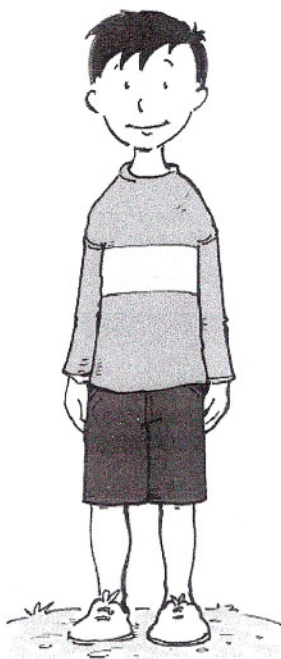


**The adventures
of
Luc & Lucie**

Martinique



*Valerie Halstead
Jacqueline Hughes
Marion Vincent
et
Bernadette Clinton
©clé group*

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Chapter 4

Martinique

"I'm sure you'll be happy there," said Mum.

It was the beginning of July and Luc and Lucie had just been to look at the collège, about twenty miles away, where they would be moving in September.

"I'll be sorry to leave our village school," said Luc. "The collège was so big."

"But our friends will be there too," said Lucie. "Eloise and Denis and"

"And the bus will come to the village in the morning to take you there," added Dad.

They drove home with Luc still rather gloomy. They went into their computer room to find out if the school had some clubs or societies.

"I wonder if Pirate has found out anything yet. When he flew in the other week he hadn't got any news."

"Let's have a look at the piece of fabric again." Luc got it out from the box and they looked at it carefully.

"It's very thin. Is it a blouse do you think?"

"No, I don't think so. Perhaps it's curtain fabric."

"I don't think it's any kind of a clue - but it's the only thing we have."

Dad came in. "Have you found anything about clubs?"

"We haven't actually started looking yet."

"What's that you're looking at?" asked Dad. He picked up the fabric. "Funny," he said, "I'm sure this is a bit of the flag of Martinique. You know I was out there for a month once for work."

"Oh, we must have picked it up somewhere!"

Dad left them to their searching. They began to look at the Collège website and found there was a photography club and a swimming club so they began to cheer up.

"Google *Martinique flag*," said Lucie "<http://www.crwflags.com/FOTW/flags/mp.html>"

"Y e e e s," they said together as a blue flag with white snakes on it appeared.

"Found something?" called Dad.

"Yes, a photography club and a swimming club," shouted back Luc.

"We need to contact Pirate," said Lucie. "Let's go and talk to the birds again."

Later that evening Pirate appeared.

"So you have some news?"

"We think they're in Martinique," and they explained about the flag.

"Give me a day or two and I'll check it all out and get back to you. You look up Martinique on the net and get to know it a bit."

"Just a minute," said Lucie. "I've been thinking. We've already failed to rescue Sélène three times. If we really want to rescue her this time we need to plan it all more carefully **before we go**. We've relied too much on contacts in other countries and haven't really known what we were getting into. We don't need all these boats to take her away. She could come back with us through the computer couldn't she and meet her father in France?"

"You're right," said Luc.

"I agree," said Pirate. "Sometimes I do things in a bit of a hurry."

Lucie got some paper. "Let's write down a list of questions to which we need answers."

This was the list:

1. Is Sélène really in Martinique and if so where?
2. What's the plan for rescuing her?
3. What are the difficulties and what can we do about them?
4. Where is the nearest computer? (to get back to France)
5. How will she meet her father?
6. How will they get home?

"That's good," said Pirate, tucking the paper into his feathers as he flew off. "It will give me something to work on."

"I've found out answers to all our questions," he said when he returned.

1. Sélène is being held in Martinique, near St. Pierre, in a stone hut outside the town. It's up the hill towards the volcano.
2. The plan for rescuing her depends on other things so we'll come to that later.
3. Difficulties: - no street lights so we'll have to do it in daylight;
- there's always a guard sitting across the door;
- at the moment it's pretty hot - about 34° and there are sometimes tropical storms.
4. The nearest computer is in the Museum in town.
5. Her father will come to Charmante la Forêt. We'll meet him in the Café in the square.

