



Chapter Fourteen

ANNA DID NOT go to school quite as soon as she had expected. Mamma had arranged for Max to start at a *lycée* for boys early in January – a *lycée* was a French high school – but there were only very few *lycées* for girls in Paris and these were all full, with long waiting lists.

'We can't afford a private school,' said Mamma, 'and I don't think it would be a good idea for you to go to an *école communale*.'

'Why not?' asked Anna.

'They're for children who are going to leave school very early and I don't think the education is as good,' said Mamma. 'For instance, you wouldn't be taught Latin.' 'I don't need to learn Latin,' said Anna. 'I'll have my

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hands full trying to learn French. I'd just like to go to school!'

But Mamma said, 'There's no rush. Give me a little while to look around.'

So Max went to school and Anna stayed at home. Max's school was almost on the other side of Paris. He had to take the Metro early in the morning and did not get back till after five. Mamma had chosen it, although it was so far away, because the boys there played football twice a week. At most French schools there was no time for games – only work.

The flat seemed dull and empty on the first day without Max. In the morning Anna went with Mamma to do the shopping. The weather was bright and cold and she had grown so much in the past year that there was a huge gap between the top of her knitted socks and the hem of her winter coat. Mamma looked at Anna's goose-fleshy legs and sighed.

'I don't know what we're going to do about clothes for you,' she said.

'I'm all right,' said Anna. 'I'm wearing the sweater you made me.'

This sweater, owing to Mamma's curious technique of knitting, had turned out so large and thick and dense that no cold could penetrate it, and was a most useful

garment. The fact that only a few centimetres of Anna's skirt protruded below it did not seem to matter.

'Well, if you're sure you're warm enough we'll go to the market,' said Mama. 'Everything is cheaper there.'

The market turned out to be some distance away and Anna carried Mama's string bag while they walked through a number of winding little streets, until at last they emerged into a bustling road lined with shops and stalls. The stalls sold everything from vegetables to haberdashery and Mama insisted on inspecting them all before she bought anything, so as to be sure of getting the best value for her money.

The owners of shops and stalls alike were crying their wares, holding them up for people to see, and sometimes it was quite difficult for Anna and Mama to walk past, as onions and beautifully clean-scrubbed carrots were thrust in front of them to admire. Some shops specialised in only a few foods. One sold nothing but cheese, and there must have been at least thirty different kinds, all carefully wrapped in muslin, displayed on a trestle table on the pavement.

Suddenly, just as Mama was about to buy a red cabbage, Anna heard a strange French voice addressing them. It belonged to a lady in a green coat. She carried a bag bulging with purchases and was smiling at Anna

with very friendly brown eyes. Mama, still thinking about the cabbage, did not recognise her for a moment. Then she cried, 'Madame Fernand!' in a pleased voice and they all shook hands.

Madame Fernand did not speak any German but she and Mama talked in French to each other. Anna noticed that although Mama's voice still did not sound very French she was talking more fluently than when they had first arrived. Then Madame Fernand asked Anna whether she could speak French, pronouncing the words so slowly and clearly that Anna could understand.

'A little,' said Anna, and Madame Fernand clapped her hands and cried, 'Very good!' and told her that she had a perfect French accent.

Mama was still holding the red cabbage which she had been about to buy and Madame Fernand took it from her gently and put it back on the stall. Then she led Mama round the corner to another stall which they must have missed and which had much better red cabbages for less money. Prompted by Madame Fernand Mama bought not only a red cabbage but quite a lot of other vegetables and fruit, and before she left them Madame Fernand presented Anna with a banana, 'To strengthen her for the walk home,' as Mama translated. Mama and Anna were both much cheered by the

encounter. Mamma had met Madame Fernand and her journalist husband when she had first come to Paris with Papa and liked them both very much. Now Madame Fernand had asked her to ring up if she needed help or advice on anything. Her husband was going away for a few weeks but as soon as he got back she wanted Mamma and Papa to come to dinner. Mamma seemed very pleased at the prospect. 'They're such nice people,' she said, 'and it would be lovely to have some friends in Paris.'

They finished their shopping and carried it home. Anna said '*Bonjour, Madame*,' to the concierge, hoping that she would notice her perfect French accent, and chattered cheerfully to Mamma on the way up in the lift. But as they entered the flat she remembered that Max was at school and the day suddenly felt dull again. She helped Mamma unpack the shopping but after that she could think of nothing to do.

