



Ma Maman est en Amérique...

(My mother is in America, she met Buffalo Bill)

by Jean Regnaud, Emile Bravo

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Comix Influx - Spread The Words

First page of comics is on page 9 of the book.

Page 1

Page 8

Page 9

*Chapter 1: Mrs Moinot // It's the first day of big school.
We wait the teacher in front of the classroom.*

Page 10

That's it, she's here! // ... // Shoot... why do I get a teacher so ugly? What's more, she doesn't look very kind...

Page 11

The teacher tells us to get to line up in pairs. // All the others take a friend by the hand. // I'm on my own. I don't know anyone, because last year, in kindergarten, I was in a school in a different area.

Page 12

Next to me, another pupil is alone. IHe comes over to me and takes me by the hand. // That's it, we're all two by two. We can enter.

Page 13

When everyone is seated, the teacher introduces herself. She is called Mrs Moinot. She writes her name on the board. At least, I guess that it's her name, since I can't yet read. // _Monday 14th September 1970_

Page 14

The teacher asks us our name and our parents' professions. The first answer and the teacher takes notes in a big notebook. // I start to sweat in my socks. I don't want it to be my turn. I want time to stop. And then I would run away!!! // I am all red, I'm stiffling hot. What am I going to reply that she does, my Mother? That buzzing in my ears and my temples makes me feel ill. It is already the turn of my neighbour! // He's called Alain... // ...his mother is a nurse and his father paints lead soldiers.

Page 15

That makes everyone laugh. // The teacher isn't happy. She says that it isn't nice to mock. She orders us to stop laughing and be silent. // I pray that she doesn't remember where she est and she skips my turn... // But she turns towards me...

Page 16

My throat is knotted. // She asks me if I have lost my tongue then what I'm called. // My jaw loosens itself a little and I say to her: // _IamcalledJean_ // _myfatherisbosssofaractory_ // _mymothersecretary_ // I said it that quick so without doubt no-one understood. But the teacher passes on already to the next. // I didn't listen to the responses of the others, I am petrified. My feet swim in the juice of my shoes.

Page 17

After the teacher announces that at Christmas, she will be leaving to retire and that another teacher will be coming to replace her. She is all sad when she tells us that. // That sounds a long way off, Christmas...

Page 18

Page 19

Chapter 2: My Father // The mothers and fathers come to collect their children at the school exit.

It is Yvette who comes to collect me. // Yvette is our nanny. She lives with us. She makes us food, makes us learn our lessons, washes us in the morning, dresses us... // ...and comes to collect us from school. // In the car, there's Paul, my little brother. He is one year younger than me, he is still in kindergarten.

Recipe for iced chocolate milk by Yvette

My father comes back late from work. It isn't because of the journey, since his factory is just next to our house. It's because of his responsibilities: he is boss. // And apparently, boss, it's a nice job to keep you full of worries. // Worries, that sounds like eyebrows. My father, because of his worries, he always creases his eyebrows.

Her parents own a kennel. They are very strange, especially her father. He yells all the time... // ...at her mother... // ...or at Michèle. // Since he yells, that excites the dogs who get themselves barking. In turn, he also yells at the dogs which are then even more excited. // And so everybody yells and everybody shouts at the same time. No-one knows any more what started it. It's truly a noise from hell.

In fact, Michèle only plays with me when she is bored. When her friends come round, she's not interested in me any more. // Well, apart from that, Michèle is very nice. And then, she's my only neighbour... // Sometimes, she wants to play at hairdressers. I brush her hair and she tells me her girl stories. // But I don't like that so much. I prefer we play at Indians.

My heart beats very hard when I say to her yes. Often, secrets, they are a bad surprise. There, it is a good one, an INCREDIBLE ONE! // Michèle pulls out of her jumper a postcard... // ...she tells me that it is MY MOTHER WHO WROTE IT!!! // Michèle tells me then, looking me right in the eyes, that she wants to read it to me but that first I must promise her that I will not speak to anyone of the card.

Paul and me love each other, and say it to each other every day with our words between us. // In order to stop us fighting, Yvette threatens not to give us our iced chocolate milk. // It us a very effective threat because we love it when she prepares us it as a snack.

