

Charlies Journal

-Book One-

The Making Of A Cheesecakeologist

By

Julian C Corbett

~ ~ ~

Smashwords Edition

Copyright © 2014, 2015 by Julian C Corbett.
All Right Reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods, or by any information storage and retrieval system without the prior written permission of the publisher, except in the case of very brief quotations embodied in critical reviews and certain other noncommercial uses permitted by copyright law.

Smashwords Edition, License Notes

This ebook is licensed for your personal enjoyment only. This ebook may not be re-sold or given away to other people. If you would like to share this book with another person, please purchase an additional copy for each recipient. If you're reading this book and did not purchase it, or it was not purchased for your use only, then please return to your favorite ebook retailer and purchase your own copy. Thank you for respecting the hard work of this author.

Acknowledgement

This journey would not have been realised without the help and support from those around me. The first thanks should go to Amy for her help and support with editing and grammar checking, but more importantly for providing answers and guidance to the mysteries of the english language.

Next I would like to thank Ren for producing a beautiful bespoke, hand drawn cover which just looks amazing.

Last but not least, I would like to acknowledge my beautiful partner Donna who has shown belief in my dream in this series of journals, whom has been there with words of encouragement and inspiration, when the dreaded writers block crept in. But above all else, for sharing this journey with me. Thankyou

Table of Contents

- [1. Leaving Home](#)
- [2. Captain Macrina](#)
- [3. Monsieur Luc](#)
- [4. Charlie's Apprenticeship](#)
- [5. The Competition](#)
- [6. Paris Awaits](#)
- [7. The Truth Discovered](#)
- [8. Returning Home](#)
- [9. The Food Festival](#)
- [About The Author](#)
- [Other Books](#)
- [One Last Thing](#)

Chapter One - Leaving Home

The week had been a hectic one for Charlie and Claire. The arrival of their daughter and grandchildren for the holidays was such an exciting and busy affair, the days passing joyfully. So with their time left together growing short now, a sense of enjoyment in their shared company... a quiet contentment seemed to bind them together as it grew dark outside and the winter's late afternoon gathered in.

Charlie tended the blazing fire he had prepared in the lounge, as Claire finished up in the kitchen after another wholesome winter's meal had drawn to a close. Charlie returned the poker and groaned as he straightened himself. Now satisfied with the intensity of the fire, he returned to the comfort of his favourite armchair. His daughter was resting, snuggled deep into one of the sofas.

Savannah, the youngest of the grandchildren, had made herself comfortable by the fireside. Seeing that her grandfather was now settled, she turned towards him with childish enthusiasm and asked, "Grandpa... could I please hear the story again?"

Leaning forward slightly in his chair, he smiled lovingly toward the bright-eyed face peering at him expectantly. Feeling her father's weariness from the stresses of the day and wanting to rescue him from any further retelling of the tale, Charlie's daughter asked, "Don't you ever get tired of hearing about grandpa's adventures when he was a younger, Savannah?"

"No, never," came the loud reply from the youngster.

"Well... perhaps... if you really need to hear the story again, maybe I could tell it this time!" said her mother.

"Come on you two," Savannah called excitedly to Charlotte and Michael who were pestering Claire in the kitchen. "Moms going to tell us the story this time!"

After a moments silence, a loud "yay" was heard as two very enthusiastic children raced in from the kitchen, evidence of chocolate around their mouths. They were closely followed by Claire who carried a large tray, heavily laden with mugs of hot chocolate and a plate of Canelles for them all to share.

She placed the tray on the wooden coffee table; the children all gathering around, enjoying the delicious aromas and the anticipation of the beautiful treats that now sat before them. She then passed around the steaming mugs and was met by welcoming hands and murmurs of contentment.

Pleased with the atmosphere in the room, she walked over to the bookcase and removed the first of the bound journals. She paused for a moment in thought, before handing it to her dear husband as she rested her hand lovingly upon his shoulder. She then leaned over Charlie and whispered in his ear, "Just in case she forgets anything."

Then settling back herself, steaming hot chocolate in hand, she pulled a thick blanket over her legs and smiled warmly at her husband. "If everyone is ready then, shall we begin?" their daughter suggested as all the family members settled themselves down, mugs of hot chocolate in hand.

The day started like any other... Charlie was up early, chores done and room tidied... now time for breakfast! To the casual onlooker this would seem like any other day, but for Charlie, this was the day that the adventure began.... "Right, time for breakfast I think," he said as he hurried downstairs to the kitchen, joining his parents who already sat at the large rectangular table, plates piled with a hearty cooked breakfast. "Just what's needed before an adventure," Charlie thought, as he got stuck into devouring this delicious feast.

He rushed through his breakfast with thoughts of what lay ahead. "Where would he go? Who would he meet along the way, and just why was he doing this again?" he thought to himself.

Charlie's daughter paused the story as her children moved restlessly, jostling to find the most comfortable position, anticipating the journey they were about to take. Finally seeing that her children were finally settled, the story was continued.

By now, breakfast had finished, so being the ever so tidy person that he was, he cleared his plate, washed it up, and put it away. He then wiped the table clean; well, where he had been sitting anyway. In all the excitement, he had been oblivious to his mother and father still working their way through their own plates of food, so he returned to the table and once again sat back down, this time even more deeply in thought. He paused for a moment to look at them, both still sipping their morning tea. He wondered when he would see them next, a little sadness in his eyes, as he noticed his mother staring back at him with a loving smile.

"Charlie, Charlie, do you have everything packed?" she asked, which snapped Charlie out of his moment of contemplation. He replied by saying that he had, but before he could finish what he was saying, his father interrupted.

"Good lad, always good to be prepared," he said, and then added that life might be a journey of unplanned discovery, but that it was always good to be a little prepared.

There was a moment's silence followed by everyone bursting into laughter. Charlie's mother pointed out that her husband, however adorable he might be, had never prepared for anything. Joking she added that if it wasn't for her, he would leave the house still wearing his slippers and not more appropriate footwear, at which point the room filled with hysterical laughter once again.

Charlie's father, wanting to defend himself, quickly replied by informing his lovely wife that on this special occasion he most certainly was as he reached into his large cardigan pocket and pulled out a small wrapped package. He leaned forward over the table; he handed it to Charlie saying that it was just a little gift for his travels.

“Thanks dad,” Charlie said, as he took the gift from his father, who went on to explain that he was not to open it until later that day. Not stopping there, Charlie’s father continued by handing him an envelope. Charlie questioned what this was, and his what this was, his father responded by explaining that the envelope contained a letter which he wanted Charlie to hand deliver to Monsieur Luc. He then proceeded to hand his son a scrap piece of paper with the address on it. Charlie noticed that there was a slight look of sadness in his father’s eyes, which he found intriguing. He had always known his father to be a free-spirited, happy-go-lucky sort of chap, always with a sense of adventure... but that’s a whole different story.

Charlie pondered on this request briefly, as his father had never previously mentioned Monsieur Luc, and he wondered who this person was and why he must deliver this envelope to him. With little hesitation, Charlie agreed to do as his father had asked him as it surely must be important, he decided.

“Time I was leaving,” he thought to himself as he ran upstairs to grab his backpack and to take one last look at his room. “Yes, everything is immaculate, just how I like it, everything neatly sorted and in the correct place,” he thought as he took one final look at the long mirror on his wall. Before him was the reflection of a young man of above average height with an athletic build, fair skin, blue eyes, and short dark brown hair which had a natural glossy shine. The reflection he saw was dressed in cargo pants and a fleece top, with sturdy walking boots upon his feet. It happily reminded Charlie of his father’s early adventuring and days of travelling.

He took this moment to sit on the edge of his bed, looking at his room one final time and recalling childhood memories. Gazing around, his eyes eventually fell upon his backpack which was propped up against the wall next to the bedroom door. For, this backpack was no ordinary backpack... it had been his father’s, steeped in much mystery from the many adventures they had once both shared. But now it belonged to Charlie.

The backpack was still surprisingly in good condition, partly due to his mother’s ability with a needle and thread. It had one main, large compartment, a smaller internal pocket, and at the front, two smaller and not-so-wide pockets. The right side had a further two pockets with one single longer pocket on the left.

Charlie unzipped one of the side pockets of the backpack and slipped the small package and envelope that he had just been given inside. Quickly, he closed the zipper, and picking up the backpack, he swung one of the thick straps over his shoulder. Looking around his room had brought back the fond memories of growing up and the adventures that he had dreamed about having himself one day. This due mainly to the stories that he had grown up listening to that were told by his mother and father as they recounted their own travels. But now it was his turn to create his own memories, he decided. He made one final scan of the room, double-checking to see if he had forgotten anything!

"No, nothing forgotten, and if I have, it couldn't have been important anyway," he chuckled to himself. "Adventure waits for no man," he shouted out loud, and with that, walked out of his bedroom for what might be a long time and closed the door behind him.

There, waiting at the bottom of the stairs, his mother and father were watching as Charlie descended. Their only child was about to leave home on a journey that would change his life forever. His mother reached out her hand as Charlie reached the bottom step. Her voice sounding a touch emotional, she said to Charlie that he would not get very far without his passport, which she clutched tightly between her fingers. She was a little concerned that he hadn't remembered this himself, but just sighed as she thought, "Like father, like son." His mother, being the avid organizer before any grand adventure, wanted to make sure it was kept safe until the very last moment before he left. Which was also the very same moment she knew it was time to let Charlie go as he ventured out into the world.

"Mom, Dad, thank you. I love you both so much," Charlie said, and with that it was too much for all of them, tears welling up in their eyes. But before everyone became a blubbering mess, Charlie opened the front door, stepped through, and walked boldly to the end of the path. He stopped one last time, closed his eyes, and felt the warmth of a spring morning on his face. He was about to take his first steps away from home and into an unknown world.

He turned around one last time to look back. Smiling, he stepped over the threshold of the family home, turned to his right, and was on his way. "The train station and adventure awaits," he shouted back to his parents, who watched him disappear out of sight. An excitement brewed within him with every step he took as he made his way down the paved streets of Poxwold, a quaint little town set in the heart of central England.

Once Charlie was out of sight, his mother and father went back inside and closed the door behind them. Looking around arm in arm, they both noticed their home already felt very different, a little more empty and quite. For in that moment, their lives had changed forever. Just when would they see their beautiful son again? Sitting down in the kitchen, Terrence reached out his hand to hold his wife's tightly, the other hand being used to brush a tear from the side of her face.

"He'll be just fine, Jacque," said Charlie's father, giving her hand a gentle squeeze. "He's a sensible lad and has more of your level headedness than my free-spirited nature, so he shouldn't get into too much trouble," he continued to say.

Charlie's mother smiled back at her loving husband while saying, "Thank goodness for that, Terrence." With this, the mood lightened, and easy laughter filled the air.

"Think I'll go and potter in the garden for a while, and try to occupy myself," Jacque quietly said as she rose from the table and went outside. She was a small woman with pale porcelain looking skin and soft brown eyes. Her light brown hair slightly curly, gently touching her shoulders,

when not in a pony tail. When she was not helping to write, she could be found tending to her beautiful garden or tucked away in a corner in moments of quiet contemplation. This was helped by valuable techniques she had learned while on one of her many travels.

Meanwhile, his father who was now left on his own sitting at the table, had time to reflect on the journey that his son had just embarked on, the letter that he gave him before he left, and the times spent in this same kitchen with Charlie. This had been special time for them both... making gouramy pastries, laughing together, then presenting Jacque with their latest creations for her to try.

