

Christine and Mr. Eiffel's Tower

A late spring breeze ruffled Christine Daaé's hair as she gazed up at the Apollo's Lyre statue. She and her best friend, Erik Carrière-Destler, were on Palais Garnier's rooftop. Night was just beginning to fall over Paris.

"Do you see it?" Erik asked.

"Huh?" Christine asked, her gaze slightly lowering to look at her tall companion.

Erik pointed to the world beyond the opera house. "Out there."

Christine walked along the rooftop's huge zinc tiles. She and Erik sat on one in the middle as she

looked past the hundreds of Haussmann buildings. Because she was nearsighted, she had to squint to see anything past them.

It's times like this where I wish I had glasses! she thought.

"Oh, there it is!" she suddenly exclaimed.

Erik held up a pair of golden brass and pearl binoculars. He followed her finger.

"Yep. There it is," he confirmed. "*La Madeleine.*" Christine frowned. "Wait, what?"

"You know, the church named after my mother." Christine gave him a playful look.

"*Alright,*" Erik said through a sigh. "I know it's not named after her and I know you're not talking about the building that's nowhere near where you're pointing. But you have to admit, the green roof makes it recognizable," He looked through

the binoculars again. “Oh, now *there's* a recognizable sight! *La Tour Eiffel*. I can't believe it's *finally* finished.”

“It's been finished since March,” Christine reminded him. “Remember when we heard that loud boom outside?”

“And I panicked because I thought it was a gunshot, but it was just fireworks. O- Only the press was allowed inside that day. They had to take the stairs of doom... which took over an hour! And I thought the many stairs leading to the water cellar was rough!” Erik adjusted the focus on the binoculars. “How can stairs fit in there?”

“Maybe if you gave me the binoculars, I'd be able to tell! You should have brought another pair.”

“I only had enough time to steal one,” Erik handed the binoculars to Christine. “One that belongs to

you.”

“Thank you.” Christine said with a smile.

She raised the binoculars to her eyes. Now she could see the Eiffel Tower clearly. The dark red metal structure stood tall- *very* tall- amongst the Haussmann buildings.

I can only imagine how the tower must look in person! she thought in amazement.

“When we made our first trips up here, only the legs and the triangle were done.” Erik recalled.

“The triangle? I don’t see one.”

“Isn’t that space below the pole a triangle?”

“It doesn’t end at a tip.”

“*Alright*, it’s a squared off triangle.”

Christine chuckled. "It's very unique, that's for sure. I hope we'll get to see it soon."

Christine and Mr. Eiffel's Tower

It was May sixth, the first day of the Exposition Universelle. France was hosting the World's Fair this year in honor of the Revolution's centennial. The Eiffel Tower, which was now the tallest building in the world, was the exposition's main attraction.

"Can you imagine how big the crowds were today?" Erik shivered. "No thanks! I'll wait until long after the Exposition is over. Maybe... a hundred and thirty-five years will do it."

"I hope we'll go before 2024," Christine said. "The fair will only be around for a few months!"

"We'll go on my birthday, then," Erik smirked.

"My *hundred and sixty-sixth* birthday."

Just after Christine rolled her eyes, she spotted a light in the distance.

"*Oh*, it's starting!" she exclaimed.

Red, blue and white lights shone from a beacon on the very top of the tower. They danced around the structure, making it shine in the moonlight.

"It's beautiful, isn't it?" Erik asked softly.

"Oui," Christine agreed, resting his head against his shoulder. "It certainly is."



Although the Exposition had started, the Eiffel Tower wouldn't open for another nine days... and the elevators weren't operational until the twenty-sixth!

Christine didn't mind the lengthy wait. She wanted the crowds to thin out a bit!

"It's quite packed, but it was such a delight to see the Théâtrophone and the phonograph." Madame Valerius, Christine's benefactress, said five days after the fair opened.

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"It sounds spectacular," Christine replied. "I can't wait to see it!"