In the evening, after squabbling, arguing, fighting, making up, colliding, chasing through all the rooms, we take a bath and we soup. At our house we say we soup and not we dine. It should be said that, winter and summer, the evening meal starts with a soup. // My favourite soup, it's the one with numbers and letters. // Each evening, Yvette tries to get us to learn a little of the alphabet.

One question obsesses me. Every evening, I tell myself that I am going to ask but I never dare. (1) It was the first day of school for Jean today... (2) Ah yes, of course... So, it went well? (3) Er... yes... I made a new friend, he's called Alan. (4) What's the name of his family... (5) Er... I dunno... I (6) I "do not" know (7) I-do-not-know-I-still-do-not-understand-it-very-well. (8) And you, Paul? How went your day at school? (9) I fought with Jean (10) I "fought". (11) Paul doesn't start school until next Monday. (12) Ah yes, that's true... There's still a bit of the tomato salad? (14) What is it Jean? You want to say something else? (15) ... // No... (16) Where is my mother?

Chapter 3: Michèle // My neighbour is called Michèle Meunier... // She is two years older than me.

Some nights, the dogs start howling. We say they are wolves. // According to Yvette, that meant that someone had just died. When she said that, my father shrugged his shoulders: he didn't believe that. // My father won't let me play round Michèle's house. He says that their dogs are dangerous. Michèle's parents won't let her play round my house, I think it's because they don't like my father. So when we play together, we are like this... // ...each on one side of the privet hedge that separates our gardens.

(1) I saw you in the yard at breaktime... (2) We are in the same school, now. (3) Ye but you, you are with the little kids. (4) No, I am in the big kids' house. // The littlest of the big kids, that's still the little kids // ... (5) You know how to read yet? // Just "A"! (6) You see, you are still a litt'un... Hey! Not so hard!! (7) 'Scuse me... I really want to know how to write... that way... // That way what? (8) That way, I will write to my mother. // To... to your mother?! (9) Well yes, you know, she is on a voyage. If I write to her, she will write back. (10) One afternoon, Michèle waits for me at our meeting-point. // She asks me if I can keep a secret... A BIG SECRET...

Even my father or my brother or Yvette, they would be very pleased to know that mother wrote to me... But Michèle forbids me from telling them. I ask Michèle why it's her that received the card. Shee tells me that it is just because my mother wants no one to know that she wrote to me. // _Dear Jean. All's well! Today, I am in Spain. It's very hot! The ladies play castanets and the men do bullfighting. Yesterday, I ate a very good paella with crayfish. After I bathed in the sea. It was hot and very calm. I give you a hug. Mama...

Chapter 4: Alain // Some days after classes started, Alain invites me to spend a Wednesday afternoon at his house. // He lives in a large house, on a hill, a little outside the town.

Alain has a record-player. It's great to be able to listen to his real records. // But he says that it's very fragile and he doesn't let me touch it. // Alain has loads of records, but he always plays the same song. It is one where men sing in chorus: "We're the guys of the marines!"

I say to Alain that his mother is super pretty. He tells me that she isn't his real mother because he was adopted. // He tells me that with a cheerful voice. Like he was saying "I really like chocolate biscuits". (1) And your real mother, you know her? // No, I was adopted at birth. (2) And you, your mother, what's she like? (3) I don't remember any more. It's a long time since I saw her. (4) You too, you're adopted? (5) No, actually, I don't believe so. It is just that she is travelling. (6) Me too, one day, I'm going to travel.

After, we go to see his father. Basically, he paints lead soldiers. // But the most strange, it's that he has a big black beard and that he is in a wheelchair. // All around, on the shelves, there are dozens of little lead men in uniform. // They advance carrying their guns, // firing cannons, // charging on their horses

Alain's father tells me their names: there are infantrymen, artillery, hussars... // He even has one called Hairies! He tells me to choose one to take one home with me. // The soldiers, it isn't really my thing. I prefer cowboys and indians. But I don't want to annoy Alain's father and I take a hussar un a horse.

Alain's mother makes us a delicious snack. There is a large jar of Nutella. I often eat it at Grandma Edith's, but at home, it's forbidden. // I spread it over many slices of toast. (1) Your father, it's him who runs the jam factory, is that so? // Yes, madame. (2) And your mother, what does she do? (3) She's a secretary. (4) But you told me that she was travelling! // Yes, she is a travelling secretary.

