

Les Petits Oiseaux Chantent en Français

***The Little Birds Sing in
French***

An American's Lyrical Remembrance
Of French Country Life

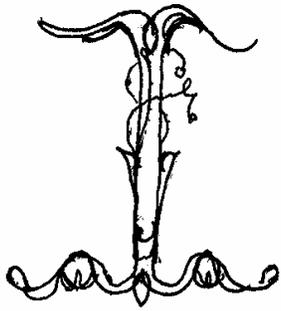
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(SAMPLE CHAPTER FROM THE BOOK)

Chapter 1: Why France

"Lavender's blue and Rosemary's green
When I am King you shall be Queen..."(2)



I was born with the surname 'Bandelier' and a rich French history was the tree branch connecting me to my French *Huguenot* ancestors. Having come into this world holding an artist's paint brush in one hand and a bouquet of flowers entwined with blue grasses in the other my passion for smelling and trying to capture scents in picture form onto paper came to me quite naturally. The medium of watercolour painting had been introduced to me while living in my child's garden years (kindergarten) and this tool gave back to me a curiosity; puddles of colour melded in jewel-like demeanor whenever the droplets of water were filled with paint and swished across the paper's surface with forms depicting imagery of France found only in my imagination.

The fairytales read to me by my mother spoke of other worlds, with pathways which seemed to always light a spark of wonder. To my heart's content, a *coeur joie*, I would play. The France of my imaginings became like the beautiful garden in the Bible, only with windows opening in, framed in lace curtains that would flutter like butterfly wings. I was entranced over the story of The Secret Garden and envisioned an ornate key hanging on a garden wall, next to the hidden garden gate; the earth would blush a rouge colour inside, a thing of mystery...wild, wet places, picture book scenes, tinted shades of blue, turquoise, purples...with threads of gold

and silver streaked across the skies. A powerful, brooding sense of enchantment hung in the air, surrounding me with pure joy and delight in this strange, yet familiar land. This was my beloved France, in my awake dreams and nocturnal musings. Those cherished moments of fleeting childhood years I remembered playing beneath the spring and summer skies entwined with perfumed breezes amidst the rain and sunshine of America's mid-west. Deep were my longings to experience the beautiful world that stretched beyond my backyard picket fence, just beyond my grasp.

"Perfume and Incense Brings Joy to the Heart..."(3)
Therein the words ornately scrolled were written, dipped in gold ink, poured out onto paper stained a rich blue hue, and framed in an antique frame of gilt silver. A haunting fragrance filled the air. Veil-like wisps of fleeting netting stirred in me as I lay sleeping. Aroused, sitting straight up in bed I peered through a glimmer of light, caught in the moment between the night's passing dream-world and daybreak's ethereal visions. Wild-eyed looking around the spacious room I remembered where I was suppose to be. Having been journeying with my grandparents we had arrived late in the evening the night before to my great-grandmother Alice's house. This was the very place that my grandfather had been born back in 1901. Something about the room where I had slept seemed strangely familiar as the early morning light toyed with my imagination, casting blue-grey colour onto very old treasures that began to undulate in sinuous manner. A flowing movement of invisible force had breathed life and animation into those objects in the room. A chest of drawers was standing against a wallpapered wall opposite my bed with a painting depicting those richly decorated letters I read. The frame was old and exquisitely time-worn and was suspended by a thick twisted cord; the

entire piece was surrounded with photographs of family portraits set in frames ranging from petite to grand all clustered together in a grouping.

An aroma of sweet innocent delight filled the room of that old house, stirring memories I had yet to live.

At the age of thirteen thinking phantastes was a childish endeavor reserved only for children I pushed the fairytale world far from me and began frowning more than smiling (hoping two creases would appear between my eyebrows causing me to look older and be taken more seriously, not as a mere child.) Further proof was needed to show how grown-up I was becoming and so my dolls were shut away in the attic and forgotten. Sharing a bedroom with my sister, I drew an imaginary line down the *centre* of that modern-world space and there-by delegated her dolls to the smallest of area. The room held a double bed, end table and chest of drawers with attached mirror, the wooden furniture pieces painted white and trimmed in gold.

As a young woman in my mid-twenties a French child was I still, in my heart of hearts. A disconcerting distraction pelted my inmost being shattering dreams and displacing my life with emptiness and guilt. Listening to flattering tongues and deceiving words singing beguiling tunes all of myself was captured and lured away from those I loved and held most dear. A captive in a world where hopelessness reigned, even the sweetest tastes became bitter in my mouth. A putrid stench belched out haughtingly with a clanging laughter filled with ridicule and contempt pecking at my inner ear until the piercing had become more than I could endure, thereby flinging me into the depths of helplessness. A taunting voice boasted how everything was lost to me forever.

Melancholia subdued me. My spirit was starving and my wretched heart ached with pain.

Time ticked on. I was lost to the Boulevard of Lights, a wanderlust traveler groveling in a pit of darkness I found not to be light at all. Obstacles loomed larger than life and I felt so alone and afraid groping along in stark bleakness with a black cloud dense as pitch, cloying and stiffling, hanging over me. Something or someone was choking me and I could hardly catch my breath. Then a wonderous event happened that changed the complexion of the story. I listened and heard a Voice. Lady Wisdom had found me and then I saw it; in the clearing an arc that was suspended across my path. A dull, silver pewter-like bridge (*pont* in French) glimmering, stretched out across the passage-way ahead of me. A signpost built of stones with an iron arrow afixed to the top pointed straight ahead. Although I could not see beyond the bridge I became filled with courage and took one step then another, and another. The transition happened as I held onto Wisdom's Fragrant Hand, and she led me into a world I thought I had to leave behind, as I grew into the body of the young woman I had become. A different song began to play in my heart...and the notes became a kind of musical modulation, with connection, coherence, and continuity. I heard myself humming and found my satin slippers beginning dancing again!