Meg's Baby Blues

Meg hummed a cheery tune as she walked down the stairs of her apartment building. She stopped once she reached the landing and looked over her shoulder. Luckily, no one was around. She grinned and hopped onto the banister.

"*Whee!*" she exclaimed while sliding down, a breeze ruffling her short curls.

Once Meg reached the floor, she ran to the mail room, which contained blocks of little mailboxes. She opened up the Giry box, finding nothing inside.

Nothing. That's always how it goes around here, huh? she asked herself grumpily.

Besides flying down the banister, life had been quite humdrum since coming home from Perros-Guirec two and a half weeks ago. Meg and Christine had explored the closed Palais Garnier a few times, but gliding through the Grand Foyer could only provide so much entertainment.

The last thing I want to do is go to the library for the hundredth time, Meg thought while trudging up the stairs. *Fun has its limits!*

Before long, she reached the fourth floor. She opened the door, seeing the same old flat. In the living room, Christine was reading a book by the same old Jane Austen.

"Any mail?" she asked.

Meg plopped down onto the sofa. "*Nope.*"

Meg's Baby Blues

"What's wrong?"

"I'm so *bored!* There's *nothing* to do around here!"

"You could read *Mansfield Park* with me."

Meg sank lower.

"Or you could see if the laundry is dry. Madame Giry hung our clothes up four hours ago. I'm sure that hot July sun has *more than* done its job!"

Meg sighed. "At least that's something different."

She went to the girls' bedroom and opened the window. Sure enough, their clothes were hanging on a clothesline just outside the balcony. Meg leaned down, freeing one of Christine's drawers. She had just unclipped her own drawers when... "*Bloomies!*" Meg exclaimed.

She reached out to them, but it was too late. The white cloth was bright against the green foliage it had landed on.

Forgetting about the chemises and bodices still hanging on the clothesline, Meg tossed Christine's chemise on the bed and ran out of the room.

"Are they nice and warm?" Christine asked.

"Toastier than ever!" Meg hurriedly replied before dashing out of the apartment.

"Meg!" Christine called from just outside the door.

"Where are you going?"

"On a mission to save my drawers!" Meg called back.

She ran down the stairs, practically leaping. By the time she reached the courtyard, her legs felt like they had performed an entire ballet!

"Bonjour, Meg!" a cheery voice rang out.

Meg's Baby Blues

Meg smiled at Pricilla Darklay. The ten year old girl lived on the opposite side of the courtyard.

"Bonjour, Pricilla!" she greeted her friend.

Pricilla picked up Meg's drawers, which were lying on a bush. "Is this yours?" she inquired.

Meg tried to suppress a blush as Pricilla gave her the underwear. She held them up to her torso and said, "They fit, so they must be!" She noticed some chalk in Pricilla's hand. "Are you playing hopscotch?"

"Oui. I want to get some jumps in before I have to go to my aunt's house," Pricilla sighed. "Her yard in Créteil isn't good for making squares."

"Why are you going there?"

"My parents can't leave us here alone! They say I can't take care of my brothers until I'm eleven."

As Pricilla swiped at the ground with her shoe, an idea sparked in Meg's mind.

"Maybe you don't have to go to your aunt's house after all..."



The first thing Madame Giry heard when she came home was a hurried string of words from Meg, who nearly rammed into her grocery basket. "...Excuse me?" she asked with a confused blink.

"Please slow down, mon amour."

Meg took in a breath and asked, "Mama, may I *please* babysit the Darklay kids?" She followed Madame Giry into the kitchen. "Their parents will be gone tomorrow and they'd have to go all the way down to Créteil."

Madame Giry took some asparagus out of the basket as she said, "Taking care of children is

Meg's Baby Blues

quite the responsibility. I'm not sure if you'd be able to do it."

"I would! I can be responsible!" Meg heard footsteps in the hallway. "And Christine could help me!"

"With what?" Christine asked as she entered the kitchen.

"With babysitting the Darklay kids! You'd be great at it."