After the snack, we return to Alain's bedroom to listen to records, actually, a record and to play cowboys and indians with the soldiers of Napoleon. // Then Alain's mother comes and tells me that it's time to go home and that her husband is going to drive me.

Alain's father gets around like a master on his wheelchair. And he knows how to drive very well.

(1) Dear Jean. I am in Switzerland. I am skiing all week... (2) But it's Summer! (3) Not in Switzerland, it is winter there... And so, stop interrupting me... (4) The trees are all white with snow, it's cold... // Ah, you see! (5) I bought a clock that goes "cuckoo", I will show it to you on my return. I hug you. Your mother. (9) That all? (10) Well yes, that's all.

Chapter 5: Yvette // Before Yvette, there had been another girl that looked after my brother and me. She was also called Yvette. // She was young, she was blond, she played guitar.

But above all, she played the _martinet_. // (_Martinet: strips of leather with which to beat children who aren't well-behaved. Michèle's father uses one to hit his dogs.) // Luckily father was against the martine. // Yvette "martinet" was sent away, and Yvette "bowl of chocolate" replaced her.

My brother and me loved her straight away. // I believe that my father too, he is fond of Yvette. Yvette is fond of him, my father, but above all she loves her fiancé that she sees in secret. // The fiancé, he is called Daniel. I encountered him by chance, one afternoon, at the bottom of the garden.

I was playing at hide-and-seek with my brother, and him too, he was attempting to hide himself behind a tree trunk. (1) Shush! Don't be afraid. (2) I ain't afraid! (3) Go and tell Yvette that Daniel is waiting for her... But, please: don't tell your father that you saw me! If not, Yvette is going to be told off. Okay? Je n'étais plus à un secret près. // (Daniel was a fireman in Biscarosse. Some years later, he married Yvette and took her off to Landes. If I had known that because of him, Yvette would leave us two years later, I would have told on him straight away.

In addition to all her qualities, Yvette is above all a great cook. She subscribes to "Kitchen Cards" and try all the recipes that she receives in the post. We eat... // ...cheese soufflés, // stuffed aubergine, // Blackberry clafoutis. (1) You should marry soon. (2) Would you like some endives in bechamel sauce?

My brother and I, we don't like endives, nor broccoli, nor brussel sprouts but we eat all the same because we like Yvette so much. Yvette, we love her as if she were our mother. // But she isn't our mother... // Mom, I want some noodles. // Paul, I am not your mother. // I am your nanny. // Waaaaa!! I want some nooooooode!!!s.

In the night, When I am dreaming, there is a witch sitting next to my bed. // She watches me, and if I move, she will kill me. Then, I don't move even an eyelash. I try not to breathe, so that she doesn't hear me. I stay completely still. // In the morning, when I open my eyes, she's disappeared.

...it's breaktime. // - sometimes I play marbles with my classmates - I love playing marbles with my brother, I win all the time. But I hate to play marbles with my classmates, I lose all the time. // - sometimes we play football. I love to play football. But the classmates say that I shoot very badly and they put me in goal...

Luckily, my brother and I, we have come up with a scheme to watch tv in secret when Yvette makes dinner and when Papa has not come back from the factory.

Dear Jean // I'm well. Today I am in San Francisco. Americans are very nice. They drive huge cars and chew gum. This morning, I came across an Indian while I was shopping. He was called White Dog and helped me push my cart. But he left in a hurry when I came across a man with a cowboy hat. This evening I am going to go and see Buffalo Bill do his rodeo. // I give you a big hug. // Your little mother who loves you.

My brother and me, we don't like going to their house... // Firstly, as my grandma is a teacher, they live in a school. It isn't very funny to pass your holidays in a school... // Then, my grandma, she cooks less well than Yvette. In the morning, for example, she makes us powdered chocolate with hot water. // At noon, some overcooked steak and in the evening, dry salad dripping with vinegar.

But above all, the thing we hate, when we're in Tarbes, it's the feet of my grandpa. // My grand-father, he is an industrial designer at the gunpowder factory of Tarbe. It must be very hot, over there. In the evening, after work, when he takes off his shoes and puts on his leather sandals, the smell is very, very bad. It burns the nose, we cannot breathe. Sometimes, it smells so much that we hide in a cupboard to not smell the odor.

