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Opening extract from

Second Term at L'Etoile

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L'Etoile, Sweet L'Etoile



'Mollly!' Maria shouted to her sister. 'Would you please shut that window – it's like an iceberg in here.'

Reluctantly, Molly tumbled backwards onto her bed, slamming the window shut as she fell.

'Where on earth can she be?' Molly groaned. 'I can't believe it's been nearly a whole month since we've seen our lovely Pippa. Barbados was *amazebells* and all that, but a bit last minute and I would far rather have had some fun at home with her.'

'Don't be so ungrateful, Moll,' Maria snapped. 'Do you know how many girls dream of having a holiday like the one we've just had?'

'I know, I know – I just miss her, that's all. Plus, I can't wait to give her her Christmas present.' Molly undid the bow on the little red box for about the tenth time since they'd arrived back at L'Etoile that morning, to admire the little gold star necklace engraved with a 'P'. 'She's going to absolutely love it!'

'I have to agree there, Moll. Mum really does have the best taste ever and the fact that all three of us have one, the same little L'Etoile star – each with our initial on – makes it all the more special.'

'I know! M, M and P. BFFs! It was such a shame Pips couldn't come and stay with us over Christmas but, like Mum said, hopefully this necklace will make up for us doing a disappearing act for the whole break.'

'Yo! Anyone ho-ome?' came an excited voice from the corridor. All at once, the door burst open and Pippa appeared, loaded with bags and sporting her best attempt at a posh 'hair up' do to impress Miss Molly.

'Pips!' Molly shrieked, launching herself at Pippa, knocking her backwards into the corridor. 'And you've done your hair! Very sophisticated.'

'What a welcome,' Pippa giggled, delighted her efforts hadn't gone unnoticed. 'Oh, girls. I've missed you so much! Can't wait to hear all your news.'

'What took you so long?' asked Molly. 'It's typical. I've been watching for you out of the window for the last hour – and then the second my back is turned, you show up!'

'It's like I told you, Molly – what is that saying about a watched pot never boiling?' said Maria with a grin.

Pippa and Molly both gave her their very best 'put-a-sock-in-it' look.

'So come on then, tell me . . . what's the goss?' Pippa asked, as she dragged her case onto the bed and started to unpack.

'I don't know where to begin,' Maria answered. 'Have you been keeping up with the *Yours, L'Etoilette* blog while we've been on hols?'

'Yes. I loved all your backstage blogs about the Christmas gala, but all of that was mainly school stuff – what's new with you two? I want to hear about all the latest Fitzfoster twin shenanigans since we said goodbye,' said Pippa.

'Ha! OK. But first things first – is it present time, Mimi?' Molly asked Maria desperately.

'I can't believe you've waited this long!' Maria said and then turned to Pippa. 'It's just a little something from Mum . . . erm . . . and us, to say happy Christmas and so sorry you couldn't come and stay with us. Mum

felt so guilty for having to cancel our sleepover, she bought us all matching presents!'

Molly dragged Pippa over to sit on her bed and handed her the little red box with the bow, now frayed and untidy from too much tying and untying. 'Mum said it's so we can always feel close to one another, even when we are apart.'

Pippa was intrigued. 'Oh, but I haven't bought you girls anything. You shouldn't have . . .' Pippa was speechless when she saw the beautiful gold star necklace glittering up at her, with the letter 'P' inscribed in the centre. 'Oh my goodness, I love it!' she exclaimed. 'I don't think I've ever had anything so gorgeous! Thank you soooo much, girls. Quick, Molly, will you put it on for me?'

Molly was on cloud nine. In some way, getting the right gift for someone who loved it was far more fun than receiving one.

'Look, Pips – we all match now.' The twins held out their stars, both inscribed with the letter 'M', for her to see.

'I just don't know what to say. Really, thanks a million, girls. This means the world to me,' Pippa said, clutching it tightly.

'And I have a little something for you too, Pips,'

Maria said, handing over a silver DVD. 'I would have posted it to you over Christmas but didn't get a chance to download it before we went away.'

'What is it?' Pippa asked.

'It's a recording of your performance at the Christmas gala . . . so you can show your mum and Uncle Harry. Maybe it'll go some way to make up for them not being there for your big moment.'

'You're kidding me! I can't believe it. Is there anything you girlies haven't thought of?' Pippa said, turning the disc over and over in her hands. She couldn't wait to show her family – and to watch it back herself. 'Ooooh, I love you girls! What a welcome! Right, now it's my turn,' she said, rummaging around in her music bag.

'What have you lost?' Molly asked, excitedly.

'Ah ha! Here it is. Actually, this can be my Christmas present to you two,' Pippa said, sliding a CD into the player. 'While you were sunning yourselves in the Caribbean, I spent pretty much every day of the holidays in the studio with Uncle Harry, working on some new songs. And here's one I wrote for you both. It's called "Friends Forever".' She pressed play and the song burst out of the speakers.

