



TIME-TRAVEL BATH BOMB





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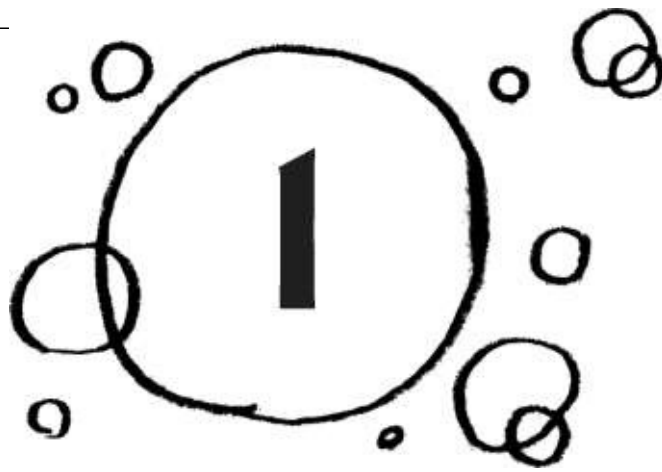
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The Postcard from Paris

THERE WAS TOTAL silence in the gymnasium. Nothing was making a sound – not the twelve sets of brown wooden climbing bars along the walls, not the old pommel horse covered in cracked leather or the eight grey well-worn ropes hanging motionless from the ceiling or the sixteen boys and girls who made up the Dølgen School Marching Band and who were now all staring at Conductor Madsen.

“Ready . . .” Mr Madsen called out. He raised his baton and squinted at them through his dark sunglasses. Mr Madsen, with dread in his eyes, searched hopefully for Nilly. He knew the other kids in the band teased the red-headed trumpet player because he was so tiny, which of course he was. But, unlike the other band members, the little guy had some musical ability. Maybe he could turn things around today. Since Mr Madsen didn’t see Nilly, he looked over at the only friend Nilly had – Lisa, who played the clarinet. She was the only one in the band who always practised at home. Maybe there was hope after all.

“Set . . .”

Everyone put their instruments to their lips. It was so quiet that the sounds of the warm October afternoon outside could be heard: birds singing, a lawn mower humming and the laughter of little, snotty-nosed kids playing. But inside the gym it was dark. And it was going to get even darker.

“Go!” Mr Madsen yelled, swinging his baton in a majestic arc.

At first nothing happened, and still the only things you could hear were birds singing, lawn-mowing and snotty-nosed kids laughing. Then a trumpet gave a wobbly bleat, a clarinet squeaked timidly and there was a tentative thump on a bass drum. An unexpected beat on a snare drum made a French horn splutter out a belching sound, and in the back of the band something big emitted a snort that made Lisa think of a blue whale that had just surfaced after a week underwater. But all that blowing still hadn’t produced an actual note, and Mr Madsen’s face was already starting to turn that colour red that warned he was about to lose his temper.

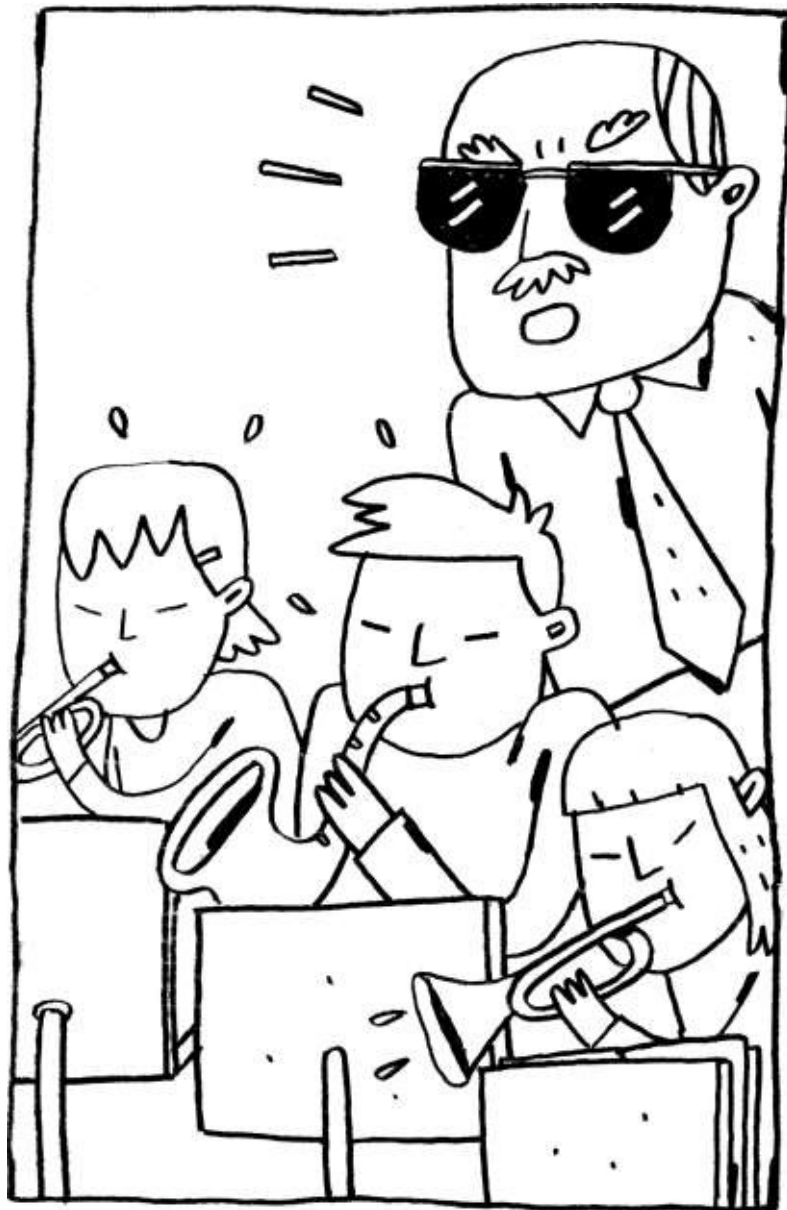
“Two-three!” Mr Madsen screamed, swinging his baton as if it were a whip and the band members were the slave crew manning the oars of a Roman galley. “Well, play for Heaven’s sake! This is supposed to be the Marseillaise, the French national anthem! Give it some dignity!”