But there is worse than the dry salad, than the public garden, than the odor of grandpa's feet. There is grandma's friends. // We meet them all the time: in the street, in the shops, in the sandboxes. They are old and they prickle us when we have to kiss them. They ruffle up our hair, then they look at us with a sad air, as if we were ill. // The poor things! // What tragedy! // It is so hard!

In kindergarten, last year, the teacher had us prepare presents for Mother's day. // Me, I made a necklace with some little pasta that I painted different colours, joined by a string. // I wanted to say "Happy holiday, Mama!" but I just said "Happy holiday, Yvette!" because I know that she doesn't like it when we call her Mama. // She said thank you and smiled but a tear ran down her cheek.

Chapter 6: Louis from Funès // The thing I don't like at school...

...And then, it hurts to stop shots. // - Sometimes I talk with my classmates of what we saw on tv. I love tv. But, at the house, my father doesn't want us to watch it. He says that it isn't good for school. In any case, not watching tv, it's not good for breaktime. (1) hey, you saw that film with de Funès yesterday? // Oh, yeah, really great! (2) It's too much, when he climbs on his shoulders, of the other guy, yeah!! // It's... oh, yeah, yeah! Definitely! // Did you see it? // Er... yeah... (3) Ha! Liar. You aren't allowed to watch tv at your house! // Yes, yes I saw it, of course! // Ha ha! What a liar!

Unfortunately, my father has a scheme to know if we just turned off the tv.

Chapter 7: Grandma Simone, Grandpa Pierrot // For the Holiday of All Saints, my father sends to our grand-parents' house in Tarbes: Grandpa Pierrot and Grandma Simone. They're the mother and father of my mother.

Furthermore, my grandmother, she isn't as nice as Yvette. In the afternoon, she sends us into the public garden which is all dark and all humid. // It smells of cat poopoo and peepee. We are so bored that time stands still. // Luckily, sometimes it rains and we stay in the house to watch cartoons.

Above the chimney, there is a picture... // Grandma says that it's my mother. She has a red and white striped t-shirt, and she is putting a flower in her hair. // Maybe we should tell them... // It isn't for us to do that...

He's the spitting image of his mother? // The spitting image or hidden image? // One afternoon, returning from the park, I made a joke to my grandmother for her to buy me a t-shirt...

As my grand-mother is a teacher, for me to get ahead of my classmates, she teaches me to read and write. // During the Holiday of All Saints, I make thousands of loops, of circles, of legs, of hats, of lines. // My brother doesn't have any desire to learn anything other than the adventures of Saturnin the duck... // ...or of Pépin La Bulle.

She tells us that it is a psychologist and that some of us are going to meet him... // He isn't very reassuring with his dark glasses and his very short, black beard. // I pray not to be amongst those going to see him... // At breaktime, the psychologist comes to find Pascal Vénert.

(1) After his visit to the psychologist, Pascal doesn't return to the school! (2) And he is where, Pascal, now? // The teacher said that he was put in Séss. (3) It's what, Séss? (4) They're the German meanies that killed everyone. (5) During the war, they set fire to the village of Mouleydiel! My father told me! (6) Pff. No! It's the school where they put people who are a bit stupid! (7) Not quick-witted = stupid.

Before the holidays, the teacher takes us to the swimming pool. // The swimming teacher has put in the big pool those who know how to swim.

As we leave school, I come across Alain who's coming back from the psychologist. He is all pale. (1) Good grief! They are going to send me to Séss! // You think? (2) I messed up all the tests!!! // What does he make you do? (3) There are the black blobs and I have to say what I see... // And then? (4) Well, I saw nothing there.... So I said that I saw the sea. // The sea? (5) Yeah, And some sailors. And then, the shrink, he asked me loads of questions on my family. Moreover, he is going to talk to my mother. // It's the first time I heard him say "my mother" and not "Sophie" or "my adopted mother.

His office turns out to be a sort of caravan parked in the courtyard. // I sit opposite the psychologist, very intimidated. Then, he makes me count and read out some letters. // It is really easy. Then he shows me some small painted sketches of black blobs. These are the drawing that Alain told me about! // The psychologist asks me to think these blobs. Me, it truly makes me think of nothing but I say to myself that it is better to answer like Alain. If that worked for him, without doubt it will work for me.

