

Chapter 1

THE BEACH AT THE END
OF THE ROAD 

1924

It was a sunny day with no clouds in the sky, but Athena's face and lips prickled as the cold wind snapped against her skin. She pulled her black trench coat around her closely to keep out the chill.

Athena Strong lived in a higgledy-piggledy fisherman's cottage in a town by the sea. Her favourite place was the long blonde sandy beach at the end of her road. She could escape the noise of the four brothers and three sisters – and baby Aristotle – Grandpa, two grandmas and Mum and Dad, that she shared a house with there.

She could taste the salt in the air. Waves broke over the shells. The seawater fizzed as it sunk into the

sand, washing away the footsteps made by Athena's tall brown boots.

Athena was a scientist and an inventor. To tell you the truth, she was an extra special inventor of incredible things. She collected the flotsam and jetsam* she found washed up on the beach. So far, she had invented a watch that could stop time and a hat that could make you disappear. She was a genius.

Athena looked around to make sure no one was watching her from behind the sand dunes or on the fishing boats out at sea. She was alone.



Under her arm was a large rolled-up piece of paper, a magnifying glass and a compass. She unrolled the paper and stared down at a map of the world.

Athena wanted to travel. Not to the beach at the end of the road. She wanted to see the world.

Athena pointed at a spot on the map and whispered something that no one else could hear.

The map started to glow. A light shone out from the soft paper, casting a rainbow of reflections of the sea across her face.

Athena smiled. It was the smile of someone who knew they had got something right. She gripped the paper so hard that her fingers started to tingle.

Then she closed her eyes and vanished.

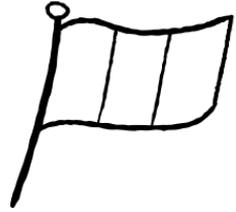
* Do you know what flotsam and jetsam are? No, me neither. Athena did. *Flotsam* is the wreckage of sunken ships which is found washed up on the seashore. *Jetsam* is the stuff that's thrown overboard – sometimes to make the boat lighter. You could find amazing stuff on the beach. Athena knew that one person's rubbish was another's treasure. Weirdly, the words flotsam and jetsam are very rarely found apart – they're almost always written together, a bit like fish and chips.

Chapter 2

PARIS IN THE MIDDLE
OF THE NIGHT



tonight



The old, rusty, black van drove through Paris with its lights turned off. It was trying hard not to be seen, even though it would soon be three o'clock in the morning and everyone had gone to bed. Even the birds, who like to wake up early, were still asleep.

“Where is it?” The driver sounded anxious.

The driver was a huge French man. He was so tall, he had to squeeze into the van like a snail into a shell. His arms were as thick as your head. He had a long wiry black beard and even longer silky black hair. His name was Jacques.