But there was no dignity in this. The faces in front of Mr Madsen stared stiffly at the music on the stands in front of them or their eyes were squeezed shut, as if they were sitting on the toilet, straining

Mr Madsen gave up and dropped his arms just as the tuba finally emitted a sound – a deep, forlorn mooring sound.

“Stop, stop!” Mr Madsen yelled, and then waited until the tuba ran out of air again. “If anyone from France had just heard you guys, they would have beheaded you first and then burned you at the stake. Let’s show some respect for the Marseillaise!”

As Mr Madsen continued to chew them out, Lisa leaned over to the seat next to her and whispered, “I brought that postcard from Doctor Proctor. There’s something weird about it.”



The voice that answered her came from behind a beaten-up trumpet. “If it’s like the last one, sound like a normal postcard if you ask me. ‘Dear Lisa and Nilly, Greetings from Paris. Sincerely, Doctor Proctor.’ Isn’t that pretty much what you said he wrote?”

“Well, yeah, but . . .”

“The only thing that’s *not* normal about it is that a person who is as weird and eccentric as Doctor Proctor would write such a normal postcard.”

They were interrupted by Mr Madsen’s thunderous voice. “Nilly? Is that you? Are you down there? A voice replied from behind the battered trumpet, “Aye aye, Sergeant!”

“Get up so we can see you, Nilly!”

“Yes, sir, oh great commander of delightful music and all the notes of the universe!”

And a little red-headed boy with big freckles and a broad grin jumped up from behind the music

stand, onto the chair. Actually, he wasn't just small, he was tiny. And his hair wasn't just red, it was bright red. And his grin wasn't just broad, it practically split his little head in two. And his freckles weren't just big, they were . . . well, all right, they were just big.

"Play the Marseillaise for us, Nilly!" Mr Madsen growled. "The way it's supposed to be played."

"By your command, great mother of all conductors and king of all military band leaders north of the Sahara and east of the—"

"Stop wasting our time and start playing!"

So Nilly started playing. A warm, resounding melody welled up under the roof of the gymnasium and out of the window on this warm autumn afternoon. When they heard the beautiful music, the birds fell silent, feeling ashamed of their own songs. At least that's what Lisa was thinking as she sat there listening to her tiny neighbour and very best friend playing his grandfather's old trumpet. Lisa liked her clarinet, but somehow there was something special about the trumpet. And it wasn't that hard to play, either. Nilly had taught her to play one song on the trumpet, the Norwegian national anthem. Of course, she didn't play it as well as Nilly, but secretly she dreamed that one day she would play *their* national anthem in front of a big audience. Imagine it! But imagining is imagining and dreaming is just dreaming.

"Good, Nilly!" called Mr Madsen. "And now let's all join in with Nilly! One, two, three!"

And the Dølgen School Marching Band joined in. Staggered, tripped and stumbled in. Drums, saxophones, French horn, glockenspiel and cymbals. It sounded like someone had turned a kitchen upside down and now everything was tumbling out of the cupboards and drawers. Then the bass drum and tuba got going. The whole room started shaking. The wooden climbing bars on the wall started chattering, the ropes were hanging at an angle as if there were near gale-force winds, and the worn pommel horse starting hopping across the floor, inching its way towards the exit as if it were trying to escape.

When they finally finished the Marseillaise, everything became quiet, both inside the gym and outside. No birds were singing, no children laughing. There was just the echo of the evil twins' – Truls and Trym – final desperate blows to the drumheads and the eardrums.

"Thanks," Mr Madsen moaned. "I think that's enough for today. I'll see you guys on Monday."

"I'M SERIOUS. THERE'S something stranger about this new card!" Lisa said as she and Nilly were walking home along Cannon Avenue. It was starting to get dark earlier as winter approached, and she liked that, especially Nilly. He thought the light summer nights they had this far north were a drag, kind of a below-average invention. But the warm, dark autumn nights with lots of darkness to provide cover for a little bit of neighbourhood apple stealing – that was a brilliant invention. Actually, it was almost as good as something Doctor Proctor might come up with. Because, in Nilly's opinion, the professor was the best inventor in the world. True, the rest of the world didn't think Doctor Proctor had invented anything of any value, but what did they know? Who invented the strongest fart powder in the world, for example?

Of course, what was even more important was that Doctor Proctor made the best jelly in the world. He was the world's best friend and neighbour and he had taught Nilly and Lisa that they shouldn't let other people bother them that the rest of the world thought they were a team of pathetic losers. A team consisting of a tiny boy with red sideburns, a timid girl with pigtails and a much-crazier-than-average professor with sooty motorcycle goggles.

"We know something they don't," Doctor Proctor liked to say. "We know that when friends promise never to stop helping each other, one plus one plus one is much more than three."

Truer words had never been spoken. But it had to be said that as a friend, the professor wasn't much of a letter writer. They had received only a couple of measly postcards in the three months that had

passed since the professor had climbed on his motorcycle, put on his leather helmet and said goodbye as he left Oslo to drive to Paris, determined to find the great love of his life, Juliette Margarine.

Doctor Proctor had lost her under mysterious circumstances many, many years before when he had been a student in France. Lisa and Nilly had only seen a picture of Juliette, from back when she and Doctor Proctor had been dating, on the wall of the professor's lab. But they had looked so happy in the picture that it brought tears to Lisa's eyes. Lisa had actually been the one to convince the doctor to go back and look for her.

"This one is *too* strange!" Lisa insisted. "Just look for yourself."

Nilly looked at the postcard she handed him.

"Hm," he mumbled. He stopped right under the next streetlight and studied it intently while mumbling several *hms* which all sounded thoughtful and intelligent.

"It's from Paris," Lisa said, pointing to the black-and-white picture that looked like it had been taken on an overcast morning. It showed a large, open square and, aside from a bunch of people walking around with parasols and top hats, the square seemed strangely empty. The only way you could tell that it was actually the world-renowned capital of France was that the word PARIS was printed across the bottom of the picture.

"Are you seeing what I'm seeing?" Nilly mumbled, lost in thought.

"Which is what?"

"That it seems like something is missing from this square. Well, I guess, I mean in the picture as a whole."