I think quickly about the public garden in Tarbes, of the dog poop, of the whiskery friends of my grandma and of my grandfather's sandals. But I doubt that that's what he wants to hear... Then I tell the psychologist that I went to the United States with my mother. That we went shopping in a supermarket and that I came across some Indians. I also tell him that we went to see a rodeo with Buffalo Bill.

Chapter 8: Jean-Michel Tong // At school, after the All Saints Holiday, the teacher introduces a man to us.

Pascal, he is bigger than everyone. It seems that he was kept back two years. He is very gentle but I heard his father, who owns the garage, say one day that Pascal isn't "quick-witted". // What does he mean, quick-witted? (1) Hey, Yvette! Am I quick-witted? (2) Hmm... I don't know... (3) If you have to ask, then you must not be.

The next day, the psychologist asks to see Jean-Michel Tong. // Jean-Michel is a Vietnamese who never says anything, not in class, not at break. He smiles all the time when we talk to him. We don't even know if he understands French. // Sometimes some people enjoy mocking him. // Tong, dirty Chinese! // Chinese, Tong! Luckily, he has two brothers older than him at the school who take care of protecting him...

Eventually, Jean-Michel Tong doesn't go to Séss. The day after his visit to the psychologist he even says his first words in French. // So Chine-chine, they put you in Séss? // Your gob or ah tell my bruvvrs!

Chapter 9: The Psychologist // Alain is the third classmate that the psychologist calls! He wasn't expecting this at all.

Luckily, the next day, Alan returns to the class. I am super happy to see him. // But my joy is cut short. The teacher calls me... // IT'S MY TURN TO GO SEE THE PSYCHOLOGIST!!!

(1) You think of what? (2) Of ma... (3) Of your mama? (4) No, of sailors. Of the guys of the marines... (6) Erm... Also the sea... (7) Sono, the psychologist asks me to tell him about my last holiday! Whoa! Alain didn't tell me about that one.

The psychologist asks me if I remember my mother well. // I answer him that yes, of course, since I passed the last holidays with her. // After, the psychologist writes some notes in his book... I say to myself I should have told him the story of the rodeo... // Before leaving I ask him if I am going to Séss. // He looks at with a surprised air and says to me no, that I am going to return to class with the others.

Chapter 10: My mother // That evening, as I go to sleep, all sorts of questions go round in my head...

Why had the psychologist wanted to see me? What were the black blobs for? Why did he speak to me about mother? (1) Hey! Paul! You asleep? (2) No! you want to fight? (3) Do you... do you remember Mama? (4) Well, yes... (5) What do you remember? (6) Well, that she is kind... that she's kind and... (8) Maamaaaaa!! (9) Waaaah!!

When Yvette leaves, I make myself think really hard of Mama. // What do I remember about her? // I remember....

The memories of mama have gone... // I don't remember anything, not a single thing with her... // Why is she on a voyage? Why am I the only that she writes to?

Suddenly, I hear a noise in the room next door... // I get up and I see through the keyhole that papa and Yvette are in the middle of watching a film... // THROUGH THE KEYHOLE I CAN WATCH THE TV! // Well, a good half of the screen... // Tomorrow I will finally be able to laugh with the others of the stories with Bourvil or of Funés... I am really happy!

Interlude // Dear Jean. I am in Africa where, as you know, it is very hot. The people are all black and they laugh with beautiful white teeth. In the forest, there are zebras, giraffes, lions, tigers and gazelles. I have even seen a troupe of elephants that walk in indian file. I will bring back an elephant tusk if I have space in my suitcase. I hug you. Your Mama. // Michèle forgot to take back the postcard. I keep it with me and in the evening, I slide it under my mattress.

Chapter 11: The Ossards // One Saturday, Yvette tells us that she is going to take us to the house of the Ossards. My brother and me, our eyes open wide.

(1) Who are the Zossards? (2) They are friends of the family. (3) How come we don't know them then? (4) They are old, they don't go out often. (6) But they like you very much. (7) How can some people that I don't know like me very much? (8) They don't have children, so they would be very pleased to have you over one afternoon.