Charlie's father was of average height with an athletic build, honed from the years spent travelling. He had bronzed skin, brown eyes like his wife's, and very short, messy, dark brown hair. It wasn't actually messy as such, as it did get a comb through on occasions. It was more of a natural look... well that's how he liked to describe it anyway.

He had spent much of his life writing books about his own travels and adventures, mainly travel guides with the occasional personal story thrown in for good measure. He never really talked about his early life, preferring to change the subject quickly when anyone asked him questions about his past. Returning to the present moment, his father stated out loud, "Okay, where's that recipe book of mine?" as he moved his seat back and then opened the small draw under the bench. Pulling out a rather battered looking cookery book, he flicked through until he found something that he wanted to bake in honour of his son.

Charlie had now arrived at the station, made his way through the crowds of people, all of which were going about their mundane daily lives, and finally arrived at the ticket desk. Looking at Charlie, the ticket master enquired as to the destination he would like.

"Oh, gosh, I don't know," announced Charlie. For in that moment, he realised in all the excitement he had not even decided yet where his first stop would be.

Quickly, he turned to the ticket master and asked for a one-way ticket on the first train leaving that would end at the big shipping port. Hearing such a request left the ticket master momentarily speechless. This in itself was a shock, as the ticket master was well known for being a somewhat talkative chap indeed.

"Leaving our little town are we?" enquired the ticket master once he had regained his voice. Charlie replied by saying in an excited tone that he most certainly was. The ticket master responded by informing his young customer that he would need to hurry to platform three as the train would be leaving quite soon. Charlie then paid the ticket master who handed over the ticket stating that he would not wish for the young adventurer to miss the train. He bid the ticket master farewell and raced off towards platform three and the waiting train.

It was not far to the platform, and Charlie could see the waiting train preparing to get underway. The conductor observed the crowds and

checked his pocket watch anxiously as the last few passengers said their farewells to family or friends who had come to see them off. While waiting, Charlie noticed the smell in the air of oil and engine fuel, all wrapped up with the clatter of metal wheels on train tracks from the passing trains.

Rushing up to the side of the train, Charlie heard the conductor shouting for all passengers to board the train in a very loud voice as he quickly hoisted himself onto the train by the handle just as the door closed behind him. "Made it," he muttered as he took a moment to catch his breath, now looking to find a seat as he felt the train jerk forward and slowly gather speed as it began to move.

Finding a seat by the window, he slipped his backpack off. He sat back into the softly padded seat and put his bag on the empty seat next to him. Staring out of the window, he soon realised that he didn't even know the destination of the train. He laughed to himself and tried to decide whether to look at the ticket or wait to be surprised.... "Although at this point, it doesn't really matter," he thought.

Soon, the train increased in speed until it whizzed past small villages and beautiful countryside, making its way to its final objective. Charlie relaxed back in his seat and thought about the adventures that awaited him. He opened the side pocket of his backpack and looked inside, then grabbing the small package that his father had given him earlier that morning, he gently opened up the sides of the rather crumpled paper. Inside it was a most beautifully bound journal and pencil. Charlie lifted the front cover and saw an inscription left by his father. The inscription read, "Death is more universal than life. Everyone dies, but not everyone truly lives... so live the adventure!" It was signed "Dad," so Charlie decided then and there that he would keep a record of his experiences.

This was indeed a special day for Charlie. Not only was it the day he left home, but it was also his birthday, but to Charlie, it was just another day like any other. Although before he left home, while having one of his mother's famous squishy hugs, he remembered her whispering in his ear, "Charlie, when you get on the train, look inside the top pocket of your backpack..." With that, Charlie unclipped the buckle and lifted the flap. There, inside the top pocket, were two little packets, all neatly wrapped. He smiled and wondered what these could be.

He reached in and pulled out one of the packets, smiling at how precise the paper had been folded and tied with string. His mother was quite a meticulous person in that way, quite a contrast to his father. He reflected on how much he was like both of his parents... his mother because of her meticulous attention to detail, and his father for his carefree nature, which at times made for interesting moments for Charlie as he learned to balance the characteristics within himself.

"Tickets, please. Have your tickets ready for inspection," came the booming voice of the conductor as he entered the carriage. Charlie put the small package that his mother had put into his backpack to the side of him

and waited for the conductor. As the conductor reached Charlie, he handed his ticket over for inspection. "And where might you be heading?" he asked.

"I'm not actually sure, sir. When I purchased my ticket, I asked the ticket master for passage on the first train leaving the station that was heading to the port," Charlie replied. The conductor looked at Charlie's ticket and asked whether he would like to know his destination. Charlie thought for a moment and replied, "No sir, this is an adventure, and I'd like to wait until we arrive to find out where I am."

"Very well young man," said the conductor as he passed back his ticket, which Charlie carefully put back into his coat pocket for safe keeping. Just as the conductor was about to continue his ticket inspection, Charlie enquired as to how long the journey would take. The conductor replied by informing him that it would be a couple of hours yet. Charlie thanked the conductor who then proceeded to quickly moved on to check the next passenger's ticket.

Settling back into the soft padded seat, he allowed himself to become comfortable once more, looking out of the small window at the ever changing countryside and quaint villages that the speeding train passed by. Charlie sat in the corner of the carriage and decided that there were not many people travelling, but perhaps more people would board the train along the route.

Remembering the small packet that his mum had lovingly surprised him with, he turned to look for it. Having placed it on the seat next to him when the conductor came along, he reached for it, but it wasn't there! Momentarily stunned, Charlie wondered where it could have disappeared to! In a panic, he wondered if it might have fallen onto the floor with all the movement of the carriage. He then shuffled forward in his chair and leaned over, looking under the seat, and yes there it was. Reaching down, he picked it up, relieved it was safely back in his hands once more.

Holding the package again, he began to wonder just what might be inside, as the corner of his mouth gently curled to offer an ever so slight grin, for he had a good idea what it was as he gave the packet a very small squeeze.

"It's one of mother's famous 'travelling sandwiches.' That's what it is," he concluded, as he chuckled to himself.

"Nom, nom, nom, I will enjoy that later," he mused, his mouth beginning to water ever so slightly at the thought of it. Returning it to the top pocket of his backpack, he zipped it back up, keeping it safe. "No losing that again," he quietly whispered to himself.

Everything sorted... sandwich secure, ticket inspected... Charlie settled back into his seat once more and closed his eyes, relaxing to the clattering sound of the train wheels on the track, thinking of what the future may hold. Charlie thought about the types of people he might meet along the way and the places he would like to visit, thinking that he didn't really have a plan, being the impetuous character that he was, very much like his father in this

way. For now, he would sit back and gaze out of the window without a care in the world.

While sitting there, quietly drifting to the hypnotic sound of the train, Charlie thought back to the times spent in the kitchen with just his father. He cherished those moments, as they both loved to create a dish from scratch, taking ideas from different recipes and combining them, often mixing an assortment of different ingredients together, trying to create something delightful that they would all share. He often wondered how his dad had become such a good baker, putting it down to him learning due to the many countries he had visited, picking up recipes here and there. Though one thing was for certain, he did like to bake when at home. They spent many hours in the kitchen, flicking through cookery books and looking for things to try. Charlie had picked up many odd tips here and there from those times.

Knowing he'd have to earn money along the way to cover his travelling costs, he'd thought about looking for work in a café or coffee shop. But as he now sat there, his imagination running away with him, he thought, "Better still, perhaps a bakery." Drifting deeper, he began to envision himself dressed as a chef, controlling a brigade of chefs, much like a conductor controlling an orchestra. Or maybe standing behind a coffee machine, making a variety of cappuccinos, lattes, and macchiatos for the long queue of coffee loving addicts. But he decided there and then that he would only look for work in places that served baked goods or coffee, or better still, both. And with that final thought, Charlie drifted off into a deeper sleep with a smile on his face.

Charlie was woken by a sudden jerk of the train as several carriages bumped together. Opening his eyes, he looked out of the window, and to his surprise the train was slowing, and the ever changing countryside had started to transform into a coastal town.

"We must be almost there," he thought, gently patting his face to wake up. He then turned to sort through his backpack, making sure everything was zipped up or clipped. The train rattled as it started to slow even more. The conductor's voice could be heard over the tannoy.

"Last stop ladies and gentlemen. Please make sure that you take all of your belongings with you."

Charlie arose from his seat, double-checked that he had not left anything, kneeling down to check underneath the seat. No, nothing else had fallen off while he had been snoozing.

He then grabbed his backpack and threaded an arm through one of the straps. He swung it around and then slipped the other arm through. Secured on both shoulders, he turned and started to walk towards the carriage exit. The conductor was standing by the carriage door, waiting for the train to stop. Charlie tried to take a peek out of the window and could see that the train was now slowly edging along the platform. As the conductor pulled down the door window in preparation, he turned his head towards Charlie and wished him well on his journey. Charlie thanked the

conductor, just as he opened the door and stepped down onto the platform. Excitedly, he began to make his way along the platform, following the sea of other passengers who had also alighted from the train.

Making his way along the platform, then through the station concourse, he exited through the main station doors, the smell of the sea air hitting his nostrils. He stopped, closed his eyes, and took a deep breath.

"MMMMMMMM, that's the smell of adventure" he said out loud, forgetting for a moment where he was.

"The smell of adventure?" he heard someone say, and with a start, Charlie opened his eyes.

There in front of him stood a local cabby, leaning against the side of his shiny vehicle.

Charlie replied by saying he "knew" that it was, and went on to say that not only was today his birthday, but it was also the start of a great adventure.

"Well then don't let me hold you up any longer" replied the cabby, with a cheeky smirk, whom then went on to ask if he needed a lift anywhere. Charlie replied to the rather scruffy looking cabby driver that he didn't, but if he would be so kind to point him in the direction of the port. Thinking for a moment, as he was used to driving and not walking, he then proceeded to inform Charlie that he needed to cross over the road, turn right and walk about half a mile, turning left at the junction. Then follow the road for about another mile or so until he could not go any further.

Charlie thanked the cheerful cabby for his help and headed off in the direction he had been told, hearing the cabby's voice in the background touting for business.

Thrilled to be on his way, Charlie rushed along having to then stop and think what the cabby drivers directions were again. Before long, however, he was there, amazed at what his eyes saw. Standing at the port gates, lorries whizzing by, both entering and exiting the port, some with containers, or cargo, and some empty. Charlie remembered what his father had told him. That an avid adventurer, whether a seasoned traveller or first time novice, could always find passage on a cargo ship if he asked at the harbourmaster's office.

"So now I need to find where the harbourmaster's office was," he thought, and made his way through the side entrance of the main gate and into the port, being ever mindful of the traffic. He walked over to where he could see a small group of dock workers standing chatting, and as he approached them, they all seemed to turn in unison toward him.

"Are you lost young man? Not the type of place to be aimlessly wondering around," one of the group asked Charlie in a rather gravelly gruff tone, which his father had said was generally associated with the working environment of the docks.

Greeting the group, Charlie politely replied by saying that he was looking for the harbourmaster's office and could they help. This prompted another member of the group to step forward, signalling with his hand for the others

to stay back. This younger man, seeming to be friendlier than the others, asked again if it was the harbourmaster he was looking for. Charlie affirmed that was the case, to which the first dock worker suggested that he had better follow him as the docks could be a very hazardous place in more ways than one. As they walked away, he discretely gave a slight nod back at the group of workers left standing together, to which Charlie grinned back.