"Maybe," Lisa said. And when she thought about it, she realised that Nilly was right, but she couldn't quite put her finger on what it was.

"Plus, the card is a little warped . . ." Nilly said, carefully pinching it. "Like it somehow got soaking wet and then dried out again. So, tell me, were you standing in the shower when you read this?"

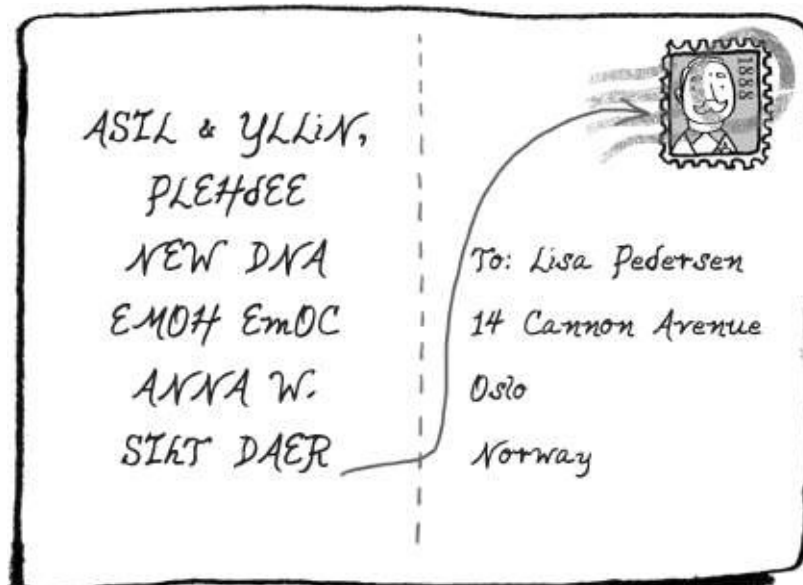
"Obviously not," Lisa said. "It was like that when it got here."

"Aha!" Nilly exclaimed, raising a tiny index finger that had a bitten-down nail. "I, Mastermind Nilly, have yet again cleverly come up with what must surely be the answer to this riddle. This card must've got wet in his lab in Paris!"

Lisa rolled her eyes. "And how do you know that?"

"Elementary, my dear Lisa. It says so right here on the card. Read it for yourself." Nilly passed the card back to her.

But Lisa didn't need to read it. She had already read the short message twelve times and knew it by heart. But since you haven't read the postcard, here it is:



~~“He says he’s working on some kind of new DNA invention, right? I’m sure there’s lots of ways a postcard could get wet in a laboratory. So what?”~~ Nilly asked. Feeling satisfied, he passed the card back and studied the rest of his bitten-down nails, looking for something new to sink his teeth into.

“It’s not how it got wet that’s strange,” Lisa said. “It’s what he’s written! Like, for example, who are Asil and Yllin?”

“Maybe he forgot our names,” Nilly said.

“That’s not it. He wrote Lisa Pedersen just fine in the address,” Lisa said.

“Hm,” Nilly mumbled, and it didn’t sound quite as intelligent as his earlier *hms*.

“Asil is Lisa spelled backwards,” Lisa realised.

“Elementary, my dear,” Nilly said, and then he quickly tried reading it backwards. Asil was indeed Lisa. “Well but then what’s Yllin?” he asked.

“Guess!” Lisa groaned, rolling her eyes.

“Hm . . . maybe Lisa upside down?”

“It’s ‘Nilly’ backwards!”

“Heh heh,” Nilly said, flashing a row of tiny zigzag teeth. “Just kidding. Elementary!” But his earlobes were a tad red. “Well, then the problem is solved. So what are you going on and on about?”

“That’s not what’s strange!” Lisa shouted in exasperation.

“So what *is* strange then?”

“The rest of what he’s written!”

Nilly flung up his short arms. “He told us he’s working on some kind of new DNA project. He’s a crazy scientist inventor guy, isn’t he? The plehdee is a kind of French platypus. They’re very unique animals. They’re the only mammals that lay eggs. Plus they’re one of the only venomous mammals. I’m sure Doctor Proctor could learn a lot from their DNA. Platypuses are all over the place in Australia, but the French ones are on the verge of extinction. There used to be lots of them swimming around in the Seine, but they’re kind of absent-minded and there’s so much boat traffic on the river, what with all the tourist cruises, that the poor plehdees keep getting bonked on the head by the boats. Anyway, it’s really not that strange that an inventor who happened to be in Paris would see what he could learn from platypus DNA, is it?”

“A French platypus?” Lisa said, sounding sceptical.

“Yup,” Nilly said. “Featured on page six hundred and twenty of *Animals You Wish Didn’t Exist*.”

Lisa sighed. Nilly often referred to this enormous book that his grandfather had apparently had on his bookshelf – *Animals You Wish Didn’t Exist*.

“Well, what about EMOH EmOC?” Lisa asked. “What’s that supposed to mean?”

“Simple,” Nilly said. “EMOH EmOC is the actual section of DNA code that Doctor Proctor discovered. Maybe that’s what makes the platypus venomous.”

Lisa gave Nilly a dubious look. “And who’s this ANNA W. person? Didn’t the professor go to France to find Juliette Margarine?”

Nilly shrugged. “Maybe Anna’s just a friend or someone who’s helping him with his research or something.”

“Rubbish! Baloney!” Lisa growled. “First of all, why would the professor go all the way to Paris to search for his long-lost Juliette and then spend all his time with someone named Anna? Second of all, I don’t think PLEHdEE is spelled right. If it’s French, wouldn’t it be spelled *plûdille* or something? And if the professor were studying it, wouldn’t he know how to spell it?”

“Hm,” Nilly said, scratching his left sideburn and sounding even less thoughtful and intelligent than he had during his earlier *hms*.

Lisa sighed, sounding discouraged. “And what’s the last part supposed to mean, the part that says

SIhT DAER?”

Nilly chuckled condescendingly. “Ah, but my dear peanut brain, that’s the easiest one of all to figure out. Obviously he means ‘sit there’. The doctor obviously trained one of the plehdee . . . plehdees . . . plaudeux? I’m not very good with French plurals, but anyway you get my point. He must have trained one of them to sit on command and, drenched after a nice swim in the Seine, the platypus obviously sat on the postcard and got it all wet. Okay, so maybe it’s a little bit gross that a wet platypus has been sitting on this postcard, but obviously it’s not like it’s *dangerous* or anything.”

