but you have to know what you're getting into."

Granny appeared behind them. "Have you bought something?" she asked.

"Yes," said Lucie hastily putting away the note. "Smell."

"Lovely," said granny. "Come and see what your mother's got."

It was a beautiful oval pendant of turquoise set in gold.

"From dad for my birthday," said mum. "Mohammed's uncle and



grandfather were so nice and there were so many beautiful things to choose from."

The Zitouna Mosque was just round the corner and they stood on the viewing platform and looked at the beautiful colonnade and tall graceful tower, then they wandered round the Medina again. Stalls were selling all sorts of little cakes and hot unfamiliar food. They wandered past stalls where fruit and vegetables were heaped up - figs, dates, melons, limes, peaches and pomegranates.



"They seem to have this fruit almost all year now," said granny. "I'm glad they're clearing up the rubbish - I thought I saw a rat a minute ago."

"Oh no," said Lucie, startled.

"Don't worry Lucie I shouldn't have said anything. I was probably imagining it anyway."

"All this food is making me hungry," said granddad, and looking at his watch, "it's after two o'clock."

In a small dark café they ate mechoum with mint tea and had wonderfully sweet and sticky cakes. They wandered round to the workshop next door, and watched the craftsmen there producing delicately patterned, brightly coloured tiles, and then, exhausted, they turned back home. Mohammed popped into his grandfather's shop to ask if he could go back to the flat with Luc and Lucie.

"My uncle will call for me in his car and grandpa said you must all come out and see us in Sidi Bou Said while you're here," he said.

In the flat Pirate was waiting for them. They showed him the note and then they explained to Mohammed all about the result of the puzzle, showed him the key and told him about what had happened in Madagascar.

Holidays always seem to stretch ahead endlessly at first and that's how it was for Luc and Lucie but suddenly they were half way through their ten days in Tunis. They'd been to Carthage and looked at the amazing Antonine Baths - "Imagine having all those different kinds of baths almost two thousand years ago," Luc had said "and with sea views too!"

They'd visited the Bardo Museum and seen all the intricate Roman mosaics. They'd been to Sousse to stay two nights with Uncle Daniel and Auntie Sophie and their three cousins, and seen the Roman theatre at Dougga. They had had a camel ride and suddenly there were only two days left. Mohammed had telephoned. His grandfather had, as he had promised, invited the whole family out to their house in Sidi Bou Said and the visit had been arranged for January 4th. They were to come for lunch so that day found them all on the TGM heading in that direction. As the train went through Carthage Salamambo Luc and Lucie looked out of the window but all they could see were some hotels and houses and rough grass as the hillside sloped down to the sea. It was very windy and clouds were scudding across the sky.



At the station Mohammed was waiting for them and led them towards the crowded main street.

Sidi Bou Said was breathtaking: a village curving steeply up the cliff. All the houses were dazzling white and every single one had turquoise blue doors and shutters and windows with grills.

After a minute or two he stopped at a huge blue door and rang the bell. His grandfather came to greet them and they walked from the noise of the street into the silence of a courtyard with a tiny tinkling fountain in the centre.

"Good heavens," they heard their father say. "This must be one of the original courtyard houses - how beautiful." First they drank some delicious fruit juices and then followed Mohammed's granddad into a large room with walls covered in exquisite blue and white decorated tiles. A table was laid with salads and



couscous dishes and tagines - one of lamb and prunes and the other of chicken, lemon and olives. Luc and Lucie had grown to love

Tunisian food.

"I'll try to make some of these when we're back in France," said Mum "but we shan't be eating them in such beautiful surroundings."

After the meal Mohammed asked his grandfather if he and Luc and Lucie could go for a walk to the top of the village.

"Afterwards I'll take them down to the Marina to look at the boats so we might be some time."

"Take good care of your friends. It gets dark soon at this time of year so you might be seeing the boats in the dark. I know you know your way around."

They did climb up to the top of the village quickly where they had a magnificent view of the coast.

"It will be dark soon," said Lucie "we ought to be going to rescue Sélène. They ran down quickly to the station again and picked up the TGM.

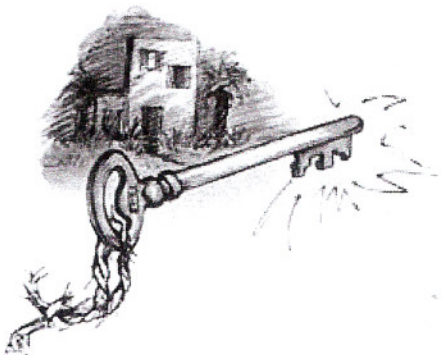
At Carthage Salamambo, Pirate was waiting. Luc opened the slip of paper and read again "*downhill second left, 55 rue Hannibal.*" They followed the instructions and there it was - rue Hannibal. At first glance it didn't look very promising: just hotels and shops. Then they saw number 55, a derelict looking house set back in an overgrown patch of grass. There was a light in an upstairs window.

"Now what?" said Luc. "How are we going to get in?"

"Have you got the key?" asked Pirate. Luc nodded.

"Then try it."

The golden key glinted in the last rays of the sun and turned easily in the lock. Somewhere a dog barked.