He followed the dock worker, trying to stay close-by as not to get in the way of any of the trucks or forklifts that were whizzing around in some sort of synchronised, choreographed dance. That thought made Charlie chuckled to himself, and he was unable to muffle the sound emerging. The dock worker, who momentarily lightened his own mood, asked Charlie what he was chuckling about.

Charlie explained that the trucks and forklifts looked more like a ballet, at which the dock worker looked at him with a bewildered look, but then realised that was actually the case and burst into laughter.

It was not long before the two of them had reached the office of the harbourmaster, the dock worker then knocking firmly on the door which was brown with dirt. They didn't have long to wait until a loud voice rang out telling them to enter. Once inside the office, the dock worker explained to his boss that Charlie was looking for him, but was not quite sure why, having himself forgotten that important question. The harbourmaster suggested that he had better show Charlie in then so he could find out.

The dock worker gestured for Charlie to enter the office and introduced him to the harbourmaster, who then swiftly turned, closing the office door behind him as he left.

"Wow," Charlie thought as he looked around at all the maps and charts lying around on desks or pinned to notice boards on the wall. The harbourmaster greeted Charlie and suggested he take a seat for a minute while he returned to the conversation that he was conducting over a hand held radio.

He sat patiently in the visitor's chair and couldn't help but notice all the dust and piles of seemingly unorderly paperwork that was lying around on various surfaces. This made him feel slightly unsettled as his compulsion for tidiness was starting to take a grip. Charlie became very fidgety where he sat, his right foot starting to twitch in order to settle his nerves.

Several minutes later, the harbourmaster swivelled around in his chair muttering under his breath that it was sorted, then asked Charlie how he could help him.

Charlie began to recount his story so far to the harbourmaster, telling him about his father, and once his story had finished, added that he was looking for passage on a cargo ship, and his father had told him to come and speak to the harbourmaster.

Having patiently listened to the story, the harbourmaster asked Charlie if he knew where he wanted to travel to. Charlie then replied that he was not sure but quickly remembered the scrap piece of paper with an address written on it that his father had given to him earlier in the day.

Charlie slipped off his backpack, unzipped the side pocket, and reached in to get out the paper, offering it to the harbourmaster who then took the scrap of paper from Charlie. Puzzled, the harbourmaster rose out of his seat and walked over to the map to take a look, commenting that he was not sure where that was.

He then glanced at the map for a short while before he jabbed his finger towards it. Then, with a hint of excitement in his voice, he announced to Charlie that he had in fact found the town of Villejacques. The harbourmaster explained that it was inland a little way, but there was a port not far away. He gestured for Charlie to come over so he could show him the location on the map. Leaving Charlie staring at the map for a moment, the harbourmaster then said that he would check to see if any captains were heading in that direction. Just as he reached the day's dispatch sheet, then adjusting his voice to sound a little more official, he turned and said he first needed to make sure Charlie had a current passport to be able to travel. Charlie responded by saying that he had, then patted the side of his backpack while thinking to himself that if it wasn't for his mom, he would have left it at home, and with a sense of relief he brandished a wry grin.

Charlie had been well prepared for his travels, as his mother had always taught him to be organised, he explained. At which point the harbourmaster commented by congratulating Charlie in a more relaxed manner, and said that he would now see if he was able to be of help. He then returned to his seat and started to look at the days dispatch sheet. Charlie heard all sorts of sounds coming from the direction of the harbourmaster until finally he declared that there was, in fact, a ship heading that way, but it would not be the first port of call but would take a few days. He then asked Charlie if he would like this, to which Charlie eagerly agreed, keen to get on his way. The harbourmaster, seeing Charlie's excitement, said he would speak with the captain and find out if he had a berth available.

After a short phone call to the ship, he turned back and informed him that the captain of the ship was more than happy to offer passage if he didn't mind mucking in.

Charlie thought for a moment and said that he would be more than happy to give a hand only to be told that, in fact, that particular captain said that to everyone but never meant it. The harbourmaster then confirmed that it was all sorted and handed him back the scrap piece of paper with the suggestion that he keep it safe. Charlie smiled as he took the paper from him and returned it to the safety of his backpack. The harbourmaster informed Charlie that it would take him a few minutes to collect together some necessary paperwork and suggested that he wait by the jeep that was parked just outside. He would then give him a lift to the ship and introduce him to the captain. Charlie thanked the harbourmaster and left the office, casually making his way over to the jeep that was parked just a few steps away. As Charlie stood patiently waiting for the harbourmaster to join him, his attention was drawn to a payphone on the wall of the office wall. Rummaging through his trouser pocket, hoping that he might find sufficient

loose change, enough just to call home anyway, just to let his parents know he had found passage on a ship. The call was brief, as he was interrupted by the arrival of the harbourmaster, but he let his parents know that he would call them again once he had arrived in Villejacques. The harbourmaster now standing beside his jeep, gestured for Charlie to end his call and jump into the passenger side.

Call finished, they both climbed into the jeep, the harbourmaster quickly having to rescue the documents, as Charlie climbed in, that he had just habitually deposited onto the passenger seat. Now seated in the jeep, Charlie thought it looked just as untidy as the office, with dirty seats, a dust covered dashboard, and a pile of crumpled up wrappers in the foot well. A turn of the key and the motor came to life, the harbourmaster now weaving in and out of all the other machinery. Several minutes later they arrived at the dock side of Pier 8. Charlie jumped out, glad to once again smell the fresh sea air. There was quite a strong odour coming from what Charlie thought must have been some rotten food maybe under a seat.

The harbourmaster gestured for Charlie to follow as he headed towards the gangway of the ship. Stopping at the bottom, he let Charlie know that the captain would join them in a moment. Charlie looked on at the long, thin railing that led to the ship. It looked rather old, rusty, and well worn... weathered by many years at sea, he thought. Before long, the captain appeared at the top of the gangway and slowly made his way down. When close enough, the harbourmaster introduced Charlie, who kindly thanked him for allowing him board his ship. The harbourmaster handed over the paperwork to the captain, saying that these needed urgent attention, who sighed at the sight of more forms. Before the harbourmaster turned to walk away, Charlie thanked him for his kindness, and with that he wished him a *bonne voyage* and left.

The captain then turned to Charlie and said that he had better follow him on board as they then made their way up the rusty looking gangway that led up to the opening of the ship. He looked back at the busy port one last time and smiled before he turned to follow the captain.

Chapter Two - Captain Macrina

Having now followed the captain through a maze of small narrow corridors, they eventually arrived at a row of doors. Stopping in front of one, Charlie soon realised these were doors to individual cabins. The sign on the wall that read "Passenger Cabins" in big black letters might have also given it away. The captain opened the door to cabin number four, stepped over the raised step and entered while Charlie followed behind.

"Here you go young fellow, you can stow your backpack here," the captain said in a slight haste. Gathering himself ready to leave, he quickly explained that the ship was due to leave port in less than a couple of hours, once all the cargo had been loaded and secured. The ship also must be ready to leave with the high tide for a safe exit. This being a whole new experience to Charlie, an excitement welled within him at the thought of seeing all this first hand. The captain walking backwards, dispatch papers at the forefront of his thoughts, bumped into the open door while attempting to finish his final words. Lastly, he suggested that Charlie make himself comfortable and come and find him on the bridge a little later.

As the captain rushed off, Charlie shouted a thank you for offering passage before turning around slowly to inspect his new home for the next couple of days. He was now very much aware of the weight on his shoulder, so he felt relief as he slipped off his backpack, placing it on the ordinary looking chair in the corner. His attention was caught by voices outside on the corridor, so he walked over and closed the cabin door.

Charlie took a deep breath in, sighed, and took a seat on the edge of the bunk. He had never been on a boat before, unless you were to count the time spent on a barge during one summer holiday when he was younger. So he was pleasantly surprised by the cabin. He was expecting something resembling a broom cupboard, but instead found himself sitting in what he thought was quite a spacious and almost luxurious room.

The cabin had its own bathroom and a comfy looking bed... a kettle with the usual teabag and sugar selection. There was a big couch along one wall, a coffee table, and a tall cupboard in the corner for hanging clothes. There was a lot of storage space under the bunk with several smaller individual lockers. Charlie giggled to himself as the thought struck him that he could even run around in circles, the cabin was that big. It certainly looked bigger than their guest room back home in Poxwold. But as the captain had pointed out that he was free to roam around the ship, he would not need to run around in circles in the cabin.

"I'm going to make the most of the time before the ship is ready to depart," Charlie thought to himself, and with that he decided it was time to begin his journal. He grabbed his backpack, unzipped the lower pocket on the right hand side where he'd put the journal earlier for safe keeping, removed it, then made his way over to the sofa now feeling more settled.

Opening the journal at the first page, pencil in hand, he began to write about his adventure so far.

It didn't take him long before he had filled two sides and excitedly looked down at his watch thinking, "It must be close to leaving," as he sprang up from the sofa to look out of the porthole. It was now getting close to sunset. The sky was beginning to change from the blue hue of the daytime sky, morphing into shades of burnt orange which reflected in the rippling water. Even though it was a busy working environment, with lots of cranes, trucks and noise, smells lingering in the air of fuel and grease and then there were those that he could just not recognise, and perhaps would prefer not to discover, he thought it was still a very magical place.

Gazing out of the porthole, Charlie was suddenly brought back with the sound of the ship's horn which reverberated throughout the vessel.

"We must be getting ready to depart," he suddenly realized, panicking slightly, not wanting to miss the ship leaving the dock. He replaced the journal into the safety of the pocket of the backpack. "Time to attempt to locate the captain on the bridge," he thought.

Opening the solid cabin door, the ship suddenly sounded more alive in his ears. He heard the distant sound of loud voices trying to be heard over the banging of what he assumed were the last few items of cargo being secured prior to departure. Charlie decided to try to re-trace his steps back to the gangway where he first boarded. He remembered seeing a large sign on the wall next to the main stairs showing the layout of the decks.

He arrived back at the stairs by the gangway entrance, which was now secured, and looked at the sign on the wall. Charlie, in amazement, was surprised at how many decks there actually were... certainly more than he had thought. Having scanned the sign out of curiosity, he found out that the bridge was on the top deck. His heart raced with enthusiasm as he began to climb the steep and narrow stairs, remembering to make a mental note as to which deck his cabin was on. "Note to self, Deck D," he muttered under his breath while making his way upwards.

While turning a corner on one flight of stairs, Charlie came face to face with one of the ship's crew.

"Who are you?" demanded a loud grumpy Italian voice.

As he looked up from staring at the belly, Charlie noticed a name badge which read "Federigo Romano - Chief Engineer."

"My name is Charlie. I'm a passenger, sir," he replied, trying to appease this man's tone. Looking up at the face of the crew member, he added that he was looking for the captain. The officer demanded to know just why he wanted to see the captain, adding that it's normally mid-cruise when that usually happens, asking whether he had a complaint already.

A little puzzled by that last statement, Charlie politely replied by informing the officer that he had been invited by the captain to join him on the bridge, that he had been offered passage for helping with duties on board.

With a look of relief on his face, the officer suggested that he hurry as they were preparing to leave and instructed him to keep going up until he ran out of stairs. He then finished by demanding that he now move out of his way as he had work to do and didn't have time to stand around chatting.

Charlie moved against the side rail as far as he could, and with that the officer brushed passed him and continued to descend the stairs. Before Charlie could thank him, he was gone.

After that he did hope that the rest of the crew were not as grumpy as that person was, otherwise it was going to be a long couple of days.