“Enough already, Nilly!” Lisa warned.

Nilly looked at her as if he had no idea what she meant, but obediently kept quiet.

“There’s something else here,” she said.

“Really?” Nilly asked. “What else?”

“I don’t know, but something. Like that stamp, for example. Don’t you think there’s something weird about it?”

“Nope, I have to say that a square stamp with a perforated edge and a picture of a serious-looking guy doesn’t exactly make me jump out of my chair in surprise.”

“But did you see what it says on the stamp?”

“No,” Nilly was forced to admit. Lisa passed the card back to him.

“Felix Faure,” Nilly read. “Well, that’s obviously the name of the guy. And 1888, that’s probably the year of the stamp. Ew!”

“Ew?” Lisa asked.

“Yeah, imagine licking a stamp that’s over a hundred years old . . .”

“Okay, whatever, but do you think it looks like it’s a hundred years old?”

Nilly studied the stamp closely and had to admit that Lisa was definitely on to something. Aside from the fact that it was a little warped from being wet, it looked brand-new. The colours weren’t faded and the edges looked crisp and fresh.

“Maybe it’s a fake, or a reproduction,” he said, but he didn’t sound quite so confident anymore.

“You think?” Lisa asked.

Nilly shook his head as if to say *maybe not*. “Yeah, there is something more here,” he said.

“Everything about this is upside down,” Lisa said.

“I thought you just said everything was *backwards*,” Nilly pointed out.

“What did you just say?” Lisa asked.

“What you said.”

“Which was?”

“That everything was backwards,” Nilly said. “You know, the writing.”

“That’s it,” Lisa said, snatching the card back from him. “That’s it!”

She studied it. And then gasped.

“What is it?” Nilly asked, concerned.

“I think . . . I think Doctor Proctor’s in danger,” she stammered, suddenly very pale. “Read the whole card backwards.”

Nilly did. And you can too, of course. Right now, for instance . . .

DONE? DID YOU understand it?

All right, neither did Nilly, really. “*READ THIS*,” he read. “*W ANNA COME HOME AND WEN EEdHELP, NiLLY & LISA*.”

“So that’s what it says,” Lisa moaned. “Something is very wrong.”

“Yeah,” Nilly said. “ANNA W isn’t actually a name, it means WANNA. And it should be WE NEED instead of WEN EED.”

“Not that!” Lisa cried out. “Don’t you get anything?”

“Uh, no,” Nilly admitted, scratching his sideburns. “For example, I don’t get what he means by READ THIS. The card? We did that.”

Lisa stared at the postcard, concentrating hard. “Look at the arrow,” she said. “It’s pointing at the stamp.”

Nilly stuck his right index finger into his right ear and twisted it round and round while squeezing his right eye shut. This always helped Nilly think – it was like turning the ignition key in a car; it sort of started his brain. There was an audible *pop* sound when he pulled his finger back out.

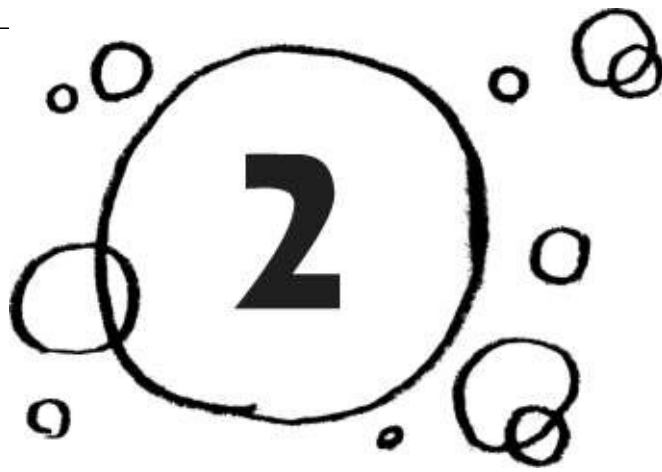
“I’ve got it,” Nilly said, examining his finger with fascination. “The card is a secret message to us, something no one else is supposed to find out about. Doctor Proctor knew that a smart guy like me would realise that there was something strange about the way it was written.”

Lisa rolled her eyes, but Nilly pretended not to notice.

“READ THIS and an arrow pointing to the stamp,” he continued. “That means that the rest of the message is under the stamp! We just have to take it off.”

“That is exactly what I have been thinking for a while now,” Lisa said.

Nilly passed the card back to Lisa with a satisfied sniff. “Good thing you have me here to crack these secret codes, don’t you think?”



Doctor Proctor's Cellar

LISA'S FATHER, THE Commandant, woke up on his sofa with the taste of newspaper ink in his mouth. This was because, as usual, he had fallen asleep with the newspaper over his face and was snoring so vigorously that the curtains over by the window were swaying and the bottom page of the paper – the one with the weather on it – was being sucked into his mouth each time he inhaled. He glanced over at the clock and gave a contented sigh when he saw that it was almost time for bed. But first a chicken sandwich. Or two. He tossed the newspaper onto the coffee table and hefted his large stomach out over the edge of the sofa, thus automatically tipping himself up onto his feet.

"Hi there," he said when he walked into the kitchen. Lisa was standing by the counter and Nilly was standing on a chair next to her. The Commandant knew him as the tiny neighbour boy from the strange family that had moved onto Cannon Avenue that spring. The kettle in front of Lisa and Nilly was quivering and sputtering as steam spewed out of its spout.

"Tell me, aren't you kids a little young to be drinking coffee?" the Commandant asked them with a yawn. "And at this late hour?"

"Aye aye, *el commandante*," Nilly said. "We're not making coffee."

Only then did the Commandant notice that Lisa was holding something that looked like a postcard in the cloud of steam billowing up from the kettle.

"What are you guys up to?"

"Go back to the living room, Dad," Lisa said.

"Hey, I'm the Commandant here!" the Commandant said. "I want to know what you two are up to!"

"Sorry, *el commandante*," Nilly said. "This is so top secret that if we told you, you would know too much. And you know what happens to people who know too much, right?"

"What?" the Commandant asked, putting his hands on his hips.