Ooooh . . . just little old me,
Ooooh . . . then we were three.

I can't explain the feeling,
The one that leaves me reeling.

I never thought that friends could be
A second kind of family,

Ooooh . . . this ain't no short-term endeavour
Oooooh . . . you know we're friends forever . . .

The L'Etoilette trio sat bobbing their heads to the beat, grinning from ear to ear as the track continued to play.

'It's BRILLIANT!' exclaimed Maria and Molly in unison as it finished.

'I just don't know how you do it. And I love the lyrics . . .' Molly began singing at the top of her voice:

Ooooh . . . just little old me,
Ooooh . . . then we were three.

'Well, if you've picked it up that quickly – at least we know it's catchy,' Pippa beamed, loving

the twins' response to all her hard work.

Knock, knock.

'Who is it?' Maria called out.

A voice boomed through the door, making them jump. 'L'ETOILETTES, WOULD YOU PLEASE KEEP THE NOISE DOWN!'

Who on earth was that? All of a sudden, Sally Sudbury thrust open the bedroom door, which hit the wall with a crash.

'SALLY!' Molly cried with delight. 'Sally, Sally – so good to see you. You look great. I love your boots – so this season! How are you?'

'Really, Molly? Thanks!' Sally said as she hugged the girls, delighted her Christmas-present footwear was a hit with the queen of fashion. 'I'm good, thanks . . . really good, as a matter of fact. Guess what?' she almost burst with excitement, 'Lucifette's not coming back to L'Etoile this term!'

'WHAT?' Maria, Molly and Pippa gasped with glee.

'Now *that* is what I call a Christmas present!' Maria joked.

'Oh, Sally – that's wonderful news. Quick – grab a fairy cake,' Molly pointed to a box of half-eaten homemade cakes on the bed. 'And tell us everything!'

Sally sat down and took a deep breath. 'You should have seen her after the gala. Boy, was I ever in the wrong place at the wrong time. Stupidly, I stayed backstage after I'd done my poem because I wanted to witness her get busted – but I didn't think far enough ahead to realise I would be the first person she'd run into as she came off stage! Honestly, she was in that much of a rage, I thought she was going to knock me out!'

'Oh, Sally, you poor thing. But by the way, your poem was simply wonderful. I didn't get a chance to say after the show. You're so clever,' Pippa said, and then realised she was changing the subject too soon. 'Sorry – do carry on – then what happened?'

'Oh, thanks so much! I'd quite forgotten that went so well with everything that's happened since,' Sally said. 'Anyway, as you can imagine, she was furious and mortified about being caught out like that in front of everyone. She was ranting and raving at such a pitch all the way to the car, I couldn't even understand what she was saying. I thought she was going to bust a vocal chord!'

'Hoped she would, you mean,' chuckled Maria.

'No such luck. It wasn't a pretty sight. As you know we didn't even go back to the dorm to get our bags. Miss Coates had to pack them and give them to the courier

the next day. Mr and Mrs Marciano wouldn't hear of us going back to Garland. They couldn't bear the humiliation of having to see anyone after the show – for Lucifette – or themselves! So we were whisked straight off to London. From what I gather, the Marcianos sent a fairly large cheque for the L'Etoile Founder's Fund – to try and smooth over the embarrassment.'

'Well, they do say money talks,' said Pippa.

'Yes and Lucifette's walked!' said Maria, excitedly. 'So, is she gone for good, Sal? And, more to the point, how did you manage to get them to let you come back to L'Etoile by yourself? I should have thought Lucifette would have needed to bully you more than ever after what happened.'

'Well, that's the funniest part!' Sally said. 'That family is so arrogant, Mrs Marciano actually said as part of my punishment – for not somehow preventing the situation – I was to come back to L'Etoile on my own rather than having the honour of being by her daughter's side!'

'How lucky is that!? You're going to have the time of your life this term, Sally. You'll feel free for the first time in years I should think,' Molly said. 'And judging by the fact you're still breathing, I'm guessing they don't know you helped expose Lucifette then?'

'Oh, don't. In actual fact, for a minute I thought she might have realised that I was the only other person who knew the whole story to betray her. But luckily she thinks I'm too stupid to think for myself. She's put the whole thing down to Pippa chickening out of the fake Universal Music audition.'

'Oh, great!' said Pippa. 'So I am public enemy *numero uno*. Just tell me she's not coming back – ever!'

'Sadly, we're not that lucky. She managed to talk the Marcianos into letting her spend a term at a special acting school in LA. She's aiming to be back next term so she can sit the end-of-year exams and pass with flying colours.'

'Well, that's something to look forward to then,' said Maria sarcastically.

'What? Lucifette coming back – or end-of-year exams?' groaned Molly. 'Just listen to us!' she continued. 'Let's focus on the positives and be happy for now that we've got a whole term without her. Think how deliciously uneventful it's going to be.'



But as we know, Story-seeker, those are famous last words. Life is never quite what you expect it to be!