He then continued to climb the steep sets of stairs, and it wasn't long until finally he had reached the very last step. "Wow, thigh burn," Charlie thought as stood on the top deck looking along a short corridor with a door straight ahead. He noticed that there was no handle on this side, but a sign in large bold letters stating, "No Entry to Unauthorised Personnel." Now Charlie didn't know what to do, but being the cheeky chap that he was, he decided to knock anyway.

Charlie knocked on the door three times and waited. It was not long before he could hear footsteps getting louder, and suddenly, the door opened. There, standing before him was a smartly dressed female officer.

"Yes, what do you want? Can't you read the sign?" snapped the crew member.

"Sorry, mam", replied Charlie, "but the captain invited me to join him on the bridge."

She told Charlie to wait there, closing the door, disappearing back into the room. Charlie tried to catch a glimpse through the door before it closed and could just make out several crew members busily going about their duties.

Moments later, the door reopened, and this time it was the familiar face of the captain. "Charlie, my boy, welcome to the bridge of the Pierre Tristran," and with that the captain invited him in and formally introduced himself. "My boy, my name is Captain Macrina, and I've been looking after this beauty, as both man and boy, now for near on thirty years."

Charlie was now standing on the bridge, and the captain introduced him to the other crew members who were on duty. It wasn't long before he was explaining, in quite some detail, how the Pierre Tristran was classed as a freighter that, at its maximum, could carry about 4,500 containers and was 65,000 D.W.T.

"D.W.T, what does that mean?" Charlie asked the captain.

"Sorry, my boy," chortled the captain. "Without being too technical, it means Deadweight Tonnage. It's a measure of how much weight a ship is carrying or can safely carry while out at sea."

Just as the captain was about to continue his explanation, he was interrupted by the first officer who announced that the ship was ready to depart and that they were just waiting for the tugs. The captain acknowledged his first officer and turned back to Charlie, saying in an

almost excited tone, "Time to go to work! This is the second favourite part of my job, Charlie."

Looking a little bewildered, Charlie responded "The second, Captain, so what is the first?"

"The first, my boy, is when we arrive at our destination. That's my favourite part of my job." And with a broad smile, the captain then instructed Charlie to stand over to one side so he could watch out of the port side window.

It wasn't long before the tugs were in place and the heavy grease covered mooring lines were released from the dock cleats and hauled back on board the ship. The bridge had now come alive with activity as the tugs started to manoeuvre the ship away from the dockside. After about twenty minutes or so, the tugs had positioned the ship so that the engines could be started. After several heated exchanges between the captain and chief engineer over the internal intercom, the engines finally sprang into action. This allowed the tugs to release their ropes, and once at a safe distance the engines were increased and the ship juddered forward. As they took hold, the ship finally made its way slowly out of port.

The phone on the bridge rang and the captain answered. "Yes, permission to come aboard," he replied then promptly hung up.

Charlie wondered just who was coming on board, but before his mind could wonder through all the different possibilities, there was a knock at the door. The first officer opened the door tipping his hat as a sign of acknowledgement, and in walked a very official looking person. The captain looked over to Charlie and explained that this was the pilot. His role was to navigate the ship down the channel and out into open water.

Charlie was watching everything that was happening on the bridge, and it did not take the pilot long before he had masterfully steered the ship into open water and handed control back to the captain. Papers were signed, and with a quick handshake, he left the bridge and made his way back to the waiting pilot boat, which would take him back to port.

Elation and intrigue raced through every fibre of his being, thrilled to witness such an event. Taking a breath now to settle himself, he gazed out of the window... out across the open water, the coastline now beginning to fade into the distance and the sky darkening.

"Well, my boy, it will soon be time for dinner" explained the captain. "I suggest you return to your cabin and come and join me in the mess shortly. Tonight you can be my guest at the captain's table."

Charlie thanked the captain for his invitation and left the bridge. Making his way down the stairs, Charlie tried to remember which deck he needed to stop at. In all the excitement he had forgotten. Pondering for a moment he thought, "Yep, that's right, it was 4C." Wondering down the corridor, Charlie pushed open a rather heavy cabin door and saw something that no impressionable young man should ever see! In a panic he quickly shut the door, muttering a very nervous apology to the occupants of the room, then quickly remembered, "Oh no, it was 4D, not 4C!"

Hastily, he rushed down the corridor back to the stairs, climbed one more level, finally making his way back to his cabin. Before opening the door he double-checked the number, and with great relief the sign read... "4D."

He opened the heavy cabin door, the weight of which he had not appreciated until that moment. The first thing his eyes were drawn to was the bunk. Suddenly, he felt tired and realised that it had been a long day, and although elated with joy, his body needed rest. Closing the door behind him, he walked over to the bunk and lay down. As soon as his head touched the pillow, he was asleep. Exhaustion had gotten the better of him.

It was still dark outside when Charlie woke. Sitting bolt upright and feeling a little disorientated, he wondered just how long he had been asleep for.

He rubbed his eyes and looked up at the clock on the wall. It was after midnight already. Charlie had slept through dinner, and now he realised that he was feeling hungry as he hadn't eaten anything all day. Thank goodness his mother had sneakily packed some food in his backpack before he left. With a smile on his face at the anticipation of opening the parcel, Charlie leapt off the bunk and straight over to where he had left his backpack earlier that day. With great excitement, he opened the pocket and pulled out the little package.

Sitting down now on the sofa, Charlie placed the package on the table in front of him. His mouth was beginning to water at the thought of the taste sensation that lay ahead. It had been a while since he had tasted one of his mother's famous "travelling sandwiches." He began to peel back the ends of the neatly wrapped parcel, first the left side, then the right. He finished by opening the middle section to reveal something very special indeed.

To the uninitiated, the travelling sandwich looked just like any other sandwich, but to Charlie it had history... it had sentiment... it had a story. Looking at what lay before him on top of the grease-proof paper, Charlie decided it was time. Carefully he picked up the sandwich with both hands, lifting it slowly towards his mouth. He closed his eyes and bit a big chunk out of one corner. The explosion of flavours in Charlie's mouth were so intense, he let out a rather loud groan of sheer delight. Realising what he had just done, he wondered if anyone heard him and laughed within. He savoured that first mouthful... the marriage of the differing flavours.... To Charlie this was a little piece of heaven. Then once that first mouthful was finished, it did not take Charlie very long to finish the rest. The last mouthful always being the saddest to take, but what a new memory he now had.

Being late, his hunger now satisfied, he decided to go back to bed, not taking long to wash his face, clean his teeth, and crawl back into his comfy bunk. He wondered if the noise of the ship slicing through the water would allow him to fall back off to sleep but guessed he would soon find out. Removing his watch and setting the alarm, Charlie climbed into the bunk, pulled the crisp white sheets up to his neck, closed his eyes, and settled

down to sleep. Soon he could feel himself drifting, helped by the rhythmic drone of the ships engines and the gentle motion of the ship moving through the water.

Woken by his alarm, Charlie rubbed his eyes and was soon sitting up in bed, surprised as he normally woke before the loud beep sounded. "Well, I guess I didn't have to worry about the noise of the ship keeping me awake," he chuckled to himself. It was morning already, and the sun was streaming through the porthole. "No time to waste; there's a ship to explore!" Charlie stated out loud, and with that, Charlie sprang out of his bunk, straight into the bathroom.

Usual bathroom jobs taken care of, it did not take Charlie long before he was rummaging deeply into the main pocket of his backpack, looking for something suitable to wear. He neatly removed items of clothing until finding just the right thing... a cleaner version of exactly the same thing he wore the previous day. For, Charlie was not one for clothes based on the current trend but went more for practicality.

Dressed, bunk tidied, the wrapper on the table left from the midnight snack scrunched up and discarded into the waste-bin, Charlie left the cabin and headed back to the main stairs. Looking at the sign on the wall, the officer's mess was just two decks above. Charlie quickly turned towards the narrow stairwell, and without delay extended his stride to take two steps at once, arriving on Deck F in no time. Charlie now faced another sign on the opposite wall to the stairs, showing directions again to the mess.

A short brisk walk and he was standing outside the entrance. Charlie tried the handle, but found it to be locked. He realised that in all his excitement, he hadn't checked the time. Looking at his watch he realised he had another twenty-five minutes to wait until the mess would be open and breakfast served. Fidgeting on the spot after only a minute, he decided to have a walk around and hopefully not get into any trouble. After all how could he stand at a door for twenty-five minutes when there was a whole ship yet to explore?

He headed back to the stairs... then a decision to be made... up or down? As he couldn't decide, he thought he would flip a coin. Rummaging through his trouser pocket, he pulled out a coin and decided that heads would be up, tails would be down.

With a quick flick of his fingers, he sent the coin spinning skywards with a little too much excitement; the coin then hit one of the many pipes traversing the ceiling and ricocheted down the corridor. Charlie saw it disappear rapidly under the gap of one of the doors. Moments later, as Charlie tried to decide what to do, the door flew open and there stood the very grumpy looking "chest" that Charlie had bumped into the day before.

Before he could look up, he heard a grumpy harsh voice saying "You again. I assume this is yours," as the coin appeared in front of Charlie's face.

Charlie confirmed that it was indeed his, but before he could finish his explanation, the officer told him to choose heads or tails. Charlie was

informed that if he won, he would get it back, and if he lost... well he knew the answer to that he thought, as he stared into the face of the grimacing officer.

Without a moment of hesitation Charlie called, "Tails."

"Tails it is then," responded the officer, and with a quick flick it was up in the air, caught by one hand, with the other placed over the top. Removing the hand that was covering the coin, the officer's slight brazen grin turned upside down, as he realised he had thrown tails, noting the rather ugly portraiture of the king staring sternly back at him from the coin. Begrudgingly, he handed it back to Charlie, stepped back into his room, and slammed the door behind him. Standing there for a moment, Charlie looked at the coin in his hand and smiled knowingly at the image.

"Tails wins again," Charlie whispered, and turned the coin over... "every time," as the exact same image became visible on the reverse side of the coin. "Most people know about the double-headed coin, but not one with two tails," Charlie thought, letting out a cheeky snigger. The coin safely back into his pocket, he walked back in the direction of the officer's mess, taking his time to look at the various signs pointing towards several of the communal rooms. "Wow, this is so exciting," Charlie thought, smiling broadly as he arrived back at the mess.

By the time he had arrived back at the officers mess, he did not have to wait for too long before a member of the crew unlocked the door from inside then invited him in.

"You must be one of our passengers. Please come in and find a place to sit. I'll be with you in a moment," the crew member told Charlie, and with that disappeared through a revolving door into what Charlie assumed must be the galley. Having entered the mess, Charlie looked around the room. There were four tables which had been set up for breakfast and another long table against one of the walls. The air in the room was filled with the various aromas you would expect at breakfast: baked bread and croissants, eggs being fried, the smell of sweet smoked bacon being grilled, and all accompanied by the smell of freshly ground coffee.

Charlie was not in the room by himself for long as other people began to filter in and find a seat. Then Charlie saw the captain enter the room through the revolving door who, upon seeing Charlie, walked over.

"Good morning, Charlie. Did you sleep well?" the captain asked.

"Good morning, Captain. Yes, I did, though I think I was more tired than I realised," replied Charlie politely and proceeded to explain to the captain the events of the previous evening.

Breakfast was soon underway, and the room was busy with activity. Busboys dressed in grey jackets were rushing here and there, taking orders from the mix of officers and passengers that had now descended on the mess. Returning rather promptly with hot plates of cooked breakfasts, or bowls of steaming porridge out of the kitchen, as well as bringing out jugs of tea and coffee that were then placed in the middle of the tables before empty plates were cleared and taken back to the kitchen. It was all quite

hectic, yet efficient, Charlie realised, as breakfast was only served during very specific times due to the operation of the ship.

