

Chapter 1

Trouble at breakfast

Colette was awake. She couldn't sleep. She was very excited. Today she was going to the National Gallery. She looked at the alarm clock. It was only five thirty in the morning! Colette wanted to talk to someone. Maybe one of the other girls was awake. She got out of bed and walked over to Isabel's bed. Isabel was asleep. Maria and Annika were asleep too. Colette did not want to wake them up. She got back into her bed and thought about the day.

Colette was in London for a summer course. She was doing a four-week English language course at the Crown School of English. She was staying with the other students at the Crown Court Hotel next to the school. Colette was fifteen and was from a small town in France. This was her first time away from her family. She was a shy girl. She was in London because her parents wanted her to learn English with people who didn't speak French.

Colette was in a class with Isabel and Maria, and they had a nice teacher called Mr Parry. But it was hard to speak English all the time. Colette felt very shy in the class. She felt shy about speaking English.

Colette had to speak English out of class too. The girls in the room with her couldn't speak French. Isabel was from Brazil and spoke Portuguese. Maria was from Spain and spoke Spanish. Annika was from Finland and spoke Finnish. So they all had to speak English together. Colette liked the girls. It wasn't like talking to her friends in France, but they talked about a lot of things.

On some days the classes went on excursions to places in London. Colette liked the excursions. But today there was an excursion to the zoo. Colette didn't want to go to the zoo. She had permission from the school to go to the National Gallery, the big art gallery in the centre of London. She had permission from her parents too. Colette loved art, and her parents wanted her to see the paintings in the gallery. Colette had permission to go with Annika. Annika was older than the other girls – she was seventeen – and her English was better.

Colette turned on the lamp. On the table by her bed were a map of London and a notebook. She opened the map and found the National Gallery. There was a smaller map of the underground trains. The closest underground station to the gallery was Charing Cross. Colette counted the stations between their hotel and Charing Cross Station.

She opened her notebook and looked at all the words on the page. She liked to write down words and questions in her notebook.

'What time is it, please?'

'Where is the station, please?'

'Where is the café, please?'

'Which way is the National Gallery, please?'

It was easy to speak English when she was on her own, but it was hard to talk to a person. Colette didn't like being shy. Her parents were right. This summer course was a good way to learn English. It was nice to make new friends and she really liked London.

Colette looked at the clock again. Six o'clock. She turned off the lamp and tried to go to sleep.



An hour and a half later, Colette and her friends went down to the dining room for breakfast. There were some girls outside the dining room. They looked upset.

‘Look,’ said Colette. ‘That’s Vera. She’s crying.’

‘Why is she upset?’ asked Maria.

‘I don’t know,’ said Isabel. ‘I don’t understand what they are saying.’

‘They’re speaking Russian,’ said Annika.

‘Oh, I didn’t know Vera was Russian,’ said Colette.

Colette and the other girls went into the dining room and sat down.

‘Please come to the zoo with us, you two. It will be fun,’ said Maria. ‘Isabel and I don’t want to go without you.’

‘Yes, don’t you want to see all the animals?’ said Isabel.

‘The zoo will be good,’ said Colette. ‘But Annika and I want to go to the gallery.’

‘Why do you want to go there?’ said Isabel. ‘Looking at paintings is boring.’

‘Boring? I love looking at paintings,’ said Colette.

‘I do too,’ said Annika. ‘You think art is boring, Isabel, and we think the zoo is boring. Colette and I are going to the art gallery, and that’s that. Okay?’

After breakfast they walked out of the dining room and saw some teachers talking to Vera and her friends. The director of the school, Mrs Clark, was there. Mrs Clark looked angry.

‘Something is wrong,’ said Isabel. ‘What is it?’

‘I don’t know,’ said Colette, ‘but they don’t look happy.’