



Chain Stories



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Project description

“Chain Stories” Erasmus Plus project was elaborated during 2020 lockdown. Teachers from Italy, Portugal, Romania and France (Martinique Island) planned to make their students achieve a collaborative work. Each country would start writing a story belonging to a particular genre: Portuguese students had to start the first part of a Drama Text, Romanians had to write the beginning of a Fairy Tale, Martinicans a Ghost Story and Italians a Detective Story. Next, each text or story was to be passed on to a partner so that the students of the partner’s country could continue it and transmit it after to another partner. Each part of these texts was to be made of 10 pages and an illustration had to be provided.

As far as characterization was concerned, the stories were to feature the same main characters: the teenager twins Daniel and Maria. Nobody knows where they exactly come from. What is sure is that they are European citizens who have links with each country they discover. The partners’ countries and environment are the setting of the stories. Emblematic and picturesque places from each country are depicted through Daniel and Maria’s adventures.

All the story-writing activities were done during classes or workshops. As far as the other activities were concerned, twinspace of Platform eTwinning was used to upload, photos, games and activities linked to the project. The twinspace has been highly appreciated as an educational tool as there was no face to face mobility at the beginning of the project because of the pandemic situation.

Afterwards, face to face mobilities gave partners the opportunity to consider the gap between fiction and reality, as every participant could discover the scenery and setting of the stories for real. It was also an opportunity for our students to discover European countries and culture which was a first step to the construction of their European citizenship.

This project has enabled the students to enhance their writing skills, language competences and creativity.

The final task was the release of this book that gathers all the stories.

THE TOMBOLO MYSTERY



CHAPTER ONE

My name is Daniel, I live with my sister Maria in a small town. I'm thirteen years old, I love reading, playing video games and eating. Maria and I had an unbelievable adventure!

It was twilight, the moon shining in the sky, everything was bewitching and peaceful. I was playing video games when all of a sudden, my sister called me.

- Daniel, come on! The notary said that when Grandpa died two weeks ago, he left us a little diary ! we have to meet him.-

We went to the office notary. When we arrived, the notary gave us the diary and said: - This diary was very important to your grandfather, it contains a lot of information about him. Read it carefully because it's the last present that he gave you. Good luck! -

On the ride home, I was thinking of our Grandpa. I don't remember a lot about him... But I remember that he lived on an island in the Caribbean.

-Hurry up! - shouted my sister who saw that I was in my thoughts.

- Ok, I'm coming. - I answered.

Back at home, while I was sitting on my bed, Maria took the diary from my hands. I joined her and I opened the mysterious notebook. It was worn out by the years and the pages were starting to turn yellow. Despite this, it gave off the smell of new pages...It was amazing! This diary was really strange...

I flipped through it and I saw a letter hidden between two pages. My sister grabbed it and unfolded it, and written was :

"Dear children, I wanted to write to you for a long time. I spent more than twelve years in Martinique. I don't have time today to explain to you in detail, but you will know what to do...Go and seek the power and find the truth..."

- Wow! It's very, very strange it looks like a farewell letter don't you think? - Maria said.

- Yes, I think so. And... How are we going to find the "truth" he talked about? -

I answered.

I observed the letter and saw that it was accompanied by two plane tickets to Martinique!

- I know how, to go to Martinique. Look at these tickets, the departure date is scheduled for tonight! Let's go and pack our bags! Grandpa wanted us to go to Sainte-Marie in Martinique to finish what he started and to find the truth! -

Sainte-Marie is a little town in the north of Martinique. From the Tombolo, in the foreground, you can see some little fishermen boats on the shore. Many coconut trees are growing on the beach. In the middle ground, there are some old houses and buildings and a high and imposing church which dominates the town. In the background, we can see some hills called "morne" with some colored houses on them. The teens decided to visit Sainte-Marie. First, they visited the St James distillery. The St James distillery makes different types of rum with sugar cane. There is also a museum where people can learn about the production of the rum. Next, we took the bus to go to the Lasalle plantation to learn more things about Martinique. Here, the sunlight is really tough like a barbecue. Luckily, the

atmosphere was a little bit wet. At last, we decided to go take a break and drink some delicious passion fruit juice !

Maria and I were sipping our delicious juice near the supermarket in the town when an old lady came to see us.

- Peter ? - she asked to Daniel.

- Excuse me, but I think that you are mistaken. It isn't my name. -

- Oh, I see...You look like a very good friend of mine. His name was Peter. -

- Daniel ! said Maria -

- What ? - I asked.

- Madam, Peter might be our grandfather ! Mightn't he ? - my sister said

- You must be Daniel and Maria...! Peter's grand children? Ouhh, how nice to meet you, I'm Esmeralda. - the lady added.

- Nice to meet you too ! - answered the twins.

- Well, what are you doing in Martinique ? - the lady asked.

-Our Grandfather asked us to find something called the truth...But, we don't really know what that is... - We told her.

- Well, I can help you. I know that Peter loved walking through « La Philippe Forest -. My son, Juan, often goes there ! I think that you will meet him. So good luck on your quest ! - She asserted.

- Thank you Esmeralda. » said Maria.

The lady continued to shop and we set off for the La Philippe Forest.

The - La Philippe Forest » was a little forest near the town center. It was full of vegetation.

- What a great forest ! - Maria said.

- Yeah, come on -. I answered

Maria and I entered the forest, astonished by the landscape. There were some kiosks and benches set all over the place.

- what should we do now ? - asked Maria

- I don't really know...Maybe...Look for Juan ? -

- that's a great idea, said Maria. -

We walked throughout the forest yelling "Juan, Juan" but we got no answer. We walked again and again and he still didn't answer.

- let's give up, obviously, he is not here ! - said Maria, exasperated.

- Who are you looking for ? - said a teen voice with a spanish accent.

A tall boy stood there. He was older than us but he wasn't an adult.

- Excuse me, who are you exactly ? - I asked the stranger.

¡ Hola amigos ! Me llamo Juan ¿ y vosotros ?

- Juan You are the one we have been looking for ! nice to meet you, my name is Daniel and here is my twin sister, Maria. -

- Wait a second, you're Spanish ? - we asked the boy.

- Yes, indeed my parents were born in Cuba but I was born here, in Martinique. So why are you looking for me amigos ? -

- We need your help to find a kind of treasure. -I said.

- A treasure ? You're lucky, because three weeks ago, I found something interesting... ¡ Vamo ! -

Maria and I followed him wondering what the "treasure" was. Juan led us to the depths of the forest to a tree. It was the biggest tree we had ever seen. Juan knelt down to the roots of the tree and, with a wide smile, unearthed a small box.

- What's that ? - my sister asked.

- In fact, I don't really know...I found it three weeks ago, and I didn't touch it 'cause I thought that someone would come looking for it. I wasn't mistaken, was I ? -

-No, so..., can I just take it ? -

- Sure, Maria...After all, it was your grandfather's. - Juan answered.

Maria took the box cautiously and opened it. Juan and I stood on tiptoe to have a better look. In the box there was a little bit of parchment.

Was written :

- Go to Saint-Jacques for find the truth -

- Saint-Jacques. What does it mean ? - I said

- Fonds Saint-Jacques is a district of Saint-Marie, we're not far from it. - My sister answered

- Let's go there ! - I told her

My sister and I, went to «Fonds Saint-Jacques district » with Juan. That was a very beautiful district. There were many trees which twisted in every direction. There were houses in the heights of Sainte-Marie, beside the sea. The way that we walked along was sloped and intertwined.

- is that Saint-James ?- asked Maria to Juan when we stopped.

- It 's Fonds Saint-Jacques. It a nice district, you know, People are cool and they have a natural kindness.-.

-So, where shall we go first ?-Juan asked

- I have just thought about it,- I said loudly.

- Let's go to..., - started Juan but Maria cried :

- What is that ? -she pointed to a big building which protruded from the trees.

- Cultural buildings,- said Juan proudly -. Plantation Saint-Jacques.
Brilliant, Maria !

- You need to see that ! ; Vamos amigos ! -

We followed him again, amazed. The plantation was really beautiful, with its domain lined by all kinds of flowers. We also noticed, that there was in the middle, a pretty little chapel.

- Here we go! Welcome to the plantation ! People gather here for religious ceremonies, organize weddings and cultural practices.- Explained Juan

We entered the chapel. It was a little bit hot inside, but it was peaceful. On the altar there was a big table overlooked by a little thing...

- Look, a box ! - I cried with excitement. Maria and I looked at each other with a kind of little grin on our faces. We ran to the altar and Juan stared at us with sparkling eyes of happiness. We took the box and opened it. Once again, a little bit of parchment writing : "at the tombolo, the truth will be revealed".

- Once more this truth's affair -, I moaned.

- It must be an important secret ? - Maria said thoughtfully

- Yeah, Indeed. - Juan answered.

In Sainte Marie, the tombolo is a stretch of sand which connects the town and the little island that you can see there. Juan pointed at the island when he arrived at Petite-Anse, the Sainte-Marie beach.

The tombolo was as he said : a wonderful stretch between an island and a town. I looked up at Maria. She was impressed too by the beauty of the place.

- So, I have unfortunately to leave ... I'm going to join my mother. continued Juan-

-Ok, see you then ! - said my sister

- Thanks for...everything. - I said to Juan.

- You're welcome, cheer up for your quest ! -

- So, goodbye Juan ! -

-Bye bye ! - He answered

Maria and I waved at him while he walked away. I noticed that the sun was going to set soon.

- We should go...before the coming of the night. - My sister said.

I took out my magnifying glass and my stuff, ready to visit the islet. They were made up of two pieces of land with stairs allowing tourists to visit them. Suddenly, we heard heartbreaking and frightening screams. These cries came from behind the islets in a part not enlightened by daylight.

Maria begged me not to go but I had to know who or what was making that noise. by descending into the tunnel, we emerged in a cave. We were then in the center of the islet. I noticed a glowing ball embedded in the stone. I was absorbed by this stone.

- Come and help me take it off! - I said.

- I...I don't think that's a good idea...This island is very scar... - she answered frightened.

But I'd unhooked the stone from its location. Then, a dull cracking sound was heard and a thick fog came around us. So much fog that neither my sister nor me couldn't see each other.

-What did you do ? - asked Maria, panic- stricken.

I tried to determine her position, but couldn't. I had lost her, she was not there...Oh no, she wasn't here !

-Maria ! Maria, where are you ? Maria ! - I screamed

I called her for a quarter of an hour. The dull cracking sound did not stop. It continued, again and again and louder and louder. Accompanied by little voices whispered something like "Manman dlo...Manman dlo is coming...". The whispers started to sing that. I was mad. I thought that it was in my head but it wasn't. I knew that when I saw a girl at the bottom of the island in the beach. I only saw her head : the rest of her body was in the water. And she was very pretty with her wonderful bluish braided hair. She was singing with a hundred small underwater creatures which swam around her.

- Who are you ? -I asked

-Both a dream and a nightmare. - said the girl with a strange smooth voice.

- What are you doing here? I mean, on an island in the middle of the night ! - I asked.

- What are WE doing here ? Alone, lost...trapped on a scary island ? So weird isn't it ? -I cried

- You're weird ! - I cried and then I ran away. I ran again and again but...

- Daniel ! - said a voice that I knew : It was my sister, Maria.

- I found something ! It's maybe the « Truth ». -My sister said enthusiastically

I joined her to see what she had in her hands. It was a little box like the ones we had found earlier. The only difference was that it has a golden stripe on the front face. As I wanted to see first what was in the box, I pushed her and I snatched the box violently.

- Ouhh, what are you doing ! You hurt me !!! - Yelled Maria

- I have to be the first to see what is in the box ! - I replied.

- Why would you have the right to see it before me ! Give me the box
! -Maria replied

-Never ! -I answered.

Suddenly I heard a noise and I looked in another direction. Maria took advantage and tried to snatch the little box. Then, I tried to keep it on my chest but unintentionally, threw it over the barrier of the island.

- Look at what you have done ! - cried Maria wildly.

- I did nothing, you...you pushed me and...and now because of you, we'll never know what was in this box! -

- What a shame ! - said a girl : It was Mamandlo. She dived into the water again and where she was, we could see a handmade basket full of tangerines. It floated in the water slowly moving away from Daniel and Maria.

- Where does this basket and fruit come from, Daniel? - Asked Maria

- I don't know, where it will float - I said.



CHAPTER TWO

It was twilight, the moon was going up high in the sky and the sun was setting.

- Let's go, Maria, there is nothing much for us to do here – I said to my sister –.

As we walked back on the stretch of sand of the Tombolo we did not share a word. I was thinking about the blue haired girl... Where did she come from? Was she a girl or a... Mermaid? I did not think I would find the answer to my questions, or at least I did not think that that would happen any soon.

- You really don't want to talk about what just happened, Daniel? – My sister asked me when we arrived back on the mainland, close to the main street.

- No. – I answered, and there was silence again.

An old blue truck drove along the main street and stopped where we were standing silent.

- Hop on! – Said a familiar voice: it was Juan!

Maria and I did not wait for another invitation and hopped on the truck with Juan and his mother Esmeralda, who was driving.

- We don't have much time, your flight is in two hours and we need to drive all the way to Fort-de-France – Said Esmeralda with a worried voice.

- Flight? – Asked Maria with great surprise.

But I was not surprised, I knew that there must have been an explanation to all this, just couldn't figure it out yet.

- Yes – Said Juan – You are going to Italy! –

- What?!? – I asked together with my sister.

Esmeralda then said – I wanted to look at the photos I had with your grandfather Peter, and when I opened the photo album, I found an envelope in it. – She took a breath and continued – In the envelope there were two flight tickets to Italy with your names on them! –

Maria and I looked at each other, someone wanted us to go to Italy for a reason, and we were ready to keep looking for the Truth.

We first flew to Paris, then to Rome and then to Palermo, in the island of Sicily, in the south of Italy. It was a long trip but it was worth it, we loved Sicily!

When we got to the airport, we did not know what we were supposed to do there, except of course that we needed to look for the Truth.

- Daniel! – Shouted Maria when we got out of the airport – Look at that! – She added pointing at a young woman who was holding a sign on which was written: “Daniel and Maria”.

We ran to the young lady.

- Hello, we are Daniel and Maria – I said. – Who are you? – I asked the woman.

- Welcome to Sicily, darlings! – She said. – I am Eliana, my mother Sandra and your grandfather Peter were close friends... –

- And how do you...? – Maria started asking, but was interrupted by Eliana who was already answering the question.

- My mother got an anonymous letter in which it was written that the two of you would arrive today. She told me she recognized your grandfather's writing... –

- Ok... – I said. – What do we do here in Sicily? – I asked together with Maria.

- First of all, we go for a swim! - Said Eliana, and she showed us her car, we hopped onto it and she drove us to Terrasini, a nice village on the coast, not far from the airport.

Maria and I were very tired from the long trip, but the idea of going for a swim made us forget all those hours spent on the plane and in the airports.

We stopped at Sandra's place, we met Sandra, she was a very nice lady, and she gave us everything we would need to go to the beach, so we changed our clothes into swimming suits.

The sea was not far from Sandra's place, so Eliana walked us to the beach from there, it took us not more than fifteen minutes.

- Here we are. - Said Eliana, and she pointed at a very steep staircase that led to a small beach, surrounded by rocks on three sides.

The Praiola beach was not too crowded that day because schools were still open and only a few tourists were sunbathing there on the white sand or swimming in the clear light blue water.

We did not talk much, we looked around ourselves in search for any clue about the Truth or anything else that could lead us to it.

We left our things on the beach and went for a swim following Eliana. The water was the perfect temperature, not too cold and not too hot, it was very pleasant to swim in it.

We swam to the first and the closest and biggest of three sea stacks that could be reached only by swimming.

- Can we dive from there? - Maria asked. We both loved to dive from high rocks.

- Yes, but be careful! - Answered Eliana, and the three of us climbed the sea stack to dive back into the water.

Splash!

- That was sooo cool! – Shouted Maria, and I was sharing the feeling, so I asked – Can we do it again? –

Eliana looked at both of us, then she looked at the other two sea stacks and back at us, then she said – Let's swim to the last sea stack, it's even more fun to jump from that one! –

Happy and surprised we swam to the last rock and before climbing it, we rested a little, floating in the water just at the bottom of the sea stack.

It was a hot day, but the sea breeze and the shade of the sea stack made it really enjoyable.

I was the first to climb the rock and as soon as I got to the top of it, I froze. There, on the top of the sea stack, there was a handmade basket with tangerines, the SAME basket we saw in Martinique!

- Ma... Maria? – I called with a feeble voice.

- Yes Dan, what's up? - She answered from the bottom of the rock.

- Basket... Tangerines... – I said with trembling voice, and then I added – Come and see! –

Maria climbed the sea stack followed by Eliana, who did not understand what we were talking about.

- How come...? – Maria asked, her voice was trembling too.

After a few minutes of silent stares between the three of us we explained everything to Eliana, everything except the *mermaid* part, and we decided we would take the basket back to Sandra's place to look for answers.

Maria and Eliana gently pulled down the basket from the rock, I preferred to dive into the sea.

- Manman dlo... –

Underwater I was sure I heard the voice saying those words again, but when I emerged from the water there was silence again.

I did not mention it to Maria.

Back at Sandra's place we let the basket and tangerines to dry in the sun. How could they have gotten so far without any damage?

To let the basket dry faster we took out all the tangerines and it was then that we found... Another piece of parchment!

- Open it! – Said Maria anxiously. And so I did. I opened it and I could not believe that the writing was still perfect, as if it had just been written.

- Read it! - My sister told me! And so I did, I read it aloud.

On the piece of parchment there was written: "The Truth lies at sunset".

Silence.

- Well, that was clear! - Said my sister with sarcasm.

Silence.

- Really?!? - I asked Maria.

Silence.

Then the silence was interrupted by Sandra who was preparing dinner and had eavesdropped what we were talking about.

- Your grandfather and I loved to go to the Praiola beach to enjoy the sunsets... – Said Sandra with dreaming eyes and voice.

- So... Let's go there at sunset! - Said Maria.

After a refreshing shower and a few snacks – we actually ate the tangerines and they tasted very good – we walked back to the beach, and this time Sandra come with us too.

From the top of the stairs, we looked down at the Praiola beach and the view was breathtaking: the beach was even more beautiful now there were no more people there.

We walked down the stairs, slowly because we went at Sandra's place, and as we got to the beach we stopped to let the lady rest a little.

But Sandra was eager to help us to *find the Truth*...

Eliana and Sandra sat on the last steps of the long staircase and we had the feeling that the rest was up to us.

Before I could ask my sister what we should do next, Sandra pointed with her finger towards the sea stacks and said: - There... -.

Maria and I looked at each other and then we walked towards the first sea stack, which was connected to the beach by some rocks now that the tide was low.

The sun was setting when I started climbing the first and lowest sea stack, followed by my sister.

We reached the top of the rock and looked all around us. The sun was setting and the sky and the sea were colored with different shades of orange and pink.

The sea was very calm and we kept looking around us wondering if anything was going to happen.

And it did.

- Bubbles! -, whispered Maria grabbing my shoulder.

- Where?! -, I asked her with a surprised whispering voice.

- There . . . -, she said pointing with her finger towards the last spot where I had dived in the water earlier.

I saw the bubbles, and they seemed to be slowly growing in number, as if something or someone was coming out of the water.

- Manman dlo . . . -, the voice echoed in my ears stronger than before.

Then I saw her.

From the bubbles in the sea, that were now a thick foam, emerged the head of the blue haired girl.

I felt like a magnetic attraction towards her, and I had to dive, to swim and to reach her.

- Daniel! -, shouted Maria not understanding what was going on. Didn't she hear the echoing voice?

I didn't stop to give her any explanation.

- Manman dlo . . . -, the echoing voice got louder while I was swimming towards the girl.

Then I was there, face to face with the beautiful girl. She was looking at me and I couldn't help staring back at her.

I noticed she was holding a little box in her hands, like a small treasure chest.

I did not know what to say, but deep inside I knew I was supposed to get the wooden box from her hands.

So I reached the little chest with both hands and everything happened very fast.

Her lips almost did not move while she whispered: - Manman dlo -, then the beautiful girl changed into a scary, evil and horrible monster: her lips widened in an evil smile and her teeth grew out of it, her blue eyes widened and become red with blood, her hands became like those of a mummy and her nails became sharp as knives and kept on growing to protect the box.

Then I was drowning.

The mermaid was dragging me to the bottom of the sea and I felt lost.

I was going to die.

- Manman dlo . . . –

I died. Almost.

- Daanieel! -, shouted my sister, and she dived into the sea to try to save me and Eliana came after her to help.

None of them had seen the girl, but they had seen me drowning in the foam without understanding why.

I was pulled down to the bottom of the sea with the monstrous hands clutched with their sharp nails around my wrists. I could not breathe.

Then other hands, more familiar and gentle ones, caught my ankles and pulled me in the other direction.

I could breathe. I was alive.

Maria and Eliana pulled me out of the water, they swam me to the beach. I was still in shock.

Sandra put a towel on my shoulders and rubbed my arms to warm me up and make me recover from the shock.

It was only a few minutes after we were all back on the beach that we realized I was holding something in my hands: it was the small treasure chest!



CHAPTER THREE

With the chest in their hands, Maria and Daniel tried to open it, however, it was locked. The mermaid, in her last breath, yelled with all her strength:

- Portugal!

Afterward, she collapsed into the trembling blue ocean while a non-registered solar eclipse started. Even though both teenagers were amazed by the magnificent happening, they could not seem to forget the hint just given.

- I think we need to pack our bags – said Maria

- Portugal... I guess it is a bit far but we have no other option – said Daniel thoughtfully

- We need to buy plane tickets! - hurried Maria

- Besides we are only thirteen, where will we get the money?

- What if we ask – Maria was interrupted by her phone – Hello Juan, I was just about to mention your name!

- Guess I'm pretty important then – said Juan proudly – Why were you talking about me?

- Well – said Maria hesitantly – we might need some money

- We? - asked Juan

- Yes, for Daniel and I

- Hi Juan – said Daniel close to the phone, in an attempt to be heard on the other side of the call

- Sure. How much do you both need?

- For the flight, it would be around...

- For the flight? where are you two going? - asked Juan in shock

- We are headed to Portugal. Please stop interrupting me. So... three hundred sixty (360) times two would be seven hundred twenty (720)

- A little expensive I have to say, but you deserve it. But don't both of you need permissions to travel abroad?

- Do not worry about that – assured Maria

- Alright then. Best of luck!

- Goodbye! - said the twins simultaneously before they hung up

As they walked back to the hotel, the only thing on their minds was what they would do in Portugal and how they could solve the problem. When Maria and Daniel arrived at the hotel, Maria booked tickets for Porto, while Daniel packed their bags.

- Do you have a plan? - questioned Daniel – Where to go and what to do?

- I don't... I guess that or I come up with a plan or destiny will guide us. - said Maria in an encouraging tone.

- If you say so.

The twins went to sleep uncertain of their future. The next morning, as things were already packed, Maria and Daniel got ready, called a taxi, and rushed, anxiously, to the airport

- Which one is our gate? - asked Daniel

- 49, I believe – said, Maria

They went through security calmly, as they were on time, and waited for their flight. When it was time to catch the plane, they were lucky as they were the first ones to enter it. Once they boarded, the twins sat and only got up again upon arrival, after about 2 hours.

As they were at the leaving gate Daniel called a taxi for both of them to get to the Truth Hotel, a brand new one.

- Why did you choose this hotel, Maria? - asks Daniel

- I don't know to be honest. I guess the name was catching.

Maria and Daniel are finally at the hotel

- I can't believe it, after a two-hour journey we finally arrived at the hotel! - said Maria

- Maria and Daniel got in tune, and as one they turned to the hotelier and the twins asked, in sync:

-Good afternoon, we are Maria and Daniel, and booked a room here, under our names.

- Good afternoon both of you. The reservation is completely correct. How do you want to proceed? - asked the receptionist, in a kind voice

- Don't get us wrong but after these days of travel and adventure we would love to rest, so tomorrow we will schedule the itinerary for our visit to Portugal – said Maria in an exhausted voice

- I'll be here tomorrow to discuss it – said the receptionist

The receptionist politely takes the twins to their respective rooms to show them where they were going to sleep. Maria and Daniel didn't realize that they hadn't eaten since their arrival in Portugal, so they quickly dropped their bags and went straight to the hotel's restaurant:

- I can't wait for tomorrow. I can't believe we're so close to discovering the truth – said Daniel with an excited tone

- I miss the easier times when we had grandpa's presence.

- Life brings us things we're never expecting, not that they're negative, but to remind us why we're here, we still have each other at least – Daniel said, trying to cheer Maria up

- Well, that's enough for me bro – said Maria sleepy

The next morning, they both woke up with a desire for adventure, which led them to go to the receptionist, as she had promised to give them the itinerary.

- Good morning! You came just in time! I already have the itinerary printed here to give you. The itinerary that I gave This is all the locals that you should visit:

- Torre dos Clérigos; Train Station of São Bento; Ponte Dão Luís; Teixeira Lopes Museum and Sr. Da Pedra – said the Receptionist in a nice voice

- Good morning! Thank you for being so kind to us! - answered Daniel

Daniel and Maria carefully read their program for their experience in Portugal and discover that their first location will eventually be Torre dos Clérigos.

- It seems that we have a place to go. Let's start our adventure! - excitedly said, Maria

- I called an Uber, you don't have to worry about it- said Maria, proudly

- There is our car. Let's go! - noted Daniel

A few minutes late they arrived at Torre dos Clérigos. Both were stunned by its architecture, and also by the surroundings. Quickly they spotted what seemed to be a local:

- Hello, what is your name? - questioned Maria

- I'm José Matos. I was paid to be here, awaiting you.

- Oh! So, what do you have to say to us?

- Hello! 225 steps to climb to reach your goals.

Intrigued, they went to explore. Daniel also saw a part of a symbol that he was familiar with in the man's glove. It shined and had all the primary colors in it.

Upon entering, José Matos had vanished. They didn't give it much thought. When inside, they saw exposed in the interior the number of stairs: two hundred and twenty-five (225). Curious, they remembered what José had said. Then they climbed it all. Upon arriving they were greeted by an amazing view:

- Wow! - they exclaimed
- I know that this view is gorgeous, but do you have the chest here? - questioned a thoughtful Daniel
- Yes, I wouldn't leave it alone a second – said Maria
- So, you might call me crazy, but in the last 10 steps, alternately I saw the word “C E N T E R” is spelled.

Quickly they scanned the area and, coincidentally, they looked at the tower's roof:

- A key! A key! Just what we needed! - they said
- Effortfully, they got the key by getting Maria on her brother's back.
- YES! - said Maria upon grabbing the key

With both on the ground, they tried to open the beloved chest, yet the key dissolved, all of a sudden. It dropped a note while disappearing saying “those who really want something, will get it at all costs”. After reading the paper, they got strangely motivated. They explored the metro of Porto, and then went directly to the Station of S. Bento.

As they arrived, they admired the station to all of its extent. They were amazed by the tiles. So amazed that they went asking around about their history, yet there were only tourists. After more searching, they eventually saw a local.

- Hello, sorry to bother, but do you know the story of these tiles?
- asked maria

- Yes, I do, but first of all, what are your names? I'm Silvia Fernandes – she said.

- I'm Maria and this is my brother, Daniel – said the sister

- Tiles are extremely important to the Portuguese. This culture originated from the Muslims. After the knowledge of how to make them, they improved the techniques until almost perfection. People say that if you order tiles right it gives you the truth or something.

Shocked with this information, they spent a lot of time trying to put the tiles in the right order. When they did it, a trapdoor opened in the railways. The twins went there but there wasn't a key. Yet there was a key stand. They panicked a little, but got calm quickly. As they were leaving, Daniel saw another symbol with the same exact colours.

As soon as they were at the common part of the station, they went on a bus to their next destination: Ponte Dão Luís.

- One building is prettier than the other! Everything is so vibrant!
- said Maria.

- You are completely right! I think because we are here, we should do the climbing of the bridge, for some adrenaline! - said Daniel, hopeful that his twin said yes

- That's a nice idea! - said Maria

As they were approaching the bridge, a strange personage, with the same icon as before, talked to them and said "By climbing the answer should be shining". As they climbed, Maria saw a shining thing, as the person mentioned. She quickly grabbed it and, as they were on the way down, she saw what it was: another key. Maria went to talk with Daniel, and they opened triumphantly the chest.

Again, the key had dissolved. It left a piece of paper “it WAS the key”. They were more confused than ever. Maybe it was the key on the pedestal, maybe there was another truth? They stopped giving it much thought. Daniel picked the paper and saw, that when the paint reacted to the sun, it transformed into the three primary colours, similar to the mysterious icon

As the sun set down, they called an Uber to the Hotel, where they slept, tired from the day.

- I slept like a baby! - commented Daniel
- Me too! I guess yesterday was very exhausting.

As they ate the buffet, the receptionist got to them:

- Was your trip good? - asked the receptionist
- Yes, we haven't finished it though – said Daniel
- We are going to finish it today – completed Maria

As they finished eating, they called an Uber to Museum “Teixeira Lopes”. Upon arrival, they admired the place.

- Phenomenal! These monuments just keep getting better! - said Daniel

- You are right! - Maria said
- Let's buy tickets before more people arrive! - said the brother

After that, they rushed to the ticket seller.

- Hello, what do you wish? - questioned the salesman
- We want 2 tickets for the museum please – said the twins
- Ok, and what is your name? - asked the salesman
- Our names are Maria and Daniel – said Maria
- Ok

As they got the tickets, they went exploring the museum, amazed by each corner.