"They get their tongues cut out so they can't speak. And all the fingers on their right hands cut off so they can't write."

"And what if you guys discover that I'm left-handed?" the Commandant said.

"Then you'll be really unlucky, because then we'll have to remove the fingers from that hand too."

"And what if I can write with the pen between my toes?"

"Both legs right off, *el commandante*. Sorry, but spy work is serious business."

“Yes, apparently it is,” the Commandant sighed.

“~~But everything has a bright side,~~” Nilly said. “~~Without legs you could lie on the sofa until Easter without having to wax any skis, wash any socks or tie any shoelaces.~~”

“You may be on to something there,” the Commandant said. “But what if I figure out that I can put the pen in my mouth? Or send signals in Morse code by blinking my eyes?”

“I’m sorry you figured that out, *el commandante*. Now we’ll be forced to cut off your head right from the start.”

The Commandant laughed so hard his enormous belly shook.

“Quit fooling around, you two,” Lisa said. “Dad, get out of here! That’s an order.”

Once the Commandant had left, shaking his head, Lisa pulled the card out of the steam. They sat down at the kitchen table and Lisa peeled the stamp off very gingerly with a pair of tweezers.

“It worked!” Lisa exclaimed. “How did you know that steam would loosen the stamp?”

“Ah, just a little basic forensics,” Nilly said, but actually he looked a little surprised himself.

“There’s something written under where the stamp was, but the handwriting is too small for me to read it,” Lisa said, holding the postcard closer to the light. “Maybe it would be easier for you since you’re . . . uh, smaller?”

“What does that have to do with anything?” Nilly asked, looking at her with one eyebrow raised.

Lisa shrugged. “Smaller people wear smaller clothes sizes and are happy with smaller cars. Why not smaller print, too?”

“Let me see it,” Nilly mumbled, grabbing the card and squinting at it intently.

“*Nada*,” he said, and held out his hand without looking at Lisa. “Magnifying glass please.”

Lisa darted over to a drawer, found her mother’s magnifying glass and placed it in Nilly’s outstretched hand.

When he saw what it said, Nilly said, “Aha.” Because what he saw was this:

SOS. I’ve disappeared in time. Bring the jar labelled “time soap bath bomb” from the lab and come to Paris immediately. Also, bring the French nose clips that are in the drawer marked “Unpatented Inventions”. You can get money for the plane ticket by selling this stamp to the Trench Coat Clock Shop on Rosenkrantz Street. But don’t say anything to the storeowner about where you got the stamp from or where you’re going. You understand, Nilly?



“Yup, understood,” Nilly mumbled, moving the magnifying glass down.

In Paris go straight to the Hotel Frainche-Fraille. Once you’re there . . .

. . . Sincerely, Doctor Proctor

“Hey!” Nilly yelped. “What is this? The rest is missing.”

“It must have been washed away by the water,” Lisa whispered breathlessly over his shoulder.

“Does it say anything else?”

Nilly moved the magnifying glass down further.

P.S. I hid the key to the lab in a very clever spot: under the doormat.

“What are we waiting for?” Nilly shouted.

“On your mark, get set . . .” Lisa yelled.

“Go!” they both shouted in unison.

Then they jumped out of their chairs. Lisa rummaged around in the bottom drawer in the kitchen until she found her father’s torch and then they ran out on to Cannon Avenue, where darkness and silence had fallen over all the gardens and wooden houses. The moon was curious and peeked out at them as they climbed over the fence surrounding the smallest house and the garden with the tallest grass (Doctor Proctor had been away for a while). They sprinted past the pear tree over to the cellar door and lifted up the doormat.

And, sure enough, a key gleamed in the moonlight.

They stuck it into the keyhole in the old, unpainted door and the metal made a slightly spooky squeaking sound as they turned it.

They both stood there looking at the door.

“You first,” Lisa whispered.

“No problem,” Nilly said with a gulp. He took a deep breath. Then he kicked the door as hard as he could.

The hinges made a chilling creaking sound as the door swung open. A gust of cold, raw cellar air wafted out of the doorway and something fluttered over their heads and disappeared into the night, something that might have been an unusually large moth or just an average-sized bat.

“Yikes,” said Lisa.

“And ew,” said Nilly. Then he turned on the torch and strolled in.

Lisa looked around outside. Even the usually welcoming pear tree looked like it was clawing at the moon with witch’s fingers. She pulled her jacket tighter round herself and hurried in after Nilly.

But he was already gone and all she saw was total darkness.

“Nilly?” Lisa whispered, because she knew that if you talk loudly in the dark, the noise will make you feel even more alone.

“Over here,” Nilly whispered. She followed the sound and saw that the cone of light from the torch was pointing at something on the wall.

“Did you find the time soap bath bomb?” she asked.

“No,” Nilly said. “But I found the biggest spider in the northern hemisphere. It has seven legs and hasn’t shaved them lately. And a mouth that’s so big you can see its lips. Check out this beast, huh?”

Lisa saw a very ordinary and not particularly large spider on the cellar wall.

“A seven-legged Peruvian sucking spider. They’re extremely rare!” Nilly whispered, excited. “They live by catching and sucking out the brains of other insects.”

“The brains?” Lisa said, looking at Nilly. “I didn’t think insects had brains.”

“Well, that’s exactly why the seven-legged Peruvian sucking spider is so rare,” Nilly whispered. “I hardly ever finds any insects with brains to suck.”

“And just how do you know all this?” Lisa asked.

“It’s in—”

“Don’t say it,” Lisa interrupted. “In *Animals You Wish Didn’t Exist?*”

“Exactly,” Nilly said. “So, if you’ll go and find the time soap bath bomb and the nose clips, I’ll work on trying to capture this rare spider specimen. Okay?”

“But we have only one torch.”

“Well, why don’t we turn on the overhead light, then?”

“The overhead li—” Lisa started to say, putting her palm to her forehead as if to say *duh*. “Why didn’t we think of that before?”

“Because then it wouldn’t have been so delightfully spooky,” Nilly said, pointing the torch at the light switch next to the door. Lisa flipped it on and in an instant Doctor Proctor’s laboratory was bathed in white light.