"I've never taken care of kids before, but it *would* be nice to see them again..."

Meg crossed her fingers while giving Madame Giry a pleading look.

"*Oh*, alright," her mother relented through a sigh.

"You and Christine may take care of the children!"

"*Yay!*" Meg cheered, spinning Christine around.

"Summer is finally exciting again!"

Raoul and the Sour Songbirds

Raoul de Chagny stood at the helm of his boat as it drifted along the Celtic Sea. He took a deep breath, smiling at the refreshing scent of saltwater. It sparkled in the waning sunlight as a breeze ruffled his hair. Past the golden globe, he could see a lighthouse in the distance.

Good, I'm close to shore. he thought.

Just then, a boom of thunder shook the sea! Raoul held onto the boat as it rocked. Before he could think about the choppy water sending him overboard, the thunder rumbled again. Oddly enough, it sounded like someone screaming!

Someone's in trouble! he worried. *Or maybe it's sirens? No, that's just a myth. But it did sound an awful lot like-*

The strange thunder occurred again, this time bringing a crack of lightning with it! The wooden boat splintered, sending Raoul into the churning depths of the sea.



When Raoul sat up, he was beyond relieved to see morning sunlight streaming through his room. *Good, it was just a dream.* he thought, running a hand through his wavy auburn locks.

He stretched and rose from his bed, going over to the window. The backyard's trees were aglow in shades of orange and yellow. He walked into his closet, finding a navy blue vest with the outlines of golden leaves. It was perfect!

Raoul and the Sour Songbirds

Raoul went downstairs, where a breakfast of powdered sugar puffs were waiting.

"*Mmm*, this looks delicious!" Raoul took a bite, smiling at the raspberry jam filling. "Tastes like it, too!"

"*Ugh*, can't you say that *after* swallowing?" his older sister, Garcelle, asked.

"And don't muddy up your hands." her twin, Estelle, added.

"It's only a little sugar." Raoul pointed out, smiling as the twins shared a disgusted look while he licked the powder off his fingers.

"I'd hate for it to get under my nails."

"Then trim them! You'd benefit from not poking someone's eye out."

"*Oh*, I'd like to do that to you right-"

"*Children!*" Aunt Rayier exclaimed. "Please don't fight. Breakfast is supposed to be a pleasant time."

Raoul and Estelle glared at each other.

"Now! What dance will you be learning today, Garcelle?"

Garcelle shook her head while taking a sip of Earl Grey tea. "Not today. I have other plans."

Other plans? Raoul wondered with a raise of his eyebrows. *She never skips dancing!*

"Oui, so do I." Estelle added, stabbing a pastry piece with her fork.

Before Raoul could ask what they were up to, Aunt Rayier asked, "Raoul, dear, could you take a photograph of my geraniums with that camera of yours? I want to share it with the garden club ladies."

Raoul and the Sour Songbirds

"Sure." Raoul replied with a nod.

"Oh, merci! What an amazing invention that camera is. I can show everyone my flowers while being at Madame Desrosiers' house! I'll need the photo by Saturday."

"I'll get it to you by *tomorrow!*"



After breakfast, Raoul went to the garden in the corner of the backyard. The bush of azure rush geraniums were blooming nicely. He smiled at their minty, rose-like scent before getting his camera ready. He used a sixty degree line on the top of the leather box to get the flowers in frame. Then he pulled a string, set his finger on the button...

"*La, la, LAAAA!!!*"

Startled, Raoul nearly dropped the camera! He looked behind him while thinking, *That's the sound from my dream!*

He located the screeching sound to the twins' bedroom. He called, "HEY!" but they didn't notice. He found a rock and threw it at the window, narrowly missing the glass.

"What in the world was that for?" Garcelle asked while opening the window. "We're *trying* to sing up here!"

"You sound like a bunch of dying cats!" Raoul called to her. "Is this your plan for today?"

"Oui! Now leave us alone!"

The window slammed shut.