- It feels magical! - commented Maria

- Your right sis! I feel trapped in the museum, every corner has something.

As they explored, they arrived at the division where the most important piece, “Verdade”, a glorious statue:

- “Verdade”, it sure is monumental – said Maria

- I heard that “verdade” means truth, quite a coincidence isn’t?

- Daniel said

- I don’t know if I believe in coincidences right now... -Maria commented

- Good point, even with all of those symbols... - Daniel reflected.

- Symbols? What do you mean? - asked the sister, in a high tone

- I haven’t told you? - asked Daniel, confused

- NO! - Maria said, almost screaming

- Throughout the adventure, in all of the places we have been to, there has been symbols, with the 3 primary colours in them, in a darker tone. Even in the papers after the keys disappear, if you reflect them with the sun, it shows the same colours – explained Daniel

- Why didn’t you tell me this earlier!?

- I didn’t remember

As Maria started getting angry, a loud ‘bang’ was heard. Quickly after, a brick dropped right in front of them. The brick cracked and there was a bit of the museum’s story in the brick, with some destaqued letters “here, there is a divinal key”.

- H-E-A-D, the highlighted word is head! - exclaimed Daniel

Maria quickly scanned the area, and suddenly jumped to get the head of the statue off (the girl’s head). There wasn’t a key. There was another riddle “Water Chapel”

They opened their phone.

- Apparently, the only chapel on water is on Porto surroundings, precisely Miramar, Sr. Da Pedra – said Maria

- There also is an urban legend that says that a lost king once put his horse's paws in a rock. Maybe the key is there – speculated Daniel

After this interaction they got into a train and arrived at Miramar. They quickly went to the chapel of Sr. da Pedra.

- This park, the chapel and the sea are amazing – said Daniel

- Indeed brother, but we need to hurry, otherwise the sun will set – said Maria

- Ok, so by what I know, the key is supposedly on the left side, behind the chapel.

- Ok!

They went there, still admiring the beauty of it. After a rough time getting to the rocks, they finally got there.

- Wow, it sure was hard. But as the paper said “those who really want something, will get it at all costs”. - said Maria

- True, but be careful the tide is rising – alerted Daniel

- Yeah, you got a point – answered Maria

When they saw what seemed to be the place, they noticed a lot of mussels around it. They, luckily, didn't cut themselves and got the key.

- Finally! - said the twins, synchronized

- We need to get out of here before the tide gets us!

- You are right!

They successfully got out without being injured.

- I think we shouldn't open it here. - said Maria

- I think the same as you, we should open it somewhere special – said Daniel

- But where? - questioned Maria
- Maybe in the ocean? - proposed Daniel
- I mean, maybe – said Maria, unsure
- We'll see – concluded Daniel

Eventually they got on the train, and, from Porto S. Bento called a Uber to their hotel, as they decided to open it in the next day.

On the start of the other day, they discussed where to go open the chest:

- Where should we do it? - asked Maria
- I don't know... - said Daniel
- The beach? - insisted Maria
- I think the beach is a bad place. We lost the chest two times there, and the mermaid... - pointed Daniel
- That's true, but we can finish it where we started, kind of an end in the start – said Maria
- Ok I guess, but which beach? - questioned Daniel
- Sr. Da Pedra beach, the one we got the key in – suggested Maria
- Ok – said Daniel

As they were going to the beach, they had a strange feeling. They stopped on a snack-bar. Maria put the chest on her bag. After chatting for 30 minutes, Daniel noticed someone running away. With the symbol

- Maria, where is your bag?
- It is her-
- MARIA, WHERE IS IT?
- No, no NO
- Do you have the key?
- Yes, at least.



CHAPTER FOUR

They were very angry. They thought it was all over and that they would never know the truth, however Maria discovered something.

- Daniel! Look! Something is written on the key!- said Maria.

- Let me see!- he said excitedly, yanking the key from Maria's hand.

- "Pontus Euxinus?"- they asked in a voice.

- We could look it up on the internet. Surely we will find something! -Maria said confidently.

The two searched on the internet and found out that the Pontus Euxinus was actually the Black Sea.

-The Black Sea? But several countries have access to it...- Maria said a little disappointed.

-You really didn't realize? It's obvious! The next location is in Romania.- Daniel said.

- How did you come to this conclusion?- she asked puzzled.

- Do you recall the symbols I told you about, those with the three primary colors? It's Romania for sure! What other country with these colors has access to the Black Sea?-

- You're really smart! What are you waiting for? Let's go back to the hotel, pack our bags and go to Romania!-

Arriving at the hotel, they ran into the room to pack their bags, when they saw two plane tickets to Romania on the bed. Happiness could be seen on their faces. They were determined to follow the trail of the thief who stole their chest. From Portugal they arrived in Great Britain where they changed planes, then arrived at Bucharest airport.

Once they arrived at the airport in Bucharest, they didn't think for long and started their adventure in Romania. They began to look for some ways

by which they could reach the Black Sea. While looking for a train to take them there, they saw some posters of the Danube Delta. They were very impressed by the wonderful scenery that the Delta offered, so they decided to go there first and then to the Black Sea.

Because the train was leaving in an hour, the two children decided to go get something to eat. They were very lucky to find a traditional food restaurant within walking distance of the train station. After enjoying some extremely tasty dishes, they left for the station. They got on the train, but they had almost lost it because of Daniel, who couldn't get enough of the food at the restaurant.

- Daniel, what if we had missed the train? It would've been your fault! Do you realize that we would've had to wait three more hours for the next train!?- Maria said angrily.

- Oh! I am sorry! I didn't want to, but the food was so good! I couldn't stop! I promise it won't happen again! Is it ok?-

- Daniel, I forgive you this time, but I hope you will keep your promise from now on. Let's go to our seats. I'm tired. I don't want to be standing up anymore.-

After taking their seats, they calmed down a bit and slept for a few minutes.

Suddenly, Maria woke up and noticed a strange man wearing a hat with the symbol of the three primary colors printed on it and holding a chest similar to the one that was stolen from them.

- Daniel, wake up !- Maria exclaimed as she shook her brother.

- What happened?- Daniel asked confused.

- Look at the chest that was stolen from us! Let's catch the thief!-

However while they were talking, the thief noticed them, ran away and got off the train as soon as they reached the next station. Fortunately,

while they were running, they spotted a policeman and called for his help. The robber was caught and arrested, and Daniel and Maria recovered the much-desired box.

Because it was getting dark, they decided to stay at a hotel in Constanța and go see the Danube Delta another time. They stayed at the Ibis hotel where the staff was friendly, the food was appetizing, the surroundings were wonderful and the sea was right next to them.

- Where do you think it would be best to open the box? - Maria said.

Daniel didn't answer as he seemed lost in his thoughts, still thinking about the mermaid he had met so many times. Surely she had something to do with the truth.

- Daniel? Daniel??- cried his sister, who was getting worried.

- A suitable place would be at the beach, near the seashore.-

It was morning and the twins were planning to open the box at sunset, so they spent the rest of the day exploring the area, taking pictures, and having fun as they knew the truth was close at hand.

The most awaited moment was approaching fast. Maria and Daniel were near the seashore, where they were preparing for what was to come. The two placed the box on the hot sand and slowly inserted the key. Inside was a rare stone of an incredibly bright blue which symbolized the sea.

“Manman dlo” could be heard from the water and then the siren appeared. At first, Daniel was scared of her, but after looking at her carefully, he noticed that she had a necklace around her neck with a missing piece. The twins slowly approached her and realized that the rare stone they had was a perfect match for the mermaid's necklace. They then placed the stone in its slot, and the mermaid lit up and spoke to them for the very first time.

- Thank you very much! My name is Selena. You saved me from a very cruel curse.-

- Was this the long-sought truth? - the twins asked.
- I was cursed by an evil wizard hundreds of years ago, and your grandfather was the first man that tried to help me. In case he couldn't succeed, he left behind the diary you found.-
- We are glad that we could help you and that we could fulfill our grandfather's wish! -
- I will always be your friend, and as a reward for your efforts, I will give you these silver necklaces. Look! If you put them together they form a mermaid.-

At the end of the day, the twins went back to the hotel and were very happy, because they were able to fulfill their grandfather's wish, and were thinking about how much they had been through together on this adventure.

Because they had some free time left, they decided to put into practice an idea they had initially abandoned: to visit the Danube Delta! They asked for some information at the hotel reception, and then took a bus that dropped them off at their destination. There, using the digital map on their phone, they rented a boat and cruised the waterways. The landscape was wonderful, everything around was green and the lakes strewn with flowers delighted their eyes. They never would have thought that the Danube Delta could delight the eyes of visitors so much.

The port city they had reached was Sulina. After getting off the boat, they decided to look for accommodations as close to the delta as possible, and after a long search they found a guesthouse where they could stay for the day.

- Could you imagine, Maria, that the Danube Delta would be so fabulous?- asked Daniel.

- It's impressive, the port, the Sulina canal, all of it! And oh, how hungry I am! I think we should eat something!-

After finding the nearest restaurant, they ordered food specific to the Danube Delta: fish with a traditional sauce.

- The food looks appetizing, and it also tastes very good. I would really like to prepare this kind of fish at home, but we don't know the recipe!- said Daniel.

- We can ask, maybe the cooks are friendly and willing to tell us the "secret" recipe of this dish! -said Maria.

Convinced that they must find out the recipe, Maria and Daniel went to the restaurant's kitchen, lured by the smell of the food, and as it got stronger, they could easily identify where it originated from. When they entered the kitchen, they asked the chef for the recipe, however, he politely refused, stating that the recipe is kept carefully in a safe, and the only one who knows its contents is the owner of the restaurant who is also the head chef.

Disappointed, but also happy that they tasted one of the best dishes they have ever tried, they left for the port which was not hard to find. Once there, they boarded the boat and set off.

Arriving in the proper Delta, the twins saw fish of various colors and sizes, multi-colored flowers, various species of plants growing in the water, and also the water of the Delta which was very clear.

While admiring the scenery, they heard a familiar voice.

- What are you doing? -Selena asked them.

- We've decided to enjoy the vacation we're on,- the twins answered.

- Do you want me to show you some nice places?- the siren offered.

- Of course!-

Suddenly, Selena said some magic words and told the twins to dive into the water without fear. They accepted the proposition and jumped into the clear water, where they could surprisingly breathe without any problems.

- Selena, you are wonderful, how did you cast this spell?- the twins said.

- It's a family secret!, I can't tell you- said Selena. But I want you to know that the spell lasts until the end of the day, after that it has no effect, so we have to hurry!

Arriving in the Delta water, the twins and Selena decided to analyze every underwater animal, but before that, Maria insisted on meeting Selena's family. Selena took them to the underwater cave where she lived, and there they met her parents which were preparing a meal.

- Mom, Dad, these are my new friends, Maria and Daniel! They are really cute; you should get to know them better! -Selena told her parents. Her father got up from the table and whispered something to his daughter, after which he greeted Maria and Daniel.

- My name is Maria and this is my brother Daniel. Nice to meet you mister...mister...

- I'm glad too!- said Selena's father.

-I'm very glad that Selena was able to find some friends like you! But how was it possible?-

-Well, our grandfather tried to save Selena several times but failed so he wrote a journal about it, and we decided to follow his advice and go in search of the chest that contained a rare stone in mermaid shape, which I put in Selena's necklace! - explained Daniel.

-Thank you very much for saving my daughter and removing the curse! - said her mother.

Although they had already eaten, the twins did not hesitate to taste the food prepared by Selena's mother, which consisted of delta plants!

-Let's get to know the different types of fish, underwater plants and shells! - Selena exclaimed.

And so the twins set off on their journey under the Danube Delta and the Black Sea, starting from the Sulina canal.

They discovered different species of fish, such as: sturgeon, trout, catfish, crucian carp, bream, anchovies, carp. A lot of birds were walking both on water and on land: white pelicans, pink pelicans, storks, gulls, wild ducks with multi-colored plumage, swans. But they were most impressed by the pink pelicans and the turtles that guided them to the mouth of the Danube Delta into the Black Sea. Arriving in the Black Sea, Selena suggested that the twins visit the most famous restaurant in the city of Constanța "Danubius" where they had the pleasure of enjoying the fish soup that fascinated them and, eager to find out another recipe, they decided to convince the restaurant's chef to tell them the secret ingredient that gives food its flavor.

-I can't give you the whole recipe, but I can tell you that the secret ingredient is love and water from the Danube!- said the cook.

The twins received a note in an envelope with the recipe for fish soup.

Let's see what it said there: we need 1 liter of water, 3 finely chopped onions, 4 diced peppers, 3 carrots, 2 pieces of celery, a parsnip, natural tomato juice, a trout, a carp and a crucian carp. Also, the most important ingredient must be added, namely: a liter of fresh water from the Danube. We have to boil the soup for about 2 hours, on low heat. Yum..! That's what we'll do when we get home. Our friends will be delighted.

Barely 10 minutes from the restaurant, they saw a Dolphinarium. When they entered, the twins were amazed by its splendor. The aquariums were magnificent, with different kinds of underwater life that continued to amaze them: dolphins, octopuses, jellyfish, crabs, giant turtles, rays, sea cats, starfish, sea dogs, seahorses, squids, and hundreds of other animals.

Selena proposed to Maria to venture into the knowledge of marine species held within the Dolphinarium. They first inspected the dolphin's aquarium, where Selena used a language only she knew to communicate with the dolphins.

- Thank you for visiting us, we are pleased to meet you, Maria. If you want to see more, we can show you the most efficient way to get to the other animals' aquarium! -said the dolphins. However you have to say "Manman dlo" 3 times for a "secret" door to open!

The twins and Selena uttered those magical words, and (miraculously) a door opened right before their amazed gazes!

- Come on, why are you hesitating? I guess you can't wait to meet our friends!- the dolphins said in unison.

- Can't wait! -exclaimed Maria.

The dolphins led the three into a shining tunnel, at the end of which was a door that they thought would be the way to the other animals' aquariums, so they opened it without hesitation. What they saw on the other side shocked them: all the animals in the Dolphinarium were dancing and talking, as if they had learnt to speak human languages!

- It's fabulous! How....how....is such a thing possible? Am I hearing things?- asked Daniel frightened.

-Welcome! We are pleased to meet you! What brings you here?- asked the underwater creatures in unison. We are very glad that you are visiting us, on this occasion we can see our best friend, Selena!

The moment the animals spoke, the twins fell silent, it seemed unreal. But Selena was overjoyed to see her old friends, whom she hadn't spoken to in a long time.

After meeting the animals in the Dolphinarium, Selena suggested to the twins that they visit the seafront.

- Goodbye, we hope to see you again! - said the same surreal chorus.

They left the Dolphinarium and went to the seafront to see the Black Sea and its wonders, and also buy some souvenirs from the areas they had already visited. They arrived at a store and greeted the clerk, but something was strange: he was actually the thief who had stolen their chest! -How could he possibly be here, didn't the police arrest him?- Daniel asked himself. And to top it all off, he was selling a necklace that looked exactly like Selena's!

- That is your necklace, Selena. Why does the wizard have it? What happened?-

- After you gave me the missing stone, I returned to the water. There I met the sorcerer who told me that if I didn't give him the necklace he would curse me again, and this time no one would be able to help me.-

The children motioned for Selena to speak more softly as the wizard seemed to be listening. Daniel tried to talk to the seller because he wanted to buy the necklace, but at the same time he wanted to make sure it was the real one and not a forgery.

Just as they were about to buy the necklace, the "clerk" hesitantly told to the twins:

-You seem familiar to me, as if I've seen you somewhere before!-

The children, seeing that the thief recognized them, decided not to buy the necklace out of fear that he might trick them. Afterwards, they decided to visit the cliff in front of the Casino and come up with a plan to retrieve the necklace. The spectacular landscape of the Black Sea, sprinkled with golden stars and the color of the sea, pearl-blue, delighted those three.

- I think we should stop at a terrace to enjoy a lemonade with mint and lime.-said Daniel. Because Daniel was very excited about Romanian food,

they decided to try something else - seafood: shrimp, octopus, clams, snails and crab legs.

Then they visited the wine cellars in the town of Murfatlar, the Cernavodă nuclear power plant, and the town of Mangalia. There they had the joy of finding out that the Dobrogea region is spectacular from all points of view: fabulous creatures, multicolored plants and flowers, and also natural tourist attractions that delight the eyes of any visitor.

-Constanta County is dotted with the most beautiful tourist attractions in Romania! -proclaimed Selena.

- The whole of Romania is very beautiful !- said the children. We would like to visit it again!

After all of these adventures, the children uttered the magic words "Manman dlo" and then entered the water to be able to return to the guesthouse in Sulina where they were checked in.

Arriving at the intersection of the Black Sea and the Sulina canal, Daniel asked Selena:

-Why did you show us so many places?-

-This whole trip was for the purpose of thanking you for freeing me from the curse! And it's all because of your courage. If your grandfather hadn't written about the trip in his journal, then you wouldn't have been able to free me from the curse either! -Selena said gratefully, her eyes filling with tears.

-But why would our grandfather want to rid you of the curse?- Maria asked.

-I can do many things. For example, I can cure some diseases or help people who are in danger at sea. The only ones who knew this secret about me are my parents, the Danube fish and your grandfather.- Selena said.

-But why were you cursed by that wizard? What would be the reason to curse a mermaid who can do such things?- asked Daniel.

-That wizard wanted to steal my healing powers, said Selena.-

-Let's find that sorcerer and convince him to not do you any more harm and return the necklace.-

So the three set off on the Sulina Canal to reach the wizard, but no one knew which way the wizard's house was. They did have one help though... the magic words "Manman dlo". After they uttered those words, a boat appeared in front of them, inside of which was a gentleman.

-What are you doing? Where are you going? Why is Selena with you?-

- Hello! Who are you and how do you know us?-

- I'm a detective and I've been on your trail all along. I was friends with your grandfather.-

- We want to find the wizard who cursed Selena. Do you happen to know where we need to go find him?-

- I think I have an idea. Get in the boat and close your eyes.-

After closing their eyes, as if by a miracle, they felt a strong wind pushing them from behind. As if by a miracle, they reached the ruins of a fortress.

-Where are we? It looks like a pretty old fortress!- said Daniel.

- We are at the Histria citadel, one of the oldest citadels in Romania!- the detective told them.

-But why is this fortress so important?-

- The Histria Fortress is located in the town of Istria, having been founded by the Greeks in the 7th century before our era, forming one of the first Greek colonies in the Black Sea and at the same time it was the first urban settlement on the current territory of our country. The first silver coins from the current territory of Romania were minted in Histria. The name of

the Histria fortress is given by the name of the river Istros, which is how the Danube was called by the ancient Greeks. The ruins of the fortress are located on the shore of Lake Sinoe, the one you can see in the distance. But at the time the citadel was built, the current Lake Sinoe was a simple bay open to the sea, and among the oldest discoveries is the Sacred Area of the citadel, comprising temples dedicated to Aphrodite and Zeus located on an ancient rocky island. A walk through the streets of the Histria fortress will take you back millennia. The Histria Archaeological Museum has many special exhibits from Histria and throughout the region, all of them gathered after centuries of archeological diggings.

In front of them was a huge rock that had windows and they realized that the wizard who had cursed Selena lived there. The detective opened the locked door and saw the sorcerer preparing a green potion in a huge pot. Then Selena starts singing a song:

-Enter the water of the sea and do not be afraid. /You will learn to swim among the mermaids. / And then on the golden cliffs. / You will share a flower with a hummingbird! (Repeating these lines for five minutes).

When the sorcerer heard those lines, he got scared and asked the twins what they wanted.

-What do you want, kids? And you, Selena, what are you doing here? Know that I will cast the curse on you again!-

- Please, sorcerer, give me back the necklace! There are many people who need my help! -Selena tells the wizard.

-Never!! The necklace will stay with me.-

Hearing all of this, the detective, who in the meantime rummaged through the wizard's belongings, found a very old book. He opened it and uttered an incantation that caused the wizard to age greatly. Seeing that he no longer had any strength, he caved in:

- Okay, okay... I'll give you what you want! Selena then moved closer to him and said the two magic words: "Manman dlo."

At that moment, Selena received back her powers and the necklace, and in order to show the sorcerer that good always wins, she turned him into a good man.

Maria, Daniel, Selena and the detective left the wizard's house and went to Selena's parents to tell them that she had gotten her necklace and powers back.

-Thank you, our dears!- How can we repay you for all your help to our daughter?

-You don't have to pay us.- We are glad that we were able to help Selena so that she, in turn, can help people in need.

- Won't you stay to eat with us?- asked Selena's parents. We have fish with sauce, fish soup and seafood.

- I think we're going to stay,- said Daniel, thinking about what goodies Selena's mother had cooked.

After eating they said goodbye to Selena and her parents and then got into the detective's boat and left for the guesthouse where they were checked in. After sailing for two hours, they reached their destination just before the landlady locked the door. Arriving in the rooms, knowing that there was still a day until they had to go back to Portugal, they talked to the detective for a long time. Because they had made very nice memories in Romania together with Selena and because they wanted to visit Romania again, they decided to share all of their thoughts with their grandfather's friend.

At the end of these fun-filled days, Maria and Daniel took a picture with Selena and then said their final goodbye to her. The photo will be placed in their room to remind them of this incredible adventure.

The end.





The Wonderful Adventure of Maria And Daniel



Act I
Scene I

Daniel and Maria are twins, they are in Porto, in Ribeira, with three friends, João, Ana and André.

An elderly woman drops her grandson's puppet into the water.

JOÃO: Hey, guys! Did you see that? That old lady dropped the puppet.

DANIEL: We better help!

ANA: You're the best swimmer, go ahead.

(Everybody agrees, nodding their heads.)

ANDRÉ: You better be careful, the currents are strong, here!

DANIEL: Don't worry, I'll be careful.

(He jumps into the water, gets the puppet and the old lady thanks him. Meanwhile he notices something unusual, but still goes back to his friends.)

MARIA: Are you OK? You didn't get hurt, did you?

DANIEL: No, I'm fine but I saw something really strange down there... Near the rocks. *(He points to the place, leading his friends towards it.)*

JOÃO *(grabbing it)*: It's a bottle and there is a paper inside...

ANDRÉ: Should we open it?

ANA *(grabbing the bottle and opening it)*: Of course!

DANIEL: What does it say?

ANA *(reading)*: "I write this tearful note, with the hope that one day, someone might help me; I will leave a map, so that only the right people may find me... and not the wrong ones.

Signed: Alexandru Popescu."

(They all look at the map carefully.)

JOÃO (*surprised*): Oh God, what now... What shall we do?

DANIEL: I think we should investigate...

ANDRÉ: No way, we don't even know who he is...

ANA: Stop being stupid, of course we are, we are the right people to do it.

Agreed?

(They all agree.)

MARIA: Well, but we'll do it tomorrow. Now, it's too late.

The friends say goodbye and go back home.

Scene II

On the following day, the group meets again, near D. Luís Bridge

ANA: Good morning everyone, are you ready for our adventure?

ANDRÉ: Not really, I still think it's a bad idea.

MARIA: Oh, stop complaining.

(Daniel takes the map out of his backpack and they analyse it).

JOÃO: Doesn't this look familiar?

MARIA: Yes, It's Clérigos' Tower.

DANIEL: All right, let's go, we don't have time to lose!

They leave.

Act II

Scene I

Daniel, Maria, João, Ana and André are in front of Clérigos' Tower door.

ANA: Have you got any money for the tickets?

ANDRÉ: I've got some.

JOÃO: Somebody is going to pay mine because I haven't got any money.

MARIA: João, I'll pay yours and mine.

DANIEL: Ok, then, we all have the money.

(They nod, buy the tickets and get in.)

MARIA: Let's climb the steps, all the way to the top.

(They follow Maria).

ANDRÉ: Be careful, not to fall down.

ANA: Stop being so boring, you're not my father!

(When they reach the top, they start looking for something relevant. Suddenly the bell rings and João gets such a fright that he falls down.)

MARIA *(laughing)*: João, are you OK?

(Daniel arrives and lifts a stone that João had pointed out).

ANA: Look, a box!

DANIEL *(opening it)*: There is a paper inside.

MARIA *(grabbing the paper)*: Let me see.

ANA: Read it, quickly! What does it say?

MARIA *(reading)*: "If you are reading this letter, it's because you've completed the first challenge. To reach the next one, you have to speak to Mr. Menício and ask him about the classic one. I can't say no more, hope to see you soon."

Signed: Alexandru Popescu."

ANA: We know what to do next.

JOÃO: Yes, but after we have something to eat.

DANIEL: Let's go to **Conga** and eat some "bifaninhas" (pork sandwiches), I'm paying.

ANDRÉ (*laughing*): Now, that's talking!

They go to the restaurant.

Act III

Scene I

At the restaurant, many tables are taken. The five friends are sitting by the window, having lunch and thinking about their next move.

JOÃO: Well, one thinks better with a full stomach. What's our next step?

DANIEL: I don't know, but the letter talked about Mr. Menício...

MARIA: I don't know any Mr. Menício, but we can always ask around. Perhaps, starting with the customers of the restaurant.

ANA: Yes, the customers.

ANDRÉ: But be careful who you're asking; not everyone is trustworthy.

ANA: Shut up! You go first.

(André addresses the people sitting at the table at the back of the restaurant.)

ANDRÉ: Good afternoon, sorry to interrupt your "bifaninhas", but I would like to ask if you know someone by the name Mr. Menício...

A RUSSIAN (*speaking Russian*): Чего хочет этот идиот? (*What does this idiot want?*)

ANDRÉ (*facing his friends*): They are Russian.

ANA: Say Извините (*Sorry*).

(André mispronounces the word and the Russians think that he is insulting them.)

A RUSSIAN (*getting up absolutely enraged*): Что ты сказал? Повтори это?
(*What did you say? Repeat it!*)

(*Mr. Frederico, the restaurant owner becomes aware of the situation and gets close to calm them down.*)

Mr. FREDERICO: Lets' quiet down please, children come with me.
(*He takes the children out of the restaurant.*)

Mr. FREDERICO: You shouldn't mess around with strangers!

ANDRÉ: I just asked if they knew Mr. Menício.

Mr. FREDERICO: Mr. Menício? I used to know one, who works at *Lello* bookshop.

JOÃO: Then, it makes sense... The classic... On the letter... It must be a book.

DANIEL: So, you think the work "Classic" refers to a literature classic?

MARIA: We better go there and check it out.

DANIEL: Good idea! Thanks for your help Mr. Frederico.

JOÃO: Ei! We still have to pay for the bill...

Mr. FREDERICO: Today, it is on the house... You can go. Good luck, I hope I was useful.

They head to Lello bookshop.

Act IV

Scene I

The five friends get into the bookshop and go to the shop counter.

MARIA: Good afternoon, we are looking for Mr. Menício.

Mr. MENÍCIO: It's me, how can I help you?

JOÃO: Alexandre Presco, do you recognize this name?

DANIEL: Shut up, that's not like that. It's Alexandru Popescu!

Mr. MENÍCIO: Oh yes, we have been friends, but there's quite a while I haven't heard about him. Why are you interested in him?

ANDRÉ: Do you think he might be connected to a book...? You work here... You should know!

Mr. MENÍCIO: That's the pseudonym he used to use.

ANA (*talking to the group*): Now the letter makes sense.

ANDRÉ: That's the pseudonym he used to write books? Like, classics?

Mr. MENÍCIO: Yes, *The Classic* was his favourite book.

DANIEL: Can we see *The Classic*?

Mr. MENÍCIO (*heading to the back of the store*): Follow me, let's go to some place quieter.

Mr. Menício shows Daniel "The Classic". He sits with his friends and flips the pages, while taking some notes.

Two hours later.

ANA: Look, it's getting late, and I still have to help my grandmother with dinner.

ANDRÉ: Right, it's getting late, and it can be dangerous, we can be robbed.

DANIEL: So, let's meet tomorrow after lunch, in *Ribeira*.

They all return to their homes.

Act V
Scene I

On the next day, the friends meet in Ribeira.

ANDRÉ: Good afternoon!

MARIA: Hi, guys!!

ANA: So, let's analyse what was on the book.

MARIA: Well, we took some notes, but when I reread them at home, I noticed that there are many references to musical classics. So, I thought we should look for some answers in *Casa da Música*.

JOÃO: Ok, it's now that I'm starting to sing *Fado*...

ANDRÉ: That would be really interesting ... To hear you singing... *Fado*. But *Casa da Música* isn't near here.

JOÃO: We can go by underground, right?

DANIEL: There are many ways to get there, but the underground is certainly the best.

They all agree and then go to "Casa Da Música".

Act VI

Scene I

Five friends, next to "Casa da Música".

ANA: Well André, we got here quite quickly.

ANDRÉ (*being ironical*): You're really funny, aren't you?

MARIA: Please focus, we don't have much time.

DANIEL: All right, the book tells a lot about classical music.

MARIA: Indeed, if the book talks about classical music, we could ask the receptionist which is the most noble room at *Casa da Música*.

JOÃO (*moving towards the reception*): I will talk to her; she's kind of cute.

DANIEL: I knew you would be saying that.

Scene II

João knocks on the window to speak to the receptionist. A group of tourists waits nearby.

JOÃO (*looking at the badge*): Good afternoon Miss Clara, can you tell me what is the most noble room inside this precious building?

CLARA: Good afternoon, you mean Sala Suggia.