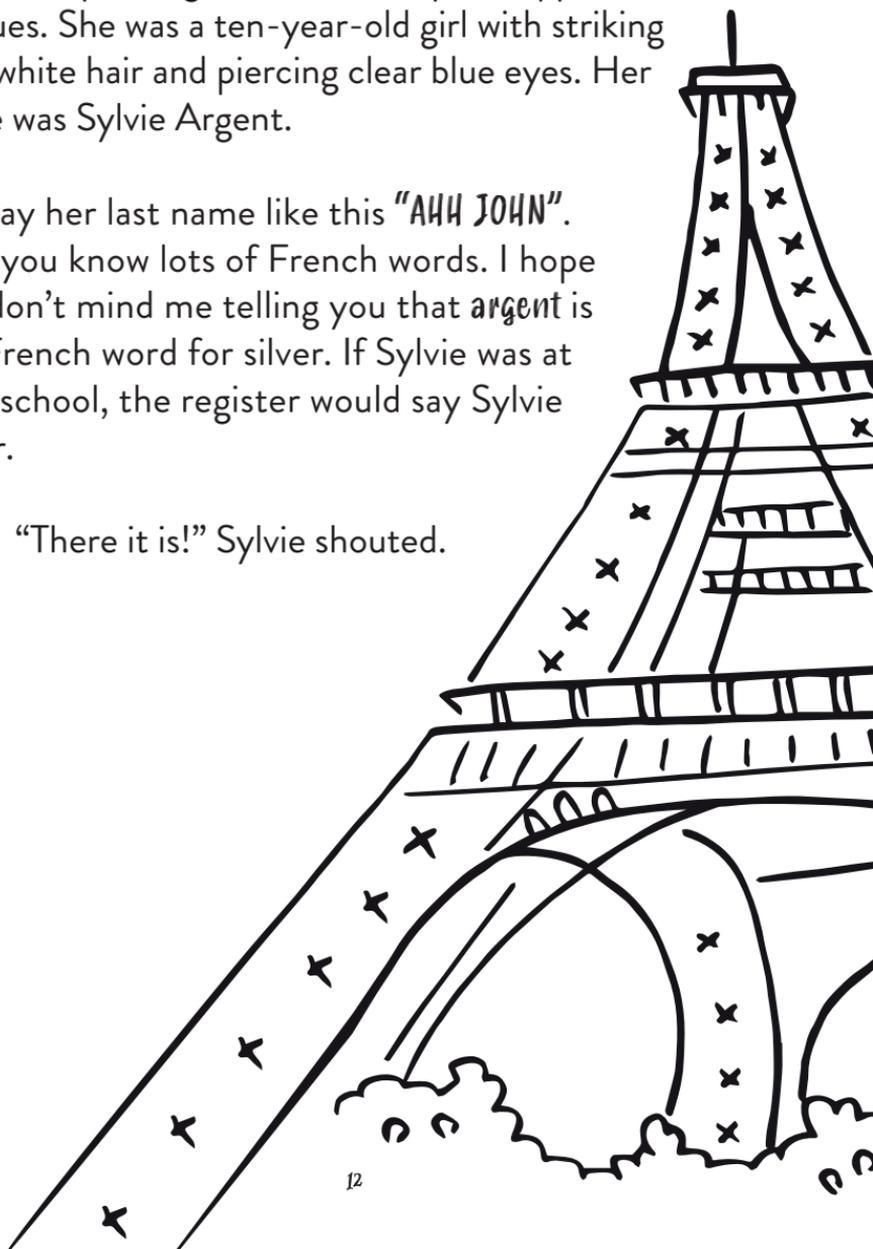
“Don't worry Jacques, you can't miss it,” snapped the passenger. “It's the big tower that looks like the Eiffel Tower. Because it is the Eiffel Tower!”

In France, they call it *La Tour Eiffel* and they say it like this: "LA TOOR EE-FELL"

The passenger was the complete opposite to Jacques. She was a ten-year-old girl with striking long white hair and piercing clear blue eyes. Her name was Sylvie Argent.

You say her last name like this "AHH JOHN". I bet you know lots of French words. I hope you don't mind me telling you that *argent* is the French word for silver. If Sylvie was at your school, the register would say Sylvie Silver.

"There it is!" Sylvie shouted.



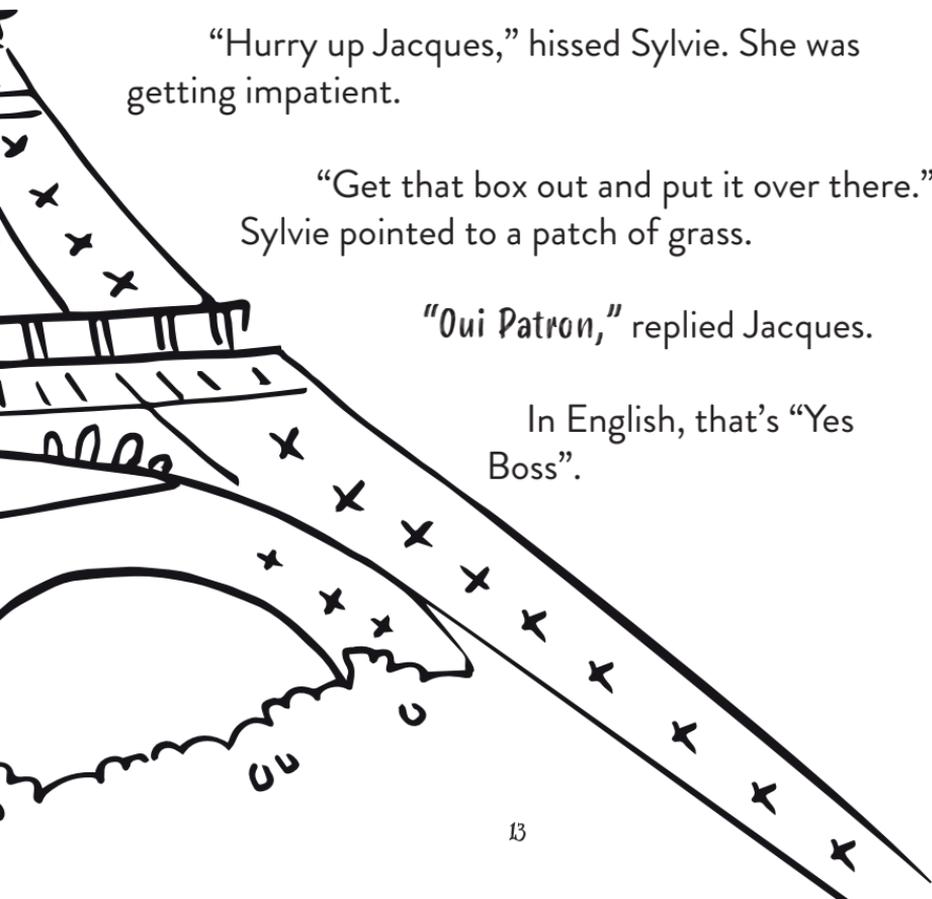
She folded up the map and pointed out of the window. A very big brown tower, with four pillars, criss-cross joists and a point to the top, sat on the other side of the river. The tower was lit with golden yellow lights. Jacques drove the van across a bridge and stopped. Not underneath it. Right in front of it. Sylvie jumped out of the van and ran to the back doors. She threw them open. Jacques was a bit slower getting out the door. He squeezed his head out first, then his thick arms. Finally, his body followed. Jacques was double the height of Sylvie.