Grete was washing some clothes in the bathroom and for a moment Anna wondered whether to go and talk to her. But Grete was grumpier than ever since her holiday in Austria. She thought everything in France was awful. The language was impossible, the people were dirty, the food was too rich — nothing suited her. In addition Grete's mother had extracted several more

promises from her during her stay at home. Apart from always having to get her proper sleep Grete had promised her mother to be careful of her back, which meant that she could only wash the floors very slowly and not at all in the corners, and not to strain her wrists. She had also promised always to have a good lunch, to rest when she was tired and never to catch cold.

Grete was very anxious to keep all these promises which were constantly being threatened by requests from Mamma and the rest of the family, and they cropped up in her conversation almost as often as her disapproval of the French.

Anna did not feel she could face her just now and she wandered back to Mamma in the kitchen and said, 'What shall I do?'

'You could read some French,' said Mamma.

Mademoiselle Martel had left a book of stories for Anna to read, and she sat down in the dining room and struggled with it for a while. But it was meant for children much younger than herself and it was depressing to sit working away with the dictionary by her side, only to discover that Pierre had thrown a stick at his little sister and that his mother had called him a naughty boy.

Lunch came as a relief and Anna helped to put the

things on the table and to clear them away afterwards. Then she did some painting, but still the time passed terribly slowly until at last, well after five o'clock, the door bell rang to announce Max's return. Anna rushed to let him in and found Mama already at the door.

'Well, how was it?' cried Mama.

'All right,' said Max, but he looked white and tired.

'Isn't it nice?' asked Anna.

'How do I know?' said Max crossly. 'I can't understand a word anyone says.'

He was silent and morose for the rest of the evening. Only after supper he suddenly said to Mama, 'I've got to have a proper French briefcase.' He kicked the German satchel which he normally carried strapped to his back. 'If I go round carrying this I even look different from everyone else.'

Anna knew that briefcases were expensive and without thinking she said, 'But your satchel was only new last year!'

'What's that to do with you?' shouted Max. 'You don't know anything about it, sitting at home all day!'

'It isn't my fault that I don't go to school!' Anna shouted back. 'Just because Mama can't find one for me to go to.'

'Well, until you do go you can shut up!' cried Max, and after this they did not speak to each other any more even though Mama, to Anna's surprise, promised to let Max have the briefcase.

It was miserable, thought Anna. She had been looking forward to Max coming home all day, and now they'd had a row. She was determined that next day should be different, but it turned out much the same. Max came home so tired and irritable that before long they had another quarrel.

Then, to make it worse, the weather turned wet and Anna got a cold so that she could not go out. She began to feel cooped up in the flat day after day, and by evening both she and Max were so bad-tempered that they could hardly say a civil word to each other. Max felt it was unfair that he should have to struggle through long difficult days at school while Anna stayed at home, and Anna felt that Max was making enormous headway in this new world they were going to live in and worried in case she might never catch up.

'If only I could go to school – just anywhere!' Anna said to Mama.

'You can't go just anywhere,' said Mama crossly. She had looked at several schools but none of them had

been any good. She had even asked Madame Fernand. It was a very depressing time.

Papa was tired too. He had been working hard and had caught Anna's cold, and now he had started having nightmares again. Mamma said that he had had them before, but at the Gasthof Zwiern the children had not been aware of them. He always dreamt the same thing – that he was trying to get out of Germany and was being stopped by the Nazis at the frontier. Then he woke up shouting.

Max was such a heavy sleeper that Papa's nightmares did not disturb him, even though Papa's room was next door, but Anna always heard him and it distressed her dreadfully. If Papa had woken up quickly with one big shout it would not have been so bad. But the nightmares always started slowly with Papa moaning and making frightening grunting sounds until at last they exploded into a great cry.

The first time it happened Anna thought Papa must be ill. She ran into his room and stood helplessly by his bed, calling for Mamma. But even when Mamma had explained to her about the nightmares and Papa had told her not to worry, she felt just as bad about them. It seemed terrible to lie in bed listening to Papa and knowing that in his dreams awful things were happening to him.

One night after she had gone to bed Anna wished very hard that Papa could stop having nightmares.

'Please, please,' she whispered – for though she did not exactly believe in God she always hoped that there might be someone who could arrange these things – 'Oh please let me have nightmares instead of Papa!' Then she lay quite still, waiting to fall asleep, but nothing happened.