Breakfast now over, Charlie received an invitation from the captain to see the workings of the ship, which he eagerly accepted. Upon leaving the mess, they made their way to the bridge stopping every so often for a brief chat with a crew member or passenger. The captain's presence intrigued Charlie. Although seeming stern, he had a certain disposition about him that didn't seem to fit. First on the list of duties for the captain would be a hand-over briefing from the night watch. Once finished, they would be dismissed and a briefing for the day watch would be conducted.

Charlie's attention was caught by the sound of boots scuffing along the steel deck, and voices with different accents grew louder as the officers arrived on the bridge. With everyone now present, the meeting promptly commenced and was conducted in a very precise manner. Everyone present, apart from Charlie, knew their role... what to report and when to report it. The meeting was swift, with details of events that occurred during the night quickly discussed. The captain was informed of any important radio messages that had been received, before the meeting was concluded. As quickly as everyone had arrived, they were gone... going about the days duties. But not the night duty crew.... They were off to their bunks for a well earned sleep.

The next job on the captain's list was an inspection of the ship. He invited Charlie to continue on with him if he'd like. Charlie instantly accepted, explaining that it would be awesome to keep tagging along, anticipation raising the tone of his voice. Charlie was eager to see as much of the workings of the ship as he possibly could.

"Okay then, let's go!" the captain informed Charlie, smiling back at the enjoyment he saw in the young lad's eyes.

The captain was off like a greyhound out of the trap as Charlie tried to keep up. "Much to get done, and not much time to do it in," the captain explained.

"I've heard of a running commentary," Charlie chuckled to himself while simultaneously trying to not fall behind.

All the while as they made their way upstairs and through corridors, opening and closing large heavy bulky doors as they went, the captain was telling Charlie about his ship. He described the various operations in quite some detail. At times, it was difficult for Charlie to understand what the captain was saying. He noticed that in the captain's own enthusiasm, at times, he forgot to speak in English!

They were in and out of various rooms with quick exchanges of words between the captain and many of the crew members that they met along the way. Charlie had noticed the captain took time to speak to every member of his crew, often exchanging a random joke along the way. Sadly for Charlie, they were always in Italian. Charlie had to keep pinching himself to remember that this was not a dream. As he was on board a working cargo

ship and only days before this was sitting at home in the small cosy town of Poxwold.

After some time and having passed through the laundry room, they arrived at a big heavy looking door at the end of the corridor, located deep in the bowels of the ship. As they walked through the door on the side of the passage, it was like they had entered a whole new climate zone. They had entered... the engine room!

The door itself was intimidating with big notices that read; "Danger! High Noise Level. - Wear Ear Protection." "Caution! Wear Eye Protection." "When Alarm Sounds, Vacate at Once!" Once you opened the door, you were immediately overcome by the piercing whine of the engines. Thankfully, one of the engineers handed both the captain and Charlie a pair of ear phones each.

The captain, having to raise his voice over all the noise, went on to explain that the ship had six engines. Charlie leaned in uncovering one of his ears to hear what was being said. The forward three, which were 2,100 horse power each, were used to power the ship's motors. The rear three, which were much smaller the captain explained, ran the ship's services such as lights, computers, kitchen appliances, washing machines, air circulation, and also ran the ship's motors in an emergency. The captain was continuing to inform Charlie that not all the engines ran at once, however, as usually only one of the large engines would run at a time

The captain was so distracted explaining about the engine, he was momentarily unaware of the appearance of the chief engineer.

"Charlie, let me introduce you to the ship's Chief Engineer, Federigo Romano. We have sailed together since we were young lads starting out," the captain said, hand on his shoulder.

"How's she running?" the captain asked.

The response Charlie heard from the chief engineer led him to think all was not going well, even though he didn't fully understand the terms used.

Despite enjoying the experience, once they had finished their exchange, Charlie asked the captain whether they could leave the engine room, saying he was getting rather hot, which was made noticeable by the beads of sweat now forming on Charlie's brow, and dripping down his back, a sure sign it was time to leave. The captain grinned and took the ear phones off of Charlie, handing both pairs back to the engineer as they hastily exited the engine room.

Once out, Charlie asked if everything was okay as he thought the chief engineer did not look too pleased. The captain responded by saying he, too, was displeased as the engine had been giving them some trouble for a while, and the owner would not agree to have it looked at until the next dry dock date. But with a look of relief on his face, he explained that the ship was due for its five year overhaul very soon, and the engine would be looked at then. But until then, the chief engineer would remain somewhat tetchy because he continually had to patch it in order to keep it going. Charlie asked whether he was always that grumpy with people or was it just the

engine trouble. The captain went on to explain that the chief engineer was a little "old school" and thought that passengers had no place on board a cargo ship.

"That explains a lot," Charlie said, and he told the captain about the earlier incident with the coin.

Pulling the coin out of his pocket, Charlie showed the captain, first one side and then the other. The captain laughed, labelling Charlie a cheeky chappie, but insisted that Charlie keep that between the two of them, for the chief engineer would not see the funny side.

Once the two of them stopped laughing about the coin, they continued their journey again down the many corridors and passing many rooms entering just a few more.

Several hours had now passed, and they were again standing on the top deck which was the same level maybe as the captain's quarters. The captain stood outside his door, and explained that he must leave him now as he had paperwork to catch up on. Charlie happily thanked him for the tour and decided to return to his cabin for a while. The captain's parting words were to invite Charlie to join him for dinner later again but to try not to sleep through it this time. Parting company, there was laughter in the air from the captain's comment as he entered his quarters, now securing the door behind him.

What the captain hadn't mentioned was that he had to get back to his quarters to let out his pet Cockatiel, Bubbles, who travelled everywhere with him. While docked at a middle eastern port, having been delayed by a late arriving shipment, the captain took the opportunity to visit one of the local souqs. While passing one of the many street traders, his attention was drawn to a small bird cage buried beneath several others. The commotion that was coming from this cage prompted the captain to stop and inspect it. He knelt down and looked inside to see a small, grey and white ball of feathers cowering in the far corner in fear while being pecked by several larger birds.

Witnessing this dismal sight, the captain felt compelled to rescue this poor little creature and provide it a safe, loving home. He haggled for many minutes until finally a price was agreed that included a small cage. Hands were shaken, and the small bundle of quivering feathers was rescued.

The captain looked on as the trader reached in and grabbed the bird in his grubby han, before unceremoniously depositing it in the smaller cage. He handed it over to the captain who immediately headed back to his ship. Looking at the new member of his crew, he knew that this bird would require much love, care, and attention, and he was just the person for the task.

Bubbles loved to sit on the captain's shoulder while he was at his desk, often grabbing the attention of the captain with a gentle nibble, her way of asking for more scratches. That's if she wasn't sitting on the ledge of the closed porthole investigating what was going on in the world outside. She had been the captain's companion for so long now, he had even had a

mobile aviary made on ship, beautifully disguised as an old shipping container as to not incur too much attention.

Every so often he would let her out into the aviary, open up the sides, and the two of them would sit there for hours looking out over the sea. It was a little escape for the captain, and he cherished moments like these.

Once back in his cabin, Charlie reached for his journal inspired by the day's events so far, wanting to record all he'd observed and experienced. He mulled over what he had seen, the crew he had met, and his thoughts about life at sea. He remembered something the captain had said... that he preferred cargo over passengers since containers couldn't talk. Charlie found that quite amusing, although he had asked him to explain it further as it didn't seem to fit the side of his character Charlie had witnessed.

The captain responded by telling him about his much older brother who was also in the merchant navy but had opted for life on board passenger liners. It had been one day when they had both been in the same port on the same day. His brother had invited him to join him for lunch on board the passenger ship as he was already first officer and in line to be the next captain.

Well, during that lunch he had witnessed first-hand just how demanding being a captain of a passenger liner could be. Not from the ship or the crew, but because of the passengers. There were endless requests from passengers, complaining or asking for the captain's individual attention. That's when he knew that life on cargo ships was going to be the life for him.

Charlie then made an entry into the journal describing what the captain looked like. He had a rather round face with a neatly trimmed grey seafaring beard, and his face had been slightly weathered from all the years at sea. He was also a little on the short side with a rounder midsection to match his face.

Satisfied his journal entry was now complete, he returned it to its usual home and grabbed his favourite book. Wanting to enjoy the smell of the sea air, he made his way out of his cabin and headed towards the stairs. Walking down the corridor, he bumped into the Canadian couple Carla and Bernie Waters, also passengers on the ship, whom he had met earlier that morning at breakfast. They reminded him of his parents and home.

"Where are you off to young Charlie?" asked Carla.

Charlie replied by saying that he was heading on deck to look for a place to sit and read for a while. With a smile Carla replied, and leaning forward, she whispered into his ear that he was in luck as they had found the most lovely little spot the previous week.

Having received the directions and thanking Carla, he headed off, trying to remember just what she had said as it sounded a little confusing. But with luck on his side he managed to find the spot that Carla had suggested, and it was perfect he thought. It was out of the way, sheltered a little from the noise of the ship, but with breathtaking views reflected sunlight sparkling and dancing across the aqua blue sea.

“Perfect,” Charlie thought... and with that he found a cosy spot to sit. Leaning up against the wall, he opened his book and began to read.

The rest of the day passed without Charlie realising as he was so engrossed in his book and with occasional sleepy episodes of day dreaming mixed in.

The air starting to chill made Charlie realise he was now feeling the cold, his light shirt not providing much warmth. Then, looking up from his book, he saw the sun was already starting to set on the horizon.

“It must be almost dinner time... better not miss it this time,” he thought, musing to himself.

Closing his book, he walked over to the railing to take a last look at the beautiful sunset. There in the distance he could see a pod of dolphins skimming the water as the day turned seamlessly to night. He breathed in deeply the sea air, feeling the joy of beginning a new adventure. Moments later, he was making his way inside and back to his cabin, returning his book to the backpack. Looking up at the wall clock, he realised that it was in fact almost dinner time, so he rushed to freshen up before making his way to the officer’s mess.

By the time he arrived, it was already busy with every table almost full. As he entered the room, the captain spotted him and called him over to a saved seat at his table. Also seated there were Carla and Bernie, whom the captain formally introduced to Charlie, and explained that they were old friends who had been passengers on and off for many a year.

Dinner was a much more formal experience than the breakfast sitting had been, and it felt more like being in a fine restaurant than on board a ship, let alone a cargo ship. The evening waiter, well actually it was the same crew member from earlier who were just wearing a white waiter’s jacket this time, arrived to take the orders. Wine was then served and the conversation light and humorous. As the evening progressed, each new course was a new taste sensation to Charlie’s palate. It was only when the dessert arrived that Charlie’s enthusiasm increased even more as he was trying to discern what each flavour was that exploded inside his mouth. He tried to make a mental note for his journal entry later.

The final course was now cleared and coffee was then served. The waiters were very efficient, even “crumbing” down the table prior to coffee being served and as for the food... Charlie was surprised at just how good it had been.

The evening was drawing to a close, and the mess was starting to empty out with the crew heading back to continue their duties or returning to their cabins. The few passengers that were on board either stayed to chat further or took a little walk on deck before retiring for the night. For Charlie, well, he decided to do the latter, but firstly he thanked the captain, as he was about to leave the table, then Carla and Bernie for a lovely evening.