"And then what happens?" asked Lucie, impatiently.

"Well, in two days' time it will be July 14th and there'll be fireworks near the Eiffel Tower."

"Yes, we always go up to Paris to see them." said Luc.

"That first evening when I came to your house to ask you about the quest it was"

"July 14th," they said together.

"Do you remember that huge set piece by the Eiffel Tower with birds and animals?"

"Yes, there was a parrot," said Luc.

"Exactly," said Pirate, "and I came out of it. This year it will be a Cinderella with a magician who changes the pumpkin into a coach and me into a prince and then we'll all fly off in it."

"So," said Luc "we have to rescue her during the day on July 14th. We usually set off for Paris about six o'clock so we'd need to be back by then."

"If we left at half past five that would be half past twelve, lunchtime, in Martinique and if we're back in our usual five minutes that still leaves you twenty five minutes. We don't want Mum and Dad to have to wait too long in Paris before leaving."

"So there are still two questions," insisted Lucie. "How are we going to distract the guard and how are we going to protect ourselves?"

"No problem this time with protection. I've organised Lance and his friends to help us. No chance of a mistake this time."

"Who's Lance?" asked Luc.

"You'll see," replied Pirate mysteriously.

"Now about distracting the guard. If we took a mirror with us we could flash it in his eyes," suggested Luc.

"We need to be sure the sun was shining - if there are storms"mused Lucie. "Some sort of noise?"

"What about taking my camera? I could set it to flash and then take lots of photos - that should worry the guard."

"And I'll bring the whistle we use for the swimming races so we could use both. That should do the trick."

July 13th was the longest day they had ever experienced. They spent a good deal of time on the computer looking at all sorts of Martinique websites. They typed in:

<http://www.geotimes.org/may02/geophen.html>

<http://www.zananas-martinitue.com/en-martinique-beaches/>

"It's such a shame that we're just dashing there and back," said Luc. "There are so many things to see. I'd love to wander round the ruins of St. Pierre. Amazing isn't it that, when the Volcano erupted in 1902 and killed the 30,000 people who lived in the town, only two people survived - a cobbler and another man because he was locked in the prison."

"And look at this one I've found where some girls give their favourite recipes."

<http://www.europeanschoolprojects.net/festivals/Martinique/cuisine/cuisine-ecadre.htm>

At breakfast on July 14th they discussed their visit to Paris. "We'll eat early," said Mum.

"Could we eat really early - about five o'clock because we've arranged to meet some friends in the square for about five minutes at half past five?" asked Luc.

"Fine," said Mum. "I'll do some sandwiches and fruit and then we can pick you up in the car, at a quarter to six, in the square."

The rest of the day they wandered round the garden playing with Picasso and Josephine, then chatting to Eloise and Denis. The hours dragged by. Eloise went off to meet her parents and Denis said he had to go and do some e-mailing. It was five o'clock. The children went into the kitchen to eat their sandwiches and fruit.

"You're both rather quiet," said Mum. "Is anything the matter?"

"No," said Luc "but I'd just like to look up something on the computer before we go down to the square."

Their parents exchanged glances.

"See you down there at a quarter to six," said Dad. "We've just got to take some shopping round to Granny and Grandad's in a few minutes."

The children dashed upstairs. Luc made sure he had his camera and the key and Lucie found her whistle. They went down to the computer room. It was twenty five past five. There was a gentle rush of air and Pirate alighted on the computer. "Ready?" he enquired.

"Ready," they replied.

Luc typed in <http://www.martinique-photos.com/en-martinique-saint-pierre-05.htm> and up came the picture of the town of St. Pierre and the volcano.

"Off we go," said Pirate and once more they felt themselves lifted off their feet. They were swept down the tunnel and landed on a grassy hillside in the full heat of the sun.

"You were right," said Lucie "it is hot."

"Look at the view," said Luc "down to the town and the sea beyond it. It's so blue."