JOÃO: Thank you, how much do 5 tickets cost?

CLARA: To visit Sala Suggia or to attend a concert?

JOÃO: In fact, we would like to visit Sala Suggia. Is it possible?

CLARA: Yes, it is, but only by appointment, and for today there are no vacancies. The last group is getting in now.

João signals his friends to join the group near the entrance door, while he talks to the receptionist.

Scene III

They get inside Sala Suggia, with the exception of João. The tourist group has already left the room.

MARIA: Ok, the book provides details about music by Beethoven and Mozart.

Daniel: Well then, Ana and Maria look for any kind of reference about Beethoven while André and I look for Mozart.

ANDRÉ: But be careful, don't spoil anything.

(They look everywhere.)

ANA: What a terrible idea Daniel had; we don't even know what to look for.

DANIEL *(screaming from the other side)*: I HEARD THAT!

ANA: It was supposed to.

MARIA: Be quiet and stop screaming.

ANDRÉ: I agree, someone can hear and find us.

ANA: Shut up André, look for what you are supposed to.

DANIEL: Come on, we have a lot to search for.

(After a while, the boys find a painting with musical scores by Mozart and look at it attentively.)

DANIEL: Girls, we found this painting of Mozart!

ANDRÉ: It seems there is a paper behind it; but I'm afraid to touch it.

DANIEL: Leave it, I'll do it...

ANDRÉ *(interrupting Daniel)*: Be careful, it may activate an alarm and we'll go to jail.

DANIEL: Stop it.

(Daniel takes the paper out.)

DANIEL *(talking to the girls)*: I think I found a clue, but it's torn in half, we better keep looking.

(After looking again, *Maria and Ana notice a painting of Beethoven.*)

ANA: We found this painting and it seems to have a half-torn sheet, too.

MARIA (*grabbing the sheet and yelling*): Daniel and André come quickly.
(*André and Daniel run to them and they join the sheets.*)

ANDRÉ: Guys, we have to go, João is waiting.

DANIEL: Just a minute. The sheets together look like a train.

MARIA: Does it mean we have to go to *São Bento* train station?

ANA: It must be, but now we have to find João.

They leave “Sala Suggia” and meet João.

Scene IV

In front of “Casa da Música”.

ANDRÉ: João, how could you entertain the receptionist for so long?

JOÃO: I have my tricks.

ANDRÉ: You must teach me later.

MARIA: Stop playing around, João we found a sheet with a train; so, we thought that our next move should be *São Bento* train station.

JOÃO: That sounds right but now it is too late and I have other things to do.

ANA: Agreed, we shall continue tomorrow.

They say goodbye and go home.

Act VII

Scene I

On the following day. The group of friends meets at São Bento train station. Two security guards and Mr. Popescu enter.

MARIA: Hello everyone, I have been looking at the sheet we found yesterday, and the train had a no. 1; so, I thought that Popescu could be hiding somewhere in line 1 because that line is only for the exhibition of old trains.

ANDRÉ: All right, but how are we supposed to find a stranger... All of a sudden?

ANA: There you are...

DANIEL: Don't start! Let's check line 1.

(Everyone starts looking.)

SECURITY GUARD *(yelling)*: You can't be walking around here.

JOÃO: Is this when we start running?

ANA *(a bit ahead)*: You're too late...

(João starts running and the security guards follow them.)

POPESCU *(noticing the noise)*: Children, hide here!

ANDRÉ *(hesitating)*: Shall we get in?

MARIA: Shut up and get in.

(They get inside the carriage and the security guards can't see them.)

ANA *(breathing heavily)*: Thank you very much for your help, what's your name?

POPESCU: My name is Eurico Gomes, but you know me as Alexandru Popescu and I am the twins' father.

TWINS (*together*): What?! We are orphans.

POPESCU: Yes, your mother died when you were born. I took care of you for some years but then I was charged by the Russian Mafia of something I didn't do. So, I had to put you into an orphanage and hide. But I always said I would come back for you when you were ready.

JOÃO (*almost speechless*): Jesus, I'm shocked, this looks like a Mexican soap!

MARIA: But how did you know that we would be the ones to find your clues?

POPESCU: I planned everything to the slightest detail, so that it was only you who could see the first clue and so on.

DANIEL: Ok, but what do you need us for?

POPESCU: Now that you found me, again, you can stay with your foster family or travel with me to Romania, to help me find the truth. Of course, your friends will have to stay, but they would be a tremendous help if they wanted to come along.

ANDRÉ: Are you sure you want to trust him? You have just met him, and you already want to follow him to Romania?

ANA: Even I, agree with this boring guy. You just met him!

DANIEL: Maria, what do you think?

MARIA: I feel we can trust him; I think he is not lying.

DANIEL: If you believe him, I will too. We're going!

POPESCU: I'm glad, you can't imagine how happy I am! Let's prepare your trip.

DANIEL: But we still have to tell our "parents". They deserve the truth, and they have to authorize us leaving the country..., right?

POPESCU: I can see that you are a reliable person. I'm happy, your education wasn't in vain. I'm sure, there won't be any problems. My contract

with your adopting family was celebrated many years ago and we foresaw this situation. Besides, they are my true friends and I wouldn't do anything to hurt them. They know this day would come.



Act VIII

Scene I

The twins drive Alexandru Popescu's car to their adoptive parents' house. João, Ana and André leave to discuss with their families and ask them if they are allowed to go to Romania.

MARIA *(to Alexandru Popescu)*: Do you think our parents will allow us to leave with you?

POPESCU: Of course I do. They are my best friends. When I left to hide from the Russian Mob, they promised me that when I come back, they will allow you to meet me and come with me if you so wished to.

DANIEL *(looking at Popescu)*: I'd like to ask you something... What was our mother like?

POPESCU *(with tears in his eyes)*: Your mother was a kind, beautiful woman, a person that saw the good even in the worst things. You know... You both have her eyes, *(smiling)* and I noticed that you, Daniel, you have the same tic that your mother had: when she was unsure or she was scared, her left eyelid was fluttering. Ooh... and Daniel, you don't need to address me with "mister", you can call me Alex if you don't feel like calling me "dad".

DANIEL: Alright, Alex. Just so you know we will try to call you "dad".

THE DRIVER: Mister Popescu, we arrived at the destination.

(The three get out of the car and enter the house. The parents, Miguel and Lorena, are in the kitchen, preparing dinner.)

Scene II

Alexandru Popescu knocks on the door and Lorena opens. At his sight, she bursts into tears for seeing an old friend.

LORENA (*very amazed*): Are you really Alexandru? Why, I'm glad you've come! (*At the sound of his wife's scream, Miguel also appears outside the door and hugs Popescu.*)

MIGUEL (*happy*): Our old friend, Alex, we so missed you! I see you've already met your children (*looking at the twins*). Well, what are you waiting for then? Let's come inside!

(*Everyone enters the house and sits on the sofa.*)

POPESCU: Miguel, Lorena, you are such wonderful friends. You brought up my kids so beautifully and helped me when I needed it! That's why I want you to know that whenever you have a problem, you can call me and I'll help you. Now that I crossed paths with the twins I introduced myself and explained why they ended up at an orphanage. My intention is to go to Romania to prove my innocence and I would like the twins to accompany me. It would be a way to get know each other better and an occasion to visit together my wonderful childhood places.

LORENA: If they want to, we have nothing against it. You are their father.

THE TWINS (*excited*): Honestly, we would like to go!

MIGUEL: If this is how you feel, you may go with your father. We'll draw the papers today.

(*The twins run to embrace their adoptive parents.*)

THE TWINS: Even though we met our real father, we will love you still.

MIGUEL AND LORENA (*embracing the children*): You will always be our children!

Scene III

Maria and Daniel go to meet their friends in a nearby park.

MARIA: Hello, friends! We'd like to tell you something... We are going to Romania.

ANA: And why are you sad?

DANIEL: Because we won't see you anymore!

JOÃO (*joyful*): At least ask us what our parents said!

ANDRÉ: We're coming to Romania, too!

ANA: We had no idea that our parents were also good friends of Alexandru Popescu!

JOÃO: My mum...

ANA: ...and my dad...

ANDRÉ: My mother, and Miguel and Lorena...

JOÃO: And Mr. Popescu.... They were the best of friends!

ANA: Just like we are!

ANDRÉ: Yes! Exactly like us!

MARIA (*very happy*): This means that you are all coming with us! I am sooo happy!

JOÃO: And... When are we leaving? Our parents are already discussing about our trip with Mr. Popescu.

DANIEL: I think we are leaving tomorrow afternoon.

ANA: Then let's go and pack our bags!

The kids happily leave for home to pack their luggage.

Act IX

Scene I

The friends meet at the airport in Lisabon. The kids are being accompanied by their parents.

ANA'S DAD: Look Alex, for the sake of my daughter and of our old good times, I'm letting Ana go with you, but please take care of her and the kids!

POPESCU: Relax, Rodrigo! I will protect them with my life!

MIGUEL: I trust you that it'll be fine! Let us now when you arrive in Romania! God's speed!

POPESCU: Thank you, Miguel! All the best!

(The kids' parents entrust them to Alexandru Popescu and then they proceed to board the plane.)

Scene II

The children are all excited because they are flying on a plane for the first time.

ANDRÉ (*happy*): How high we fly! We are among the clouds!

JOÃO (*a little scared*): I hope there won't be any turbulence!

ANA: Stop acting like a small child! You've seen too many movies!

(Out of the blue, the plane makes a sudden move, and the children jump scared, not knowing what is happening. The plane's captain makes an announcement to calm down the passengers.)

CAPTAIN: Please, remain calm! We have an unexpected problem with our plane's board and we need to force land on a nearby field. But do not worry! I have experienced such a situation before, and everything went fine. Please, remain seated and fasten your seatbelts!

POPESCU: Kids, hold on tight! I am right beside. All will be fine!

DANIEL (*towards his friends*): We have to prove that we are brave!

MARIA: We are afraid, but I guess you are right. Everything will be just fine!

(The plane lands with minor damages, but none of the passengers is hurt.)

CAPTAIN *(to the passengers)*: Please get off on the inflatable slides following the instructions and wait for the bus that will take you to Henri Conada airport from Bucharest.

POPESCU *(worried)*: Children, are you ok?

THE CHILDREN: Yes! We were just a little frightened.

POPESCU: Keep your cool. The bus will be here any minute. We seem to be in Buzau county, near Bucharest.

MARIA: Thank God we landed safely!

DANIEL: It was so exciting! I love adventures!

MARIA *(a tad scared)*: I like them too, but maybe not this kind...

DANIEL: I would like to explore this area some more. The wait for the bus is too long. Anyway, I understand we can use other means of transport to go to the airport. If we want to.

ANDRÉ: Oh, I agree!

ANA: Me, too!

POPESCU: I am so glad that you are fine. And that you enjoy a good adventure. But I think we'd better wait for the bus.

JOÃO: Pleaseeeee!

POPESCU: Allright! But we won't go too far, and maybe we'll get the chance to find something else to arrive at the destination. It makes me happy that you also like to explore.

THE CHILDREN: Yey! So good!

MARIA: But where are we, exactly?

POPESCU: According to my map, we are very close to the natural reservation Muddy Volcanoes, in Buzau county. They are known for their spectacular view. And also, they are unique in Europe for their reduced size

and process of forming. It would be mighty nice to go to that place! Let's use this occasion! But we need to walk about an hour before we can see them. Are you ready?

THE CHILDREN: Yes! We can hardly wait!

POPESCU: Then let's get going, troupe!

Scene III

Everyone is heading to Muddy Volcanoes with great enthusiasm.

MARIA (*a little worried*): Will we have problems with the Russian Mob too?

JOÃO: I don't know, but it would be great. We would be like in that movie with...

DANIEL: It's the fifth time you've told us about that movie. Aren't you bored yet?

JOÃO (*slightly upset*): Then, if you're not interested, I won't speak to you the entire way!

(After 5 minutes.)

JOÃO: Is the food good in Romania?

ANDRÉ: You said you wouldn't talk.

JOAO: It doesn't matter when it comes to food. So does anyone know?

MARIA: Well, I read that Romania has some traditional dishes, such as sarmale with polenta.

JOÃO: And how are the "Sarmale" made?

ANA: It's prepared from minced meat, rolled in a cabbage leaf.

JOÃO: What? I wouldn't eat that! Good thing I know how to make sandwiches.

(Everyone starts laughing.)

MARIA: You only think about food! Look at the beautiful landscape! How quiet, how many flowers of all colors! It's like a dream!

(Mr. Popescu calls their parents to tell them that everything is fine. Then, seeing that they are a little tired and hungry, he waves to a car to stop.)

POPESCU: Hello!

THE VILLAGER: Hello!

POPESCU: We would like to reach the Muddy Volcanoes. Can you tell us where to go?

THE VILLAGER: I'll take you to it! I'm on my way there.

POPESCU: That's good! Thank you!

(Everyone arrives at the desired destination and is amazed by the beauty of the selenarian landscape.)

CHILDREN: Wow! It's great!

DANIEL: It's like we're on the Moon! I never imagined that I would be able to see such a magical and mysterious place!

POPESCU: I'm glad you like it. You would have been sorry to miss such an opportunity!

JOÃO: It's like we're in the STAR TREK movie.

ANDRÉ: You've seen a lot of movies! But this time I agree with you.

(Everyone starts laughing.)

POPESCU: Time has passed quickly, but the adventure continues! Now we are heading to my house in Constanta! We will take a minibus to Buzau, then we will go by train. I thought of everything! Do not worry!

ANA: I really like our trip!

MARIA: Me too! I can't wait to continue!

Act X

Scene I

Everyone arrives safely in Costanta, then Mr. Popescu leads the children to his house.

ANDRE: What a beautiful house you have! It is much bigger than our houses!

ANA: Yes! Yes! Very beautiful indeed!

DANIEL: It was a long road, but it was worth it. Here I feel at home!

MARIA: So am I! I'm glad we got to know you... Dad!

POPESCU (*excited*): I'm glad you like it! I'm impressed! (*He takes Maria and Daniel in his arms.*) And you, dear children (*to João, Ana, André*), you can simply call me Alex. (*He hugs them all.*)

ANA: Ok, Alex.

The children enter their rooms and unpack, then rest until the next day.

Scene II

In the morning the children wake up bright and eager for new adventures. First, they go to the kitchen with Alex to prepare breakfast.

POPESCU: Would you like for me to teach you how to cook Romanian food?

THE CHILDREN: Of course we would!

POPESCU: Then let's make one of the most popular dish: cabbage rolls with polenta. It is honestly my favourite dish!

(After they finish cooking, they are all eating the food, except João.)

ANA: João, are you sure you don't want any? They are delicious.

JOÃO: No, thank you very much. I'll stick to my sandwiches.

POPESCU: But have you ever tried “Sarmale”?

JOÃO: No, I haven't. But I don't like how they look.

POPESCU: Maybe you should try one, see if you like it.

(João tries the food and realizes that it is quite good.)

JOÃO: Alex, can I have more of this food, please?

POPESCU: Sure, João. How many do you want?

JOÃO: Ten!

(The children start laughing. After they eat...)

DANIEL: Alex, can you take us for a walk by the sea?

POPESCU: Sure. Would you like to go right now?

DANIEL: Yes.

POPESCU: Fine. Let`s go!

Scene III

All of them walk quietly on the Black Sea beach.

ANDRÉ: Wow! This is one big lake, isn't it?

POPESCU: Oh, André! This is the Black Sea, not some lake.

ANA: That explains why it looks SO big.

MARIA: Look over there! There are some seashells. Let's pick them up.

JOÃO: Seashells? What are we waiting for?

(The kids run to gather shells, when Maria observes a strange object.)

MARIA: Alex, is it normal for shells to sparkle?

POPESCU: How come sparkle?

MARIA: Like they're made of gold.

POPESCU: Of gold? Defintely not. It must be something else.

DANIEL: But where did you see such a thing?

MARIA (*pointing to a certain place*): Right there!

(*Daniel goes and brings back the object.*)

ANDRÉ: It's a ring!

POPESCU (*a bit worried*): Children, it's getting late. Let's return home!

Scene IV

They arrive home and Alexander locks the doors, shuts the windows, turns the lights off and lights some candles.

MARIA: What's going on? Why did you do all this?

POPESCU: Take a seat here and I'll tell you.

(*The children sit down and listen with curious faces.*)

POPESCU: You know that I told you about the Russian Mob and that I was hiding from it. Vladislav, the head of the Mafia, had a ring just like the one you found. In fact, he had several... He told me that every time he would cross my way, he would send me a ring so that I would know that he was following me.

ANDRÉ (*scared*): So we're being chased by a Russian gangster now?

POPESCU: I am being watched! I don't want you to be in danger. If you want, first thing tomorrow you can return to Portugal.

DANIEL: We won't leave you alone! I shall stay with you!

MARIA: Me too! I can't go back, knowing you're in danger.

JOÃO, ANA, ANDRÉ: We're not leaving either!

POPESCU: Very well. But we will leave this house. Vladislav has already gotten our lead, but he does not know my plan.

DANIEL: And what's your plan?

POPESCU: I really want him to follow me in order to gather as many rings as possible that could incriminate him, without him realizing it. In fact, he is afraid I might tell the police all the secrets I know about his business. We'll head to the places he used to spend time. If he finds me, I could get him to tell the whole truth while I secretly record him. Then I'll use the recording and the rings with his name on them to prove my innocence. As far as I know, he had some business in Sinaia, Braşov and Alba Iulia and, on this occasion, we could visit these wonderful places, as I promised.

Act XI

Scene I

The next morning, everyone goes to Brasov in a rented a car. On their way, they stop at Peles Castle in Sinaia.

POPESCU: Children, we will cross the forest through the most beautiful places, under the secular firs and the old beeches, covered with moss.

MARIA: It's like the landscape of my dreams!

ANDRÉ (*glad*): How beautiful the castle is! What is the name of this castle?

POPESCU: This is the "Peles Castle", one of the largest castles in Romania and one of the most beautiful!

DANIEL: It's like a fairytale castle!

POPESCU: Of all the royal castles and palaces, Peles was certainly the most beautiful! Peles Castle was the first residence built by King Carol I, the first Romanian King who, together with his wife Queen Elizabeth, left their mark on the sumptuous residence in Sinaia.

DANIEL: The castle is surrounded by splendid gardens!

POPESCU: That's right! The gardens are the work of several landscape architects, each of them leaving his mark on the design of the parks and gardens of Peles.

The children are amazed by everything they see. In two hours they arrive in Braşov, going to the summer fair.

Scene II

MARIA: Alex, where are we now?

POPESCU: In Brasov. This is a large and beautiful town, but we won't stay here. We'll visit the summer fair, then we'll go to Alba Iulia.

ANDRÉ (*glad*): What a big fair this is!

POPESCU: You could buy some souvenirs here.

MARIA AND DANIEL (*surprised*): What are these things?

POPESCU: These things represent the history, customs and folklore of my country. They are handmade by the most skilled artisans.

ANDRÉ (*attracted by a delicious smell*): What a nice aroma!

(It is the perfume of Romanian cabbage rolls and sweet bread. After so many hours of travel, the children cannot resist the urge to stuff their faces with delicious Romanian food.)

DANIEL: Alex, near this stall I found a ring similar to the one from Constanta.

POPESCU (*fearfull*): Dears, let's go! I will keep watch behind. Enter this building!

JOÃO: But what building is this?

POPESCU: This is The First Romanian School.

DANIEL: I would have liked very much to study here.

ANDRÉ: Me, too. But I think it's an old building. What year was it built in?

POPESCU: Classes in Romanian language started in 1583, inside St. Nicolas Church's yard. Nowadays this school is considered a museum.

(The children are able to see objects, tools and clothes used by students and teachers from past times.)

POPESCU: Now we need to start towards Bran Castle. Maybe we'll get the chance to see Vladislav there.

DANIEL: Is it near? Where is this castle?

POPESCU: Yes, it is close. It's 30 km away from town. It is called Vlad Tepes' castle.

Act XII

Scene I

They arrive at Bran Castle and visit the village museum situated in its court.

ANDRÉ *(while admiring the museum)*: What kind of museum is this? It has got so many old and wonderful objects!

JOÃO *(in wonder)*: I like this traditional costumes very much!

POPESCU: This is a Village Museum and this clothes are traditional outfits that people wear on National celebrations or on special occasions.

JOÃO: I'd like to buy something here, so I can remember my visit to Romania.

ANA: I'd like a pair of colorful braided bracelets, to gift my cousin Kira!

POPESCU: I want a pair of peasant shoes with traditional motifs.

They all buy what they want and leave to search for Vladislav.

Scene II

MARIA: These paintings and sculptures inside the castle, do they depict real events?

POPESCU: Some are real, some are from the painter's imagination. One thing is for sure: Vlad Tepes never forgave traitors.

ANDRÉ: Look here! I've found a ring near this sculpture.

POPESCU: Perfect! Now we can continue our trip!

ANA: Is Alba Iulia a nice place?

POPESCU: Of course! You know, a long time ago, Romania used to be some divided territories, inhabited by Romanians but ruled by foreign countries that didn't allow unity. In 1918 all these provinces decided to unite as one, and here, at Alba Iulia, Romania was birthed. Should we leave now?

THE CHILDREN: Yes. Let's go ahead!

ANDRÉ (*wonder in his voice*): Romania is so beautiful!

POPESCU: It's the country I was born and raised in.

Act XIII

Scene I

The six arrive at a peasant house from Alba Iulia, in a remote place in the mountains.

ANA: We're not on holiday here. We should find means to get rid of the Mafia.

MARIA: Alex, pass me the ring, please!

POPESCU (*giving her the ring*): Here you are!

MARIA (*observing it in detail*): These rings... Are they made by Vladislav?

POPESCU: No, he buys them from some place. He has a certain welder, but I don't know him.

DANIEL: And this is a good start.

MARIA: To solve this problem, we need information. So, let's start with the beginning. Why does the Mob know you?

POPESCU: I was young, around your age. I grew up in an orphanage until the day Vladislav came and took me with him to Russia. He wanted to groom me, to be cruel and ruthless, just like one of them. Soon it came the time to perform my first mission: eliminate someone. It was your mother.

THE TWINS: What?? Why? And what did you do?

POPESCU (*tears in his eyes*): They wanted revenge on her father, but I couldn't do it. To save her from death, we ran away to Portugal. And I guess you know what happened next...

MARIA: You fell in love and then we came along...

POPESCU: Correct!

JOÃO: So you are a wanted man because you didn't kill who they ordered you to? Such mean people!

ANA: True!

MARIA (*happy*): I know how we can stop them!

ANDRÉ: How?

MARIA: We need to find the artisan first. Then we need to find Vladislav's address. And after that we'll clear this situation.

DANIEL: Ok, ok. But right now it's gotten late. Let's sleep!

Act XIV

Scene I

Next morning.

ANDRÉ: Wakey-wakey! We have a lot to do!

ANA: Fine, fine! We are up.

JOÃO: But we can't do a lot on an empty stomach!! We must eat something first.

DANIEL: I prepared some traditional cheese.

JOÃO (*tasting*): It's very delicious!

ANDRÉ: Exceptional, indeed!

(They finish eating. Popescu comes into the kitchen.)

POPESCU: Come, children! A new day, a new adventure. Today we'll try to find the famous artisan.

The children pack their bags and get on the car to find the artisan, a popular man from a foreign country.



Act XIV

Scene I

The children pack their bags and get in the car to find the craftsman who is supposed to have made the rings. They know more about him. He is said to be a popular man from a foreign country. Popescu stops abruptly as a traveler crosses the road. A woman quickly approaches the car. She is dressed in several red, pink and yellow jackets. She wears a patterned scarf on her head and looks very old.

POPESCU: You're crazy to cross like that in front of the car, I almost ran you down!

WOMAN: I'm not a crazy woman! I'm Eleanor the fortune teller.

MARIA AND DANIEL: Sorry ma'am, we didn't want to hurt you.

ANDRÉ: We're driving fast because we have to find a bandit.

WOMAN: Oh, it's okay maybe I can help you!

(The woman takes Maria's hand and reads her future.)

WOMAN: You are looking for a person named Vladislav. The spirits tell me that he is in a tropical country where they make rum and sugar.

DANIEL: What could this place be?

MARIA: Let me think...

JOÃO: Can we have more information?

WOMAN: Okay, this country is situated in the Caribbean.

ANA *(excited)*: Oh, it may be Guadeloupe! We often go there with my parents during the holidays.

DANIEL: Or It could be Dominica?

WOMAN: It's not Dominica or Guadeloupe.

JOÃO: Oh I know! It must be French Guiana!

POPESCU: No! It might be Martinique! One of our ancestors travelled there!

WOMAN: All right but you have to pay me now!

POPESCU: What?! You didn't say we had to pay you!

WOMAN: I want a million dollars!

A policeman hears the noise and rushes towards them.

POLICEMAN: What is going on?

POPESCU (*angry*): That crazy woman! She wants a million dollars cash just for information!

POLICEMAN: Ok, I understand. Madam, be sensible and don't beg for money.

WOMAN (*even more angry*): But It's... Okay sir.

(Then the policeman leaves.)

POPESCU: I can give you nothing!

(Seeing that the policeman was still watching them the woman gives up.)

WOMAN: All right.

(The woman and the policeman leave.)

MARIA: There is a pond in the middle of a meadow in this neighbourhood. There, we can find pelicans who had once helped us to get to Martinique.

They take the road towards the pond. After a while.

POPESCU: I remember that there is a house in the distance next to a big lake. Let's have a look!

(He looks from afar, then approaches the house. It is an abandoned house with spider webs on the ceiling, dusty furniture and outside the house, the

shrubs had not been cut for a long time. The house is still in good condition and pleasant to look at: it is made of wood, painted in red.)

POPESCU: I can see that there still are many beds inside I think that we can stay there just for the night.

Act XIV

Scene II

The whole group goes to see the house and not far away, they see the pond and they speak to the pelicans.

MARIA: Where is the king of pelicans?

ONE OF THE PELICANS: He's in his part of the pond but he's still mad at you.

MARIA: Why is he mad at me?

DANIEL (*remembering*): Oh I remember that the last time we were in Martinique riding the pelican, we were attacked by a sort of water goddess called "Manman dlo".

MARIA: It wasn't my fault! This goddess is unpredictable!!!!

ANA: You could tell your friend King of Pelicans that this time we're going to land in a safer place.

(The pelican accepts to meet them and they decide to leave.)

PELICAN KING: I will call one of my friends to take your friends Popescu and João, he can fly pretty fast.

One week later, they travel on the back of the pelicans. The journey lasts 3 days. The third day is the hardest because there is a storm and they are

forced to stop and shelter behind a huge rock. Suddenly, they hear a scratching sound.

DANIEL (*startled*): What's happening? Where have we landed?

MARIA: It is only a crab; it was a crab with a very big claw.

PELICAN: Ohh I want to have it for lunch!!

CRAB: Dear friends, you have arrived to Martinique, please have some pity and do not to eat me I'm going to tell you a secret 'cause I know that you are looking for a man and I will tell you where he is right now. You will have to be careful, this man is very dangerous. I know that he has eaten all my relatives, he ate them for the traditional Easter festival.

(They land a little farther at "La baie du trésor" in Tartane in the north of Martinique.)

MARIA: See how the sea is so blue and beautiful!

PELICAN: Sorry, I can't drop you off!

MARIA: It's not a problem, thanks!!

DANIEL: Now we have to wait for Popescu and João until they reach "La baie du trésor".

MARIA: Hey Pelican! Where are our friends, we can't see them!

THE PELICAN KING: Guys, don't have to worry about that! They are on their way.

The mangrove is muddy with lots crabs, there are also many trees. The leaves of the mangrove trees are tinged with a deep green, with their roots turning in all directions and plunging into the swamp. Close to the beach there are many different species of fish.

MARIA: Oh! Daniel help me please, my foot is stuck in the mud, I can't get out.

DANIEL: Don't worry I will help you!!!

(Daniel is finally getting Maria's foot out of the mud when a "Moqueur gorge blanche" flies away.)

MARIA: Did you see the bird? It is from an endangered species! We can find the moqueur gorge blanche only in "La Caravelle", a natural reserve in Tartane. The moqueur gorge blanche has a gray and white neck, its eyes are brown, its eggs are pretty special because they are not like the other birds' eggs, they are small navy blue eggs.

CRAB: "La Caravelle" is one of the most beautiful places in Martinique! There are cliffs and rocky coastlines with a little red and white lighthouse overlooking the sea.

(Suddenly, they see another hidden crab.)

MARIA: Do you know any jewelers in the area?

CRAB: Jewelers?

DANIEL: Yes! We need to find someone who makes rings.

CRAB: Rings? I found a beautiful ring in Sainte-Marie once! Maybe the jeweler in Sainte Marie can help you more!

JOÃO: Ouhh we've been to Sainte-Marie before! We would love to explore it once more. Are there more things you can recommend visiting there?

POPESCU: Maybe we can find a kind animal who can take us there quickly?

CRAB: Maybe the jeweller can also tell you where the forest is? I know there is an opossum who lives just up the road. Maybe he can help you?

(So the kids walk 20 minutes along the road in the very hot sunlight, until they reach a large rubbish bin. Here they hear an animal scratching.)

POPESCU: Hello? Is anyone here?

MANICOU: Hello.

POPESCU: We come from Europe, can you help us find our way to Sainte-Marie?

MANICOU: Why would I help you?

DANIEL: Have you ever heard of a forest in Sainte-Marie?