There were kettles, pressure cookers, buckets and shelves full of jars with different types of powder mixtures and chemicals. There were iron pipes, glass pipes, test tubes and other kinds of pipes – even an old rifle with an ice hockey puck attached to its muzzle. And next to the rifle, on the wall, hung the picture that Lisa was so fond of. It was of a young Doctor Proctor on his motorcycle in France. *She* was sitting in the sidecar – the beautiful Juliette Margarine with the long auburn hair. His girlfriend and the love of his life. They were smiling and looked so happy that it filled Lisa’s heart with warmth. In the *last* postcard he’d sent, he had written that he was on her trail. In the only other card he’d sent from Paris, in June, he’d also written that he was on her trail. Maybe by now he’d found her?

Lisa continued scanning the room again and stopped when she spotted an almost empty jar with something strawberry-red in the bottom. It wasn’t the strawberry-red that caught her attention, but the label.

Because it looked like this:

TIME SOAP BATH BOMB

Instructions:

POUR INTO A BATH THAT IS
THREE QUARTERS FULL. ½ CUP
PER ADULT PER TRIP. WAIT UNTIL
FULL SUDS EFFECT IS ACHIEVED,
THEN SUBMERGE YOUR ENTIRE BODY
AND CONCENTRATE ON THE TIME AND
PLACE YOU WANT TO GO.

P.S. REMEMBER TO HOLD YOUR BREATH!

P.P.S. WHEN THERE ARE NO MORE
BUBBLES, THE SOAP WON’T WORK
ANYMORE!

Lisa took the jar down from the shelf and walked over to a big, rusty filing cabinet. She pulled out the drawer labelled “Unpatented Inventions”, flipped through the files until she got to *F* and – sure enough – there was a manila folder marked “French Nose Clips”.

She opened the folder, turned it upside down and two blue and seemingly completely normal clips fell out. But no instructions. They looked like you would use them for swimming. She tucked them into her jacket pocket and announced, “I found them! Let’s get out of here.”

She turned round and discovered that Nilly was standing on the workbench with his whole arm down inside another jar.

“What do you think you’re doing?”

“Taking a little fartonaut powder, what does it look like?”

“Nilly! That stuff is dangerous and totally illegal!”

“So sue me,” Nilly said. “Besides, a normal amount of farting is healthy.”

“A normal amount? The last time you took a spoonful of that stuff, you farted so hard you blasted off into outer space!”

“Leave the exaggerating to me please,” Nilly said, pouring a fistful of the light-blue fartonaut powder into a little plastic bag that he tied shut and stuffed in his jacket pocket. “I flew maybe fifty metres up into the air, and that’s not that high if you compare it to . . . well, like the Eiffel Tower, for example. You’re a girl, which is why you don’t have any talent for farting. You girls can hardly even manage to make little mouse farts.” Nilly farted an average fart to make his point.

“Did you hear that?” he asked. “Your turn.”

“Pff,” Lisa said. “I fart too, but only when absolutely necessary.”

“My dear Miss Fancy Fart,” Nilly said, screwing the lid back on the jar tightly and jumping down. “I officially bet you a ton of sticky caramels that you will *never* fart loud enough that it can be detected by human ears. Better leave the power-farting to us boys.”

“Just you wait and see,” Lisa said.

“Wait and *hear*, you mean,” Nilly said, putting one hand behind his ear. “And what do I hear? . . . *Nothing!*”

They turned off the light, locked the door, stuck the key back under the mat, strolled through the garden and stopped under the pear tree to look up at the moon.

“So, I guess we’re going to Paris,” Lisa said. “Alone.”

“Alone together,” Nilly corrected. “And Paris isn’t that far.”

“It’s further than Sarpsborg,” Lisa said. That’s where her old best friend had moved to.

“Just barely,” Nilly said.

“I have to ask my parents for permission first,” Lisa said.

“Forget that,” Nilly said. “They’ll never let you. They’ll just tell you to file a missing person report for Doctor Proctor with the Paris police. And then we both know exactly what’ll happen.”

“We do?” Lisa asked, a little unsure. “What will happen?”

“Nothing,” Nilly said. “No grown-up will believe the stuff Doctor Proctor comes up with. ‘He’s disappeared in time using soap?’ they’ll say. ‘Have you ever heard anything so ridiculous?’ That’s why the professor sent that postcard to us. He knew that no one else would believe him, right?”

“Maybe,” Lisa said cautiously. “But . . . but then, are you really sure that we believe him? I mean, he’s nice and everything, but he’s a little . . . uh, crazy.”

“Of course I’m sure we believe him,” Nilly said. “And Doctor Proctor isn’t a *little* crazy. He’s totally off-the-deep-end insane.”

“Exactly,” Lisa said. “So how can you be so sure?”

“Elementary, my dear Lisa. Doctor Proctor is our friend and friends believe in each other.”

Lisa gazed at the moon for a long time and then nodded.

“That,” she said, “is the truest thing you’ve said in ages. So what do we do?”

“Well, tomorrow is Friday, right? So, now you go home and tell your parents that Anna who moved to Sarpsborg invited you to spend the weekend with her, that you’re going to take the train down there after school and that her family is going to come and pick you up at the train station.”

“Hm, that might work,” Lisa said, biting her lip. “What about you?”

“I’ll tell my mum that I’m going on a band trip to Arvika this weekend.”

“A band trip? Just out of the blue like that?”

Nilly shrugged. “My mum won’t bat an eyelid. She doesn’t keep track of stuff like that. In fact, she’ll probably just be happy to be rid of me for a few days. So anyway, tomorrow you should pack a few extra things in your backpack for school, not a lot, just a few little things that start with *P*. Your

passport, a pair of pyjamas, packs of peanuts and stuff like that. Then we'll go to school and pretend like everything is normal, right? But then after school we'll go downtown, to that clock shop . . ."

"The Trench Coat Clock Shop," Lisa said.

"Exactly. We'll sell the stamp, take the bus to the airport, buy tickets on the next flight to Paris, check in and, presto, we're there."

Lisa chewed on her lower lip as she considered what Nilly had said. *Presto this and presto that*, she thought. When Nilly talked he had this way of making things that were actually very complex seem so simple.

"So?" Nilly said. "What do you say?"

Lisa looked down at the jar in her hand. The strawberry-coloured powder sparkled, beautiful and mysterious, in the moonlight. Disappeared in time? Time soap? French nose clips? This was all too weird.