Me, what would have made me happy, would be to go to play football on the wasteland instead... And my brother thinks the same. But in spite of our protestations, we are put in the Simca 1100. // The Ossard are very old. The woman speaks with a voice that's feeble and shaky, the man with a voice that's very high-pitched.

We go outside and he shows us their rabbits in a hutch, at the bottom of the garden. But we tell him that we don't like rabbits. // Then the man takes us to see some little ducks that go "quack-quack" in the middle of a cage. But we don't like ducks either. // Then, we return to the kitchen...

The indoors of the house is all grey, all sad. We say that the colour has rubbed off of the Ossards. // Mrs Ossard makes us a mountain of pancakes. // It isn't really the time to eat them but they're put on the table.

(1) I remember that you really liked pancakes. (2) It's natural, I was born on Pancake Day. (3) Ah, my poor little thing... (4) Both of you, you are the spitting image... // Élise, come on! (6) Mrs Ossard is without doubt a friend of Grandma Simone, one of the ones that fret and that pat me on the head. // Moreover, it doesn't work... (7) They are good, no? (8) Yvette makes them better. (9) My brother and I, that day, we really agree on everything.

After the pancakes, we insist on watching the tv saying that it is the time cartoons are on and that we watch them every Saturday at our house. We are a little disappointed because the screen is in black and white, but for once we can watch a whole afternoon's tv. // At one point, there are the adventures of Saturnin, the little duck that's full of stories. // As the Ossards take a nap, that gives us an idea.

On the way back home, we cry a lot in the car. We tell that the house didn't smell good, that the pancakes were poisoned and the people sleep with their rabbits... // Yvette doesn't believe us but we never return there.

Interlude // An adventure of Saturnin! (2) quack quack quack // quack quack quack // quack quack quack

She live in the country, in a big house where we spend nearly all of our Summer holidays. In the winter, when it's cold, she prefers to live with us in the town. // Paul and me, we adores Grandma Édith. She is very nice to us. // When we are on holidays at her place, she lets us watch the tv all the time, we can shout, we can run about in the house, we can have pillow fights, we can make camps in the attic, we can have treasure hunts in the cellar, we can cut bamboo to make arrows, we can go to play with the neighbours, we can go on our bikes... // ...even on the steep hills.

In the Simca 1100, Yvett takes us to the big square where the fair is. My brother wants to have a go on the merry-go-round. Me, I tell him that I am too big for that! // Still he looks like he's enjoying himself, sitting in his skyrocket. // When Paul has finished, we go on the bumper cars. Yvette rides with Paul, me, I'm all alone! Bing! We don't stop bumping each other!!

When we get back to the house, we try to scare Granma Édith with the spider. // At school, in contrast, the spider works really well. // Unfortunately, I lost it playing marbles very quickly.

Chapter 13: Father Christmas // It's the holidays... // As Yvette has returned to her family for the holidays, in the daytime it's Grandma Édith who looks after us. That's to say that we can do what we want, especially when she's doing her crosswords.

Paul and me, we go to bed and make believe that we are asleep. We cannot turn on the light, otehrwise my father is going to realise that we're not sleeping. We take turns being lookout. Through the keyhole, we can see, at the end of the corridor, a bit of the christmas tree, next to the tv. The fairy-lights twinkle in the gloom. // It's hard to stay awake in the dark. Eventually, I fall asleep. // Luckily, my brother is more tenacious. He wakes me because he begins to hear a noise. // We open the bedroom door in silence.

Then it's dark again... // My father rises up then and falls over us! // He tells us off dryly for leaving our bedroom. He see the Polaroid. I tell him that we wanted to photograph Father Christmas. // He seizes the photo that we have taken. // There is nothing on it, just the Christmas tree at the end of the corridor. He returns it to us laughing.

*(8) D.. Dea... Dea... Dea-ur... Miqué... Mickey... Mi...ch...
(9) Michèle...*

Chapter 12: Grandma Édith // At the beginning of winter, Grandma Édith comes to live at our house. She's papa's mother.