MARIA: If you take us to Sainte-Marie, maybe we could visit the forest together, right?

MANICOU: Sounds like nice a plan!

The manicou and the children travel from “La baie du trésor” to Sainte-Marie. On the way they see the beautiful blue ocean, a little further, they see a small island that you can visit by crossing the dike. The islet is called the Tombolo. They spot many bright green hills called “Mornes” in the distance.

Act XIV

Scene 3

DANIEL: Have we arrived?

MANICOU: Yes we have arrived in Sainte-Marie.

(Suddlenly an Iguana appears from nowhere.)

IGUANA: The jeweler’s is downtown in the village of Sainte-Marie, not far from the post office. Sorry I can read in your thoughts, I can take you there if you want.

DANIEL: Where are you from iguana?!!!

MARIA: Calm down, it's just an iguana, he's not going to hurt us, he just wants to help us get to Sainte-Marie. He told us to go that way, we have to follow him!

IGUANA: This way!!

POPESCU: Wow, this iguana is going fast, Maria tell him to slow down please!

MARIA: Slow down Iguana!!

IGUANA: Okay, we've almost arrived, here we are in the village of Sainte-Marie.

MARIA: You have been a great help to us Iguana.

IGUANA: You're welcome! Goodbye, I will come back soon!

The children watch the big green reptile walking away down the street, but it soon disappears.

Act XIV

Scene IV

DANIEL: We've arrived to the jeweler's!

MARIA: Wait, there's a sign, it says: "No animals", will you stay outside?

MANICOU: Ok, I'll wait for you but not for too long!

Act XIV

Scene V

Popescu and the children enter the jewellery store, Maria and Daniel look at the different pieces of jewellery while Popescu speaks to the jeweler.

POPESCU AND THE CHILDREN: Hello sir!

JEWELER: Hello, can I help you?

POPESCU: Yes, someone told us that you've made this ring...

MARIA (*looking around her*): Have you made this ring? I can't see it anywhere.

DANIEL (*looking also*): There are no such rings here.

JEWELER: No, no, you are not mistaken; I made this ring, but a few months ago a certain Vladislav ordered this jewel!

MARIA: Forgive me for asking you this, but do you know where Vladeslav is now?

JEWELER: Sorry, I don't know... I have been burgled and some jewels have disappeared.

DANIEL (*exclaims*): Look! A piece of paper is hanging on the broken glass of the window !

POPESCU: Do you mind if we look up what is written on the paper?

JEWELER: No, but watch out for the glass

MARIA: Sorry, but aren't you going to fix that window?

JEWELER: Sure but I have to know why the burglar stole the ring. It will be repaired very soon.

DANIEL: Let's have a look!!!

MARIA: Please give it to me!

DANIEL: No, I will read it because I have found it.

MARIA: And then give it to me!

DANIEL: No!

POPESCU: Stop arguing and give me that NOW!!!

DANIEL: All right, sorry, dad.

(*Popescu reads the paper.*)

JEWELER: I am looking at the headlines, they say that there is a fair at "Le Domaine d'Émeraude", it is a medicinal plant exhibition. Here we have a clue! Vladeslav has underlined the event on the paper with a pencil.

DANIEL: He must be there!

MARIA: Let's go!!!

JEWELER: Yeah in the paper Vladeslav said he will be at the "Le Domaine d'Émeraude".

DANIEL: Where is this forest?

MARIA: Ouhh! The iguana must know where the forest is!

POPESCU, DANIEL AND MARIA: Iguana!!!!!!

JEWELER: There is no Iguana here, we have to go to the countryside to find iguanas. Anyway, there are no Iguanas in the north of Martinique. We hardly ever see them in "Fort Saint Louis" In Fort de France.

DANIEL: What is Fort Saint Louis?

JEWELER: It's an old military fortification. We don't need to go there.

"Le Domaine d'Émeraude" mentioned in the paper is in Morne Rouge, in the north of the island, take the bus !

Act XIV

Scene VI

They arrive in Morne Rouge at "Le Domaine d'Émeraude", it is a sort of rain forest with a museum inside. There are many people visiting the medicinal plant exhibition.

MARIA: Gosh, this place is beautiful! Go and ask the warden if he has seen Vladeslav.

(Daniel takes a Vladeslav's portrait he has drawn, out of his pocket, it is a little crumpled.)

DANIEL: Excuse me sir, have you seen this man?

SECURITY OFFICER: Sure, he seemed to be interested in spices and aromatics: saffron, arrow-root, indian borage and so on. I saw him stealing plants and spices. He has destroyed a whole part of the garden. Unfortunately, I could not arrest him. He run away.

MARIA: Too bad! Arrow-root? I have never heard of it!

DANIEL: Why did he steal all those plants? What are they for?

MARIA: Let's go to the market to ask what those plants are used for.

Act XIV

Scene VII

They arrive at the market in Fort de France. Daniel and Maria go to the market which is crowded.

MARIA: What is happening here?

(They go in the market and ask an old stallholder what is arrow-root and some plants that have been stolen for.)

OLD LADY: Arrow-root? They use it to make hot chocolate, the one we drink for our first holy communion. Safran is used for the "Colombo", an Indian dish.

MARIA: Let's buy the ingredients to make hot chocolate!

DANIEL: You're greedy! All right, let's visit the city! Let's go to the Schoelcher library. There are many interesting monuments to visit in Fort de France!

Act XIV
Scene VIII

They enter the Shoelcher Library. Maria sees something on the floor, She picks it up. It is a ring. There is also a message signed by Vladeslav.

MARIA: Vladeslav confesses that he has stolen the plants to plant them in a greenhouse in his country Romania because his boss “King Lion” loves “Colombo” and exotic herbal tea, also, he likes sweets and pastries and his favorite dessert is “Robinson”. He wanted to please his boss.

DANIEL: The King Lion!!! I have already heard this name!

MARIA: What! He's the one who kidnapped our mother, time is flying! We have to hurry home quickly to free Mom !

DANIEL: Let's go and find our friend King Pelican, dad told us that he left Tartane to go to the forest of Vatable in Sainte Luce, near the mangrove.

Act XV
Scene I

Maria and Daniel arrive in the Vatable forest, they see the pelican who looks very happy.

MARIA: Hello King Pelican, we are happy to find you! We have to leave quickly to free Mom!

PELICAN: My dear friends, I would like to help you but my friend, the other pelican whose name is Matt and I, have decided to stay here in Vatable.

MATT: We love this country, the weather is fine here and it rains a lot.

KING PELICAN: Your father Popescu who is resting in the forest will be able to help you. You can go to the airport by taxi because it is not far!

Act XV

Scene II

Popescu is lying on the beach in the shade of a mangrove.

MARIA: Dad, let's go, let's go to free Mom!

POPESCU: We have to continue our visit before leaving! Anyway we have to find Vladislav, only this man can lead us to your mother!

DANIEL: Shall we visit Diamond, there are very interesting monuments there? The Diamond Rock for example!

MARIA: Good idea! I know there is the convict's house, and the cape 110 huge statues representing former slaves who died in a ship wreck .

DANIEL: I feel hungry I would like to eat something!

POPESCU: Oh there is a culinary animator who will show us how to make an excellent traditional cake in Le Marin.

Act XV

Scene III

Maria, Daniel, João and Popescu are in a culinary workshop at Le Marin, they are welcomed by the hostess Natanaëlle.

NATHANAELLE: We have a special traditional cake from Martinique called "Robinson", I'll show you how to make it.

MARIA: That looks delicious, can we help?

MARIA (*whispering to Daniel*): It is supposed to be King Lion's favorite dessert.

DANIEL: I know, we are going to enjoy it!

NATHANAELLE: Let's gather the ingredients you need: flour, butter, sugar, 1 teaspoon of cinnamon, 1 cupful of old rum, 5 eggs, a vanilla pod, 1 lemon zest, and baking powder.

NATHANAELLE: Mr popescu, can you make the pastry while the children are mixing the ingredients?

POPESCU: Sure!

Act XV

Scene IV

Natanaelle takes out a beautiful cake from the oven.

MARIA: It looks delicious!

NATHANAELLE: Earlier this morning, we made another fine dessert, Euh... an Italian specialty. Our customer, was in a hurry. He told us that he had to go to an Italian island, moreover he offered me this ring and left Martinique. My husband dropped him off at the airport!

NATHANAELLE: The cakes's name was, let me think.... Cannoli!!! That's it!! It is made with Ricotta and pistachios.

MARIA: It's Vladislav!

DANIEL: We have to go to Sicily, he must be there! Only this man can tell us where our mother is!!



Act XVI

Scene I

In the plane to Sicily. Some of the characters are sleeping, some of them are playing cards or reading.

VOICE-OVER: During their journey in Martinique, Popescu had told his children and their friends that his wife, the mother of the twins, was still alive. The twins' parents Eurico, alias Alexandru Popescu, and Anabela, alias Monica Terranova, had faked Monica's death after Daniel and Maria were born and went on the run from Vladislav and his boss the King Lion. They were kidnapped by the two villains and only Alexandru was able to run away from them. Now that he was reunited with his children and had a lead to follow, it was time to get the whole family back together.

Scene II

At the airport. The group is walking in the arrivals' hall towards the exit.

ANA (*stopping the group*): I need to go to the toilet, can you wait for me please?

MARIA: Me too, let's go.

(The group stops and the girls go to the toilet.)

João wonders around the hall, stopping to watch some advertisement posters. There is one in particular that attracts his attention: it shows the Kite Festival by the beach in San Vito Lo Capo.

JOÃO (*murmuring*): So beautiful!

DANIEL (*calling from the distance*): João all good?

JOÃO: Yes, we should go there... Come and see!

(*Daniel, André and Popescu get closer to João and the poster he is looking at.*)

ANDRÉ (*in wonder*): These kites are amazing! Look at that...

DANIEL (*interrupting André and raising his voice*): In the shape of a Lion King!

JOÃO (*in a low emphatic voice*): Or a... *King Lion!*

(*There is silence for a minute, Daniel, André, Popescu and João are all looking at the advertisement poster. Then André touches the Lion King kite on the poster and stops again. When he withdraws his hand, he is holding a golden ring with two fingers.*)

ANDRÉ (*surprised*): Look guys, another ring!

(*André shows the ring to the group.*)

POPESCU (*grabbing gently the ring from André's fingers and looking at it carefully*): It is indeed from Vladislav, we have a destination!

(*The girls come out of the toilet following a dozen of young people with backpacks and beachwear. They approach the rest of their group.*)

MARIA: Can we go to...?

DANIEL (*interrupting his sister*): San Vito Lo Capo!

(*The girls look at the resto of the group members in wonder.*)

MARIA and ANA (*in one surprised voice*): How did you know?

POPESCU (*showing the ring to the girls*): Vladislav left us another ring. But how can we get to San Vito Lo Capo?

MARIA and ANA (*in one confident voice*): We know, follow us!

Maria and Ana lead their friends to reach the group of people in beachwear. Maria talks to a girl from the group, then turns to her friends smiling and they all exit the airport together.

Act XVII

Scene I

San Vito Lo Capo, a bus stops by the beach. Maria, Ana, Daniel, André, João and Popescu hop off the bus waving goodbye to their new friends. The beach and the narrow streets are very crowded. Many different shaped kites are flying in the sky from all along the beach.

POPESCU (*addressing the children with a low voice*): We should divide in two groups to better search for the next clue. Let's meet by that palm tree in one hour.

(The children nod in sign of approval).

POPESCU (*pointing to a big palm tree*): Let's meet by that palm tree in one hour.

The girls go with Popescu and the boys go together.

Scene II

The boys are walking on the beach among people flying kites. Suddenly Daniel looks at the sky and stops his friends.

DANIEL (*pointing to a group of kites in the sky*): Look!

(The three boys freeze in silence for a few seconds.)

JOÃO (*whispering*): The King Lion kite!

ANDRÉ: Let's go see who is flying it!

(The three friends run towards the thread holding the Lion King kite. When they get there, they realize no one is holding the thread, it is tied to a rope tied around a big stone placed on the sand. The boys lean towards the connection between the kite thread and the rope.)

ANDRÉ *(grabbing the connection between the thread and the rope)*:
Another ring!

DANIEL *(looking at the ring tied to thread and rope)*: Take it, but be careful...
(André frees the ring, but the Lion King kite flies away.)

DANIEL *(in a resigned voice)*: ...not to let the kite fly away.

(The Lion King kite flies away not as if it was blown by the wind, but as if it was somehow piloted. Maria, Ana and Popescu arrive running to meet their friends.)

MARIA: What happened?

ANA: Did you let the *King Lion* kite fly away?

MARIA: But... why?

POPESCU *(in a reassuring voice)*: My dear girls, look what your friends found.

(Popescu hands out his hand for André to give him the ring. The boy hands the ring over to Popescu and the man looks at it carefully.)

POPESCU: It is definitely from Vladislav.

JOÃO: What do we do now?

ANDRÉ: We don't have another clue to follow...

MARIA: Yes, we do: we follow the kite!

POPESCU: Good point.

POPESCU *(gently taking a light blue ribbon out from the side pocket of Maria's backpack)*: Maria, where did you get this?

MARIA (*looking surprised at the ribbon*): What...? It is not mine, how did it get there?

(*Everyone looks at the ribbon in silence.*)

POPESCU (*sighing*): It reminds me of someone... She used to tie her hair with coloured ribbons... And she told me she would have loved to do it with her daughter when she grew up...

DANIEL: Dad, are you talking about...

MARIA: ...Mom?

POPESCU (*sighing*): Yes, my dear children.

MARIA: So, she must be around...

DANIEL: Let's go find her!

POPESCU: Sure son, but... We must be very, very careful. I feel that Vladislav is here too.

ANDRÉ (*pointing in the sky far away from them*): Look at the *King Lion* kite!

JOÃO (*pointing to the Lion King kite in the distance*): It has stopped above that small villa over there, at the end of the beach.

DANIEL: Let's go there!

They start walking towards the villa at the end of the beach, Popescu leading the group.

Scene III

The group arrives in front of the villa at the end of the beach. The Lion King kite is still flying over the villa, like if it was disguising some kind of drone. The villa is surrounded by a garden and an iron fence, with a mighty gate in the middle. An emerald green ribbon is tied to the left side of the iron fence, and it is flying with the wind.

MARIA (*pointing towards the green ribbon, whispering*): Dad look, another ribbon!

POPESCU (*whispering too*): Yes, my dear. Please, come this way.

(*Popescu guides the group to the left side of the villa, where the green ribbon is. Once there Maria unties the ribbon from the iron fence and pulls it open: there is something written on it.*)

MARIA (*reading what is written on the ribbon*): “Follow us until the sun down.”

(*They all look at each other, then they look around themselves.*)

ANA (*pointing to an olive tree close to the villa*): There!

DANIEL: Another ribbon, shall we go?

JOÃO: Of course, what are we waiting for?

POPESCU: Be careful dear children, we are all in danger now: I am sure we are very close to Vladislav and the King Lion.

MARIA: Dad, what do you think the message means?

POPESCU: I am not sure, but we will find out. Your mother is somehow guiding us.

(*The six of them walk towards the olive tree with the orange ribbon. When they are half way to the tree they hear three gunshots: at the first one they freeze, at the second one they look scared at each other, at the third gunshot they run to the tree and find that there is a hiding place between the tree’s roots, just under where the orange ribbon is tied.*)

POPESCU (*whispering and gesturing to invite the children in the hiding place*): Quick, in here!

(*Popescu lets the children get in the hiding place before him.*)

MARIA: Dad!

(*Popescu unties the ribbon and joins the children.*)

POPESCU (*whispering*): Are you all safe?

DANIEL: Yes...

JOÃO: What...

ANDRÉ: Were...

ANA: Those shots?!?

POPESCU: They sounded like gunshots. Like Italian Police guns' gunshots.

ANA: Police? Does this mean they are after Vladislav too?

POPESCU: You're right, Ana.

DANIEL: Oh, great!

(There is a minute of silence, everyone seems relieved.)

JOÃO (*pointing out from the hiding place towards a shack in the back of the villa*): There is another ribbon over there!

MARIA: Is it safe to go out now?

POPESCU: Let me check, I'll give you a sign if it is safe.

(Popescu goes out from the hiding place and looks around.)

POPESCU (*holding his hands close to his mouth to make his voice louder*):

Meeeeew! Meeeeew!

(Some seagulls fly over Popescu and answer to his call with some "Meeeeew" themselves. The children under the tree roots look at each other.)

DANIEL: That's definitely the sign.

Scene IV

Popescu, Daniel, Maria, João, André and Ana are in front of the entrance to the shack at the back of the villa. A yellow ribbon is tied to the wooden door to lock it.

POPESCU (*whispering while untying the ribbon*): We go inside, keep your eyes and ears wide open.

(The door screeches while Popescu opens it. Dust comes out of the shack and Popescu and the Children behind him cough a couple of times.)

DANIEL: It seems that no one has opened this door for a long time.

MARIA: Dad, do you think this shack belongs to the villa? Is it safe to go inside?

POPESCU: Yes, I think it is part of the villa's property. The ribbons are guiding us, have faith in your mother.

(On the inside face of the opened shack's door there is a painting of a sun setting into the sea. It is quite old, but the colours are still intense.)

ANA (*whispering while looking at the painting on the door*): Look, a painting of the sunset!

(They all look at the painting.)

MARIA (*whispering*): No, not of the sunset...

(Marie takes a deep breath, everyone else is looking at her.)

MARIA (*whispering with a confident voice*): ...of the sun down!

(Daniel pulls out of Maria's backpack's pocket the written emerald ribbon and reads it again with his eyes. All the others look at him in silence.)

DANIEL: Here we are, at the *sun down*, let's go inside!

The six enter the shack, Daniel ahead, Popescu at the end of the group, closing the door behind himself. A police car siren sounds in the distance.

Scene V

Inside of the shack all is dark except for the light that comes through the wooden door.

POPESCU (*whispering to the children*): Boys, girls, did you bring flashlights as I told you to do?

JOÃO: Oh yes, Mr Popescu. They're here in my backpack.

(João opens his backpack, takes out a first flashlight and turns it on towards the inside of the backpack. The other children grab one flashlight each and all of them turn them on. The interior of the shack is now lit. It is a squared room with wooden walls painted with sea scenes.)

ANA: Cool paintings!

ANDRÉ: Yeah, cool... But what are we supposed to do here?

ANA: They are not only on the walls, look at the floor!

(Everyone looks under their feet: there are paintings on the floor too.)

POPESCU: You have a good eye, Ana.

ANA: Thank you, Mr Popescu.

ANDRÉ: There...

(André points to a painting on the floor depicting a sun setting in the sea, like the one painted on the door. The children get closer to the painting illuminating it with their flashlights.)

DANIEL (*touching the floor around the sun set painting*): It's a hatch!

JOÃO: Let us help you!

(The boys try to find a way to open the hatch and they find it after a couple of minutes. After the hatch is opened all of them look down inside it.)

MARIA (*pulling out a turquoise ribbon from inside the hatch and showing it to the rest of the group*): Look... Shall we climb down the ladder?

POPESCU: Yes, let me go first.

ANA (*handing her flashlight to Popescu*): Here, Mr Popescu, please take my flashlight.

POPESCU (*taking the flashlight from Ana*): Thank you, dear.

(*Popescu directs the light of the flashlight to the ladder inside the hatch and starts climbing it down. After twenty steps he touches the ground with his feet.*)

POPESCU (*from the bottom of the hatch*): It's safe, you can climb down.

One by one the boys and the girls climb down the ladder inside of the hatch. A police car siren sounds in the distance.

Act XVIII

Scene I

Inside of the living room of the villa, the King Lion and Vladislav are sitting one on a sofa and one on an armchair. On the low table between them there are a bottle of vodka, two shot glasses and some caviar canapes. At the door of the room and at the balcony window there are, standing, two machine guns armed guards. The King Lion and Vladislav are talking to each other, drinking vodka and eating the canapes.

The doorbell rings and the King Lion makes a sign to the guard in front of the door, who disappears out of the room. After a few minutes the guard is back with a lady from a local bakery and two big boxes. The lady is dressed all in white and her hair is tied in a ponytail with a white ribbon.

KING LION: Please, come in my dear!

BAKERY LADY: Thank you, Sir. Where should I do *the job*?

KING LION (*indicating the low table between him and Vladislav*): Here, I want to see how you do *it!*

BAKERY LADY (*her left eyelid trembling*): Thank you, Sir. Can your guards help me with the boxes?

KING LION: Of course, my dear!

VLADISLAV (*to the guards*): You! ...and you! Come here and help the bakery lady!

(The guards move from their position and help the bakery lady bring the boxes to the table at the centre of the room. The bakery lady starts pulling out some trays and other smaller boxes from the two big boxes, and places them on the table. The four men observe her in silence.)

BAKERY LADY (*her left eyelid trembling*): As you know, gentlemen, the name of the dessert “Cannolo” comes from the word “Cane” because originally the crust was shaped by wrapping the dough around a sugar cane. *(The four men keep on observing the bakery lady in silence as she places twenty empty cannolo crusts on the first tray.)*

BAKERY LADY (*pulling out of the big boxes a bowl full of ricotta cheese, a pack of white sugar, a packet of dark chocolate chips and a fork*): You add white sugar to the fresh ricotta cheese and you cream it with a fork. Then you add chocolate chips.

(The bakery lady pours the sugar onto the ricotta cheese and starts pressing the mixture with the fork. The four men observe her in silence.)

BAKERY LADY (*her left eyelid trembling while adding the chocolate chips to the mixture*): It is usually better to have chunks of chocolate, but as I was told not to bring any knife, I am using already ready chocolate chips.

(The King Lion and Vladislav look at each other with a grin.)

BAKERY LADY (*searching for something inside of one of the two big boxes with both hands*): Now the cream is ready and we can fill the cannoli...

(The bakery lady pulls out two guns from the box and points them to the King Lion and Vladislav.)

KING LION: Is that a joke, my dear?

(The two guards point their machine guns to the bakery lady. A door slams and running footsteps come from outside the living room. A police car siren sounds from the distance and gets louder as if it is approaching. The bakery lady is frozen with the pointed guns, only her left eyelid is trembling.)

POPESCU *(running into the room and jumping on one of the guards to make him fall on the ground)*: STOP!

(The children enter the room running after Popescu: João and André jump on the other guard, Daniel jumps on the King Lion, Ana and Maria jump on Vladislav. In a few seconds the guards, the King Lion and Vladislav are lying on the floor of the living room. The police car siren sounds louder until it stops.)

BAKERY LADY *(pointing the guns toward the lying King Lion and Vladislav)*: Don't you dare move!

(The bakery lady throws some white ribbons to the group and the boys, the girls and Popescu tie up the men with these ribbons and the coloured ones they had found before.)

BAKERY LADY *(shouting out of the window)*: YOU CAN COME IN!

(Four police men enter the room with guns and handcuffs. With the help of the bakery lady, they put the handcuffs on the wrists of the two guards, the King Lion and Vladislav.)

BAKERY LADY *(to one of the police men)*: Grazie Commissario, I would love to stay a little more with my family.

COMMISSARIO: Sure, Officer Terranova, we couldn't have caught these Russian Mobbers without your help. Take all the time you need.

(The police men walk out of the room with the two guards, the King Lion and Vladislav. The police car siren sound starts and gets lower as the car is driving away.)

BAKERY LADY *(almost in tears to Popescu)*: Eurico...

POPESCU *(hugging the bakery lady)*: Anabela...

BAKERY LADY *(looking at her children)*: Oh my!

DANIEL AND MARIA: Mom!?!

BAKERY LADY *(hugging her children with tears in her eyes)*: Yes! You have grown up so beautiful... We will never be parted again!

POPESCU: Never!

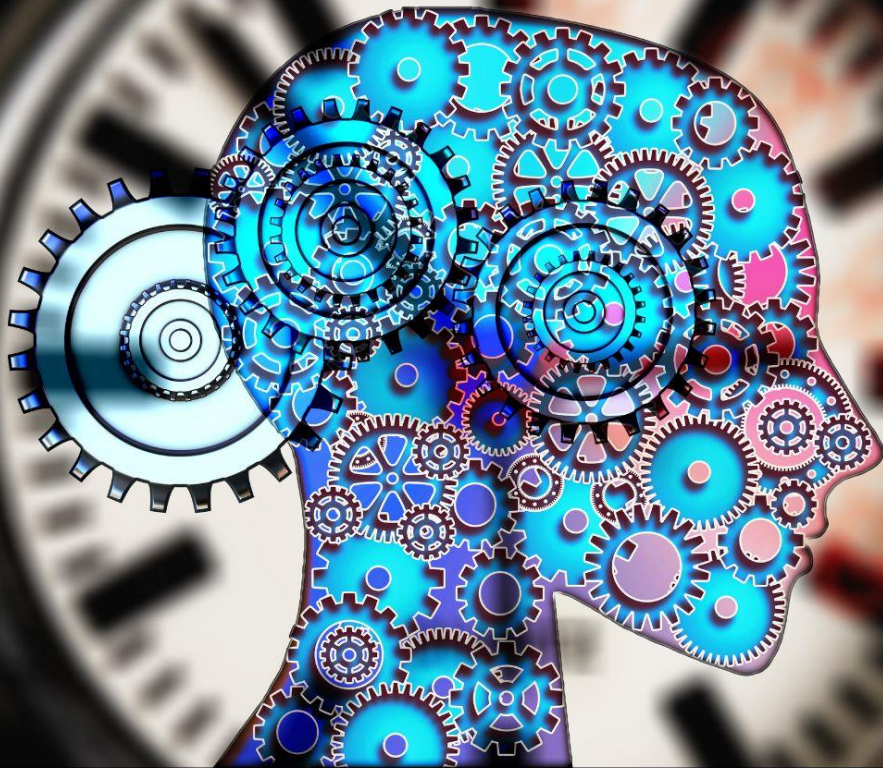
While the reunited family members talk to each other crying and laughing, Ana, João and André go to the table where the bakery lady was preparing the cannoli and finish to prepare them by filling the crusts with the ricotta cheese cream and sprinkling the sides with some chopped pistachio. They join the rest of the group with the tray full of cannoli, all of them takes one and they eat them satisfied.

THE CURTAINS FALL - THE END



A DETECTIVE STORY FOR KIDS

The Enigma of the Clocks



AN ERASMUS PLUS PROJECT PRODUCT

CHAPTER 1

In the morning of a day like many others the twins Maria and Daniel were getting ready to go to school in their village Montelepre, not far from Palermo, the capital city of Sicily Island, in the south of Italy.

It was actually not a day like all the others because it was a Friday, so the twelve years old twins were not going to go to school the next day and were looking forward to going out with their friends after school.

The plan was to leave their school bags at home, get their bicycles and have a packed lunch in the park with their best friends Giulio and Emma, who lived in Giardinello, the village next to theirs.

Daniel and Maria were twins, but besides for their birth date and their pale skin they were very different from each other. Maria had brown eyes and long blond and curly hair, which she used to keep tied in two beautiful braids; Daniel had blue eyes and straight brown hair, with some trouble in keeping it in order, so he often wore a baseball cap. But brother and sister had one more thing in common: the shape of their smiling mouth was exactly the same.

As soon as the last school bell rang Daniel and Maria run home, exchanged their school bags with the ones with their lunches and games, and hopped on their bicycles.

Meanwhile in Giardinello their friends Emma and Giulio were doing the same and in no more than twenty minutes the four of them were already eating their sandwiches in the park of Montelepre.

What the four friends were eating were not just sandwiches, but *vota e svota*, typical bread made with a dough similar to the one of the pizza, and stuffed with sliced tomatoes, cheese, ham, olive oil and oregano.

When the lunch was over and the four friends had decided where to go with their bicycles, Daniel got on his bike to lead the group. Giulio followed him, and Emma and Maria went after them.

Giulio was a tall boy with curly brown hair and brown eyes, his cousin Emma was a tall girl and had curly hair too, but hers was black and long, and her eyes were of a very dark brown.

All of the four friends' bicycles were mountain bikes, not the top and newest ones, but they did well their job on rocky and muddy paths.

Monte D'Oro was their destination. This mountain was the oldest area of Montelepre, very close the village itself. It had not been a long time before then that pieces of art from ancient populations were found on the Monte, and the students were very eager to find some more pieces themselves.

– Follow me! – said Daniel, – Sure Dan! –, replied the other three, and up they went cycling.

It was a spring day and the four friends enjoyed cycling in that nice weather even if they had to climb pretty high.

The boys were leading the group and after a while it was Emma the first one to call for a stop: – I need a sip of water, can we stop please? –.

Maria and Giulio stopped to have a drink of water too while Daniel kept on cycling up. When he realized none of the other three was following him anymore, he stopped to wait for them.

Daniel let the bike fall on the ground and looked back towards the path to see where the others were. He could not see them nor hear their voices.

He was just about to shout their names out loud when he froze, still holding his hands close to his mouth to shout louder.

His friends' and sister's names turned into an almost silent breath as Daniel saw something shining on the ground and stopped to take a closer look at it.

At first it seemed a silver ring, but looking closer at it, Daniel realized it was a silver gear, not bigger than a 50 cents coin. He bent down, picked it up with two fingers and stared at it intently. There was something written on the shiny gear, or at least Daniel thought it was some kind of writing, because he could not understand what was written on it.

– Daaaaan! – Maria shouted when she saw her brother standing still next to his bike.

– Are you ok? –, she continued with a pretty scared voice, and she let her bicycle fall on the ground and run to reach her brother, followed by Emma and Giulio, who let their bikes on the ground more carefully than what Maria had done.