But before Charlie could leave the table and make his way out on deck, Bernie warmly grasped his hand and shook it firmly. He wanted to wish him well with his onward journey. While Charlie and Bernie were saying their

farewells, Carla reached into her purse and pulled out a 20 franc note. When Charlie had finished conversing with her husband, she took Charlie's other hand in hers. Pressing the 20 franc note into his hand, she said, "Here Charlie, make sure you have a warm meal once you arrive at your next destination."

Smiling warmly at Charlie, a tear welled up in her eye, for Charlie had reminded her of her own son and of when he had travelled out into the world to begin his own life's journey. Carla then said her goodbyes, and both she and her husband left the table.

Now alone at the table, Charlie decided it was time to head out on deck, to experience the ship at night. The crisp night sea air had made Charlie quit relaxed so he thought he would not stay out too long. But before retiring for the night, he walked over to the railing to look over the sea. The lights from the ship glistened over the rolling waves that were now lapping up the side of the vessel. It was much rougher sea's now with even the occasional spray of water hitting his face making him feel invigorated as the ship coursed ahead. Tomorrow, they were to arrive at the Port of Frausseilles, which is where Charlie would be leaving the ship. In the distance, he could faintly make out the coast and some lights. A voice from behind Charlie announced that it was the Port of Frausseilles off in the distance and that they were due in at about 5:00 am.

Turning around to thank the owner of the voice, Charlie was again face to chest with the chief engineer, as he was somewhat of a tall chap. "Maybe another reason for his grumpiness," Charlie thought, "as to move around the ship couldn't be easy."

"Thank you" Charlie replied, and turned back to watch for a moment longer.

With tiredness now taking hold of Charlie, he decided it was time to head back to his cabin to get some sleep. Thanking the chief engineer as he passed him for pointing out the landmark, he wished him a good evening. Turning, Charlie began to make his way back indoors with the words, "Good evening? What's good about it?" hanging in the air from a still grumpy chief engineer.

Being a little tired, he double then triple checked the cabin number on the door before entering, not wanting a repeat vision. Safely inside, he firmly closed the door behind him and decided to tidy up and repack his backpack now so there would be less to do in the morning. Through sleepy eyes he checked the room one last time, and when Charlie was satisfied that he had done as much as he could, it was time to sleep.

Getting ready for bed, Charlie again set the alarm on his watch as he was not going to miss the ship arriving in port. That done, he rested his head on the pillow and soon started drifting with the sound of the engines and the motion of the ship. As he drifted off to sleep, he realised he now understood why the engines were making that strange, yet rhythmic sound that helped him to relax into a deep sleep.

Chapter Three - Monsieur Luc

Charlie woke early, before his alarm even had the chance to sound. This time, a large shudder from the ship jolted him from a deep sleep into wakefulness. Suddenly, remembering they would be docking that morning, he sprang upright in bed, full of excitement and quickly rolled out of his bunk, legs hanging over the side. He grabbed his watch and disabled the alarm, chuckling as he did. "No need for that with faulty engines driving the ship," Charlie quietly chuckled to himself.

Surprisingly, although it was still only 3:00 am, he felt quite refreshed. So he went about his morning ritual of bathroom duties and was soon dressed for a new day. Being so early, the only thing Charlie could think to do now was tidy the bunk, straightening out the bottom sheet and quilt, and fluffing up the pillow. Next was to return all his remaining belongings into his backpack, making certain it was fastened securely before it was placed on top of the bunk, ready for departure.

A little time had passed from when he had woken to finishing the tidying of his temporary cabin. He looked down at his watch, noting the time was now nearly 4:00 am. Determined to not miss the arrival of the ship into port, he headed off, his legs seeming to lead the way before his body could catch up.

Charlie had only been on deck for a few minutes when he saw the pilot come aboard. It was quite the thrill seeing so many boats around and the whole hustle and bustle of a ship being steered through the narrow canal. He now began to understand just why Captain Macrina enjoyed this part of the voyage the most. First the pilot came on board, due to his expertise and knowledge regarding the currents and location of sandbanks that could catch the novice by surprise. It was his job to steer the ship safely into the inner port and finally position it along the dockside. Charlie watched with bated breath as the powerful tugs pushed and manoeuvred the Pierre Tristran into her berth, carefully avoiding all potential hazards. Soon, the ship was alongside the docks and being secured in place by the many large heavy and greasy mooring ropes.

After some time, the yelling officials and sounds faded away, and all that hung in the air were a few faint lingering voices that still commanded attention. The once palpable tension was greatly lessened now that the ship was securely moored in place. Charlie had also noticed the dimming groan of a disgruntled engine as the power was cut; all that now remained was the stench of marine fuel and oil leaking from the stern of the ship.

"What an amazing experience that has been," Charlie thought.

It would still be awhile before he would be allowed to disembark, so he decided to join the other passengers and officers for some breakfast before saying his farewells. Then the next phase of his journey would begin.

The officer's mess was already busy by the time Charlie arrived, but Carla had saved him a seat next to herself and Bernie; for, Carla was quite a motherly type, especially around Charlie it seemed.

He was going to miss the medley of aromas that constituted breakfast and hastily filled up on a selection of pastries followed by eggs benedict. This sent his thoughts homeward again as he was reminded that his mother always made this on Sunday mornings or on special occasions. He washed the meal down with a mug of freshly ground aromatic coffee. On this occasion, Charlie and the other passengers were offered something very special indeed.... On this particular morning, the captain had given the gallery some of his own special coffee. Charlie was especially entranced and keen to discover just where it had come from, making a mental note to ask the captain before he left the ship.

It wasn't long before breakfast had come to an end, and passengers and crew started to leave the mess. Charlie, Carla, and Bernie were the last remaining people at their table, as they were lingering a little while saying their farewells. Bernie passed Charlie a piece of paper, motioning to him to read the words, duly inviting Charlie to visit them in Canada one day, along with another piece of paper displaying their home address. Charlie was visibly moved by such a kind gesture and felt compelled to give both Carla and Bernie a hug before saying his goodbyes and wishing them a safe and happy time throughout the continuation of their journey.

Leaving the mess, he returned to his cabin, as he had to wait there until the Immigration Officer had been to check and stamp his passport. Charlie left the door open and sat on the sofa fidgeting as the minutes passed by. Even though it hadn't actually been that long, it felt like an eternity to an excited Charlie. He felt like he knew every mark, scratch, or tiny pinhole on the furniture and walls as he looked for something to occupy his mind while he waited.

Soon, Charlie heard a knock, and standing in the doorway was a very official looking gentleman... the immigration officer, who greeted Charlie and asked to see his passport. Being prepared, Charlie held out his passport to the official who by this time had entered the cabin and met him halfway across the room. He was quick to check his documents and asked the purpose for his visit, to which Charlie explained that he was on his way to the town of Villejacques.

"Ahh, Villejacques. I know that town very well as I have relatives there," explained the immigration officer.

Charlie noticed that he had now stopped looking at the passport in his hand and looked as though he had drifted off to a time of fond memories.

"Are you okay sir?" he asked apologetically.

The official smiled reassuringly and began to recount a fond memory of the first time that he visited a little patisserie shop in the town. He told Charlie of an almost magical experience he had encountered, tasting the most exquisite of pastries while there.

Pausing momentarily in thought, and lifting his gaze to meet Charlie's, he continued by saying, "It was owned by a gentleman whose first name was Montaine. I have longed to return, but sadly, with work commitments, I have not found the time. Maybe one day I will visit again. After all, I do have to visit the family, too, once in a while," stated the official with a slight grin.

Now returning his attention to his job, he stamped Charlie's passport and handed it back. Before leaving the cabin, he recommended that Charlie visit that little shop, if he could, before he turned and continued on his way.

Intrigued by the suggestion, Charlie returned his passport to the safety of the backpack and once more made certain that everything was fastened. He then slipped an arm through one of the straps and swung it onto his shoulder. "Yay," he quietly said out loud. "Now onto the next adventure." Leaving the cabin, he made his way to the gangway ready to disembark the ship. Standing there, looking a little anxious, was the captain who was waiting for the "all clear" from immigration before allowing passengers and crew to go ashore. It seemed that the captain also had a tradition where he bid farewell to every passenger that left his ship. There was also another reason for the captain's presence and that was to take delivery of his personal supply of roasted coffee beans, which came from a small supplier near his home town. Every few weeks he would request a fresh delivery and personally collect it from the dockside, securing it safely in his cabin.

The captain received the "all clear" over the radio and the gangway was opened. Like a shot, he was scurrying off down the gangway to greet his coffee delivery man who had been patiently waiting to hand over the valuable package... valuable not in monetary terms, although it was not cheap to courier this package, but valuable more in sentimental terms. Package signed for and safely in his hands, the captain was now free to bid farewell to the departing passengers from the end of the gangway.

Charlie looked up at the sun peering through the clouds every so often and realised it was now nearing mid morning. Keen to get on his way, backpack over his shoulder, he briskly made his way down the narrow metal gangway and towards the waiting captain.

"So, my young friend, it's been a pleasure to have you travel with us, even if for only a day or so. My crew commented on how inquisitive you have been and how eager you were to learn, and so I would like to offer you my contact details. If you ever wish to travel with us again, please do not hesitate to get in touch," the captain said to Charlie, with a warm hearted, seafaring smile.

"Thank you, Captain Macrina. I had a lovely time on your ship and will absolutely be in touch at some point," Charlie replied. He then continued to say that he'd had a thoroughly memorable time on board whilst firmly shaking the captain's hand.

Ready for the next adventure, Charlie merrily set off to locate the train station to make his way to Villejacques.

The Port of Frausseilles was not as busy as the last port that Charlie was in, but nevertheless, it was still impressive. "Perhaps it is just not a busy day for deliveries," he concluded.

Standing still for a brief moment, he could see that the dock workers were already busy off-loading cargo from the Pierre Tristran. Next would come the repositioning of the cargo that would remain on board before the final loading of new cargo bound for other destinations. Charlie watched and marvelled at the precision with which the machinery was navigated, each piece being operated seamlessly to get the job done. He thought he would love to find out more about the workings of a cargo ship one day, perhaps even spending more time on board one.

"Who knows just what the future holds," pondered Charlie, as he walked towards the port exit.

While standing at the exit looking for some indication as to which direction to take, the chief engineer walked past. Seeing Charlie's confusion, he sighed, then stopped to ask if he needed any help. In his gruff manner he let him know which streets to take, and then headed off, continuing on his way, his body language quite clearly conveying a message of, "Don't talk to me."

While watching the Chief Engineer walk away, Charlie came to the conclusion that he must always be in a grumpy mood. "Perhaps he was born grumpy," Charlie surmised. "Right, station it is," Charlie muttered to himself and set off in the direction that had been offered just moments ago.

The town of Frausseilles was a small market town... very picturesque, but a little behind the times when it came to its architecture Charlie observed, as he made his way through the streets. It was alive with locals going about their business, the one thing standing out above all else being the small food businesses he passed and the myriad of street cafes, all of which seemed full, even at that time of the day. This truly was a town that took its food culture very seriously, Charlie concluded.

Eventually, he arrived at the town's small train station and made his way through the grand entrance towards the ticket counter. While standing in the small queue, Charlie reached into his backpack and pulled out the piece of paper which his father had given him, and read the address. "12 Rue de Muniers, Villejacques, France." Charlie was none the wiser as to why his father had wanted him to visit this person and deliver the letter he had been entrusted with, but he thought, "What better way to start an adventure?"

After a short wait, a ticket window became free and Charlie was called over. Upon approaching the window, piece of paper in hand in case it was needed, he quickly asked the person behind the counter whether they spoke English. To Charlie's relief the reply came back, "Yes, young sir, I do."