Max cuddled his pillow close to his face, sighed twice and immediately dropped off. But what seemed like hours later Anna was still lying there, staring at the dark ceiling and wide awake. She began to feel very cross. How could she have a nightmare if she could not even go to sleep? She had tried doing sums in her head and to think of all sorts of boring things, but nothing had been any use. Perhaps it would help if she got up for a drink of water? But her bed was so comfortable that she decided against it.

However, she must have got up after all in the end, for she suddenly found herself in the hall. She was no longer thirsty, so she thought she would go down in the lift to see what the street looked like in the middle of the night. To her surprise she found the concierge asleep in a hammock slung across the front door and had to ease her aside in order to get out. Then the door

slammed behind her – she hoped the concierge would not wake up – and she was in the street.

It was very quiet and there was a curious brown glow over everything that she had never seen before. Two men hurried past, carrying a Christmas tree.

'Better get inside,' said one of them. 'It's coming!'

'What's coming?' asked Anna, but the men disappeared round the corner and at the same time she could hear a shuffling sound from the opposite direction. The brown glow became stronger and then a huge, long creature heaved into view at the top of the street. Although it was so vast there was something familiar about it and Anna suddenly realised that it was Pumpel, grown to gigantic proportions. The shuffling sound was made by his legs and he looked at Anna with his little spiteful eyes and licked his lips.

'Oh, no!' said Anna.

She tried to run away, but the air had become leaden and she could not move. Pumpel started towards her.

There was a flurry of wheels and a policeman shot past on his bicycle, his cape flying behind him.

'Count its legs!' he shouted as he passed her. 'It's your only chance!'

How could she count Pumpel's legs? He was like a

centipede – his legs were everywhere, moving in great ripples on either side of his long body.

'One, two, three . . . !' Anna began hurriedly, but it was hopeless – Pumpel was still coming towards her, and now she could see his nasty sharp teeth.

She would have to guess.

'Ninety-seven!' she cried, but still Pumpel kept coming and suddenly she realised that since they were in Paris, of course he would expect her to count in French. What was the French for ninety-seven? Her mind was blank, panicked.

'*Quatre-vingts* . . . !' she stammered as Pumpel was nearly upon her . . . '*Quatre-vingts dix-sept!*' she shouted triumphantly and found herself sitting bolt upright in bed.

Everything was quiet and she could hear Max breathing peacefully on the other side of the room. Her heart was thumping and her chest felt so tight that she could hardly move. But it was all right. She was safe. It had only been a dream.

Someone on the opposite side of the courtyard still had a light on and it made a pale golden rectangle on the curtains. She could see the dim outlines of her clothes piled on a chair ready for the morning. There was no sound from Papa's room. She lay basking in the beautiful familiarity of it all until she felt calm and

sleepy. And then, with a surge of triumph, she remembered. She had had a nightmare! She had had a nightmare and Papa hadn't! Perhaps it had really worked! She snuggled down happily, and the next thing she knew it was morning and Max was getting dressed.

'Did you have any bad dreams last night?' she asked Papa at breakfast.

'Not a thing,' said Papa. 'I think I've got over them.' Anna never told anyone, but she always felt that it was she who had cured Papa's nightmares – and curiously enough, after that day, neither she nor Papa had any more of them.

One evening a few days later Anna and Max had a worse row than usual. Max had come home to find Anna's drawing things all over the dining-room table and there was no room for his homework.

'Get this rubbish out of the way!' he shouted, and Anna shouted back, 'It's not rubbish! Just because you go to school, you're not the only person who matters in this house!'

Mama was talking on the telephone and she called to them through the door to be quiet.

'Well, I certainly matter a lot more than you,' said Max in a fierce whisper. 'You just sit about all day doing nothing!'

'I don't,' whispered Anna. 'I draw and I lay the table . . . I draw and I lay the table,' Max mimicked her in a particularly hateful way. 'You're nothing but a parasite!'

This was too much for Anna. She was not sure what a parasite was but she had a vague impression that it was something disgusting that grew on trees. As Mama put down the receiver, she burst into tears.

Mama sorted things out briskly as usual. Max must not call Anna names – anyway it was silly to call her a parasite – and Anna must clear away her things and make room for Max's homework.

Then she added, 'In any case, if Max called you a parasite just because he goes to school and you don't, there'll soon be an end to that.'

Anna stopped in the middle of putting her crayons back in their box.

'Why?' she asked.

'That was Madame Fernand on the telephone,' said Mama. 'She says she has heard of a very good little *école communale* not too far from here. So with luck you'll be able to start next week.'