Raoul started to turn back to the flowers, but a question popped in his head. He yelled, "WAIT!" Garcelle opened the window. "What?"

Raoul and the Sour Songbirds

"Why do you want to sing all of the sudden?"

"It's none of your business!"

Raoul sighed as Garcelle loudly closed the window again. He ran to the geraniums, snapping a couple photos before the sisters' singing could start up again. Hr tried to wind the key to advance the camera's roll of film, but it wouldn't budge.

Wow, a hundred photos already! he thought.

Guess it's time to develop them.

"La, la, la, *la*, la, la, *LAAAA!!!!*"

...And fast!



Raoul was thankful to go to the photography studio to get his photos developed. There were no squawking birds in sight! He wished he could stay to watch the developing process, but the studio owner told him to return tomorrow.

Raoul went home, but only for a moment. He saddled up Caesar and they ran off!

"Are you just as sick of their singing as I am?" he asked the white Andalusian horse.

Caesar responded with a whinny, causing Raoul to laugh. A brisk October breeze carried them through the busy streets of Paris. The crisp, earthy smell of fall was definitely in the air!

After arriving at Palais Garnier and taking Caesar to the first cellar's stable, Raoul made his way backstage. Everyone was hard at work rehearsing Ambroise Thomas' *Hamlet*. Carlotta Espinoza and Oroyeso were singing *L'âme de Votre Fils* as Gertrude and Claudius. They had no idea that Raoul was sneaking into a baaignoire seat!

But two people *did*.

Christine's Fresh Focus

The auditorium of Théâtre Lyrique was abuzz with chatter as Christine and Raoul settled into their seats. Ladies were only permitted to sit in the balcony, so Christine had a full view of the stage and the audience.

...And a fuzzy one! It was hard to make out the elegant design above the stage. Christine and Raoul were about to see *Esclarmonde*, Jules Massenet's latest romantic opera.

"Wow, this has already been performed over sixty times!" Raoul remarked.

"Oh my! That must mean it's good." Christine said.

She took a peek at the program in Raoul's lap, which was far clearer than the stage. The only name she recognized was Sibyl Sanderson, the newly famous American soprano. (And Massenet's favorite!)

Just then, the lights dimmed. Christine looked back, seeing the curtain rise. The audience applauded as the show began.

Esclarmonde was an exciting story about a magical empress who had to choose between being loyal to her family or a handsome knight. Christine was swept up by the story...

Or she *would* be if she could see! It was hard to concentrate when she kept wondering, *Wait, what*

Christine's Fresh Focus

is he holding? Oh, why were the only available seats in the very back?

It was hard to see most of Esclarmonde's sorcery! Christine's vision slightly improved when she squinted, so she did that for most of the show. But it still wasn't that clear, especially in her head...



"That magic effect was amazing!" Raoul said, his hazel eyes sparkling. "I wonder how they did it," He gave Christine a sneaky look. "You want to find out?"

Christine smiled at her friend. She couldn't pass up an adventure...

The couple found their way backstage, where a technician was happy to reveal his secret.

"I don't use magic per say, I use a magic *lantern!* But it's not really a lantern, you see. A strip of

round glass plates are projected out of this device." the technician said, gesturing to two stacked wooden cubes with long golden lenses. "Wow, it looks like a camera!" Raoul remarked, absolutely fascinated. "Doesn't it, Christine? ...Christine?"

Suddenly, she felt a tap on her arm. Her eyes fluttered open and she asked, "Huh?"

"Doesn't the magic lantern look like a couple cameras?"

"Oh!" Christine exclaimed. "Why, it does."

Raoul smiled. He was enthralled by the magic lantern, but Christine could barely pay attention. Her eyes were so tired after squinting for so long! *And there's still an hour to go.* she thought with a sigh.

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Christine's Fresh Focus

Christine blinked, sparking a dull pain within her head. She set her needle on her lap with a wince.

"Did you prick your finger?"