Grandma Édith is very gentle. She rarely uses more than two or three words when she speaks. Her favourite phrase, it is: // Yes, of course! // The only time that I saw her worked up was the day that my brother stole a packet of cigarettes to see what it was like to smoke... // In fact, what Grandma Édith wants over all is that we are not always under her feet. Her three favourite pastimes are: smoking cigarettes, doing crosswords and reading novels with black covers. // Today, it is the St Martin Fair. Grandma Édith is also very generous. She gives us some coins for us to amuse ourselves on the fair stalls.

But my favourite thing at the fair, it's the lucky dip. Yvette reads to us what's written on the box: A pleasure to give, a joy to receive. My brother and I, we definitely prefer to receive. // I get some little firecrackers on a string. I quickly put them in my pocket before Yvette sees them. I don't know yet what I'm going to do with them. // After, I get a hairy spider. My brother has a glow-in-the-dark skeleton and a big ring with a skull. He offers the ring to Yvett but she doesn't want it. She suggests giving it to Papa.

Interlude // The list // Papa checks the list for Father Christmas that we have prepared with Grandma. My brother wants an aquarium with a shark. Papa thinks it's a good idea, but says that Father Christmas might prefer to bring a goldfish. My brother cries because it's a shark that he wants, not a goldfish. // Me, I want an Indian costume. My father asks if I don't think I'm a bit too big to play with that. I don't think that there is an age limit for dressing like an Indian. // Then I say that I want a Riot Police costume.

Today, it's the eve of the big day... Paul and me, we have a big project: to photograph Father Christmas. // My brother has got Papa's Polaroid camera. He hid it under his bed. // In the evening, before going to bed, I ask what hour Father Christmas comes, usually... // My father frowns. Grandma Édith said that we don't know the exact time. He has lots of work, he never comes at the same time.

THERE'S SOMEONE NEXT TO THE TREE!! // We approach slowly in the corridor... // SUDDENLY THE ROOM IS LIT UP!! // My brother managed to press on the camera and the flash was let off! // We hear a big racket with parcels falling on the ground and the sound // of broken glass.

We return to bed and promise him that we'll go to sleep... // In my bed, before we turn off the light, I stare at the photo. // My heart leaps in my chest! Low down, to the left, next to the tree... // ...THERE IS THE TIP OF ONE OF FATHER CHRISTMAS' SHOES!!! // I keep this secret for myself and hide the photo under my matteress, with the card from mama.

*Chapter 14: Everyone and me all alone // It's Christmas!
// We discover all our presents under the tree.*

My brother has a book on sharks and a word from Father Christmas telling him that he will receive, in a few days, another present that he could not bring with him because he was too loaded. // Me, I have an Indian costume and a book on cowboys. // In the afternoon, when my brother takes a nap, I go to see Michèle to play with her.

(1) You know what... I have a secret to tell you. // What? (2) Look... (4) It's your Christmas Tree? (5) Yes, but look closer... low down, to the left... (6) I see nothing. // But yes, there! (7) It's the shoe of Father Christmas! We caught him in a photo yesterday, with my brother! (9) Pff! Poor fool, it's the shoe of your father! Father Christmas, HE DOESN'T EXIST!

I return in tears to the house. My father and my grandmother can't stop my tears. // When they ask me why I'm crying, I tell them that Michèle told me that Father Christmas doesn't exist... (1) He is big enough to know, now. (2) Michèle is wrong! Father Christmas exists but only when you are a child... (3) When we grow up, he disappears... Now, you are big, then, for you, Father Christmas doesn't exist, but for your brother he still exists.

She takes a big book and asks us to say our first names... // ...just our first names.

But Michèle is waiting for one of her friends. She tells me that she hasn't time to play around with me and that, anyway, she's no longer the age to play at Indians. // She tells that I look dumb in my costume. That annoys me. // I ask her what Father Christmas brought her but she answers that it's not my business. // I say to her that if she wants to play with me a bit later, I would be happy to comb her hair now. She accepts.

I start to cry!!! // I pull her hair. She starts to cry. The dogs bark... (1) Idiot! Because you're so stupid, I won't read anymore cards from your mother! // Eh? You have received another?! (2) Pfff! It's me that made them up, your cards! (3) YOUR MOTHER, SHE'S DEAD!!

That evening in my bed, I say to myself that Mama, she's like Father Christmas... // ...now I am too big to believe in her...

Epilogue // At the beginning of January, I meet my new teacher. She is called Miss Méheux. She seems very nice.