"Never mind that," said Pirate testily. "Let's concentrate on what we're going to do. First you must meet Lance." He gave a piercing screech and they waited expectantly. There was a rustle in the grass and in front of them appeared a huge and terrifying snake.

"Oh no," said Lucie and clung to Luc who tore a branch off a nearby bush ready to defend them both.

"Don't worry," said Pirate reassuringly. "Let me introduce my friend Lance. His full Latin name is *Bothrops lanceolatus* or the lance headed viper. He won't hurt us but if Deimos's men try to attack us he'll bring his friends to attack *them*."

The snake hissed quietly "Yesssss, no hassssssle, we'll sssssupport you no worriessssssss."

"That's the hut up there," said Pirate. "Not too far."

"It's all right for you, you just fly," thought Luc.

Lance led the way, slithering through the grass ahead of them. It was true it wasn't too

far but it was uphill and it was hot. Clouds were gathering in the sky. After half an hour's scrambling through scree and grass they paused behind a rock within fifty metres of the hut. The guard was sitting across the door. It was very quiet.

"Now," said Lucie. "Let's make sure we're organised this time. Pirate, you go and tell Sélène to be ready. You and I, Luc, will start distracting the guard. Where are your friends, Lance? They should be ready too."

Lance gave a low hiss and, suddenly, they were aware of the grass rippling and it seemed as if the whole hillside was quietly seething with snakes.

"All pressssssssent and correct," said Lance.

"One, two, three - go," said Luc and began to take flash photographs while Lucie blew her whistle frantically and Pirate flew off.

The guard leapt up. "What the? Who's there? You're trespassing...." He picked up his mobile they could see him talking. He then called inside "Come out you useless rodent. Go and see what's happening. You've never been any good at all. Wait till Deimos comes back. Torturing's too good for you."

The rat hesitated on the door step. The man suddenly kicked it in the air with his boot. It squealed in pain and began to limp through the grass towards them. Lance started to move. Suddenly Lucie said "Don't attack him, Lance, he's really hurt. They seem to have been cruel to him too."

They waited and the rat appeared. "I'm sorry," he squeaked. "I never wanted any part of this but they beat me and starved me and I had nowhere to go."

"What's happening?" cried the man again. "Come back here and report."

The rat hid in the grass.

"Right." The guard locked the door and began to walk towards them. He had scarcely gone two strides when he found himself approached on all sides by snakes. Shaking with fear he

clambered up into a tree. Lance hissed, "ssssssstay at the bottom ssssssssssssurround him."

Luc and Lucie ran over the house. The key, as usual, fitted the lock and there was Sélène ready to go.

"This time it's really going to work," said Lucie. "Come on we have to go down into the town." At the moment a jeep drove up the hillside.

"Don't worry," said Luc "today we've really got the answer."

Two men began to get out of the jeep but immediately what seemed like a moving carpet surrounded them. "Good Heavens, look at these snakes." They got back in immediately and slammed the doors.

"There must be a plague. Fix the roof tight shut."

The first large drops of rain began to fall.

"Quick, we need to hurry," squawked Pirate.

"What about me?" There was a pathetic squeak from the ground. "I'm really sorry I got involved in it all. I didn't mean to hurt you - I was just obeying orders."

"What do you think Pirate?" asked Luc.

"I think he could come with us. The enchanter will know what to do with him." Luck picked up the rat and put him in his pocket.

"Follow me now to the Museum"

The drops of rain now seemed to have changed into hard jabbing stones which pounded the ground and their bodies as they fought their way down the hill into town.

"Follow me. The Museum's this way," squawked Pirate and suddenly, there it was, in front of

them - CLOSED.

"Oh no," wailed Lucie, then suddenly, "use the key Luc." And sure enough the door opened and they rushed in, closing and locking it behind them.

"Safe now. Where are the computers? Oh here's one in the reception."

They switched it on. Pirate logged them in and Luc typed in their e-mail. They all lined up for the final time Pirate, Lucie, Sélène, Luc and the rat, ready to go. Pirate said the magic words and - nothing happened. They looked at each other in alarm. Pirate said the words again. Again nothing happened.

"Why doesn't it work?" asked Lucie nervously.