Charlie smiled and promptly asked for a one-way ticket to Villejacques.

"Ahh, Villejacques," came the response. "Did you know that it is famous for its patisserie, and rumour has it that there are two very fine patisseries there," continued the staff member.

Charlie cheerfully replied, "I do very much enjoy pastries, and I will have to visit these two little shops if I can find them." With that, Charlie purchased a ticket, and the lady pointed him in the direction of the platform. Thanking her, he made his way to the platform, putting both the purchased ticket and piece of paper back into the side pocket of his backpack. Not needing to rush, as the train was not due to leave for at least another hour, he slowly made his way in the direction she had pointed listening to groups of gathered people. He admired the way the French accent flowed so eloquently to his hearing, the words seemly flowing together with such grace. The staff member had also explained to Charlie that, as this was the end of the line, the train would need to be cleaned and prepared for departure before any passengers would be permitted to board.

Once at the platform, he found an empty bench that he could sit on and placed his backpack on the ground next to him. He decided to continue writing in his journal, removing it from the safety of the side pocket. Charlie opened it to the last page of his previous entry and began to write. Not only did Charlie want this journal to be a memory of his travels, but he also wanted it to be a record of the many flavours and tastes he experienced along the way. The inscription inside left by his father, and the beautiful memories of cooking, had inspired him to follow his dreams. As one of these dreams was to learn more about fine pastries, he had decided it was important to keep a written record of these experiences as well.

Time passed quite quickly as he filled pages of his journal, until the train rattled into Frausseilles bringing Charlie back into the here and now. Smoothly and with some haste, passengers who had travelled to Frausseilles, alighted from the train and continued their onward journey. A small group of cleaners, the new driver, and conductor quickly boarded to make ready for a prompt turnaround. Time seemed to vanish as Charlie became mesmerised watching the efficient flow of the cleaning staff preparing the train for departure, so he was suddenly startled when an announcement came over the speaker that boarding was now possible. He sniggered to himself as he watched as some of the passengers suddenly sprang into action, grabbing their various belongings, whether they be a bag or several suitcases, and pushed to board the train. It seemed very chaotic to Charlie who assumed these people didn't want to be left without a seat for the journey ahead. Charlie, more relaxed, waited with the last few for the rush to ease, and glanced over his shoulder to reveal a small group of other passengers shaking their heads in dismay at the behaviour of some. Once the chaos had subsided, he grabbed his backpack, and putting one strap on his shoulder, made his way to one of the open carriage doors.

Charlie climbed the little step up into Carriage-D and shuffled down the aisle to see if there were any remaining seats all the while having to quickly jump to the side as there were still passengers barging past, scurrying to grab the few remaining seats. Charlie luckily found a place to stand in the carriage entrance by the opposite door, pulling down the window in

preparation to watch the world zoom past. "Ahh, peace," he sighed to himself.

Soon, all the passengers were on the train, and Charlie could hear the banging of carriage doors being closed along the length of the train. All suddenly went quiet... then a loud whistle, and the train jerked forward. Pulling out of the station, little could be seen of the passing scenery as being an old fashioned steam engine much of the view was masked by clouds of steam billowing from the straining locomotive engine.

Before long, Charlie felt the train stop struggling to get all the carriages moving and ease into a more fluid and smooth motion. He gazed out of the carriage window, the passing scenery soon changing from grey lifeless buildings to fields and meadows full of colour. Charlie thought the carriage was rather full, as he was not the only person standing in the entrance, which explained the earlier pushing for a place as he recalled the prior chaos.

Suddenly, a loud sound vibrated through the crowd as the conductor called for tickets as he moved throughout the carriage. To Charlie's surprise, he spoke in both French and English. As the conductor was now in close proximity, he reached around to get his ticket from the side pocket where he had placed it earlier for safe keeping. Fumbling, he grabbed what he thought was the ticket and pulled, only to realise that it was the first train ticket that he had purchased, along with an assortment of other important papers. To make matters worse, all of these papers now scattered in all directions, blown by the wind as it whistled in through the train window.

In sheer panic, Charlie quickly bent down to try and recover not only his current train ticket, which could be anywhere, but also to rescue the other pieces of important paper. Amongst them were the addresses of not only Carla and Bernie Waters, but also of Monsieur Luc. Charlie let out a short scream as he realised the dilemma he now faced. Frantically, he manoeuvred around his fellow passengers who were not only standing in the entrance way of the carriage but also those few passengers who were standing in the aisle itself. Charlie found himself having to crouch low and move around people, almost in a harmonised dance with the rocking motion of the train as his partner. Moving bodies and shuffling feet, all being repositioned to counteract the movement of the train, did not make Charlie's task any easier.

In his haste to recover the items lost from his backpack, Charlie could not help but to bump into a few of his fellow passengers. Most were unresponsive to his predicament, not bothering to be particularly helpful in aiding Charlie, with a few noticeable mutterings in French filling the air. Charlie thought it was probably a good thing that he wasn't able to understand what was being said, although the looks that they gave him said enough.

Finally, after scrabbling sufficiently to recover all but one of the items, Charlie was about to grab hold of the final, but elusive piece of paper, when

he was suddenly and abruptly stopped in his tracks by a big black boot. Looking up, Charlie was confronted by the rather stern looking face of the train's conductor, who demanded to know just what was going on, firstly in his native tongue and then in English.

"Now young man, just what are you doing causing all of this turmoil?" demanded the conductor.

"I'm sorry, sir. The draft from the window blew away my ticket and pieces of paper," Charlie answered, feeling rather unsettled in that moment, his voice slightly quivering.

Not yet satisfied, the conductor continued to question Charlie, standing over him in a rather intimidating manner, and demanding to know just who had opened the window in the first place.

Charlie was quick to admit that he had been the one to open the window, having been taught the importance of honesty, and well, he also knew the conductor had seen that it was Charlie that had caused the disturbance. In an abrupt fashion, he pointed furiously to the sign above the window, which clearly stated that the window should not be opened while the train was in motion. Admittedly, the sign was in French, but Charlie thought better than to point that out, choosing to apologize, not wanting to cause any further trouble. Finally, the conductor, now satisfied that he had made his point, asked Charlie to produce his ticket.

"Ticket, oh, no, my ticket," Charlie quivered, frozen with anxiety, his breathing hastening. In all the confusion and mayhem, he was not sure where his ticket was! Then, out of nowhere, a hand appeared through the sea of passengers.

"Is this what you are looking for?" a female voice asked. Charlie grabbed the ticket, for fear it may disappear a further time, and showed it to the conductor.

"You're lucky then," Charlie heard the conductor say, distracted as he was trying to see who the female voice belonged to. "Here, take your ticket back and read the signs in the future," the conductor said in a harsh tone, tapping Charlie on the shoulder.

Charlie turned to acknowledge the return of his now stamped ticket and apologised once again. "Very well," responded the conductor as he continued on to inspect the remaining passenger's tickets in the carriage.

That situation over and the carriage returning to normal after all the disarray, Charlie took a deep breath and calmed himself. Once settled, he again tried to discover just who the owner of the female voice was. Trying to look through the gaps between the standing passengers, Charlie suddenly heard the voice again.

"Are you looking for me?" said the voice.

"I'm not sure. Are you the owner of the talking hand?" Charlie chuckled.

"Excuse me!" came the response from the faceless voice.

Charlie was not quite sure how to reply and was still feeling a little nervy, so he quickly thanked the faceless voice for saving his ticket and returned to where he had first been standing by a now closed carriage window.

Again, quietly staring out of the window at the passing scenery, Charlie wondered just how much longer before the train would arrive at Villejacques. Looking at his watch, he realized it was already past lunch time. He giggled as his stomach rumbled loudly. "If only I had another of my mom's travelling sandwiches," he thought to himself.

Several stations had come and gone, and it seemed like more passengers were getting on than off, filling the train even more. "Now I know how sardines feel," whispered Charlie under his breath when suddenly another voice piped up in a very soft French accent

"Oh, yes, sardines, marinated in a little virgin olive oil with some finely chopped onion, shavings of fennel, crushed garlic, a bay leaf, and some chopped tomatoes for about an hour. Then removed from the marinade and lightly grilled, making the skin a little crispy, with just a hint of smokiness with the flesh moist and tender. Then you take the marinade and lightly sauté until the fennel is soft. Then you carefully spoon the fennel onto a warm plate, and finally add the sardines ... c'est magnifique."

Charlie's hunger had now grown exponentially, and his mouth watered at the description... but again he was not sure just who was speaking. The one thing for certain was that whomever had just spoken truly had a passion for food.

The train began to slow once more and several passengers were saying, "Excusez-moi," in French tones as they made their way through a wall of passengers towards the exits. As the train began to slow into the station, he was able to catch a glimpse of the sign on the platform which read "Villejacques."

"Finally," Charlie thought, for any further descriptions of food like the one he had just heard, and he was certain he would faint with hunger. As the train slowed and came to a halt, the carriage door flung open, and eager passengers clambered to disembark from of the train.

"After you," said the female voice that Charlie recognised and whom had rescued his train ticket, and himself, from a world of further embarrassment.

He smiled, but as he was raised to be a gentleman, he promptly responded, "Thank you, but please, you first," gesturing towards the open door. The female passenger thanked Charlie and made her way off the train, quickly followed by Charlie. He wondered whether she was local, and if so, knew the way to Rue de Muniers.

"Excuse me, madame," said Charlie, "but do you know the way to this street?" As Charlie, very carefully this time, pulled out the piece of paper with the address on it and showed it to the petit lady that stood before him.

"Ah, yes, I know that street, and more importantly, I know Monsieur Luc, too... a bit of a celebrity in this town," came the reply. With an air of eminence she then proceeded to explain to Charlie the best route to take.

Once she had finished with her directions, Charlie gratefully thanked her, then said, "My name is Charlie."

The female replied, "Bonjour, Charlie. My name is Claire," which left Charlie momentarily silent as he was captured by her soft, yet mildly clipped, French tone.

Charlie quickly gathering his words again, thanked Claire for her help earlier on the train, as well. They both had a little chortle over the sternness of the conductor. Claire then, quickly composing herself, brushed her shiny black hair neatly behind her ears, nodded, and was off.

Charlie headed in the direction that Claire had given him, turning from the concourse onto a small cobbled street. He felt instantly that he had stepped back in time as he gazed at the small old style shop fronts along the narrow street. The air was full of delicious smells, reminding him of his hunger. He couldn't help but to stop and look into the windows of most of the shops that he passed. It was now, he realized, that although the outside looked old worldly, the inside of most of the shops had beautiful modern architecture.

The other thing that became prevalent was most seemed to be selling some type of food. It seemed to Charlie that if they were not food outlets, then they were small bistros or cafes. The air was full of the most exquisite aromas, and there were so many Charlie couldn't pick them apart, deciding in the end to just take them in and savour the moment. It had quickly dawned on Charlie just how important food was in this region that he had travelled to. He was now getting more and more excited about his journey and wanted to explore the town further. Then, remembering the 20 franc note that Carla had kindly given him, he rushed into the next inviting bistro to stifle his still lingering hunger.

A quick bite to eat, and then on to the task his father had set him. He settled on a croque monsieur, a lightly toasted ham and cheese sandwich with cheese melting to perfection over the entire sandwich. What seemed like a simple snack was a taste sensation. Feeling now full and content, Charlie decided it was time to get back on route to deliver the letter entrusted to him. It was curious, Charlie thought, that in all these years his father had not once mentioned Monsieur Luc, or not that he could remember anyway. But he was so adamant that Charlie visit him first, before he travelled anywhere else. "The plot thickens," Charlie thought as he chuckled to himself.