"I think it would be best if we showed the postcard to my dad after all," she said hesitantly.

"Best?" Nilly asked. "If that were best, Doctor Proctor would have suggested it in his card!"

"I know that, but be a little realistic, Nilly. Look at us! What are we? Two *kids*."

Nilly sighed heavily. Then he put a hand on Lisa's shoulder and gave her a serious look. Then he took a deep breath and proclaimed in an unctuous voice, "Listen, Lisa. We're a team. And we don't care if everyone else thinks we're a pathetic minor-league team. Because we know something they don't know." Nilly was now so full of emotion that his voice had started to tremble a little. "We know my dear Lisa . . . we know . . . we . . . uh, what was that again?"

"We know," Lisa took over, "that when friends promise never to stop helping each other, one plus one plus one is much more than three."

"Exactly!" Nilly said. "So, what do you say? Yes or no?"

Lisa looked at Nilly for a long time. Then she said one word: "Poncho."

"Poncho?" Nilly repeated, confused.

"I'm bringing my rain poncho. You said we can pack things that start with *P* and from what I've heard Paris is crawling with wet platypuses these days. I do not want to be soaked with platypus spray every time one climbs out of the Seine and shakes itself off."

Nilly blinked a couple of times. Then he finally understood that she was agreeing to go.

"Yippee!" he cheered and started jumping up and down. "We're going to Paris. Cancan dancers! Croissants! Crêpes! Crème brûlée! The Champs-Élysées!"

Nilly continued to rattle off Parisian things that started with *C* until Lisa finally told him enough already, it was time for bed.

AFTER LISA SAID good night to her parents and her father shut her bedroom door, she sat in her bed like she usually did and looked over at the yellow house on the other side of Cannon Avenue, at the grey curtains on the first floor. She knew that soon a reading light would turn on in there, be pointed the curtains and then Nilly would start his evening shadow play, with Lisa as his only audience. This night his tiny fingers made shadows that turned into a line of kicking cancan dancers on the curtain fabric. And while Lisa watched the shadows she thought about the story Doctor Proctor had told them about Juliette's mysterious disappearance so many years ago. The strange story had gone more or less like this:



JULIETTE AND DOCTOR Proctor met each other in Paris and fell in love. One night, after they had been dating for a few weeks, Juliette came and knocked on his door and just came right out and asked him if he wanted to get married. Doctor Proctor was thrilled, but he was also surprised, since she wanted them to get on his motorcycle right then, that very night, drive all the way to Rome and get married there as soon as possible. Juliette wouldn't give any explanation for why she was in such a hurry, so the professor packed his only suit and started up the motorcycle without another word.

He actually had an inkling of what was going on. Juliette's father was a baron. And even though it had been a long time since the family of Baron Margarine had been rich, the baron did not think that relatively unsuccessful Norwegian inventor was good enough for his Baronette Juliette. But now Juliette and Proctor were driving through the night, through France, on their way to get married. They had just filled up with petrol in a village by the Italian border when they came to a bridge. That was where it happened. Exactly *what* had happened, Proctor never actually found out. Everything went black and when he woke up again, he was lying on the asphalt and his throat hurt. A tearful Juliette was bending over him, and behind her he saw a black limousine approaching. Juliette said it was her father the baron's car and that she had to go and talk to her father alone. She told Proctor to drive across the bridge to the other side of the border and wait for her there. Proctor, shaken and discombobulated as he was, did as she asked without protesting. But when he turned his motorcycle around at the other end of the bridge, he saw Juliette climbing into the limousine, which then backed up over the bridge the way it had come and, once it was off the bridge, turned around and drove off. And that was the last Doctor Proctor saw of Juliette.

Lisa sighed. The rest of the professor's story about his early romance had been just as sad.

After he had waited for Juliette on the other side of the border for three days, Proctor tried calling her at home from a payphone at a café. The baron himself had answered the phone and explained that Juliette had come to her senses and realised that it would be quite unsuitable for her to marry Proctor. That she was sorry, but that the whole situation was so awkward that she'd rather not talk to him – and certainly didn't want to see him again. That that would be best.

Broken-hearted and exhausted, Doctor Proctor had driven his motorcycle back to Paris, but when he finally walked into the lobby of his hotel there was a policeman there waiting for him. He handed Proctor a letter and curtly asked him to read it. The letter said that Doctor Proctor had been expelled both from his university and the country of France on suspicion of terrorism and manufacturing weapons of mass destruction. The suspicion stemmed from an experiment in the university's chemistry lab in which Proctor and another Norwegian student had almost blown up the entire

university.

Proctor had explained to the policeman that it had just been one of those things that happen when you're trying to invent travelling powder for a time machine, which is what they had been working on. And that it really had just been "an ever so teensy-weensy gigantic explosion". Somehow his explanation didn't help at all and the policeman ordered Proctor up to his room to pack his bags. Proctor was pretty sure Baron Margarine was behind the expulsion, but he didn't really have much choice.

So, late one night many years ago, a young man, weighed down by a broken heart, arrived in Oslo and eventually moved into the crooked, secluded house at the end of Cannon Avenue. Mostly because it was cheap, didn't have a phone and had actually never been visited by anyone. It was perfect for someone who didn't want to talk to anyone other than himself anymore, and otherwise just spend his time inventing stuff.

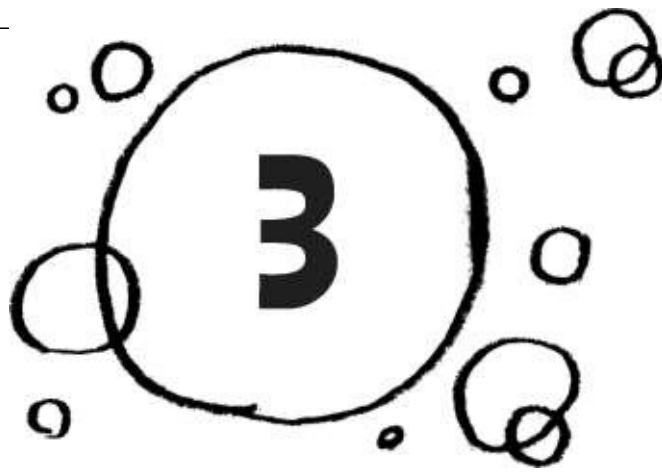
From her own red house, Lisa looked over at the professor's blue house and wondered if everything that was happening now might actually be her fault. After all, she'd been the one who had insisted that Doctor Proctor go back to Paris to try to find Juliette Margarine, hadn't she? Yessirree. She had sent him right into trouble, whatever type of trouble it turned out to be.