"I don't know," said Luc. Then suddenly "Do you think our parents could have turned the computer off? Now what?"

Lucie thought for a minutes. "Denis said he was going to work on his computer - we could try typing in his e-mail."

Luc did that and Pirate tried the magic words again. This time there was the familiar swoosh down the tunnel and they all fell out of Denis' computer.

"What in the world?" shouted Denis trembling.

"Don't worry," said Luc. "It's only us."

"But where did you come from? You're wet through - and who's this?"

"This is Sélène. We're taking her to meet her father. We'll explain everything tomorrow."

They dashed through the house leaving wet footprints behind them in the hall, passing Denis' father in the garden.

"Oh, not those children again," he said to himself.

In the square everything was peaceful. The market stalls had been packed away and the old men who were playing boules looked up in surprise at this bedraggled group of children running past them.

"There he is," shouted Sélène and there indeed was the Enchanter sipping some coffee at a table outside the Café de la Place. He leapt to his feet and flung his arms around Sélène.

"I can't believe you're here at last - but you're wet through - and so are you two. We'll have to do something about that," and, in a second, they were all dry and clean again.

"Twenty to six," said Lucie. "Our parents will be here in a minute or so. We'll have to say goodbye."

Pirate looked at them sadly. "I'll miss you both," he said. "You've been brilliant." And he turned away and they thought they saw him brush a feather across his eye.

"How can we thank you?" said the Enchanter. "Sometime in the future I'm sure we'll meet again - perhaps in our time zone."

"Do you think you could take the rat with you?" asked Luc. He had removed it from his pocket and they all looked at it cowering under the table.

"I think he was forced to work for Deimos," added Sélène.

"It's such a wonderful day today that I can't bear anyone to be unhappy. Of course we'll take him and he can work for me in the future."

At that moment a car horn sounded and there were Luc and Lucie's parents waiting for them.

"We've got to go," said Lucie. She kissed Sélène and the Enchanter and stroked Pirate's feathers.

"We'll never forget you," said Luc and they turned away and got into the car.

"Who were those people?" asked their mother.

"Just friends who are going away," replied Luc.

"You two are behaving very strangely today," said Dad. "First you left your computer on and we had to turn it off, then you came without your jumpers - it gets cold in the evening. Here they are. And now you've been talking to people we don't know."

"We'll tell you all about it one day," said Lucie. "Everything's back to normal now."

In Paris they found their favourite parking spot and walked down towards the Eiffel Tower. It was quite a cloudy evening and darkness was coming early. The fireworks, as usual, were splendid but somehow neither of the children was quite in the mood to be excited.

Finally, came the set piece. A magician stood on the left, while on the right was Cinderella in rags with a pumpkin. "Sélène and her father," whispered Lucie. The magician waved his wand. Cinderella began to shine brightly and was now wearing a ball gown and the pumpkin became a fairy coach. Suddenly, a bird appeared and was changed into the Prince who lifted Cinderella into the coach.

"Pirate," muttered Luc.

Finally a rat was magically transformed into a magnificent stallion to draw the coach. The magician leapt on board, and cracked a whip. The horse reared and, in a dazzling shower of stars, they shot off into the darkness. Above, all the lights on the Eiffel Tower began to shimmer and twinkle. The crowds roared and clapped.

"It's amazing what can be done with modern technology," said their Dad. "I wonder why they had a magician rather than a fairy godmother though?"

"And a bird and a rat instead of the white mice," said Mum, "but it was even more spectacular than usual. Pity it's all over."

"Yes," said Lucie. "Pity it's all over."

They made their way slowly from the Eiffel Tower back to the car.

"I'm feeling really strange," said Lucie to Luc. "I can't believe that we shan't ever see them again nor zoom through the computer again to some foreign country. Everything will seem very tame now. We'll begin to think we imagined it all."

"I know," murmured Luc, "but every time I see the Eiffel Tower shimmering and twinkling I shall think of them."

From his pocket he produced the key which glinted under the street lights and they looked at each other.

"You never know what may happen in the future," he said.