All the thinking, combined with the most amazing smells, had distracted Charlie, and he had not realised that he had already turned on to Rue de Muniers.

"Now I wonder where number 12 is," Charlie thought. Looking up at the decorative number on the shop before him, he realised that he was not far from the letters final destination. Moments later, Charlie arrived outside number 12. Standing there for a moment, he examined the shop front. It had a large front window, a solid shop door, and a sign above which simply had two initials, "ML," written in white on a black background. Looking through the glass shop window left Charlie mesmerised by the delicacies that were elegantly displayed. Charlie pondered on whether they were even

edible as they looked so exquisite. Having gazed in awe for several minutes, Charlie decided to remove the letter from his backpack before entering the shop.

He placed his bag on the cobbled street momentarily in order to retrieve the letter, not wanting a repeat event as on the train. Then, swinging his backpack onto his shoulder, he firmly pushed open the solid door to the shop. Inside it was beautifully clean and very modern looking, which was quite a contrast to the building's exterior. Along the length of one wall was the display cabinet. This was made up of varying sized boxes, some large, some small, all stacked together.

Each box had been placed in such a way that in itself it looked like a piece of contemporary art. Each of the individual boxes then played host to an equally impressive patisserie creation. Turning around to face the serving counter, Charlie was presented with the longest chilled display case that he had ever seen. Inside were what looked like miniature pieces of modern art. Charlie stood there in total disbelief that something so beautiful could also be edible. He quickly skimmed over the descriptions neatly written on perfectly sculptured cards, describing each of the flavours within each work of art. Charlie was now salivating at the thought of biting into one and spent some moments trying to convince himself that he was not dreaming. "I should pinch myself," Charlie thought, just to make sure. "Maybe I should," Charlie mumbled.

"Should what?" came a reply as Charlie had obviously been thinking out loud again. Greeting the woman that was standing behind the counter, Charlie explained that he had never seen edible works of art such as these before and that he wanted to pinch himself to check that he was not dreaming.

"Let me help," replied the woman behind the counter, a wide smile spreading over her face as she leant across and pinched Charlie's arm quite firmly.

"Ouch," said Charlie as they both began to laugh. As the laughter abated, the woman confirmed that he was not, in fact, dreaming, and then asked how she could be of service.

"I have a letter that my father asked me to deliver to Monsieur Luc," Charlie replied. The woman suggested that Charlie wait there for a moment while she went to see if he was available.

Several minutes passed before the woman returned, followed closely by a gentleman whom Charlie assumed must be Monsieur Luc. He was quite tall and of slender build with just a hint of over indulgence in fine food. He had deep blue eyes and short, slightly wavy brown hair. He introduced himself as Monsieur Luc, a curious expression on his face as he enquired as to who Charlie was.

Charlie started to explain that his father, Terrence Warner, had asked him to deliver a letter. Monsieur Luc looked taken aback and went quiet for a moment, before asking, in a hesitant tone, to see the letter. Charlie passed

the letter to Monsieur Luc, who hurriedly walked back in the direction that he had first appeared.

Charlie stood bewildered for a moment, not quite sure whether he should stay or go. The woman who Charlie had first encountered was now also quiet as she stood there. Gone was the cheekiness and laughter, which was replaced by a look of sadness as if something very dear had been lost.

Charlie decided to walk around the shop once more, taking a mental note of all the flavour combinations. No, surely not; he wasn't ever going to leave! he thought to himself. Plus a pondering of growing curiosity within him as to the letters content.

Monsieur Luc reappeared after quite some time and asked Charlie to follow him, leading him beyond the busy shopfront to where they could speak in more private surroundings. They walked down a long corridor, one side brick with the occasional door, the other one long glass wall looking out upon the most amazing kitchen. Monsieur Luc and Charlie then walked through a small office door, where Charlie was offered a seat.

"So my boy, you must be very curious about this letter and the reason behind it. Well, let me explain a little. I knew your father many, many years ago and he has asked me to become your mentor. He has asked me to train you to become a patissier like myself. Normally my boy, I would not consider such a thing, as I no longer take on apprentices. However, I owe your father a great debt, and so after much thought and consideration, I will agree to take you on!"

Monsieur Luc then asked Charlie if this was something that he would like to do, and how he felt about this, as there must have been a look of confusion on his face. Charlie was in fact left speechless... mouth wide open and unable to utter a coherent word. It took several minutes for Charlie to regain his composure, closing his mouth and cautiously accepting the offer. Seeing the confusion, Monsieur Luc again asked Charlie if this was what he would like. Charlie was not sure how to respond as this had come as a huge surprise. Just moments earlier, he was wondering the beautifully cobbled streets with only a letter and many delightful smells guiding him. Now he sat before a master patissier, being offered an opportunity of a lifetime, but his mind filled with so many questions. What kind of debt could this man owe his father, and how did they know each other.

"Why don't you sleep on it my boy, and give me your answer in the morning?" Monsieur Luc warmly suggested. As they both stood, he reached out to shake Charlie's hand, saying that no matter what he decided it was a great honour to meet him. He continued on to explain that there was an empty flat on the top floor that Charlie could use that night while he contemplated his decision.

With a nod from Charlie, Monsieur Luc gestured for him to follow, both men still in a state of some what shock over just what had occurred. They made their way back down the corridor, stopping about halfway to walk through a door which led them to stairs, which they proceeded to climb. Four floors later found them standing at the doorway to the small flat.

Fumbling to find the correct key amongst many, he eventually came upon it, turning it within the lock and pushing open the door. Looking around, Monsieur Luc explained that the flat had not been used much lately and so was in need of a cleaning. He continued by telling Charlie that there were bed linens in the cupboard, plenty of hot water, and that the appliances in the small kitchenette should work just fine.

Monsieur Luc paused to study Charlie, commenting thoughtfully on how amazed he was at the resemblance he bore to his father at his age. Feeling overwhelmed by the events of the past hour, he departed for the evening, handing Charlie some keys... one for the flat door and a second for the shops side entrance, suggesting Charlie get a good night's rest and that when his decision was made, he could speak with him in the morning.

Before Charlie could say thank you to Monsieur Luc, he swiftly left the flat and closed the door behind him, leaving Charlie a little bewildered standing there alone. After collecting his thoughts for a moment, Charlie decided to waste no more time and to make himself at home. He looked around and realised that Monsieur Luc had not been joking when he said that the flat did require some cleaning. Charlie thought this would at least keep him occupied for the rest of the evening and set about the task in hand. Perhaps it would even give him time to think about the events of the day and to come to a decision.

He found the distraction of cleaning cleared his mind and invigorated him. Charlie cleaned everything that evening, nothing was left untouched, and by the time he had finished, he thought Monsieur Luc would not recognise the place. It was now late in the evening and in Charlie's excitement (yes, Charlie did find cleaning exciting), he had forgotten to eat! Not speaking French, he thought it best to stay indoors, but he was feeling a little peckish. Being the slightly cheeky chappy that he was, he decided to sneak downstairs to the kitchen as he was certain everyone had left for the evening. Quietly making his way down the wooden stairs, he arrived in the darkened kitchen. There was just a hint of a light coming from the office, which was just enough light for Charlie to see his way around. He paused for a moment, trying to listen for any noise and was convinced that he was all alone. He walked over to the fridges, opened the door just enough, and peeked in hoping to find something to eat. It was several fridges later when he finally found some pastries. He reached in and picked out two different cakes that he hoped would not be missed. Quickly, he closed the fridge door behind him, turned, then bumped into one of the many storage racks, knocking lose something that fell to the ground. Charlie held his breath as it hit the floor, making a small sound. He heard a voice mutter something in French, coming from the direction of the office, and as he froze, the door was flung open and Monsieur Luc made an appearance. "Is everything okay, my boy?" he enquired, as a nervous Charlie held out his hand to reveal the evidence. Quickly, Charlie explained that he was hungry and not being able to speak any French, was left with little choice. He was extremely apologetic, which was met by a broad smile from Monsieur Luc. He

reassured Charlie that it was okay on this occasion, but not to make it a habit. He himself then apologised to Charlie for not realising this in the first place and making sure he had at least some food to eat. They agreed to keep this to themselves and both smiled back to each other. Monsieur Luc then suggested to Charlie that he might like to phone home to let his parents know that he was safe. He offered Charlie the use of the office phone, declaring that he had better head off home or he would be in trouble himself. Before leaving, as Charlie could not speak any French, Monsieur Luc placed the call for him as international calls had to go through the telephone exchange. Call placed, he handed the receiver to Charlie and bid him a good night, asking him to make sure that all the lights were turned off when he had finished.

Charlie spoke briefly to his mother, as his father was already sleeping, and reassured her that he was just fine. He chatted for a while, explaining about his journey so far and how kind Monsieur Luc had been. His mother soon suggested that he go and rest as he had a decision to make by the morning, and a clear head was required for moments like those. They said their farewells, and the call was ended. Charlie sat there for a few moments, thinking about his parents, how loving and supportive they were, yet never stopped him or interfered, always allowing him to find his own way. His moment of reflection was interrupted by sounds coming from the direction of his belly. He picked up the cakes, made certain that the lights were all turned off, and returned to the small flat at the top of the shop.

Back in the flat, he quickly settled his peckishness, bought his journal up to date, set the alarm on his watch, then to bed to sleep on the dilemma that lay before him... which is exactly what he did!

About The Author



Julian is a former classically trained chef, catering manager and cheesecakeologist, which included a short detour into the world of Chinese Acupuncture and is the author of this series of journals. These journals tell the story of Charlie and his adventures into the world of the Pâtissier and although these journals are a work of fiction, there are many parts that are taken from the author's own personal experiences within the catering industry.

Julian became a cheesecakeologist when an ardour for baking and a passion for desserts, lead him to the wonderful world of the cheesecake, in all its forms. Eventually ending with the creation of an artisan cheesecake company. The dream for the author was to redefine this classic dessert and transform it into something new, which remains still very much the case to this day.

When not in the kitchen causing mayhem experimenting with various flavour combinations, or conducting further research and pushing the cheesecake envelope, you can find Julian sitting in a boutique coffee shop. This is where he will be soaking in the atmosphere, people watching, a favourite pastime, while planning out and scribbling down notes for the next chapter of Charlies Journal. Or perhaps he'll be working on charlie's recipe book, while not over doing the coffee intake.

And finally when not spending quality time with loved ones, you can find the author indulging in his other passion, a love of flying, well flying a desktop flight simulator any.

Julian Corbett

One Last Thing

Thank you for taking the time to read the first installment of Charlie's Journal and my wish is that you enjoyed the journey so far. But were you, the reader left with some unanswered questions, so as

How did Charlie and Claire end up together ?

Just what was in the Letter that Charlie was asked to deliver ?

What were the five desserts that Fleurette taught Charlie how to make ?

The answers to these questions and many more can be found at the following website:

<http://www.charliesjournal.com>

By visiting the website often, you the reader, will discover more information about many of the characters that Charlie met along the way. There will be news, short-stories and snippets from the other journals before they are officially launched.

There will be recipe corner where Charlie will reveal many recipes and components that made up many of his cheesecake creations, as well as some useful tips to get the best results possible.

If you enjoyed this book I'd be very grateful if you'd post a short review. Your support really does make a difference and I read all the reviews personally so I can get your feedback and make these journals even better.

Thanks again for your support!