– All good, Maria –, Daniel answered, – Come here! –, he continued with a curiously happy voice, – Look at what I found! –.

As Maria, Giulio and Emma got closer to Daniel he displayed the shiny gear on the open palm of his right hand to show it to his sister and friends.

– What is it? –, asked Giulio, – A ring? –, asked Emma after her cousin.

– Nope! –, answered Daniel, – Look closer! –, he said inviting them to have a more careful look at what he had found.

– Is it... a gear? –, asked Maria, and she continued: – Let me see! –, and she stole the shiny object from her brother's hand.

– Hey, M! –, said Daniel with surprise, but he did not try to get the gear back from his sister.

– There’s something written on it! –, said Maria while looking closer at the silver gear.

– Can you read it? –, asked Daniel even more surprised.

– Maybe... –, started Maria, – Emma, you have your pocket mirror? –, she asked her friend and before Emma could answer Maria ordered her: – Give it to me! –.

Emma opened her backpack, rummaged through it, took out of it a small round pink object and handed it to Maria.

– Here you are, M... –, Emma said, – What do you need it for? –, she asked without having any clue.

Maria took the folding mirror from her friend’s hand and opened it right away. She placed the gear with what looked to be some kind of writing in front of the mirror.

– A-ha! –, Maria said with a pleased voice, – It can be read through the mirror! –, she continued with a satisfied expression on her face.

– Why did I not think ab... –, started saying Daniel, but he was interrupted by the voices of the cousins who asked almost simultaneously: – What does it say?!? –.

Maria waited a few seconds before slowly reading aloud: – *I am the third and I run like the time* –.

After seconds of frozen silence, the four friends looked at each other in the eyes, then Giulio said: – Simple, no? –.

– What exactly is simple, Giulio? –, asked his cousin Emma.

– Yes, Giulio. What is so simple? –, added Daniel.

Giulio took a deep breath, as if he were saying: “*It is so obvious*”, and then said: – If it is the third one, there must be at least other two! –.

The four friends sat on the ground, there on the Monte D’Oro, and discussed for a while.

They decided they would look for at least one other gear, and if they did not find any in a couple of weeks, they would quit the research.

Each of them was supposed to look on books, encyclopaedias, old newspaper articles and on the internet for any information about this strange small gear.

They decided the *third gear* was to be kept by Daniel, being him the one who found it.

The sun was starting to set so Daniel, Maria, Giulio and Emma cycled down the Monte back to their houses.

During the evening, while having dinner at home with their parents, the twins were very silent and ate what was in their dishes without saying a word. When their mother asked them what had happened and if everything was alright, Maria and Daniel looked at each other in the eyes and then looked at their mother.

Silence.

Then Maria asked: – Mom, dad... do you know anything about... gears? –.
– Gears? –, asked their mother to answer Maria’s question, and their father continued: – Do you mean like these? –, he asked, and meanwhile he took off his watch and opened its back to show his son and daughter the gears that could be seen moving inside it. The twins were holding their breath.

Silence.

– Yes! –, said Daniel with enthusiasm, – Like those! –, he added.

- But... –, started to add Maria, – ...bigger! – .
- Well –, said their father, - The bigger the clock, the bigger the gears... –, and then he asked his children: – Why are you interested in gears? – .
- Maths! –, answered Daniel.
- Science! –, answered Maria almost at the same time.
- Yes... –, added Daniel, – It's for a Maths / Science / Technology assignment. –.

The twins talked a little more with their parents about the made-up assignment and found out that their great grandfather, their mother's father's father, used to be a clock collector, but had sold all his clocks and watches many years before. Only one book he did not sell, and Layla, the twins' mother, had inherited it and jealously kept it in her bedside bookcase. With the excuse of the assignment the twins borrowed the precious book from their mother.

They told their parents they were going to start working on the assignment the following day with their friends from Giardinello because they had the same Science teacher.

Maria and Daniel went to bed right after dinner that evening, Daniel in his own room guarding the silver gear, and Maria in her own room guarding the old book.

The following morning arrived very soon, as if the twins had woken up just after laying their heads on their pillows.

Bathroom – breakfast – bathroom – clothes – backpacks – bicycles – and right to Giardinello they went to meet Emma and Giulio.

The four friends met by the amphitheatre in Giardinello around ten a.m. and the open space was already crowded with other boys and girls of their age.

It was a very common meeting point for students, especially in the weekends.

Daniel, Maria, Giulio and Emma greeted a few of their classmates who were there too, and after a short discussion decided to go somewhere else not to talk about their gears matter where someone else could hear them.

They cycled to the park of Montelepre and found a free bench far away from prying ears.

– We know where the gear might come from. –, said Daniel as soon as they sat down.

Maria took her mother's book out of her backpack and said: – It must come from a clock. –, then showing the book she added: – Here we have a lot to study about clocks! –.

– You won't believe it... –, said then Giulio, – ...look at this! –, he added showing his friends a few news articles on his smartphone.

There had been several thefts in antiques shops and clock museums around Europe, in particular in Italy, in Portugal, in Romania and in France. As Giulio read some of these articles aloud the other friends listened to him with eyes and ears wide opened.

Surfing on the internet they found out that some people had created a social network to exchange information about the thefts, so they decided to create a common profile and start investigating about these thefts, looking for possible hints about the mysterious gears.

It did not take them long to create a fake profile to follow what the other people were sharing about these crimes: they decided to be a man who was around fifty years old and whose name was Antonio Caruso, like their school janitor's.

They registered from Giulio's smartphone to this little new social network: "*DetectBook*", also already referred to as "*DB*" by users.

At first, they read through as many posts as they could to find the most interesting leads, and then they started pinning all the cities that had been theatres of these thefts on a map on Daniel's phone, while reading on the social with Giulio's.

The map was getting concentrated pins in Portugal around Valadares in Vila Nova de Gaia, in Romania around Merei, in French overseas island in the Caribbean, Martinique, around Sainte Marie, and in Italy around Palermo.

The four friends decided that they would investigate about what had happened around Palermo first, and they started from Montelepre's archaeological museum in the Ventimiglia Tower in the centre of the village: few days before someone had broken in and despite there had been traces of forced entry, like broken glass and fallen panels, nothing had been reported to be missing.

They got in the museum with the excuse of an Arts and History assignment and saw police lines still placed around showcases.

Emma took photos with her smartphone and Maria copied a couple of ancient pottery pieces on her sketch book.

The boys tried to get some more information about what had happened few nights before from the museum lady, but did not have much luck.

– Guys . . . –, whispered Maria, and then she added: – Come here! –.

The boys stopped asking questions to the museum lady and got close to the girls.

Then, still whispering, Maria said: – Come look at the corner of this showcase... –, and she pointed the left lower corner of the broken glass of the showcase in front of her.

There, engraved on the glass, was a strange and very small symbol that looked a lot like a clock gear, with the letters "P" and "G".

The four friends looked at each other in silence, Emma took a few photos of the engraved signs, and Maria copied them on her sketch book, then they greeted and thanked the museum staff and went back to the park with their bicycles.

– What was that? –, Daniel asked his sister and friends even before they could sit on a bench.

– A signature! –, answered Maria, pretty confident with what she had just said.

Silence.

Then Giulio broke the silence: – P and G . . . I've seen something with these two letters . . . –, he opened DB application and scrolled through the posts.

– Here! –, he said showing his smartphone to the others, and he added: – Pedro Gonzales! – .

They surfed Pedro's profile and his posts on DB and could not find any photo of him, only an image of the same signature they found on the glass in the museum, which was his profile picture. Mr Gonzales was an old clock crafter and collector from Portugal who was looking for some of his old clocks that were kept at few of the museums that were robbed.

From Pedro's posts the four friends got to know that also an old friend of his, a lady called Elena, had been the victim of a theft. She lived on Mount Etna, an active volcano close to Catania, on the east side of Sicily, where she owned and run a mountain lodge. There she kept the wooden pendulum clock Pedro had given her as a birthday present many years before. The police could not understand how such a big object could have disappeared from such a high mountain lodge which was not easy to reach with vehicles. This added even more mystery to the thefts and it definitely increased even more the interest that Giulio, Daniel, Maria and Emma had towards them.

The friends were silent for quite a long while, laying on the grass in the park and looking up at the sky. All of them were thinking about what to do next, but none of them spoke. Sometimes one of them would look for something up on his or her smartphone and then lay again on the grass.

The answer came with a phone call. Emma's father, who knew how much his daughter and her friends loved to ride mountain bikes, had been contacted by a couple of tourists who wanted to visit Mount Etna with their mountain bikes the following day. Giorgio, Emma's father, organized these tours as a job and had a big van onto which to load bicycles and people, so he thought that, because in this group there were only two persons, he would invite his daughter and her friends to join him.

Emma did not need to ask the others before giving her father the answer, which was the following: – Yes Dad, of course, thank you heaps! – .

The girl then explained the plan to her friends who were enthusiastic about it: they were going to Mount Etna for a mountain bike ride the following day, and more important they were planning to meet this Miss Elena in person! They were going to leave pretty early in the morning with Giorgio and his van because they had to stop in Palermo to pick the tourists and their bikes up, and then a three hours' drive awaited them just to get to the starting point of the mountain bike trail. So, the four friends decided they would not go out that evening, but would have dinner at home with their parents and then go straight to bed.

Sunday morning came and Emma and her father picked up Giulio and his bike first, because he lived next door, and then they stopped by the twins' place.

At 5.30 in the morning the five of them were already in Palermo.

Andreas and Magda, a young couple from Greece, were waiting for them in front of their hotel in the centre of town. Giorgio helped them to load their bikes on his van and the whole group got on the way to Mount Etna.

After exchanging a few words with the Greek couple Emma, Daniel and Giulio fell asleep, while Maria could not get any sleep. Even if she pretended to be sleeping, she couldn't stop thinking about what she wanted to ask Miss Elena about Pedro, his clock and his signature in the museum in Montelepre... Or were they better not to mention this particular detail?

– Maria! –, shouted Daniel when they arrived on the Mount, waking up his sister who had eventually fallen asleep a few minutes before their arrival. Maria mumbled something nobody could understand addressing her brother and got up.

Giorgio gave Emma the double of the van's key in case they wanted to leave their bikes there before he was back from the tour with Magda and Andreas. The four friends put their helmets on, jumped on their bikes and followed Emma's father until they reached a bifurcation on the trail. From there they took a different direction and as soon as they could not see Giorgio and the tourists any more, they stopped to talk to each other.

– Elena's lodge is that way. –, said Emma pointing out with her finger the direction they were supposed to take to get there.

– Let's go! –, said Daniel, and he led the way.

After around forty minutes of cycling between the sylvan craters they reached the "Ariel" lodge, where Miss Elena lived and worked. They left their bicycles in the bike parking and entered the lodge: there, behind the counter, was Elena, preparing coffee for the costumers.

A young lady approached them and showed them a table where they could sit, then she took their order.

As the four friends were catching their breath they looked around and saw where the pendulum clock had been placed before it was stolen.

When their four mugs with hot chocolate and marshmallows arrived at their table, Maria asked the waitress if they could speak to Miss Elena.

– More marshmallows, dears? –, asked a very gentle female voice.

Daniel, Giulio, Emma and Maria looked up from their mugs and saw Miss Elena holding a bowl full of marshmallows and smiling at them.

The five of them did not say a word but kept on smiling, then Miss Elena put the bowl on the table and sat with the four friends.

– The girl told me you want to speak with me... –, said the old lady, and then she asked: – Is it about that empty space over there? – .

The four friends stared at Miss Elena with their eyes wide opened and did not speak. How could she know?

– I saw how you were looking at where my pendulum clock used to be... –, she said, she took a breath and then she added: – It was a very precious gift from a very special friend. –.

Miss Elena sighed and there was silence for a while.

– More than thirty years ago my friend Pedro from Portugal gave me that clock as a present. –, said the old lady breaking the silence.

– I always knew there was something special about it, Pedro himself said the clock could think, but I always made fun of him when he said so. –

Silence.

– Now someone stole it from me and the police does not have a clue about who did it or why. –, said Miss Emma, and looking at Maria she took her hands in hers and she asked: – Do you want to help me? –.

Maria was not waiting for anything else, she looked at her brother and at her friends and they answered all together: – Yes! –.

Miss Emma smiled at them and while she was so close to Maria the girl noticed something gold shining on the old lady's neck.

– Miss Emma... –, said Maria, and pointing at the lady's necklace she asked her: – What is that on your necklace? –.

– This? –, asked Miss Emma showing the pendant on her necklace.

– It's another gift from Pedro, at least I still have this memory of him. –, she said with sad eyes.

Daniel, Maria, Giulio and Emma learned from Miss Emma that Pedro had died four years before, but what surprised them the most was the pendant the lodge lady was wearing.

– It's a gear! –, whispered Daniel to his friends, but the old lady heard him and said to them: – If you think it can help you find my clock, I entrust it to you. –.

As she handed the golden gear to Maria she said: – Please bring it back to me when you have found the responsible of the theft. –.

Maria nodded and the four of them reassured the old lady they would do their best to solve the mysterious theft and bring her back both the pendulum clock and the precious gear.

As soon as Miss Emma walked away from them Maria picked up the golden gear and with Emma's pocket mirror she read what was written on it: – *I am the seventh and I run against the time* –.



CHAPTER 2

As soon as they were done with their hot chocolate, the four friends decided to inspect the place where the pendulum clock used to be, but despite searching in every nut and cranny, they weren't able to find even a little piece of the clock's remains.

After being unsuccessful in their search, they decided to leave the coffee shop. They said goodbye to Miss Elena, and thanked her for the help that she had given them. As they were leaving, Daniel looked at the time and said: – Oh no! We need to hurry and meet up with your father Emma, or we will be in big trouble! –.

– Ok! –, the others responded.

As they were pedalling to the spot where they decided to meet up with Emma's father and the tourists, Andreas and Magda, they started discussing the meaning and reasons behind the theft of the clocks and their relation to the gears. They had a lot of different theories, some better than others.

– What if we need to collect all the gears in order to create a machine of sorts that does some kind of mysterious magic? –, said Giulio.

– That makes absolutely no sense! –, responded Maria.

– It's not important now, what we should talk about is what to do next. –, concluded Daniel.

When they finally caught up to the adults, who were already getting a little worried, they lied to them saying that they had got lost, and that they eventually got back on the track in order to meet up with them. Emma's

father was a bit angry because of the incident, but he was happy to know that his daughter and her friends were safe.

After they were done with the trip, they hopped back over on the van ready to rest on the three hours' drive back home after a long day of pedalling. They had a lot to talk about, but they didn't want the adults to hear, so they decided to discuss the clock's mystery only when they got home, because then they would be alone, and free to talk.

When they got home, Emma's father left Daniel and Maria at their house, and went to their village, but before that, the friends said goodbye, also planning where to meet next:

- Goodbye! We will meet tomorrow at your house! –, said Giulio.
- Until tomorrow! –, the twins answered.

Even though they didn't discover anything else in that trip, it was worth it, because they were able to gather information through Miss Elena, and even got a second gear.

After they came back from their trip to the mountains, the group had already gathered 2 gears, but they didn't know how many more there could be. From the inscriptions, the four friends deduced that there were at least five more, but they had other clues to follow. When they got together at the twins' house, the day after, they gathered everything they knew about this mystery, just so that they could organise their information and decide on their next move: – So, what we know so far is that there are clocks being stolen, there are mysterious gears involved, and that our next clue leads us to somewhere in Portugal. Is that all? –, asked Daniel.

– I think that’s basically it, but we also know that there are at least seven gears in total. –, Emma replied.

A few weeks had passed after that encounter, and summer break was approaching, so the group saw that as an opportunity to continue to explore the mystery behind the gears. Because Daniel and Maria had family in Portugal, and going to Portugal would mean finding more information about Pedro and his suspicious death, they decided to go there for summer holidays as an excuse to carry on with their search. And at the same time, since the twins, as well as Giulio and Emma, would be under the responsibility of their aunt, they wouldn't get their parents worried.

But in order for this to happen, the twins had to convince their parents...

They ended up cleaning the whole house, making their beds every day, setting up the table before every meal, but most of all, started acting nicer and more friendly, each day they would be kinder and kinder to everyone while their parents were in charge...

After acting like that for two entire weeks, one night, after dinner’s dessert, their parents called them. Daniel and Maria were chatting in Daniel’s room and heard them calling from downstairs, more precisely, from the living room... The parents asked for the twins to sit down and listen carefully:

– We wanted to talk to you about that trip you told us about some weeks ago... We have given it a good thought and decided that you can go. –. The kids were already euphoric. – As long as... You stop searching for clues about those gears you found. You started acting like crazy people, stopped eating and sleeping, simply for your addictive little investigation and even though we want you to have fun, we want it in a healthier way. –

The twins, especially Maria, looked upset, however they kept a smile on their faces, simply thanking their parents for worrying and caring.

The summer had started, and Daniel and Maria were more excited than ever, as they started packing their things. And after hours and hours of trying on outfits and making a list of everything they had to pack, their father entered the room to call them and have dinner, and caught them with the gears and the clock book in their hands, next to their bags...

Their father soon called their mother and had a conversation about how this could not go on, telling the twins: – We trusted you, when we asked you to stop that investigation, but you haven't quitted. So, we have decided, for your own safety, that you should hand over all the objects you have regarding the clocks. –.

The children nervously replied: – Please don't do that! As you said, it's important and we won't rest until this case is solved! –.

– We are really sorry kids... –, said their mother convincingly...

And then the parents took all the items related to that topic and hid them in their closed bedroom. After this, they had dinner together, all except Maria, who was frustrated in her bedroom, denying dinner.

The day to go on holiday had come, and the kids were hopeful and excited once again! They were left at the airport, where they found their best friends, Emma and Giulio, and together they waited for their flight to Portugal...

Some hours later, they arrived at Oporto airport, where their aunt and cousins were waiting... They all hugged each other and they had to call two taxis, to fit this many people in.

That night the four friends decided to go out and have dinner somewhere downtown Oporto, as they read on the internet that the city was really pretty during the dark nights...

They ended up eating at a very nice and antique looking McDonald's, in the centre of Oporto, more precisely in "Aliados" Avenue, and immediately after eating, they decided to walk around the area...

As they were walking towards "Luiz" Bridge, they suddenly came across a gear, stuck in a wall, right in front of São Bento railway station. What should they do in this situation? Should they disobey their parents? Should they keep the gear or ignore it?

The truth is that they grabbed it, while looking carefully around if someone was watching them, and Daniel put it in one of his pockets... Then they proceeded to walk and quickly saw another gear, this time on the grass, and they couldn't hold their curiosity anymore, so they grabbed a mirror, from Emma's makeup kit, and read the inscriptions, respectively, "*I am the fourth and I run against time*" and "*I am the sixth and I run against time*".

Then in the peak of emotion, their aunt called, saying it was already late and they should come back home, asking them where they were so that she could get them. But this could not be forgotten, so the four friends decided to go back there and look for more clues without their parents' permission!

So, they had to make a decision: - What do we tell her? – Giulio asked.
– We should tell her that we still have something we want to do. –, said Emma, who was known as the worst liar amongst the group.
– I don't really think that'll stick, – Giulio said, – we had better off telling her that we want to explore the city a bit more. –
– Yeah, I guess that might be better. –, Emma said, wondering why she couldn't make excuses as easily as him.
– So, it's settled! –, the twins stated simultaneously.

So, Daniel picked up his phone and called his aunt: – I think we'll stay a bit longer just to explore the city. –
– Don't you think it's a bit dangerous to go out to the city at night? –, their aunt asked, sounding a bit worried.
– Don't worry, we're not children anymore, we can take care of ourselves. – Daniel replied, refusing to give up on persuading their aunt.
– Ok, but I want you to call me at 8 o'clock, or else I won't allow you to explore the city again once it starts to become night. –
– We promise to call you at 8. –, said Maria, who was eavesdropping on their conversation.

As soon as they heard the beep from the telephone, they practically jumped out in joy. They finally had time to look for more gears, and no one and nothing was going to stop them, except for the time.

When they looked at the time on their phones, they knew they were going to need to be quick, as it marked 6:55, and it had taken them about an hour

just to get this one gear, so they imagined that it would take a long time to find another one.

But they weren't going to give up this easily, they were going to look nearby for another clue, even if there was some kind of scribble on the wall saying that a gear was hiding behind that same wall.

So, they decided to start looking in the most obvious place, the station itself. They figured: "If it was in front of the station, why wouldn't it be from someone inside?", so, they went inside the station and started their search.

After about 10 minutes of searching, the gears fall out of Daniel's pocket, and a nearby man that was witnessing everything noticed the gears falling. As soon as he went to confirm his suspicions, and they were absolutely correct, it was one of his gears.

After the initial shock, the man got himself together himself and confronted the kids:

– How did you find those gears? –, the man said hastily, searching frantically for something in his pockets.

– We've just found it laying around here and thought it might belong to someone. –, Daniel said, starting to suspect the man.

– Well, you've found the owner, –, said the man becoming increasingly agitated – now give it back! –, and the man tried to take them out of Daniel's hand.

– What are you doing?! –, Daniel shouted, hurrying back and trying to protect both himself and the gears.

– I'm trying to take back what is rightfully mine! –, the man said.

As soon that the man tried to take the gears out of Daniel's hand, his friends knew something was wrong, as they were observing the entire time, and they soon joined the ruckus.

– Leave him alone! –, Maria said, for she was worried the most for her brother.

– Get away from this you kids, I need these gears more than you do! –, said the man still trying to get the gear out of Daniel's grasp. – You don't understand how important this is for me. –

– Can't we at least talk? –, Emma asked, for she didn't like conflicts at all.

– Yeah, it's better than fighting in the middle of the station. –, Giulio said.

As soon as they heard those words they started to look around and realised a crowd had gathered to witness the ruckus that those two were causing.

Suddenly, the man calmed himself down and started cleaning the dust out of his jacket.

Daniel also started to realise what was happening and got red for all the attention that he got.

Then, the man suddenly said: – Follow me. –. And he went into the middle of the crowd and disappeared among the many onlookers. After realising he wasn't going to wait for them, they started to hurriedly chase after the man.

After just a few steps out of the crowd, they saw the man going down the street and entering a building. It had probably been once an apartment building, but it had looked abandoned for a long time.

Since the man was their best shot at cracking their case, they went after him, and went into the building. It was very old and had a weird smell, but they went in anyway. Still not trusting the man entirely, they took cautious steps, making sure the man didn't surprise them.

They were completely clueless about where the man was taking them, so, they started whispering to each other: – Where do you guys think he's taking us? –, asked Emma, last in line in case someone had to call the police.

– I don't know, but he's our best chance at getting this done. –, Daniel responded, as he wanted to find out what this was all about.

– I don't really trust him, –, Giulio whispered, – if he asks for the gears I don't think you should give them to him. –.

– But what if we need to trust him to crack this case? –, Maria asked nervously, feeling the man was somewhat suspicious.

– I don't know, but for now we have got to trust him. –, Daniel stated.

And so, they went further inside the building. They saw the man sitting on an old chair surrounded by debris, which appeared to have fallen from the ceiling.

– So, –, the man said, – you might be wondering who I am, and why I acted that way. Well, my name is Pedro, the one Elena told you was dead. –.

– But. –, stuttered Daniel, – How is that possible? –.

– I didn't really die, I just wanted to keep the gears safe from the Time Thieves. –

– What are the Time Thieves? –, Emma asked, approaching the man suddenly.

– Well, they're the thieves that have been trying to steal my gears. –

– This is all very confusing, –, Giulio said, – why are they trying to steal the gears? And why are they important? –.

– Well, the gears are very important because they allow us to time travel. –

– How is that even possible?! –, Maria asked, as she was the only one capable of muttering a word at the moment.

– Those gears have a special kind of material that allows people to travel back and forth in time. –

– How did you find out about that? –, Maria asked, still very confused.

– We don't exactly know how or why, but it was discovered when I built my first clock, it suddenly disappeared and then appeared a few weeks later. I tried stripping it apart to find out what was happening, and then I discovered it would only happen when that specific material gear was placed. –

– It's still very confusing. –, Giulio said, as he finally was able to snap out of it, – how did you get the material for it to begin with? –

– I don't know, they just gave it to me with the rest of them. –, Pedro said, starting to become visibly annoyed at the barrage of questions he was getting. – All I know is that it happened 8 more times, and then it stopped. –

– Wait a moment. –, Daniel said, – Shouldn't it be 7? –

– No, there are 8 gears –, Pedro said. – How many did you find? –

– We found 3. –, Daniel said, revealing them and placing them on a nearby table.

– That's amazing! –, said Pedro, visibly excited. – I have 3 of them, I can almost build the time machine and go back! –

– Back where? –, Emma asked.

– It doesn't matter! I think I know where we can find another gear: it's in an old clock in an antique store owned by the Time Thieves. We have to act fast before they find out about us. –

– Where is that antique store? –, Daniel asked, ready to go there.

– It's not too far, about 10 minutes on foot. –

The group looked at their phones and realised time was running out, as it was already 7:30, so they had to run.

– Ok, but we have to be quick, we don't have much time. –, Maria said, for she didn't want to get in trouble again.

– Ok, follow me. –, Pedro said, hurryingly trying to leave the room. – I won't be able to get close to the store, because they already know me and they'll call their friends. You should probably keep the gears somewhere safe. Here, –, said Pedro presenting an old wooden box locked by a key, – use this. –.

They put all of the 3 gears inside the box along with the other ones that were already in there.

After a while they finally found the antique store.

– So, what you're looking for is a big pendulum clock, you are going to want to open it and take the biggest gear there, it's the most important one. –

– But how will we be able to open it? –, Daniel asked.

– With this. –, Pedro said, taking a small rusty key out of his pocket.

After leaving Pedro just around the corner, they entered the store and realised they were being watched by the store clerk, who was keeping a keen eye on them. So, they decided that Daniel would try to open the clock while the others distracted the clerk. While Daniel was trying to find where the key lock was, his friends were bombarding the clerk with questions about the store, trying to keep his attention as far away from the clock as possible.

Once Daniel found a small hole at the base of the clock, he decided to try and fit the key in. At first it wouldn't go in, but after a bit of spinning the key to the right angle, he managed to open the clock and take the gear from the inside.

– I have seen everything I wanted to. –, Daniel said, which was their signal that everything went according to plan.

– Thanks for helping us out. –, the group said.

After meeting up with Pedro and giving him the gear, they realised they were almost out of time, so they decided to call their aunt to pick them up.

As soon as they called her, they said their goodbyes to Pedro and he told them they should meet the following day at 5 o'clock in the basement of that empty old building.

The group of friends was finally one step closer to figuring out what was happening, so that night they were so excited they almost couldn't fall asleep. But they did.

What they didn't know was that they had been followed... after leaving the shop. Someone, on a motorbike, was really interested in those gears. During the night, while everybody was sleeping, a creepy shadow entered the house silently; went up the stairs and rummaged through their belongings until he found the box with the gears

– Someone stole the gears!! –, shouted Daniel.

– What? What are you saying?“ –, asked Maria.

– Look the gear box is missing! –, said Daniel, – We must go and meet Pedro. Quickly! –.

The group of friends met Pedro in the basement of the old building and Pedro wasn't really surprised about what had happened. There was some hope because who had stolen the gears needed the final gear. But where was it?

The group started to look for clues in the book and while they were reading, Pedro noticed a reference to a special clock that everybody admired at St. Alexander Nevsky Cathedral in Sofia.

– Sofia? Where is that? –, asked Maria.

– Maria, I think we must travel to Bulgaria to try to solve this mystery. –, said Pedro. – I'm going with you. This can't fall in the wrong hands. But first, we must talk with your parents and explain the whole situation. –



CHAPTER 3

After asking their parents for their permission to go to Bulgaria, Maria and Daniel begun to pack their bags with great enthusiasm. Pedro was going to go with them, and Emma and Giulio had decided to stay with their aunt to look for more information so that at the right time they could help them.

– I think the person who stole the clock gears is in Bulgaria, because I found this passport and it's written in Bulgarian. –, Maria said to Daniel while looking for clothes in the closet.

– Probable! Let's not forget the special clock at St. Alexander Nevski Cathedral in Sofia. Now let's hurry! The last flight to Bulgaria will be at 4.30 p.m.! –, Daniel exclaimed.

After packing their bags, they got dressed and set off for the airport on the first available taxi. Daniel told the taxi driver to drive faster so he wouldn't miss his 4.30 p.m. flight.

After about two hours of flight, the plane landed in Bulgaria, and when the three got off the plane, they were amazed by the miraculous scenery. Everything was white, the tree branches were laden with snow, the silver cloak covered the entire airport. They had never seen so much snow before, and the air they were breathing was getting colder and colder.

Although they had no reservation, they eventually found free rooms at the Grand Hotel in Sofia.

The next day, even though they were tired, Maria and Daniel were eager for the adventure of searching for clues and went ahead of Pedro to the Police with that found passport. After boarding the bus, due to the ice and snow, they got stuck in the slush that exceeded 50 cm.

– How are we going to get to the Police? –, Maria wondered as she called Pedro.

– Is that so? Don't go anywhere, I'm coming quickly with a taxi! –, Pedro said as he got dressed.

– Maria, stay calm, we will arrive by closing time! We just need to know what time it is, because my watch doesn't work anymore. –, said Daniel.

Maria and Daniel got into the taxi, seeing Pedro saying that it was 30 minutes until closing time. The road was hard, the traffic hellish, but they reached their destination.