"Don't worry," said Pirate I'm good with dogs. He began to whistle a high pitched note and the dog, which had come

bounding towards them, suddenly stopped and lay down. In a minute or two he was sound asleep.

They climbed the stairs to the room where they could see light under the door. They tried the handle - locked.

"Try the key again," said the parrot.

Once more it turned easily and the door opened to reveal a frightened girl sitting in a chair, her hands tied.

"Don't be frightened," said Luc untying her hands. "Do you recognise us? We're Luc and Lucie and we've come to get you out of here."

Sélène looked at them.

"Yes of course I remember you from Madagascar," she said.

"I've hoped against hope that you hadn't forgotten me."

"There's a boat waiting for you. We have to contact them now."

Mohammed passed Lucie his mobile and after a short

conversation she said "They'll flash a torch as a signal. We just have to walk down the hill to the sea."

"Come on," said Luc. "We haven't a minute to lose."

The sun had set and the moon was just emerging from behind the clouds. The wind had strengthened and was now howling through the trees. Lucie turned on the torch and in its light Sélène still looked nervous and frightened.

"Not far now," said Lucie though she had no idea how far it was.

"This way," called Mohammed and they picked their way carefully through broken masonry.

"The Romans defeated the Cathaginians here," thought Luc and began to feel unnerved.

"There's somebody signalling from a boat," shouted Mohammed.

"I'll just check that it's the right boat and that everything's





"So-o-o-o-o-o-o here you all are....." a huge figure towered above them outlined in the moonlight. "Don't think you can get away so easily." Two figures joined him from the shadows and grabbed hold of Sélène.

Luc, Lucie and Mohammed found themselves dazzled by the blinding light of a halogen torch.

"It is these children," exclaimed the figure in front of them. "Now just you listen to me. Watch my torch and he swung it in a huge circle showing hundreds of gravestones Do you know where we are?" The children said nothing.

"We're at Tophet. Do you know what happened here?"  
Silence again.

"Well the Carthaginians used to sacrifice children to their gods. Each of these stones represents a child killed in ritual slaughter." The torch stopped on a stone revealing a small, pathetic figure carved into it. Luc's imagination was working overtime. He could see a knife plunged to strike then screams and blood and the wailing of parents.

"Now we wouldn't want to repeat the past would we?  
So KEEP OUT OF THINGS WHICH DON'T CONCERN YOU."  
With that he grabbed Lucie's torch and set off into the  
darkness with Sélène whose cries and protests gradually  
grew fainter and fainter and then stopped altogether.

The children couldn't stop shaking. Lucie was desperately  
biting her lip. She didn't want to cry in front of the boys.  
They clung together and wondered what to do next. Had  
the men really gone? Would somebody come back for them?  
Suddenly there was a swish of wings and they heard Pirate  
squawking "Where are you? What's happened?"

"We're here," shouted Lucie. At that moment the moon  
reappeared and Pirate saw the frightened children crouching  
against a rock.

"It's no good," said Luc, "the men have come and taken her."

"The boat was all ready," said Pirate "but you look terrible.  
Did they hurt you?"

"Well, not exactly but they did threaten us - this is the place where children were slaughtered."

Pirate was appalled. "I shouldn't have got you involved - it's all far too dangerous. Let's get out of here, back to the station and into the light again."

What a relief it was to be back in the normal world - it was, after all, only seven o'clock and people were still coming home from work. There was a little stall selling sweet tea on the station and Mohammed suggested they bought some. They began to feel better.

"Are you alright to go home?" asked Pirate.

"Yes, fine," they all said.

"Well then I'll see if I can find out what's happened to Sélène."

"The train sped back to Sidi Bou Said and the children sat uneasily looking round at the other passengers - an old lady with her son, a business man on his mobile, a mother and her baby - so there was nothing to be afraid of.

"It was like Madagascar," said Luc. "I just can't believe it's all happening. Are we imagining it all?"

"Definitely not," said Lucie. Soon they were standing in front of the blue door and Mohammed was apologising.

"That was a long walk," said his grandfather.

"We were beginning to worry," said his grandmother.

"It's such a beautiful place," said Lucie quickly. "We wanted to see everything."

"Well I think we must thank you for all your generous hospitality and be on our way," said Dad.

"You must come and see us in Charmante La Forêt the next time you're in Paris," said Mum.

"See you when we get back," said Luc to Mohammed and for the fourth time that day they got on the train.

"Are you feeling all right?" said Granny "you look rather pale."



"No, I'm fine," said Lucie "we had quite a long walk and I'm feeling rather tired."

Back at the flat they went straight to bed. Pirate flew in through the open window.

"They boarded an Air Canada plane" he said. "I saw them all get on - so you don't need to worry anymore about Deios's men. They're probably half way across the Atlantic by now."

"Oh....." said Lucie "but with Sélène? Can you find out what's happening to her?"

"Well I don't think you should continue to help us," said Pirate.

"We can't leave her in their clutches."

"Have a good last two days."

"But ....."

It was too late - they saw his silhouette as he flew across the street lights and into the trees across the avenue.

"Do you think we shall ever see him again?" murmured Luc.