“Hurry up Jacques,” hissed Sylvie. She was getting impatient.

“Get that box out and put it over there.”
Sylvie pointed to a patch of grass.

“Oui Patron,” replied Jacques.

In English, that’s “Yes Boss”.



Jacques lifted the black box out of the van. It was an old wooden box, the size of four shoe boxes. It was extremely heavy. On the side were three dials and two brass knobs. On the top was a big polished brass funnel, like you find at the end of a trumpet.

Jacques put the box down gently on the grass. Sylvie fiddled with one of the dials on the side of the box. The dial had the letters A and S in the middle. She pointed the arrow to the word 'small'. Next, she turned the trumpet toward the tower.

Sylvie looked down at her watch and waited for the long hand to reach 12. Tick... tick... tick. It was exactly three o'clock in the morning. The lights on the tower began to twinkle and flash. Jacques stared at the sparkling lights reaching high into the sky. He had never seen anything so pretty.

"The lights sparkle every hour through the night," said Sylvie. She winked at Jacques as she pressed the large red button on the top of the box. Nothing happened.

Sylvie didn't like waiting. Usually, people did exactly what she wanted, *'tout de suite'*.

That means ‘straight away’. You say it like this. **“TOOT SWEET”**. It’s one of my favourites. “Mum, can I have a drink? **TOOT SWEET!**”

A whooshing noise started to come from the box. Like an extremely loud vacuum cleaner. Air rushed into the funnel. Sylvie put her hands over her ears. Jacques grabbed his long black beard to stop the funnel sucking it down too. The noise stopped as quickly as it had started.

All of a sudden it was dark. The lights on the tower had been turned off. “What happened?” whispered Jacques.

Sylvie pointed to where the Eiffel Tower had been a moment ago. Jacques followed her outstretched arm. He looked up, back down and finally, up again. The Eiffel Tower had vanished.

“Where’s it gone?” gasped Jacques. He couldn’t believe his eyes.

She lowered her arm and pointed at what looked like a small Christmas tree, exactly underneath where the tower used to be.

“There it is. The machine has made it smaller.” Sylvie looked more pleased than Jacques had ever seen her. “It worked! It worked! It worked!” She jumped up and down.

“*Fantastique!*” she shouted.

I bet you can guess what that means! There are lots of words in French that are very like the English word. We’ll learn more of these later.

“*Allez, vite. (ALLAY VEET)* Put it in the back of the van and let’s get out of here,” she commanded.

This means ‘hurry up’. Or ‘go faster’. Maybe your parents say it when you’re putting your coat on before going to school?

The birds in the trees of Paris woke up first, as always. A few hours later, the woman who worked in the shop at the top of the tower parked her car in her usual parking space. She walked to the lift at the bottom of the tower and reached out her hand to press the button.

But there was no button. There was no lift. There was no Eiffel Tower.