– We want to discuss this passport! –, Daniel said to the guard.

The guard directed them to the Intelligence Bureau where they discover that the thief came the day before to renew his passport and that he was probably staying at the Grand Hotel in Sofia.

– He is staying at the same hotel as us! We have to get to the reception, fast! –, Maria was agitated.

"How are we going to get there? Traffic is blocked, but if we walk it will take us an hour." Daniel whispered to himself.

The guard helped them by explaining that there was a shortcut and they managed to get to the hotel faster. Then Pedro asked the lady at the reception if she knew the gentleman from the passport picture.

– I know he was accommodated in room number 5, but that happened a few days ago. The gentleman was saying he had a flight to Romania –, said the receptionist.

Daniel was thinking about how to find the thief and asked to inspect the room where he had been staying. He went to the hotel manager to ask for permission to find any clue in the theft case. After the hotel manager's approval, they eagerly took the room card, opened the door and took a closer look.

It was an indescribable mess, so that in that room nothing was in its place. They began to search each room, step by step, and found a note that caught their eye and had useful information written on it: a name and a number. Many files were scattered, and on different sheets were written series and numbers, probably from the stolen gears. Taking all that they found, they went to their room and they started to check the name and number written on the note, but the portfolio too.

Pedro called the phone number, letting the person who answered talk so he could finally discover that the thief was called Franz. A way to find the truth was already looming.

They went with the portfolio to the police, being sent to a person who works with deciphering those codes. They were the series of many stolen things, valuable objects and many names that back then they didn't understand, but they were the names of the owners of the stolen objects.

– These codes are of very valuable objects, that were declared to the police. Where did you find them? –, Said the programmer.

– A stranger called Franz stole some clock gears. We found these portfolios in room 5 in the Big Hotel! –, said the kids.

– We want the gears and to catch the culprit, but for that, we need someone's help. –

– You can't venture into this story because he's a dangerous criminal. But we can offer you help with a secret agent, undercover, who will watch you this whole period, until we catch the culprit to protect you. –, said a police officer.

– We are happy for the help given to us, but we want to solve the mystery as soon as possible! That's why, we can't forget the clues we have. First, let's go see the special clock from the Cathedral in Sofia! –

Thus, they enthusiastically headed to the Saint Alexandru Nevski Cathedral in Sofia. It was a big building with numerous domes, semidomes and arches that guarded the big central dome. On the exterior, the whole building was tackled with white stone and very tall granite pedestal. The very tall dome that was 45 meters had 12 bells of different heights and weights. The windows were tall, decorated with sculptures and floral motifs. When they entered the Cathedral, the kids were excited to see an enormous chandelier suspended at approximately 27 meters. In the Cathedral they weren't allowed to take photos. The candles and the candlesticks were all lit in the church, tied with chains of silver, giant candelabras, gold mosaics, all shining, and over the dome a gold cross shining on top.

At one moment, walking in the cathedral, they found next to a wooden bench a gear, and on that gear "*I'm first and I run like time!*" was written. Then they saw an enormous clock on a wall that made them think.

– Mister Pedro, is this the special clock? –, asked Daniel

– It's possible! We need to find information about this clock. –, said Pedro.

Pedro talked with a guard and he said that no one had access to that clock, because it was priceless, because it was antique and needed to be protected. Unfortunately, verifying it, they realized it was missing its gears, this confirmed the fact that the thief was there right before them. Thus, they asked permission to look on the surveillance cameras to identify the thief.

– Look, it looks like he used the back entrance when they weren't cautious to infiltrate unseen! –

– It's not good! –, Said Pedro worried.

– Why not? –, asked Daniel.

– We need to get back to Romania urgently so we don't lose any route to catch him. Look at the camera! He mistakenly let his airplane ticket show. It's clear it says Romania and we will leave soon. –

– Then let’s go! –

In this time, Pedro found a map on the ground of the city Buzau where there is the Clock Tower hosted by the spectacular Communal Palace in the city, thing that reinforced the idea that the thief was heading to that place.

Together with the agent, Daniel, Maria and Pedro, booked tickets for the first flight to Romania for the next day. They packed their bags, portfolios, tickets and they left to the airport.

The plane arrived earlier, and the kids eagerly found their seats in the plane and while they were flying, they talked, together with the secret agent, about the codes they found and about that “Franz”. They gathered all the clues found until that moment, until they got close to discovering the secret of the stolen clocks.

– The thief is booked at the Intercontinental Hotel. We need to get there first, before he puts the gears up for sale! –, said the agent while reading the codes.

– The information is helpful, but how many hours will the flight take? –, asked Daniel.

“The time for the flight is 3 hours because of the blizzard and snow!” was heard on the plane.

– Three hours? We won’t be there in time; we won’t get a room....! What will we do, how do we hurry the plane? –, asked Maria, while she was busy on the laptop trying to book a room in that hotel.

But it wasn’t like that, the flight lasted just two hours and finally, they arrived. The problem was how exactly they were going to get to the hotel in an hour. Since their phones didn’t have battery, they couldn’t use GPS. So, the agent called a taxi company and asked for a vehicle from the airport. When the taxi arrived, the agent asked the driver if he knew where the Intercontinental

Hotel was. The driver didn't speak English, so the agent wrote on a note the name of the hotel.

After they arrived at the hotel, they realized all the rooms were occupied, and the only option was to wait for the next day with the hope that there would be a vacancy. Now the problem was to find a place to spend the night. And the only hotel with empty rooms was 10 kilometres away.

- If we lose that room too, where will we sleep? –, Pedro asked.
- I don't see a single car on the street, and if we walk it will take about two hours. –
- We should take a bus or the subway, but I don't see a station anywhere. –, Maria said.

Suddenly, the agent grabbed the phone and called his uncle who was nearby. He reassured the children, telling them that in ten minutes, the agent's uncle would take them directly to their destination.

Exactly ten minutes later, a car appeared in front of them, the driver telling them to get in. The agent exchanged a few words with his uncle, and in less than fifteen minutes they were at their destination.

They rushed to grab that free room, and after booking it and getting the key, they put their bags in one place and started inspecting the codes carefully.

- These codes are very difficult to decipher. –, said Maria.
- It will take us all night! –, continued Daniel.
- Maybe we can find a way to crack the codes more easily. There must be a computer program. –, the agent said.

With the program the agent found, the codes were easier to crack, but it still took too much time.

Suddenly, they heard a strange sound at the window.

- What do you think it could be? –, Pedro asked.
- Maybe a bird hit the window, I'll go check. –, said Daniel.

At the window there was not a bird, but a hungry cat, so they let it in.

– You know, they don't allow animals in the hotel? –, said the agent.

– We won't keep her long, she has a collar. Let's see . . . Her name is Sasha. –, Daniel noted.

– We can take her to the vet tomorrow, maybe she has a chip. –, suggested Maria.

– Agreed, but for now let's hide it. –, said the agent. – I can't believe you guys have a mystery to solve, but decide to take care of a cat. –

In the morning, the group went to the vet. Fortunately, they were not caught by the hotel security. When they got there, they had to wait for a long time. The agent got bored so he went looking for clues. Finally, it was their turn. Using the phone to then communicate with the doctor, they learnt that the cat did not have a chip.

– What are we going to do now? –, Maria asked.

– I guess we keep it. –, Daniel answered.

– The agent is not going to like this! –, answered Pedro.

– Who cares about the agent? We have a cat now! –, Maria exclaimed.

– It's very expensive to make a passport for a cat, you know? –, said Pedro.

– We'll see, maybe we start a fundraiser? –, Daniel said excitedly.

– What a good idea! –, Maria agreed.

– Yes, it's a very good idea! –, Pedro also agreed.

The kids were trying to find the agent. Maria was holding Sasha, Pedro was sneezing uncontrollably because he was allergic to cats, and Daniel was on his phone watching the funds being collected.

In the end, the children found the agent, sitting on a bench. He was writing something in a notebook.

– What are you doing here? –, Daniel asked curiously.

– I found clues! Right behind me is a souvenir shop, owned by an old woman who seems to know a thing or two about the thief, but wants money for every word! –

– I think you are joking! –, Pedro said, trying not to sneeze again.

– It's true, why would I lie to some kids? –

– Well, now we have no money. I'll go to the bank to try to get cash off the card. You guys try to talk to the old lady again. –, Daniel said.

– Wait, take the cat too! –, Pedro said, but Daniel had already left.

After the agent heard the news about the cat, he was not happy at all and headed to the store. Inside there were all sorts of strange things: four-legged chickens carved out of wood, strange books with whole empty pages, strange old paintings that seemed to follow you.

– What a strange place! –, Maria exclaimed.

– Indeed, it would be good to talk to the old woman sooner. –, said Pedro.

– We do not accept cats as a method of payment, said the outraged old woman. –

– We don't want to sell the cat. –, Maria said.

– Why did you come back? –, the old woman addressed the agent.

– We need more information. –, the agent answered.

– And I need more money. –, the old woman retorted.

– We have money... Achoo! –, stated Pedro, still affected by the cat.

– You, with the sneeze, drink this, you will be cured! –, said the old woman in a gentle tone.

Pedro drank the strange liquor and instantly stopped.

– Thank you! –, Pedro said happily.

– With pleasure! –, said the old woman, delighted to be able to help.

An hour had passed, Daniel returned, but they still could not find out much from the old woman. The stingy agent was trying to haggle with the old woman, while the children were looking around at the strange objects.

Sasha was knocking down anything she caught from the shelves, but the old woman didn't mind her. Suddenly, she knocked down a huge painting. Daniel went to pick it up from the floor.

– Hey, look here! –, he said in a whisper.

– What is it? –, Maria asked.

– I can't believe! It's the codes from the things Franz stole! –, exclaimed Pedro.

– Wonderful! It seems we are getting closer to the truth! –, Maria exclaimed happily.

– Madam, excuse us, but where do you get all these objects from? –

– Well, I buy most of them from cheap stores and paint them, but a man has been bringing them to me for some time now. He said that the items cost a lot and that I should give him half the profit, but I didn't want to. Then, when he said how expensive these items were, I agreed. –

– What does the man look like? –, Pedro asked.

– Well... –, the old woman hesitated to tell them.

The agent was about to say something, but the children stopped him, telling the old woman that they would give her as much money as she wanted, just to spill the beans.

– He is tall, with black hair and has a long and beautiful coat, an expensive-looking one. –, said the old woman.

– Didn't he bring some clock gears here? –, Maria asked.

– I'd tell you, but...! –

The agent was seething with anger, he really didn't like wasting money. The children again told the old woman that they would give her the promised amount, if only she would give them more information that would help them. – No, I don't think I have such a thing! I tell you! I know all my goods! –, said the old woman. – But I have seen such gears before on the person I was telling you about before. I heard him talking to someone on the phone that he was going to the Clock Tower in Buzău. You may find him there. But you have to be very careful because it is said that the person who owns all eight gears could travel through time, changing the order of things in the future and stealing people's time, which is very dangerous! –

– Thanks for all the advice! We currently have 5 clock gears. Maybe we can find the thief as soon as possible to stop him from stealing people's time. – The children paid and happily moved on. They gave the old woman the sum they agreed upon, and went to buy something to eat. Even though the old lady didn't have the clock gears, they left with a lot of useful information about the thief. Daniel joked with the agent that Sasha was the hero today after all, but the agent didn't look too happy.

Therefore, they head to the town of Buzău where they found the Clock Tower housed by the spectacular Municipal Palace in the city. The building, which also incorporated the tower, was built between 1899 and 1903 according to the project of the architect Alexandru Săvulescu and was inaugurated in the presence of King Carol I, in 1904. The architectural style was a combination of Gothic, Byzantine, Baroque and Brancovenese. The columns on the ground floor were Corinthian, according to their capitals, and Ionic according to their massiveness. The columns of the first floor were reminiscent of the great Venetian palaces. The tower was 20 meters tall and the clock was installed in 1903.

As they were about to climb the tower, they saw an object shining in the sunlight. Thus, they discovered another gear on which it was written: "*I'm second and I'm running like time!*"

– I can't believe I found the sixth gear! –, Daniel exclaimed.

– Let's put them in the box so we don't lose them. –, said Maria carefully!

– We'd better stay away from people's eyes. It is possible that the thief is around. –, stated the agent, a little worried, but, at the same time, satisfied with the investigations done.

– Let's also take into account what the old woman told us! –, stated Pedro. They only had two more clock gears to complete the set with which they could build their dream time-machine. The problem was that they could not catch the thief and they were afraid that he would take the whole set to achieve his goal. But what surprised them the most was that the thief seemed to specifically leave some clues for them.

Their whole investigation had made sense following the information received from their friends, Giulio and Emma, who had sent them a rather useful message.



CHAPTER 4

Daniel was lying on his bed. He sat up holding his head.

– My poor head! I feel so bad! –

Maria rushed towards her brother, the secret agent and Pedro joined them.

– Daniel, do you still have a headache? – Maria asked;

Daniel replied: – Yes I still have a headache, it's very strange. I feel like I have a fever I feel bad. What is going on? – .

Maria touched her brother's forehead.

– Yes, you're right, you're hot, I think you have to take a tablet! –

Maria went to get the tablet and a glass of water, she handed it to her brother and advised him to lie down on the sofa...

– This room was very similar to that of the Grand Hotel in Bulgaria! –, Daniel said.

– We are in Bulgaria? How did we get to this hotel? –

– Are you crazy? –, answered Maria. – Daniel we are not at the Grand Hotel! –

– You are the one who has lost her mind! We are in Romania! –

Pedro and the secret agent were puzzled and invited him to come and look at the window.

Daniel looked outside and gaped.

– What!!! I can't understand what is happening! –

Maria, worried about her brother, took him back to the sofa.

Maria told him: – Remember the hotel receptionist told us that the thief of the Gears took a flight to Romania. –

Daniel said: – What about the man who had stolen the Gears!! We already had collected the Gears. We had five of them!! –.

Maria replied: – No, you are wrong! We have no more gears at all! –.

She reminded him that they had been in the Montelepre mountains and found the Gear number 3. Next, they found the 2nd gear number 7 when they visited Elena with their parents. Number 6 and 4 were found in the Porto station one in the wall and one on the grass. Then Pedro found them and wanted to take their Gears but they explained to him and he agreed they put all the gears in a small box; he put 3 Gears in it so they now had 7 Gears in total out of the 8 they have had been looking for.

– But we had a problem, we were robbed! Do you remember everything? –, she asked Daniel.

Daniel: – Definitely! –.

Pedro added: – Fortunately, the thief does not have the eighth! –.

Daniel answered : – Indeed there are 8 in all! I remember well that the Gears make it possible to travel in time! –

– We are leaving for Romania tomorrow. We're going to catch this bandit! He is outlaw. –, said the secret agent.

Pedro recalled that he had read in the book that a special clock with a Gear that he thinks is the eighth, that everyone admires, is in St. Alexander's Cathedral in Sofia.

– What are we waiting for! Let's go! –, said Daniel.

– I call my driver. He will come in two seconds. –, nodded the secret agent.

And a car honked twice. They set off in the direction of St. Alexander Nevsky Cathedral in Sofia. After a good hour searching inside the cathedral, they found nothing in particular. They were on the wrong track.

They all returned to the hotel in despair, but regained hope of finding the eighth Gear in Romania.

They all went to bed and the next day, early in the morning, they took the flight for Romania.

After landing, they went directly to the hotel booked the day before. They left their luggage and hastened to think about the day's program.

Daniel still had a headache, but he suddenly remembered there was a clock in the square.

They set off and walked across a large square in the center of which was a large clock.

Daniel said – YES THAT'S THE ONE!! –.

They walked around and Daniel showed a clock tower that seemed familiar to him, he had dreamed about it!

They approached and walked around the clock and suddenly, they discovered a piece of paper on which was written the following message:

"Hello kids, if you're reading this message that means you followed me. Just to inform you, I'm on a small island in the Caribbean with a delicious cocktail and sunglasses. Well I'm going back to my business have a nice day! "

– He is making fun of us. –, Maria said.

Daniel replied: – It pays nothing to wait! He'll choke on his cocktail! –.

Pedro added: – Don't worry. we'll get him! –.

The secret agent who until then had remained silent, read the message again and said: – He is in Martinique. –.

Maria cried out: – Yes, it's true, remember Daniel, on the search engine, we saw that there are flights in Martinique every week! –.

The secret agent then took his cell phone and began to organize everything for their trip.

Two days later they flew to Martinique.

Arriving in Martinique, the four decided to take a bus to Saint-Pierre and more precisely to "The Maison de la Bourse", it was the former Chamber of Commerce of Martinique when Saint-Pierre was the capital. They had heard that it was a famous meeting place. Unfortunately it had been burnt in 1902. Once there, they found a guide who told them the history of the place. Maria proclaimed: – Look ! The clock in the front does not work. Is it broken? –.

The guide then explained what had happened the day before.

– When my colleague and I arrived yesterday, we noticed that the clock had stopped working. We asked the watchmaker to take a look at it. And what a surprise! The whole mechanism was on the ground! –

– Well it's definitely that thief! –, said Daniel.

Meanwhile the thief, whose name Vuk, tried to find a place to hide the Gears.

"I have to find a place where nobody goes like this I will be in peace.", he thought to himself. He took his phone, looked up on internet and found a house to let: it was "La maison du Gereur". The house dated from the late 19th century. In 1924, Henri Laguarigue de Meillac, brother of Joseph Laguarigue de Meillac, settled there as manager. A kitchen, which no longer existed, was on the rear elevation side. The building currently housed offices. It was a sort of colonial house .

"Ohh!", he continued to think, "This house is very beautiful and since it's very expensive, no one will come so I will be in peace. I like the name of the house", he repeated "La maison du Gereur".

He decided to go straight away to the house, he accepted to pay 2.000 euros a week because he had a lot of money. He hired a car to go there.

When he came to the house it was 2 pm, he opened the door and looked satisfied. In the living room there were antique furniture that smelled like wax, beautiful purple velvet armchairs and a crib. A painting of an old settler was displayed on the main wall of the living room. Vuk went to the biggest room, put the small chest on the sideboard and started putting the Gears together, but he felt tired so he went to bed.

The children asked Pedro to rent a car to look for Vuk and asked the manager if there was a car left. She answered that there was no cars left because a very tall and mysterious man had taken the last one.

– What was his name? I know it's probably Vuk. –, asked Maria.

She went to check the register and she confirmed his name was Vuk.

– Are you Looking for him? He might have been going to the “Maison du Gereur”. –, said the manager.

– GREAT!!! We will catch him tomorrow. –, said the children

The day after was the 8th of May, the anniversary of the eruption of the montagne Pelée.

Pedro was driving pretty fast he said – You know, 30.000 people died in that eruption!! Its so sad. –.

They could see the house far away.

– Ouhh!!! The house is beautiful! –, they said.

It was a huge colonial house, the walls were beige, the roof was orange and the window outlines were blue.

There was... a big clock in the middle!!!

Meanwhile Vuk woke up at 7am and had a nice breakfast: cavendish banana with salted cod, hot chocolate and butter bread.

Next he went to get the gears that he had left in a small chest on the sideboard. "Oouhh!!! Perfect", he thought, "I will finish putting the gears together now and then I will go to Mexico to find the biggest treasure in the world." .

He had just started to put the gears together when he heard children shouting.

"Oh those damned kids!!!"

He put the last Gear together at that precise moment. A huge noise could be heard then.

Maria pulled her brother's arm because he was attracted by a mysterious force.

Suddenly, a large beam of light came out from the room. Pedro got nervous, he opened the door and was attracted by the beam of light. When the Children opened their eyes without worrying about the light, they realized that Vuk, Pedro and the Gears were missing.

There was a clock showing 2 minutes past 8.

– What happened? –, Daniel shouted.

– It's strange I don't understand everything has disappeared! –, said Maria.

– I know, but why? –, cried Daniel.

– There must be an explanation –, Maria said.

– Let's think about it–, said Daniel.

– What is today's date? –, Maria asked.

– May the 8th! Why? –, said Daniel.

– It is the anniversary of the eruption of the mountain Pelé –, Maria said.

– Vuk has all the Gears and must have gone back to the past but unfortunately for him it was a bad day. Too bad for Vuk! He was a scoundrel but poor Pedro he must be dead now!! –, said Daniel.

In a split second Pedro arrived with small objects shining in his hands.

Maria and Daniel speechless could not speak so much they were shocked by the scene.

In the meantime, the secret agent arrived breathless! They asked Pedro how he had managed to come back.

Pedro said with pride: – We got rid of Vuk! –.

– How did you get back? –, asked Maria.

He looked at Maria smiling . – Vuk had the Gears in hand so he returned to the past and perished at the same time as the 30.000 inhabitants of Saint-Pierre. I was able to recover all the Gears thanks to my hat. I will destroy them in order for them not to do more harm. –

They decided to destroy them, took his car and drove towards Grand-Rivière to throw the Gears. They took about 2 hours to arrive and they crossed the bridge.

Maria exclaimed: – Wow, the vegetation is very thick and this landscape is beautiful! –.

They stopped cautiously at the edge of a precipice then got out of the car, Pedro was about to throw the Gears when Maria stopped him.

Maria cried out: – Wait! What is this? –.

They realized that there was a Gear that was different from the others, it was brighter and had a somewhat pink gold color. Pedro squared his eyes and said: – Oh my God! That's my fiancée Elena's pendant! –.

– Elena! We know her, she is the one who helped us! Arrh, so you are the famous Pedro! –, exclaimed Maria.

– Poor thing! I have left her all alone, she must think I'm dead after all this time! –, said Pedro.

Pedro threw the gears into the water but kept Elena's gear.

– I keep the golden one –, said Pedro.

– Why? –, asked Maria

He replied: – It's Elena's –

– All right, I remember, we have already met her she owns a lodge on Mount Etna. –, Maria said.

– We must not lose time, let's go back to Sicily! –, said Daniel.

– Well, let's call a taxi to go to the airport! I keep thinking about Elena. –, Pedro said.

– Do you love her? –, Maria asked.

Pedro replied: – I wanted to marry her her, but she kept on telling that we should just be friends. –.

– You should try again! You might be surprised! –, the children said.

– You're right! –, Pedro said.

Maria sent a message to Giulio and Emma to tell they were coming back to Sicily so they promised they would pick them up at the airport.

Giulio and Emma were Daniel and Maria's best friends. They had shared some exciting adventures.

– Daniel, Maria where have you been all this time, guys? –, Emma asked.

– We were worried like crazy about you! –, Emma added.

– Why didn't you tell us you were going to another country? –, Giulio asked.

– It's a long story... –, Maria said.

– Okay, it's time to stop the "chitchat"! –, Pedro said.

– Pedro, why are you suddenly in a rush? –, Daniel asked.

– It's something personal, can we just drive faster and stay focused, I have to find Elena! –, Pedro said.

Then, they drove to Palermo.

A few days later a small group walked cheerfully down towards Palermo Cathedral. Pedro was wearing a black suit, while Elena had a nice beige dress. She had bought it a few years before. 10 years later she wore it for a very special day. Daniel, Maria, Emma, Giulio and some curious people were following them joyfully. There was also a cat. Elena was softly touching Pedro's hand. There was a small pink gold Gear pendant hanging on her neck. It was a beautiful day.

Of course, she had considered Pedro as a friend for a long time. But when he had given her this gold shaped gear pendant, she knew that the situation would evolve. Elena tried to remember all that had happened before this wedding day, but it was so confusing. She tried to hold back the loose ribbon which was holding her bun. She felt happy.

THE END.





Wicked Fairies
Night

"...spinning wildly with laughter in
their eyes..."

Once upon a time there were two old people that lived in a far away village, located at the edge of the forest, in a house that was made with walnut wood, surrounded with a garden full of roses and yellow tulips. They raised lovingly their twin grandchildren, Maria and Daniel, from the young age of three, and their parents mysteriously disappeared.

Far away, under the moonlight, you could see a play of lights, at the windows of grandparents` house. These weren`t any ordinary lights. In fact, if you looked closer, they were the midsummer and elder flowers that the kids would pick from Flower Meadow and that lit only at midnight. The children loved to spend their time in that dreamy place that somehow attracted them each and every time. There they made flower crowns, imagined they are noble and made little bouquets to bring their grannie to light the soul and house with their beauty.

Their grandparents were kind-hearted people and had mellow voices, they were full of zest and real hard workers. Grannie was a short woman, with grey hair, small and vivid eyes that gave off kindness. Her round head was covered in a scarf, white with yellow flowers, given to her by her grandchildren. Maria would always help her in the kitchen, especially when they baked sweet bread or cooked different traditional dishes on Celebrations. Granpa had gentle and comforting eyes, a medium but sturdy stature, proof to his balanced life. He tried to remain a strong man, but now, in his old age, he walked slower, supporting himself in a beech wooden stick carved by Daniel, who had gotten skilled in this craft, just as his grandfather. The twins learnt from their grandparents everything that is required in a household and thus becoming the family pillars at a young age. For the grandparents, their grandchildren were the light of their eyes and they took good care of them. The children had a certain beauty – their hair was fair like the sunlight, the eyes blue as the sky and they had freckles. Maria wore her golden hair free on the back, as it was long and curly. Her brother, Daniel, wore his short like any other

boy in the village. They were 13 and in all these years they never had an argument, they had a strong bond. The entire village admired them and nicknamed them “the angels with fair hair and sky eyes”. They were well behaved, polite and endowed with qualities that were supposed to be given by some fantastic beings, which folks called Midsummer fairies.

Each year, on their birthday, 24th of July, the twins were the only ones in the village that heard a godly song coming from the heart of the forest, making their hearts jump in joy. This year, when they were about to be 13, they felt like something special was to happen, something that could change their life. With this in mind, the brother and sister fell asleep and dreamt of seven fairies surrounded by light like angels. One of them told them: “My dears, I am your mother and the Fairy Queen. Please, pay great attention to what I am about to say. At the moment I am captive in a mysterious land, together with your father. Our captor is The Lion, the self-entitled King of the forest. When we were 3, me and your father went in search of the midsummer flowers as per the village tradition, to give you health and long life protection. Unfortunately, we stepped on the Lion’s territory that got mad we ventured on his land and punished us: he transformed your father in an animal, and he put me in a cage. The only chance we have to leave this land is with your help. I know you want to meet us too! So don’t forget to go to the Flowers Meadow on the night of your birthday. I promise you that the Midsummer Fairies will help you with everything you need to get to us. We love you! You are our only hope to escape!..” That is how the dream ended, with mother’s softly spoken words.

Next morning the kids woke up full of joy and impatience, but also sad and bewildered because of the dream they had. Maria looked at Daniel, and told him:

“Brother, I had a very weird dream. I saw mother even though I have no idea how she looks like. She spoke to me and promised that she will be with us. Is it really possible?”

“Unbelievable! Her brother exclaimed. I had the same dream! I think we should keep it secret from the others, because it’s a sign and I am afraid our wish to find our parents won’t come true if we talk to others.”

“Still, we should tell grandparents about our dream. They are the only ones we can trust and for sure they’ll give us good advice.”

Said and done! The children summoned courage, went to their grandparents and told the entire dream. Their grandparents went quiet for a while, but believed them with their whole hearts. And told them:

“Our dear grandson and granddaughter, the time has come for us to confess all we know about you. But first, let’s start with the Legend of the Midsummer Fairies, that will help you understand better the connection you have with them.”

So grandfather slowly got up from his comfortable armchair and left the room. After a while he came back with a dusty looking book, with a rugged leather cover titled *The Light of Midsummer Fairies*. It was an old book kept hidden in the attic. On the first page one could see a drawing of seven young girls in white dresses, holding hands, with wreaths of light on their heads, on the background of shooting stars on a quiet field. The kids knew at the first glance that those were the Midsummer fairies their mother spoke of in their dream.

Then grandpa started reading from the book with a voice filled with emotion: “In Romanian myths, Midsummer Fairies are good fairies from the elves classification, that become sisters with the Eastertides when their Celebration day isn’t respected. Their day is on the 24th of June, and it’s a celebration of flowers, sun and love. Legends say they are magical beings, with yellow hair and blue eyes, famous for their unmatched beauty and unending kindness. They live in the forests or on the fields, they float in the air, give magical powers to plants and have a heavenly voice. When they do decide to show themselves they sing and dance and

spin dizzily at midnight, when the skies open, and they grant any wishes to the mortals. The night is a magical one, when their realm touches the earthly world. The Midsummer Fairies are dressed in clothes of clouds and stardust. They always walk together, and are kind to people, bringing cure to diseases and fertility to lands, through the flowers with the same name. The traditions say that people gather these miraculous flowers (to bring health to their family) while they sing to the Fairies: *“Between sky and land/ loved by moon and wind/ floating over hills/ party of breathtaking beauties/ weaving wreaths/ for those who are in love/ from flowers carefully picked/ freshly picked/ from moon to sun/ for a better world.”*

“And so did your parents”, grandfather continued with tears in his eyes. “Every year, on your birthday, they would pick midsummer flowers to bring health to the family. Considering what your mother told you in your dreams, now we understand why your parents never came back from Flowers Meadow. We just knew they could not have deserted you. And we felt that the Midsummer Fairies were protecting you.”

Daniel and Maria sat motionless like stones. They never dared to ask their grandparents about their mum and dad. They thought they were orphans, that their parents had died and they didn't want to cause their grandparents more suffering by making them remember.

The brother and sister looked at each other with questioning eyes, noting similarities between them and those magical being grandpa talked about. Hair, eyes, maybe even some gestures resembled those beings. Now they all understood that they are children of a Midsummer Fairy. Now everything fit together like pieces in a puzzle, why they had so many qualities that even the villagers acknowledged.