Nilly's finger shadows across the street finished their dance and took a bow. Then they did their normal good-night signal, two rabbit ears that waved up and down, and then the light went out.

Lisa sighed.

She didn't sleep much that night. She lay there thinking about cellars that were much too dark, Peruvian spiders that were much too hairy, cities that were much too big and all the things that would surely go wrong.

MEANWHILE, ACROSS THE street, Nilly had one of the best nights of sleep he'd ever had, dreaming happily about flying through the air powered by farts, breaking mysterious codes, rescuing brilliant professors and all the things that would most definitely – at least *almost* definitely – go right. But, most of all, he dreamed that he was dancing the cancan on the stage at the Moulin Rouge in Paris where an enthusiastic audience and all the dancing girls were clapping to the beat and yelling, "Nil-ly Nil-ly!"



Trench Coat Clock Shop

MRS STROBE'S EYES peered down her unusually long nose, through her unusually thick glasses that sat on the very tip of her nose and focused on the little beings in front of her in the classroom and latched on to the smallest of them all:

"Mister Nilly!" Her voice crashed down like a whip.

"Mrs Strobe!" the response came crashing back from the tiny student. "How can I be of service to you on this unusually beautiful Friday morning, a morning whose beauty is exceeded only, my teacher and supplier of intellectual sustenance, by your own magnificent face?"

As usual, Nilly's answer irritated Mrs Strobe. His answers irritated her because they made her feel guilty. And also a tiny bit flattered.

"First of all, you can stop whistling that ridiculous tune . . ." she began.

"Not so loud, Mrs Strobe!" Nilly whispered, his eyes wide with shock. "That's the Marseillaise. Aren't we studying French history this month? If anyone from their embassy were to hear you call the French national anthem a ridiculous tune, no doubt they would immediately report you to the president, who would declare war on Norway on the spot. French men *love* to go to war, even though they're not particularly good at it. For example, have you ever heard of the Hundred Years' War they fought against England, Mrs Strobe?"

The whole class laughed while Mrs Strobe drummed her nails against her desk and contemplated the strange little boy who had been in her class since the spring.

"If you had been paying attention instead of whistling, you would realise that the Hundred Years' War in France is exactly what I've been talking about, Mr Nilly. For example, what did I just say about Joan of Arc?"

"Joan of Arc," Nilly repeated, scratching the sideburns by his left ear thoughtfully. "Hm, sounds familiar. A woman, right?"

"Yes."

"A famous cancan dancer?"

"Nilly!"

"Okay, okay. Can you narrow it down for me a little?"

Mrs Strobe sighed. "Joan of Arc was a nice, pious village girl. As a young girl she received a

mysterious message to find the French crown prince, who was hiding somewhere in France, and help him.”

“Sounds very familiar,” Nilly said. “She didn’t by any chance get the message on a postcard from Paris with a rare stamp on it from 1888, did she?”

“What are you talking about? Joan of Arc’s message came from angels talking inside her head!”

“Sorry, Mrs Strobe, just a short circuit in my tiny, and yet very complex, brain.”

Nilly glanced over at Lisa, who had her head down on her desk and her hands over her head again.

“It won’t happen again, Mrs Strobe,” Nilly said. “So, what happened to this Joan of Arc?”

Mrs Strobe leaned over her desk.

“That is precisely what I was about to tell you. Joan of Arc found the crown prince and they fought the English together. That young teenage girl put on armour, learned to use a sword like a master and led the French troops into battle. To this day, she remains the great national heroine of France. Write that down, everyone!”

“Wonderful!” Nilly exclaimed. “The good girl won. I love a story with a happy ending!”

Mrs Strobe lowered her long, protruding nose so that it almost touched her desk and peered at the class over the top of her glasses.

“Well, there are happy endings and there are happy endings. She was taken prisoner and sold to the English, who sentenced her to death for witchcraft. Then they invited all the inhabitants of Rouen to come to the Old Market Square, where they tied her to a stake, tossed wood on a bonfire, lit it . . .”

There was a high-pitched, almost plaintive outcry from somewhere in the classroom, “. . . but then just in the nick of time, the crown prince rescued her!”

Everyone turned to look at Lisa, who was holding her hands over her mouth in horror. No one – not even Lisa – was used to Lisa having an outburst like that.

“Look closely at the picture in your history book, Lisa,” Mrs Strobe said. “You can see the flames reaching all the way up to the top of Joan of Arc’s white dress. Does it look like she got rescued?”

“No!” the class shouted in unison.

“And she didn’t,” Mrs Strobe said. “She burned to death and they tossed her charred body into the river. Joan of Arc was nineteen years old.”

Lisa looked at the illustration in her history book. The girl’s face reminded her of another face in another picture. The young Juliette Margarine in the sidecar of Doctor Proctor’s motorcycle. Lisa’s eyes teared up at the thought of the awful thing that had happened.

“Of course the girl died,” Nilly said.

Mrs Strobe took off her glasses. “Why do you say that, Nilly?”

“To be a real hero, you have to be really dead.”

The class laughed, but Mrs Strobe nodded at this. “Maybe so,” she mumbled. “Maybe so.”

And, with that, the bell rang and even before Mrs Strobe got to the *h* in “have a good weekend”, the first student was out of the door. Because this was the last class on a Friday and now they were all free.

Lisa was putting on her jacket out in the hallway when she overheard some of the other girls talking excitedly about some party or other that it seemed like they’d all been invited to. Except for her. And Nilly, of course. She’d heard them whispering about him too. That he was so little and strange and said and did such crazy things that they didn’t really understand.

“Hi!”

Nilly jumped up onto the bench next to her so he could reach his coat, which was hanging from a coat hook on the wall.

The other girls huddled together, whispering and snickering. Then the bravest one turned to face Lisa and Nilly, while the others hid behind her and laughed.

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