Being so happy with every detail they found out, the twins decided to find the Fairies and told their grandparents that they are ready to travel, albeit it was

quite hard to leave their home and village. There was much discussion on this issue, but nothing was resolved. The children went to bed, and in their sleep they made up so many plans on how to find the fairies, to help them find their parents. The quiet night was only disrupted by the sounds the brook in the back yard was making when flowing over some boulders.

Finally, the long awaited day came! It was their birthday. The twins went to their grannie and told her that the best gift that she could offer was to allow them to go to Flowers Meadow, deep- in the forest. The kids thought that maybe there they could meet the Fairies, just as their mum said in the dream. Their parents had met in that same meadow, which made that place even more magical. After a long hour of pleading and begging the grandchildren were allowed to go in search of the Midsummer Fairies. Grandpa reminded them to stick to the road and ask for help when needed. Grandma helped Maria and Daniel pack their rucksacks for the trip filled with so much unknown.

And they set off with hearts filled with enthusiasm and hope that they'll achieve their goal, but also fear of what might lay ahead. Though the sun was setting, the road to Flowers Meadow was fully lit by small yellow midsummer that bloomed and seemingly showed the right path. Everything around them was vibrant green, the birds' songs were pleasant in their ears, and the sound of a nearby fall completed the magical atmosphere. Daniel was walking in front of his sister, to protect her if something was to happen. Suddenly they saw a shadow in front of them, that led to a brightly lit bush.

“O, dear! Daniel! What are we going to do?” asked Maria in fright.

“Don't worry, I will protect you!” answered the brother. “There is no cause to get scared. We need to be brave, just as grandpa told us.”

Calmed by his brother's words, Maria pushed the leaves aside and a frightened rabbit hopped out, trying to run from them. They both started laughing and

continued in their way. The twinkling lights from before appeared again, and they realized they were midsummer flowers forming a path that led to a very pretty meadow. The sky was full of stars, the moon was alone unaccompanied by smoky clouds. It gave you a feeling of silence and mystery.

Getting closer to the destination, the Flowers Meadow, they discovered a giant gate, carved in walnut wood, surrounded by yellow midsummer and elder flowers, hidden behind a hairy willow. The spring fragrance incited them to step on the other side of the magic gate. Proving they had courage and ambition, the kids touched the doorknob, and when they opened the gate, they stepped into a different land, filled with colored flowers as big as an oak, surrounded by busy bees and playful butterflies. Far in the distance, above snowcapped mountain peaks, the birds in the sky could be seen and it gave off such an unbridled joy. The children merrily listened to crickets, and springs flowing over the rocks, and the sound of the young leaves. They were in awe of everything they saw, and felt like they are still in a dream, on a land of mysteries.

They knew, from the legend, that the Midsummer Fairies lived in mountain forests, and they could see the mountains very far away, which meant they had to travel for a long time. Daniel reckoned that on foot it would take them months to arrive to the mountains. They walked a few more miles and they happened upon a carriage filled with hay that seemed to go the same way they were. Daniel thought they struck gold, took his sister by the hand and hopped in the carriage, hiding through the straws. When they felt the carriage changing direction, they jumped off as quietly as they got up, realizing they made quite a trip. They continued their way on foot.

As the night was falling they arrived in a tiny village. They had nowhere to sleep and as they were pondering the idea of sleeping in the forest, a kind-hearted woman saw them and invited them to her home. The twins accepted, thanking her

greatly. They entered her house and fell asleep on two big couches, covered in thick blankets. But when they woke up the next day, the couches disappeared. They were tied to uncomfortable chairs with thick twine. Not the kind their villagers back home made, but more like big vines. And the kind woman from the night before turned into a shrewd fox, who was ready to take them to an awful place. She kept telling them that they made a big mistake in trying to find the Midsummer Fairies and that the Lion, the tyrant self-proclaimed King of the forest, wanted them to be brought before him.

Scared, Maria started to yell. Suddenly, at the cottage's door, a stag appeared. He was prepared to fight the fox, but she ran away like fire was at her heels. The stag approached the children, broke the vines, but he didn't hurt them. Quite the opposite: he signaled to them to get on his back. The stag seemed calm and kind, so the kids chose to trust him even though he was a being from a different realm.

The stag took them to a very wide and old tree on the shore of a crystal clear lake. Without stopping, he ran towards it while the twins closed their eyes tight and screamed their heads off. Most surprisingly when they hit the tree no one was hurt, because they went through it to the most magical meadow, where they witnessed the Fairies they were looking for dancing. Midsummer fairies were young women of breathtaking beauty who, bathed in the moonlight, looked like fairytales queens. They had long fair hair braided on their back, blue eyes sparkling like stars, flower wreaths adorning their heads and they wore long dresses made of the smoothest silk and star dust and cloud dust and sewn with yellow midsummer and elder flowers.

As the legend told, they were born from flowers and they represented rebirth and youth. They were Fates' sisters and their job was to keep watch over children until they reached maturity. All the colors and spring fragrances melded with the melodic voices of the bouncing lasses dancing enchantingly round a big bonfire

the likes of which Maria and Daniel have never seen before. The twins went speechless when seeing them for it meant that their dream came true. They didn't dare break their dance. They even had this inkling to join them, that's how happy they were. But a little doubt crept in their hearts: Was it really real, or was it only their imagination?

Keeping quiet by the side, the children had the opportunity to witness Midsummer Fairies' traditions, for the first time in anyone's life. The sun had set, the moon had been born again on a starry night unadorned with clouds and the soft wisp of the wind fluttered the ladies' dresses while they were twinning wreaths of flowers and wheat ears. These Fairies' gentleness charged the night air with magic. In the middle of the forest, the dance was starting with small, bouncy steps, and then the girls were singing with angelic voices : *We were through the valleys and through the meadows / To pick up yellow midsummer flowers / Beautiful flower wreaths / To be fancied by lads*. The Midsummer Fairies just finished their song and dance when they spotted the twins, so they warmly welcomed them with these words:

“Welcome, our dear ones! We were expecting you here, in this land that doesn't belong to your world or times. This is an ancient place, where people believe in the power of nature, of water and plants.”

“It's great to be here! It's a truly marvelous place, just as we dreamt it.”

“We're glad you made it! Not everyone can come this far. We are the fairies of your dreams and we come to the aid of people, we cure diseases, we protect the lands and the animals. We have protected you since you lost your parents and we have inspired you to come find us.”

At that moment, one of the girls stepped closer and whispered in their ears their childhood memories. Hearing all that, Maria and Daniel struck a conversation with them.

“How did you find out what I had done in my childhood?” Maria asked.

“We were the ones who saved from drowning or when you fell from the apple tree, the ones with red juicy fruit, remember? And you, Daniel, do you remember the time you went on your grandparents` house roof and slipped off? We protected you both all the time.”

The twins, amazed and fascinated by their stories, went willingly in the Fairies` dizzying dance and while spinning along them they saw all that they lived, all that their parents lived, even all that their ancestors lived. It was like an endless dream, like a never-ending story, getting more captivating with each spin, a story from which Maria and Daniel couldn`t seem to wake up.

At some point Daniel asked one of the Fairies:

“You showed us our past and proved that you protected our ancestors. Could you show us our future, too?”

“We could look into the future but it only depends on you and on your good deeds, wherever you go, whomever you meet!”

When dawn arrived and first sunrays hit the ground, The Midsummer Fairies disappeared, leaving the kids asleep on a bed of moss. The children woke up in a cuckoo`s song, covered in a cloak made of leaves intended to protect them from rain. The brother and sister were dumbfounded by what they had seen, and couldn`t remember ever making those cloaks themselves the night before. Maria, more confident than her brother, started exploring the surrounding landscape, keen on finding out where the bonfire took place. Daniel, less curious, waited for his sister`s answers, while musing: *“Was it real? Or was it only in my imagination? I truly need to ask my sister. And if it was real, would they come again tonight?”*

Maria came back with a bunch of small flowers, happy and humming the song stuck in his brain from when they had danced along the Fairies. Speechless and with tears in his eyes, Daniel asked his sister:

“Where did you learn to sing this song from?”

“Last night I had such a crazy dream, that felt so so real and at the same time like it was a piece of fairytale!” Maria quipped.

Daniel approached her sister and asked her to remember what exactly she had dreamt about. Her story was the same, word-for-word, with his dream so it meant that everything had been real. The Midsummer Fairies had been with them all night long, protecting them. They decided to leave the place in which they slept and continue the road towards a new adventure, hoping that the Fairies would come again to tell them captivating stories and to give them sound advice.

After a long trip they arrived at a cave, and with the help of matches and dry wood they started a fire to warm themselves up. They were so tired, that they barely kept their eyes opened, but in their hearts they withheld the hope that they would see the Midsummer Fairies again.

When the clock struck midnight a loud thunder followed by a powerful lightning woke the children up. Frightened, Maria and Daniel entered the mysterious cave, from which one could hear sound of horseshoes and an outlaw song. The sister inquired in his brother’s ear:

“Are they the Midsummer Fairies or some thieves hiding their gold in the cave?”

They continued on, towards the center of the cave. Suddenly there was a carpet of ferns at their feet, adorned with little star-like flowers in the color white. At the other end of the floor there were some young ladies weaving silken dresses. Shyly, the kids stepped closer to the women and realized they were, indeed, the Midsummer Fairies. Daniel got his courage and asked them:

“So, we didn’t dream it. You really are the Midsummer Fairies, aren’t you? Where do you come from?”

“It is true! We are the famous Midsummer Fairies”, the ladies admitted.” We gifted you with all the qualities you both possess. Both your grandparents and your mother talked about us. We promised your parents that we will help you find them. As you already know, your parents were punished by the Lion but maybe he will take pity when he finds out you went in search for them out of your LOVE for them.”

Suddenly, one of the fairies appeared between them, wearing a long white dress with small red flowers:

“Love conquers all the time, against all life`s odds. I am The Midsummer Fairy of **Love**, the one that guides you to act out of love for people, and not think of evil or be envious of others. I am a wistful fairy and with my voice I can move mountains. Love never dies from people`s hearts, so together, you both and I, will persuade the Lion king to free your parents.”

“I am **Kindness**”, said the youngest Fairy. “Because of me, peace will cover the Earth. Each people is born with kindness in his heart, but he needs to discover this quality through his deeds.”

“I am **Beauty**”, another Fairy spoke enchantingly. “When people see me, they say *This girl is a piece of sun!* The soul of a kind person radiates to exterior and thus completes the beauty. So, because of me, a person has beauty of the soul and of the body.”

“Even so, without me nothing can be done”, added the Midsummer Fairy of **Wisdom**. “Only a wise man will find balance in his life. I help people to make the best of choices in difficult moments.”

A little far from the rest, there were two unassuming sisters. They spoke quietly:

“We are **Joy** and **Hope**, without whom no person could truly live. We came from the sun, on a wandering star, the saving one. And the one that embodies all

our qualities, the **Seventh Fairy** is our **Queen** and your mother, captive in Lion`s Kingdom. We will be beside you in your time of need. We were before, too, just hidden. But now you are of age and you can better understand life moments. We will continue to protect you and support you to find your parents and save them.”

“We are so happy to have find you! On the way here we were tricked by a fox that wanted to take us to the Forest King. We thank Mr. Stag so dearly, and also to all of you, for saving us!” Maria told them with joy in her voice.

“Mr. Stag heard your scream and came to the rescue. Didn`t you know?” asked the young Fairy.

“No, I didn`t... I screamed because I was scared. But how come he heard me and understood my words?”

“Well, you both have supernatural powers. Did you not know, until now?”

“Excuse me? What kind of powers?” the twins asked at the same time, bewildered.

“Well, yes. You, little girl, you can talk to the animals. You can ask for their help if you need it, and you can understand their troubles.”

“And me? What can I do?” asked Daniel impatiently.

Wisdom Fairy came closer to him, gave him a careful once over and said to him:

“You can talk to the plants. If you ask for their help, they listen to you.”

The kids also asked about the King of the Forest and what business he has with them. The fairies told them that he captured their parents and that the only way to free them is for them both to hone their powers, and they can help with that.

For two months the Fairies trained them and gave them new powers. Now, Daniel was capable of raising flowers from stardust and of downing an animal with just a hand sign, and Maria was fluent in all animal languages. She started talking to the Stag that saved them. He told her that The Forest King turned him into an animal. Before that he used to be a stout man, with blonde hair and blue eyes and

that his job was to forge weapons. When the Lion asked him to make weapons to capture the Fairies, he refused and so the Lion punished him. The Stag wanted to tell the children one more thing, but it wasn't the right time and he also feared that he might remain forever captive if he divulged the truth.

The time came for the twins to go on the road again, to search for their parents and to face the Forest King. It wouldn't be a good thing for the Midsummer Fairies to be seen by the Lion king, because he would capture them and enslave them in his land forever. So they gave the kids many pieces of advice: *Pay attention on your path, / be honest and correct/ and use wisdom as your bed. /Share joyously, /live merrily! / See only the good in life/ and the beauty in each thing./ Mind your parents` words,/ bring happiness to the world./ Elder flowers we bring thee,/ to loosen your tongue/ and sweeten the talk! / We bless your hands/ to work miracles! /Basil on your hip/ have an easy trip! /Basil on your feet/ to take you where you need,/ to help you with your plans/ to bring you home again!*



The twins, Maria and Daniel had been told by the fairies that their parents were still prisoners of the Lion King. Maria and Daniel were unhappy and desperate; Maria was about to cry, but Daniel knew how to comfort her. As they were going back home, it was sunset and night was falling. They walked for a long time. They spotted hundreds of fireflies in the sky.

The fireflies were so numerous that it gave the impression that the day lasted longer. They could see again the trees, the birds flying. The sky was pink and blue, Daniel and Maria thought that it was magical. They found a meadow with yellow tulips, purple daisies, and blue primroses. Suddenly, they heard the gurgling of water. It was a marsh with black and white pelicans.

The pelicans were playing or resting, some of them were flying and swimming in the water. Daniel and Maria were walking in the meadow and saw the pelicans. They saw many pelicans and they ran towards them. The biggest pelican was grey and his beak was a little pink. He had a long tail and his feathers looked like a crown. Maria, who was able to speak to animals, felt attracted to him. So, she decided to go and speak to him:

“Hello, I am Maria from the midsummer fairies’ village.”

“Nice to meet you, Maria, I was waiting for you !” said the pelican .

“Do you know me? “

“Of course I do. I want to help you find your parents “, it said .

“How do you know my parents? “ asked Maria.

“ I’m a friend of the fairies. They saw your parents being kidnapped. Your parents were walking in the forest when the Lion King pounced on them ... We are trying to find them!”

“If you want to help them, you have to go to Martinique. Martinique is near Central America, more precisely in the West Indies. You have to find a key there, which looks like a hummingbird. It is hidden in a cocoa plantation.”

Maria yelled: "A cocoa plantation? That's crazy!! Can you take us there? How can we get there? "

"Yes, of course I can take you. Can we go now? " said the pelican.

"Yes, let's go!" Maria said happily.

Suddenly a fairy appeared and turned them into tiny creatures "It will be easier to travel this way!!!"

The children found it strange to be so small but it was funny.

Maria and Daniel got on the pelican's back and flew away. The view of the sky and the countryside was beautiful, but the children were scared of falling. However, the pelican reassured them, the Pelican was big enough to carry them. A few hours later they flew over the ocean.

From then on they flew nights and days. Sometimes the Pelican stopped to land on some little islands which edged the sea, so they could stay and rest on them. The islands were entirely covered by tropical trees especially palm trees. Then, for a while, Maria, Daniel, and the Pelican King stopped on the shore to eat something, but they only found coconuts.

Once, as they were flying over a patch sea without any island to land on, the Pelican suddenly went through the sky curving his long and big wings. The twins held onto him wondering what he was doing. They were now really close to the sea and then, the King entered the water at full speed. Fortunately, Maria and Daniel had held their breath, so the water didn't go down their throats. The Pelican came out of the sea and opened his wings again to reach the sky. His beak was full of fish.

"Let's have something to eat! When food does not come to us, we will go to it", he said.

Then, he gave to the twins some fish which they enjoyed.

One day, the sea was really rough. The waves were hitting the rocks strongly. Maman d'lo, the wicked mermaid who lived there, felt bored because no sailors or

fishermen had been there for a long time. She decided to comb her long hair and if the waves weren't so strong, we could have heard a soft and weird music. She looked like a woman because her hair was hiding her bright-scaled tail. As she was combing her hair, she noticed something flying through the air. The thing was growing so she could see what it was. It was a noticeably big pelican and, on its back, there were two kids. It seemed that they wanted to land on the Tombolo. The tombolo is famous in Sainte-Marie, this geographic specificity is really rare. It is a sand land which appears sometimes and enables people to reach the main island in the village of Sainte-Marie.

When the pelican landed, Manman d'lo came nearer to put a spell on the pelican. The poor bird swirled in the sky and fell down and hit his head on the ground. Fortunately, the kids fell in the water and managed to swim to the shore.

“What happened?” asked Maria.

“I don't know, but I have seen a strange lady. I'm sure it was the same woman we had seen once before”, answered Daniel.

Indeed, Maria and Daniel had already been in Martinique . A strange woman had put a spell on them and they knew that she was malevolent. They looked for the Pelican... He had fallen into the water! The children managed to get to the shore and sat on the beach to wait for the pelican. But he did not come!

They walked through Sainte-Marie searching for help, but they came upon the Saint James factory. Originally founded on the heights of Saint-Pierre in 1765, the Saint-James distillery is the oldest in Martinique. Survivor of the eruption of the Pelée in 1902, it is now based in Sainte-Marie and continues to produce wonderful agricultural rums known throughout the world.

Maria and Daniel had gotten lost deep in the rainforest. The path was torturous, they felt hopeless until they saw light from the blue sky. They continued to walk and found a sugar cane field where they rested. As they were about to fall

asleep, they suddenly heard a strange rumbling. They looked up and saw a tiny bird which was flying here and there. This flying bird was a beautiful hummingbird. There are lots of these in Martinique. During the encounter with the hummingbird, they were shocked. The hummingbird was rare and incredibly beautiful with its deep blue and purple highlights, a golden beak, and alluring, sparkling eyes. The hummingbird had the power to speak any language. It asked them :

“Children what are you doing here?”

“We are looking for our parents and a place where they grow basil”, answered the children.

The hummingbird told them: “They grow basil in every garden. Maybe my friend Lily can help us. She lives at the Andidi Plantation.”

The hummingbird showed them the way to the Andidi Plantation. On the way there, they met the mongoose called Mangoustine.

Mangoustine asked :

“Children what are you doing here?”

“We are looking for our parents and the basil field”, they answered.

“Oh, I will show you around the Andidi Plantation then”, the mongoose added.

During the trip they saw a field and a magnificent flame tree with a thousand leaves. Maria said :

“ Oh, oh, there are too many curves on the road, I feel dizzy!!”

The Hummingbird gave a sweet smelling flower to Maria to invigorate her.

Mangoustine carried them on his back, and they finally found the Andidi Plantation. It was located in a town called Lorrain. The plantation was situated in the countryside. There were several houses where coffee and cocoa trees were harvested and grown. At the heart of the house, they smelt all kinds of sweet perfumes. Running along the muddy paths, they passed by trees that were incredibly old. Suddenly, a smell pricked the nostrils of the twins, so they went towards it.

There were several kinds of cocoa tree, such as Forastario, Criollo and Trinitario. As they were staring at the plantation's house, they saw a woman who was standing up on the terrace. They didn't know that an animal was observing them. It was a racoon (the racoon didn't like the mongoose because the mongoose had humiliated him a few years ago).

“Hi, kids! My name is Lily. Welcome to the Andidi Plantation ! Here we mainly make chocolate.”

“May we visit the plantation?” asked the twins.

“Sure”, Lily answered both of the twins. “Follow me then! ”

“There's chocolate in here! “ Maria said to Daniel.

“That is probably the plantation we are looking for; the key must be there!” answered her brother.

Lily welcomed them in the house really kindly. Maria and Daniel sat on a chair and Lily gave them some mandarins and some home-made chocolate basil cupcakes. They were delicious! The twins thought the home-made chocolate was twice as good as the industrial chocolate and the basil flavour gave it a fresh taste. Then, Lily went to her house and returned with three little glasses full of a brown liquid.

“It's hot chocolate. It's made without sugar, just pure chocolate”, she said.

As Lily said, the drink was without sugar and the pure chocolate was a little bitter. While they were drinking the hot chocolate, Lily asked the kids:

“So,why are you looking for a basil plant ?”

“We have come to Martinique thanks to our friend the Pelican but a wicked mermaid has jinxed him. So, we need basil to rescue him and go back home”, answered Daniel.

“Your friend is hostage of Maman d'lo right ? In that case, we can't be wasting any second ! Let's go kids, follow me !”said Lily.

Lily went with them to the cocoa and coffee tree plantation.

“Let me tell you something. A hundred years ago, Martinique was a big producer of coffee and chocolate. There were a few plantations as mine and they were creating different chocolate flavours. Unfortunately, this know-how has been lost over the years. When I came here, I found this place. It was an old plantation! As the trees were too old and ruined to bear fruit, I thought I would never be able to make chocolate anymore. But then I saw a tree which had one pod. The only one which could still make fruit, even after all these years ! I had an idea; I used the pod to plant some plant seedlings.” Lily explained.

Suddenly, a little fairy appeared in the form of a sugar bird. To get Maria and Daniel's attention, she threw guava seeds at them, but they thought that they were midges and repelled them with a wave of the hand. The sugar bird slowly approached them and started pecking their feet. Daniel and Maria dropped their heads and saw the little sugar bird with a pink belly. It seemed that the bird wanted to talk to them.

“ Hi, kids! I’m Robert, the magic sugar bird. I came here to give you a message. Your friend, the Pelican King is getting better but he imperatively needs a basil lotion to keep him healthier. Also, you need Lily to tell you where your next destination will be. How you will get another key to release your parents. But for now, let's make the basil lotion! “

“ A basil lotion? “ Daniel said.

“I've an idea! “ Maria yelled. “ We can ask Lily how to make basil lotion and we will save our friend.”

However, Daniel and Maria were preoccupied by what the pelican had said: *You had to find a key; this key will help you to find your parents.* They called Lily to ask her if she has found a key on the plantation

“A key? I found a rusty key on the grass, under a cocoa tree. I picked it up and put it in a chest. I will give it to you “, she replied.

Maria said “I’m hungry, I want to taste your delicious chocolate.”

Lily was in a hurry, but she explained how chocolate was made:

“ First you have to harvest the pods. Next , you leave them on the ground for a few days; then the seeds have to dry for a few weeks. Finally, you roast them and crush the roasted seeds to get flavourful cocoa. I’ll let you taste some.”

She gave them some thick liquid chocolate in a glass. The children tasted it, but they were disappointed. It was rather bitter.

“Was the chocolate good ?” she asked.

“Hot chocolate is strong but it has no sugar in it. It was fine, though”, said Daniel.

The chocolate was warm and smooth and crisp at the same time. The taste of the chocolate was bitter but comforting. The chocolate was flavoured with holy basil. This basil was known for its therapeutic power. Its history dated back to three thousand years ago. Holy basil originated in north-central India. It was by now well established in most Southeast Asian countries.

“ To make a lotion, we have to pick holy basil, and add water, chocolate, and sugar. In a kettle boil some water, add the basil, melt the chocolate with some sugar. Afterwards, mix all of the ingredients.”

Lily came back with the key in hand when suddenly a manicoú jumped out of nowhere and took the key from Lily's hand.

“Oh! What happened?” Lily exclaimed

“There!” said Maria, pointing a finger at the little animal which was already escaping from the house.

“He's going to run away with the key!” Daniel yelled.

“Don't let him escape, kids !” screamed Lily.

The kids started running after the manicou. They jumped out of the house and ran across the plantation trying to reach the animal. But they couldn't. He was too fast for them, and they were already breathless.

“What do you want?” Daniel asked the manicou.

The creature stopped while he was climbing a little hill. His ears stood up and he turned back to them.

“Why have you stolen the key? What do you want?” gasped Daniel, who had become red from so much running. The manicou went to them.

“So that little golden thing is a key?” asked the manicou, observing the object in his hands.

“Yes”, approved Maria.

“I thought it was chocolate... That's why I stole it!”

“It isn't... If you give me the key, we'll arrange with Lily for you to have some chocolate”, suggested Maria.

The manicou thought for a while, then, he came towards them and said

“Okay kids, I'll give you the key! I'm Maurice, the manicou.”

“Hi, Maurice!” both twins said.

After he gave them the key, Maurice stayed with Lily to taste some chocolate. It was really good! Afterwards, they went up to Mangoustine to ask him to return them to Saint-Marie. They returned to the tombolo, arriving on the island and they saw the pelican looking very ill. At once, they ran to the pelican to give him the basil lotion.

(For the lotion to work it is necessary that the pelican breathes the lotion of sacred basil).

As soon as the pelican breathed in the lotion he began to move his legs and his head. After 2 minutes he was able to get up, and after 5 minutes he was able to

fly as usual. At that moment a voice popped up out of nowhere and said *Go to Sicily!*

Daniel asked them

“Do you know why a voice told us to go to Sicily?”

“No idea !” says the pelican.

“Maybe there is another key in Sicily!”



The children and the pelican made a long trip and arrived at a very hot, beautiful and crowded beach. The pelican told the twins:

“You need to find the key and I'll be back in four days sharp at midnight to pick you up. Good luck!”

After that, the pelican flew off into the blue sky.

Daniel and Maria looked around and they were confused and disoriented, when they saw a middle-aged gentleman and asked him:

“Excuse me sir, where are we?”

“Hi guys, we are in Palermo, in Mondello beach, one of the most beautiful beaches in Sicily”, the gentleman answered smiling.

“Thank you sir.”

The twins explored the beach and between the rocks they found a strange glass bottle with a mysterious sheet inside, similar to an ancient parchment. They opened it and found a map with only two red points: they had to start from Mondello beach and the next place was the Cathedral of Palermo. So the two children started to look for a way to reach the Cathedral.

As they left the beach, they saw a fine carriage to which there were harnessed two splendid brown horses with white manes. So they decided to approach them and Maria asked the horses:

“Hello! We are Maria and Daniel and we come from Romania. We have to get to the Cathedral of Palermo, but we don't know the way, could you please take us?”

“Hello, guys! Of course we can! We know the place very well and we will gladly take you to the beautiful Cathedral of Palermo.”

“Thank you very much, you are very kind.”

So the twins mounted the horses and in a few hours they arrived at their destination.

When they arrived in front of the Cathedral, they were astonished and asked informations about that beautiful Cathedral. The horses told them: “The Cathedral is the main place of Catholic worship in the city of Palermo. From 3rd July 2015 it is part of the World Heritage Sites within the Arab-Norman Palermo.”

“Oh, what an incredible thing! For sure we’ll come back here to discover new things about this formidable city.”

Inside the Cathedral they admired the astonishing architecture and beautiful artworks, they saw a strange twinkling behind an imposing statue. They saw that it was a magical note, signed by the Midsummer fairies: *If you want to find the key, to Monte D'Oro you have to go.*

So they checked the map and they realized that footprints had magically appeared on it. Those footprints traced the road they had travelled so far and they saw that the next point to reach in the map was Monte D'Oro. The twins came out of the Cathedral and Maria asked the horses:

“What is Monte D'Oro? And where is it?”

“Monte D'oro is a mountain in a small town near Palermo, Montelepre. At the top of the mountain there is a small church, called *The Chapel of the Holy Cross.*”

“Oh, how are we going to get there!? Do you know how far it is from here?”

“It takes a couple of hours to get to Montelepre, but the road is very dangerous in the evening through the dark for us horses, so tonight you'll have to stop and sleep here in Palermo.”

“Oh no, we don't know where to sleep and we don't know the city.”

“We know it's not the most welcoming place, but you can come with us to sleep in our stable. Or you can search for a hotel.”

“We have no money, so we will accept your invitation. Thank you so much!”

The two children and the horses, walking through the amazing streets of Palermo, spent the evening together and finally went to sleep in the stable. The next morning, at sunrise, the horses took the twins to Monte D'oro.

When they arrived in Montelepre, the horses left Maria and Daniel on the slopes of the mountain and the twins began the climb. At the top of the mountain, they entered its characteristic church. Inside, they found a crooked painting, and while they were trying to fix it, another of those enchanted pieces of paper fell out: *If you want to find the key, to the Ventimiglia Tower you have to go.*

When they came down from the mountain they found themselves in the main street of Montelepre. Passing through Piazza Ventimiglia and admiring the Mother Church, they arrived in front of a long staircase. It was the stairway of the Ventimiglia tower. When they reached the top, they found themselves in front of a large door that led into a large room, a museum where you could see the archaeological artifacts found in the area. After having admired and observed all those artifacts with great interest, they found another of those enchanted notes under a mosaic: *If you want to find the key, you have to look in nature.*

Maria and Daniel thought a lot about the message, wondering about a place where nature was dominant.

“It will be a forest!”, Maria murmured.

“In my opinion this village is too small to have a forest.”

“Let's take a tour and find out!”, the twins said together.

After a short time they finally found the park, but since it was evening it was closed. So, tired of the long day spent walking around the small town, they decided to go back the next day.

They started looking for a safe place to sleep. Walking through the streets of the town they found an imposing castle and saw a sign that read: "Castello di

Giuliano - Hotel and Restaurant". They decided to go in to ask for information and met a beautiful woman with brown hair and green eyes, who asked them:

“Hi guys, what are you doing here alone at this hour?”

“Hi, we are Maria and Daniel, we come from Romania and we don't know the place. We are looking for a place to sleep.”

“Being in this situation we can make an exception for you. We will give you a room and all the services of the hotel for a few nights.”

“Thank you very much, you are very kind! We are very happy for the hospitality you are giving us.”

As they were going to bed, Daniel remembered that he still had the map, found in Mondello, in his pocket. Opening it, he realized that, in addition to the three points found earlier, two other points had appeared: one indicated the Ventimiglia Tower, where they had already been and the other indicated the Urban Park, where they would go the following morning.

“Maria, look here! New footprints have appeared. It's the path we've taken so far! Who knows what that means...”

“Curious, but for now I'm very tired. Let's go to sleep! Tomorrow we'll find out what nature has in store for us. Good night Dan!”

“Good night.”

They slept like logs: the day had been very demanding, but also satisfying. The following morning, they awoke in high spirits, ready to explore nature. Maria checked her wristwatch, and realized it was very late:

“Dan! It is very late! We have to go now!”

The twins ran towards the park, which was open this time. They ran inside and were amazed by the magnificent beauty of the rides surrounded by the great variety of plants. All very extraordinary, but where to look? Daniel then thought of talking to a big daisy:

“Hey, I'm Daniel! This is my sister Maria, and we come from Romania. We're here to look for a mystery ticket. Do you have any idea where it could be?”

“Hi, I'm Daisy. How can you communicate with us? No human has ever spoken to us before!”

“It's a long story... but we really need that piece of paper.”

“I really don't know anything, I'm always here... try asking the Great Tree, it knows everything.”

“Thanks a lot, Daisy. Where is it?”

“I don't know, but I think it's in the absolute center of the park, where the swings are.”

“Thank you very much, see you later!”

Maria and Daniel therefore went into the park, looking for the swings and the Great Tree. After asking many other plants and going all over the park, they finally found the Great Tree. It was a massive, sturdy oak that seemed to house many animals. Suddenly Maria heard a pleasant melody coming from inside the tree and so she, curious, knocked and, thanks to her ability to speak with animals, asked:

“Is there anyone in here?”

From above came a brown squirrel with a long bushy tail. The squirrel was singing and saying:

“Hi guys, what are you doing here? I've never heard a human being talking to animals! What a strange feeling!”

Maria continued:

“Hello! We are Maria and Daniel... By any chance, have you seen a strange note around here?... it's a long story.”

“Oh, I've heard of it from the Hardworking Ants, of the Olive Tree.... They say there is something enchanted underground, but I don't believe it!”, said the squirrel, singing like a soprano.

“Really? And where is this Olive Tree? This is very important!”

“Oh, well, it's a long way from here; I've been there a couple of times, but can't remember where it is.”

At these words, the twins were discouraged, since they didn't have much time available, but then they asked the singing squirrel:

“How far is the lair of these Hardworking Ants?”

“Well, for you humans, I think it's not too far from here.”

The twins calmed down because they understood that they would not waste much time reaching the lair and began to laugh like crazy at the squirrel's singing talent. After saying goodbye and thanking the nice friend, the twins set out to find that Olive Tree, but after a few minutes they realized that it was almost impossible to search among so many trees that all looked the same.

So Maria decided to ask all the animals she encountered for information on the location of the Hardworking Ants' lair, and finally, after various attempts, they met a fly that knew the park well and which therefore led the twins to their destination.

When the children arrived at the Hardworking Ants' lair they found themselves in front of many insects that brought supplies for the winter into their den. There were many of them and they all worked hard, but one in particular attracted the attention of the twins: she was bigger than the others and led the whole group of ants. So the twins decided to approach her to ask for information about the note they were looking for:

“Hi! We are Maria and Daniel. The Squirrel told us that the fairy note we're looking for is around here. He told us about a certain Olive Tree and Hardworking Ants. Are you the Hardworking Ants?”

“Hi, I'm Katherine, the Queen of the Hardworking Ants. Yesterday we found a strange shiny note in our den, but this morning when we woke up it was gone.”

“Oh no! What a pity. You know who might have stolen it?”

“Surely the Red Ants took it, they live in the Pine Tree and always enjoy teasing us.”

“I am so sorry to hear that! Do you know where the Pine Tree is? It is very important for us to find the ticket as soon as possible.”

“It is located nearby. If you want I can take you to them, but I must warn you, they are good at hiding all the things they steal from us.”

“Thanks a lot for your help. Let's go!”

Then the twins and Katherine walked towards the Red Ants' Pine. Once there, they were amazed by the size of their territory: it was very large and full of small Red Ants who were training to conquer new territories. Immediately the children noticed a tiny cave that the ants were covering with grass to camouflage it and they thought that the contents must be very important. Driven by curiosity and sure that the fairy note was there, they tried to get closer to find out what the Red Ants were hiding. But as soon as they crossed the border of the Kingdom, many menacing Red Ants stood in front of them to prevent them from advancing.

“Who are you? Go away!” they said together, quite rudely.

“Hi, we are Maria and Daniel, twins from Romania. Don't worry, we don't want to hurt you, we're just looking for a fairy ticket.”

“Yes, we have it, but we will never give it to you!”, replied threateningly Leila, the Queen of the Red Ants.

“The ticket is very important to us, we could come to a compromise.”

“What kind of compromise? What are you offering us in exchange for this useless ticket?”

“If you give it to us and leave Katherine and her people alone, we'll give you provisions for the whole year in return.”

“All year long?! This is fantastic! But who assures us that you are not lying? We want the supplies now, and only then will we give you that note.”

“All right, we'll be right back.”

The two children decided to pick lots of fruit walking through the streets of the park: they picked fifteen cherries, four figs, five medlars and about twenty blackberries. A few minutes later, they returned to the Pine Kingdom with so much fruit that the Red Ants were marveled.

“Here are the supplies, now give us the fairy ticket.”

“Keep this insignificant note!”, exclaimed Leila leaving the fairy note on the ground.

“And don't disturb Katherine and her people of the Olive Tree Ants any more. Respect the pact!”

“Definitely! Don't worry. With all this food we will no longer be interested in stealing the supplies of the Olive Tree Ants.”

The twins accompanied Katherine back to her Kingdom:

“Thank you so much, friends, for finally freeing us from the Red Ants. We will be forever grateful.”

“You're welcome, dear queen Katherine. We love you, and we will miss you!”

The children walked out of the park, sad to have left their friend, but happy to have finally found the longed-for ticket. They opened it: *If you want to find the key, you have to fight with the giant.*

By now it was time for lunch, so they quickly ate some figs picked at the park and tried to understand the meaning of the riddle.

“What do you think this giant could mean?”

“I don't know, Maria! Meantime, let's check the map, maybe it can help us in some way.”

They opened the map and noticed that another point had ticked: the “Tomb of the Giant”.

“What will it be?”

“I don't know, but we'd better look for information in a library. We'll surely find one.”

Passing through the main street of the town, they saw a sign that read 'LIBRARY'. They entered, and silently began to search for information on the Giant's Tomb, but in the midst of all those books, they didn't know where to start. So they decided to ask the young librarian:

“Hello! Excuse us, could you help us find some books with information about the Giant's Tomb?”

“Of course, children! I'm here to help you. Come, I'll take you to the "Village Legends" section.”

“Thank you very much! You are very kind and really helpful.”

The librarian led them into a small dusty room, where they found some books full of information about the Giant's Tomb, and they began to read them attentively; one in particular was entitled "The Giant of Sagana": an ancient legend told that the tomb of the giant owes its name to the fact that popular tradition believed it was the tomb of a Giant or a Saracen warrior of noble origins.

“So it's located in Sagana! But how can we get there?”, observed Daniel.

“It is close from here, by car ... about ten minutes. If you have to go on foot, it will take you more than half an hour”, explained the librarian.

“If you want, I can help you. I can accompany you, but not today. I work all day today. Tomorrow afternoon, at 3 p.m., come here and I'll take you to Sagana by car. But I'll have to get back to work right away. Okay?”

“Thanks a lot, you really are very kind!, the twins exclaimed happily.

“In the meantime, if you like, you can spend the whole afternoon here... there are books of all kinds, read as many as you like!”

Thus the twins, while waiting to arrive at the last stage of their journey the next day, began to explore the entire library and leaf through books in the English section. In the evening, tired, they returned to their room at the Castello di Giuliano. The next morning, before going to the library, they communicated to the kind girl who had offered them a room, that they would not come back, because they had finished their trip in Sicily. After saying good-bye to the girl, the twins walked towards the library, and waited there reading. At the appointed time, the librarian closed the library and drove the two children to Sagana.

In the blink of an eye they arrived at their destination and after saying goodbye to the twins, the librarian went back to her work at the library.

“Good luck, kids! I hope we'll see each other very soon, goodbye!”

“Thanks for everything, goodbye!”

For the twins, therefore, there was nothing left but to explore the territory in search of the key. They decided to check the map and they noticed that other footprints had appeared, forming a figure.

“Look, Dan, doesn't it look like a fairy to you?” Maria asked excitedly.

The next second, one of the Midsummer Fairies popped out of the map. The two kids were amazed.

“Hi, Maria and Daniel! I see you did well. At midnight you must already be at the pelican, so we must hurry to find the key. Do you see that? It is the Tomb of the Giant, the last stage to face in order to find the penultimate Key that will serve to save your mother. Come on, let's hurry up!”

The children and the fairy approached the Tomb and, thanks to the magical powers of the fairy, they managed to open it: there was a Giant with black hair, a

round face and very small ears. He was wearing a gray T-shirt and baggy brown pants and on his feet there were leather sandals. He held a key tightly in his hands, the Key that the children needed. The fairy tried to take it, but as soon as she touched it, the Giant woke up.

“WHO DARES TO DISTURB THE SUPREME GIANT OF SAGANA?!”, the Giant exclaimed barbarously.

The children and the frightened fairy backed away, and the Giant, who had now come out of the Tomb, stood imposingly in front of them, holding the Key in one hand and a menacing club in the other. He waved his weapon trying to hit the twins, but the fairy managed to distract him by fluttering in front of his face.

“Quick, get as close as possible to the Giant!” the fairy whispered.

“But it's too dangerous, he will hurt us!”, Maria replied.

“Don't worry children, I'll protect you!” she replied.

“Ok! Maria, come on let's go!”, Daniel exclaimed full of adrenaline.

The twins ran up to the Giant, and the fairy stood before the children as a shield, with all her strength and her magical powers. Maria managed to take the Key and save herself together with her brother, but the poor fairy was hit by the Giant's club, and fell to the ground.

“Oh no!”, Daniel said worried.

The two children ran towards their little friend, picked her up and, worriedly, started running to save themselves from the giant. Once in shelter, the wounded fairy said:

“Children, you did it! I'm proud of you. Now I will open a portal. You go inside, it will take you back to Mondello beach. There you will wait for a few hours for the pelican to come and take you to Portugal. Keep the Key very carefully... You will need it to save your mother.”

“What about you? You are hurt! What will you do?”

“Don't worry, children, as soon as I open the portal, I will automatically return to my woods, together with my sisters.”, the fairy answered exhausted but hopeful. Then she proceeded to gather her strength to open a portal.

Once the portal was opened, the children disappeared and found themselves on Mondello beach, where the adventure in Sicily had begun.

“While we wait for our friend, let's take a nice stroll!”, Daniel suggested.

The pelican arrived punctually at midnight.

“ Maria, Daniel! You did it!”, the feathered friend exclaimed happily.

“Yes! We missed you! Come on, we'll tell you everything during the trip!”, the twins answered enthusiastically, before flying away.



Palermo cathedral



Ventimiglia tower



gold mount



Park



tomb of the giant



As the twins finished telling the pelican all of the things they had gone through, they came to the realization that they were near the arrival. As they got closer to Porto, the Pelican told them to explore Douro, as a humble suggestion.

After the landing and saying goodbye to the Pelican, they followed its advice, and hopped on a tourist boat. This boat is an adapted touristic version of the traditional *Rabelo* boats. *Rabelo* boats were made with the purpose of transporting wine bottles from Port Wine docks along the Douro River to Vila Nova de Gaia. Because of their purpose, all of them have a wine house built in. As the boat started its trip, the twins were greeted by a tour guide that would tell them about the history of the boat. Around 15 minutes after the start of the trip, Daniel and Maria were amazed by the culture and history of the boats, but the thing they wanted more than anything was to get to the wine house of the boat.

“I am flabbergasted by the existence of a wine house on a boat!” said Maria, with her eyes sparkling.

“Don’t even get me started on it, otherwise I will pass out just imagining it!” said her brother, somehow even more enthusiastic than her.

“Now, we will go to the iconic wine house, where you will have the opportunity to taste one of the best wines in Porto” said the tour guide.

“Finally!” shouted the twins at the same time.

When they entered the wine house, they were amazed by the interior, the wine bottles, and how everything was laid out. After the tutor stopped explaining the vast tradition of wines in Porto and Portugal; the wine tasting began. The twins wandered around the place.

“This is so beautiful! The colors are so coordinated, everything flows in perfect order! It seems as if I'm in a dream!” said Maria.

“The thing I find more surprising is how many bottles of wine there are! They

managed to fill the shelves with all different wines! They have from expensive wines to cheaper ones!” said Daniel, extremely enthusiastic.

“Now... that I’m looking around more attentively, isn’t there a bottle that seems different?” said Maria, wondering. “On that back wall...”

Maria directed Daniel to where she was talking about.

“You are right! Something seems different about it...” said Daniel, suspicious “We should investigate. “

The twins quickly approached the bottle and grabbed it. They noticed there was something there.

“What could it be?” asked Daniel, intrigued.

“I don’t know, but it surely isn’t wine.” answered Maria.

“It seems like a paper, at least from the way it moves when you shake the bottle” noted Daniel.

“You have a point. I guess it's best to open it.” said Maria, confidently.

“But how? The stopper, especially in wine bottles, is very strong!” pointed out Daniel.

“Maybe we can ask the tour guide for a bottle opener...” suggested Maria, hesitantly.

“I guess we don’t have a choice”, reciprocated Daniel. “I must say that the tutor seems weird in my opinion.”

“Daniel, sometimes you just seem too stressed about things”, said Maria, tired of Daniel’s way of being.

The twins approached the tour guide.

“Sorry to bother, but can you help us open this bottle please?” asked Maria.

“Maybe we can’t open the bottles “ whispered the brother.

“This one is empty, so I don’t see why not” answered the sister.

“Of course I can, wait a minute if you may” said the tour guide, with a smirk

on her face.

The tour guide went away for some minutes and came back with the much needed bottle opener.

“Here you have it” said the tour, sounding really strange...

“Thank you” said the twins.

“This guide is really awkward ! Something is happening ... and I’m 100% sure. How can you not feel it? “ asked Daniel confused and worried.

“I don’t know what to say... As I said, you are always so skeptical about little things. Your intuition is good indeed, but this makes you look so obsessed” said Maria, trying not to hurt Daniel’s feelings.

“If you say so, but that it is not enough to convince me that there isn’t something wrong with her” answered Daniel.

“So, shall we open the bottle? “ asked Maria.

“Yes, I’d say so. I’m almost dying of curiosity to see what is in there” said Daniel, excited.

The twins went to where they had left the bottle.

“The bottle is the same and the paper is still there. I’m going to open it now” said Maria, confidently.

Maria opened the bottle, with some struggle.

“So, what does the paper say?” questioned Daniel.

“The paper is wrapping something. We just need to unwrap it!” said Maria.

Maria unwrapped the paper. There was a key.

“A key!?! Another one... Now this is getting extremely suspicious, how can we have come across another key? “ said Daniel, freaking out.

“I don’t know. I guess we’ll take it.” said Maria trying to calm him down.

“Maybe it's the Lion trying to confuse the whole thing? I don’t know how he got here and knew we would be here, but I suppose we can’t exclude that

possibility...” said Daniel, really stressed out.

“The Lion could have never been here. We chose this boat randomly. Don’t overthink it, brother” said Maria comforting Daniel.

“I’ll try not to. Can I see the paper that the key was wrapped in? I only want to check it, to see if you may have missed something in it.

Maria handed the paper to Daniel. Daniel started analyzing the paper meticulously, moving it around quickly, and strangely. As Maria was trying to tell her brother to hurry because the tour was ending, he shouted:

“WE NEED TO GO TO LELLO LIBRARY NOW!”

“Daniel, you are shouting”, said Maria embarrassed. “Calm down!”

“Sorry, sis!” said the brother.

“So, why do we need to go to LELLO so quickly?” asked the sister.

“If you look at the paper, there are two words that stand out from the others, and they are: library and LELLO” her brother explained carefully.

“Well, I must say that was a sharp analysis”, praised the sister.

“So, when the tour ends, we go there”, concluded the brother.

Then, they went to the deck to admire Porto from the river. They started feeling more relaxed, as they were observing Porto’s beauty. The orange roofs gave color to it, and the different colors of the houses, that were all from different types and shapes, giving Porto a fantastic rainbow look. The twins compared it to Montelepre and other cities they had gone to. Yet they couldn’t help but find Porto more beautiful than all of them.

When they finished the boat trip, they went directly to LELLO library. They walked along the little and beautiful streets of Porto, each one with a different story. From a covered, beautiful and original restaurant story to a simple grandma’s story about what she had been through in life. As they arrived at the street LELLO was located in, they reached a more touristic zone. They spotted what seemed to be a

shopping center, but with more trees, and all the shops outside. They also saw Torre dos Clérigos, in the distance. As they turned their backs, they saw the library.

This library was built on 1869, and remains almost identical to the original building. Having a lot of panels, each one with a symbolic and meaningful meaning – this library is considered one of the most beautiful libraries in Portugal and the whole world. It also inspired a lot of popular books, them being best-sellers or simple books made for fun. Approaching the building, the twins were amazed. Not only by the symbolism of it but also because of the various architectural styles combined, in a perfect way that almost seemed impossible.

“This library seems to be perfect!” said Maria, not believing her eyes.

“I know! Even though we walked an unbelievable distance to get here, it sure was worth it!” said Daniel, enthusiastically.

“Now we need to see the inside! I can’t even imagine how it is!” said Maria, with a glow in her eyes.

“The only problem is this line, it doesn’t end! There seems to be a specific place marked on the street just for the line to stay coordinated!” said Daniel, with the fear of wasting too much time on it.

“Now that you say it, it sure seems a boring place to be in. Maybe there is some trick for us to get past it” Maria said, as she realized what her brother was talking about.

“So, what do we do? We have time, but I don’t think it’s worth being in this line all day..” Daniel mumbled.

“I know it might sound dumb, but perhaps we can show the paper to the employee that coordinates the line ...” suggested Maria. Daniel agreed, nodding his head. They went to the employee.

“Sorry, could you tell us if this of any use?” said Maria handing the paper to the lady.

“OH! I haven’t seen one of those in ages” said the employee, surprised.

Maria and Daniel looked at each other, with a look of victory on their faces.

“Our grandparents gave us this and we didn’t know what it meant”, said Daniel, trying to come up with an excuse for having it.

“This, my dears, is an exclusive pass that only some people get” explained the employee. “It was given to the first 10,000 clients and it is used to pass through the line. I guess your grandparents are very intelligent people, to have preserved this.”

Maria and Daniel looked at each other, as if they had won the lottery.

“So, can we enter the building?” asked the twins.

“Yes”, said the employee gracefully.

Quickly, the twins went inside. They were amazed by it.

“I can’t believe it! The store is so beautiful” pointed out the sister.

“Yes! The staircase is majestic! The red carpet matches the beige tone on the walls”, noted Daniel.

“Well, try to focus on what is on the walls, and not the walls! There are so many books here! There are all kinds of books! I have never seen a library so beautiful in my life”, said Maria, with a tone that seemed that she was entering heaven.

After their first impressions, they were greeted by an employee.

“Hello! How can I help you?” asked the employee, in a very sweet voice.

“We are just wondering around, thank you”, said the twins.

As they got welcomed to the store, they parted ways from each other. Daniel explored the upper floors and Maria stayed on the first one. Maria started looking for a book to buy. She investigated the horror section, the comedy section, the sci-fi section, and the adventure section. She couldn’t find a book she liked. On the other hand, Daniel on the upper floor wasn’t so interested in books. He spent a lot of time looking at the tumultuous amount of people entering and leaving the store, and the unique panels of this library. He also got to admire the architecture of the

library, being each part of it equally beautiful, except one! This part being the center part: a mid level that was accessible from both floors. There was a glorious chair, in which there was the best seller book of the month.

“I think I know which book I want to take” said Maria.

“Forget the book, that chair is majestic” commented Daniel.

“The book is more. The book cover has vivid colors, its spine is so well designed and the book back cover is so well made!” said Maria explaining it excitedly to her brother.

“I don’t agree with you. That isn’t a chair, it is so creative and innovative!” said Daniel, trying to argue with Maria.

“So, are we going to argue or we are going to go there and grab a book or, if you want to admire the chair...”, said Maria, with a joking look on her face.

“If you insist on it”, said Daniel.

They quickly rushed to the place. They were astonished by it. They were not capable of imagining something this beautiful. They were too stunned to speak. Maria instinctively picked up the book and started instantly reading its synopsis. Daniel, on the other side, almost fell from the chair by leaning against the protection. It gave him a mini heart attack. As they started to calm down from the excitement they had been through, they both realized how euphoric they were. They laughed it off. After that strange brother- sister interaction they quickly went to pay for the book. But they still wandered around. After 15 minutes, they went to the cashier to pay for the book Maria liked.

“So, we are going to pay now, Daniel” said Maria, extremely excited.

“Yes, and how much does the book cost?” asked her brother, intrigued.

“It’s valued at 17,90”, said Maria, “it doesn’t seem that much for a book this big. Why did you want to know?”

“Curiosity”, answered Daniel.

They approached the cashier

“That will be 17,90 EUROS please”, said the cashier.

“Ok!”, said the brother, handing the cash to the employee.

“I don’t know if you saw it, but this book comes with an offer to watch one of Portugal’s football classicos - FCP - SCP for an extra 5 EUROS”, pointed out the cashier.

After some discussion, the twins agreed to buy tickets for the football game, as it seemed a very good price for such a game. Quickly, they redeemed their tickets and tried to find a way to go to Estádio do Dragão. They realized that the quickest way to go was to call an Uber. But they didn’t take that as they wanted to appreciate Porto’s beauty. They decided to go by metro. They did this by walking to Trindade Metro Station. When they got there, they hopped on a random metro, as the locals told them that any would get them to the stadium.

“Porto’s urban transports are so beautiful and organized” said Maria.

“I totally agree with you, sis!” said Daniel.

“At least we agree on this” said Maria jokingly.

“Now we must wait to arrive, but it won’t take much time”, said Daniel.

As they were approaching the beautiful stadium, the atmosphere changed. It went from a calm feeling to a chaotic one. On one side, there were green and white fans, with all the colorful smoke bombs, and the people shouting their team’s name: Sporting CP. On the opposite side of the stadium, there were the home supporters - FC Porto. On this side, the feeling they got when they entered was more intense! Fans, shouting non-stop, little kids excited to see the game and there were even men drinking beer and having fun.

“How did the atmosphere become so intense?” asked Maria, worried. “Just a few moments ago we were in what seemed to be a silence paradise.”

“I don’t know, but it feels amazing! It’s strange yet different, like bittersweet ...”

said Daniel, almost shouting to be heard.

“I guess now we should try to go to our seats, before it gets more confusing to enter the stadium. We also want to see the players warm-up, don’t we?” cleverly said Maria.

“I guess you’re right”, answered Daniel.

They quickly went to their seats and waited patiently for the game to start. About 30 minutes after they got to their seats, the game started. They heard the anthem of Porto, and the game started. As the match began, they felt a strong sensation. It seemed familiar to them, yet they couldn't understand what it was.

“Can you also feel what I’m feeling?” asked Daniel, looking worried.

“Yes, but I don’t know what it is”, said Maria. “It’s probably nothing special.”

As the game continued, the feeling got stronger. Then, at half-time the feeling reached its peak...

“This feeling, I almost can’t withstand it” said Maria, preoccupied.

“It sure feels terrifying: answered Daniel.

As half time was ending, there was a huge blow: the pitch was destroyed. From it came a dragon, with glowing white and blue colors. White underneath and blue on top. This dragon was as big as half of the pitch. The stadium quickly became filled with horror and confusion. Daniel and Maria hid under their chairs, as they didn’t want to be caught in the mess and the people freaking out.

“So, this was what the feeling was about...” said Maria, almost passing out from the clutter.

“The best we can do is wait” said Daniel, trying his best to think of a plan.

“I’m here to protect you “ said a voice that came up in Maria’s head.

“Did you hear it?” asked Maria.

“:Hear what?” said Daniel.

“If you couldn’t hear it, I guess it must have been an animal. Maybe it's the

dragon trying to talk to us, but it's too risky to assume it."

"I agree with you. After all, we are talking about a dragon." said Daniel, nodding his head.

As he finished nodding his head, an almighty pressure came from the sky. It seemed like they were being smashed. They looked up with an inexplicable amount of fear, to see something falling down, from what seemed to be a portal that led to a recognizable place, their home. From the portal, there was also another two people coming, in what looked to be a cage. This aura they faced, was the aura of no other than the feared Forest King Lion. The Lion arrived and looked deeply into their eyes. The voice that Maria heard earlier got to her again and warned them to hide. They were really confused, as they didn't know who was talking to them: the lion or the dragon. Regardless, they hid better, but they were still able to see what was going on.

In the blink of an eye, the Lion and the Dragon started fighting. The dragon relied on its flying ability, along with being extremely agile. It would spit blue fire and white fire. The blue fire was more damaging than the white one, yet it was slower, making it effective in close range situations. On the other hand, the white fire was almost impossible to dodge, but it was less harming. The Lion had strong and firm paws, making it crucial for the dragon to dodge them. He also had a superhuman jump, making his paw even more powerful. As the fight progressed, there was a white and blue show. The vivid colors were always changing, apparently there were 3 colors: white, blue and a mix of the two. The Dragon had a secret weapon - his loud scream - making the people stay in a knockout stage. But the Lion's was even worse – it caused terrible pain. The Lion accomplished stronger attacks but as the Dragon was very agile, he could escape and attack at the same time with a mix of his screams and white fire. And so, he would get closer and closer to the Dragon. Maria and Daniel realized that the Dragon was on their side so they started to push

for him.

And since they pushed for him, the dragon got motivated and gave his best, using the blue fire and making a close attack from which the Lion couldn't escape. The Lion noticed that he was becoming very weak (about to die) so he used all of his energy and jumped the highest that he could to get, at an incredible speed. His speed was so strong that even the Dragon couldn't see him. On the last moment the Dragon overtook him. The lion couldn't even get on his feet so he just accepted his loss and died. In the meantime the Dragon was still very mad because the Lion had caused him several damages. When the Lion died, all the mythical pressure was gone. It was like a message to the twins.

The dragon was still so mad that when he saw the parents of Maria and Daniel- he headed in their direction with the intention to kill them. Maria and Daniel noticed and screamed:

“NO, DRAGON STOP!!!!” Shouted Maria desperately.

“We need to get his attention” cleverly said Daniel.

“How are we going to do that?” asked Maria.

Suddenly, the midsummer fairies appeared.

“How did you get here?” asked the twins.

“We felt that the Lion King had died, so we rushed here” said the fairy of Hope.

“So, do you need any help with the Dragon?” said the Kindness fairy.

“Yes, the dragon seems in rage and we are worried that it might hurt us or our parents” explained the twins.

“We need to find a solution”, said the fairy of Hope.

“We can give it a calming powder”, said the fairy of Wisdom. “ But in order to do it, we need grass from the pitch, a piece of human hair and a fairy wing.”

The group quickly agreed to do it, and asked Maria to give her a part of her hair. The fairy wing grows back quickly, so they choose a random fairy to take it away

from. The unfortunate one was the Kind fairy. After it, they quickly handed the ingredients to the Wisdom Fairy who made what seemed to be a potion. Then the fairies, as they are extremely agile and quick, gave the potion to the Dragon, and he fell asleep.

“Now we have to hurry to our parents”, said Maria, in a rushed voice.

“I agree”, answered Daniel.

They quickly went to where the parents were. They noticed a lot of similarities between them, but they had another thing in their minds - wasn't their dad transformed into an animal?

“My dears, we can finally meet “, said the Fairy Queen, or their mother, in a calm voice.

“So, you are our mother...” said the twins, thinking about the past.

“Yes, I am. And this man here is your father. He was transformed into an animal for a long time, but the death of the lion canceled the effect, thankfully”, explained the mother.

“Hello, kids!”, said the father in a welcoming voice. “I don't want to destroy this family moment, but can you get us out of this cage?”

“Oh, sure, but we have 2 keys, and we don't know which one to use.”

“Hand it to us” said the parents.

The brothers handed both keys to their parents. The lock was peculiar, it required 2 keys to be opened, from inside and outside. The Queen kept one key, and the father took the key that was found in LELLO and stretched his arms outside the cage, in order to reach the outside part of the lock. Then he counted from 3 and at 1 they unlocked the door at the same time, successfully.

After this, the fairies hid the dragon and opened a portal to Romania. The entire family returned to the grandparents` house, settled in and talked and talked for hours, days, weeks, and got a lot of questions answered.

And they lived happily ever after.

The end.





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