Christine looked up, seeing Erik fade into view inside her mirror. It was Friday morning. She was stitching flowers onto a headband for tonight's performance of *Roméo et Juliette*.

Or, she was trying to. It was awfully hard to concentrate!

"No, I have a headache." Christine said, rubbing her left eye with her free hand.

"That's too bad. I have some chamomile pills you can take."

Christine gave a small smile. "I'd appreciate that."

"I- I'll be right there!"

And with that, his side of the mirror was shut off.

Christine set her sewing on the vanity table beside

her divan and lay down. Her head still pounded, but her eyes appreciated the rest.



"The Angel of Music is watching you..."

Christine's eyes flashed open with a gasp. She winced as the surprised action activated her headache.

Erik was standing above her, a smile on his face.

"Sweet dreams?"

"Not quite." Christine said while sitting up.

(Which took more effort than usual!)

"Well, these will certainly help. You can't go wrong with chamomile!"

Christine gratefully took two pills. She swallowed them along with a glass of water Erik had brought.

"Better?" he asked.

"It will be soon. Merci."

Christine's Fresh Focus

As Erik sat beside Christine he inquired, "What spurred this headache? Sewing stress?"

"No..." Christine replied through a sigh. "Raoul and I saw *Esclarmonde* yesterday."

"Ah, so it was spending time with *him!*" Erik exclaimed, raising a finger at that last word. "I should've guessed that."

"No, it was our seats! They were up high and in the back. I couldn't see very well, so I had to squint for the entire show. Théâtre Lyrique doesn't allow ladies to sit in the orchestra seats." Erik scoffed. "*Stupid society*. If gender didn't exist, you wouldn't have this headache."

"Exactly! At least when we went Théâtre Lyrique last year, our view was a bit closer," Christine rubbed her forehead. "Although I've been noticing that things seem a little fuzzier lately."

"Hmm. Well, at least you don't need to see far all the time. A- And when you go back to Théâtre Lyrique, you'll be sure to get great seats," Erik smiled while adding, "*And* maybe The Opera Ghost can pressure them into changing the rules!" Christine gave him a playful look, wincing yet again as pain pierced her head.

Erik's Purrfect Deck

Erik hummed *Jingle Bells* while washing a plate in the bathroom. The sudsy soap reminded him of snow... although the blissfully warm water enveloping his hands wasn't anything like winter! After making sure the plate was nice and dry, Erik took it back to the kitchen. He was walking across the house when he heard a little voice exclaim, "Mrer!"

Erik looked over his shoulder with a smile. "Good morning, princess!"

Ayesha, his little black cat, stepped out of her coffin-shaped bed. She gave a cute squeak while stretching.

"I'm glad you're up. It's very important for you to be here," Erik walked into the kitchen. "Do you know *why*?"

The bell on Ayesha's collar jingled as she trotted up to Erik, watching as he carefully set his plate in a cabinet. Then he swiftly picked her up, catching her by surprise! (Quite squeakily!)

"You're five years old today!" Erik told her. "Or, that's my estimation."

"Meh-reer!" Ayesha seemingly confirmed her age. "My fifth birthday was... *well*... filled with unmasked monsters. Not the happiest way to celebrate. That's why it's imperative that *yours* is *extra fun*," Erik booped her nose twice while

Erik's Purrfect Deck

saying 'extra fun' before setting her down. "Your first present..." He went to the counter and unwrapped something in wax paper. "Fresh salami!"

"*Mrrrow!*" Ayesha meowed excitedly.

She rubbed against his legs with a loud purr while he cut up some tiny pieces of her favorite food.

As Erik watched her chow down, he heard a knock on the door. Opening it revealed Christine, whose hands were behind her back.

"Ready for lessons?" he asked her with a wink.

"Oui!" Christine replied, winking back before stepping inside the house. "Bonjour, Ayesha!" Ayesha glanced up for a mere moment before returning to her food.

"We might as well start." Erik said as Christine hid something under his comforter.

He and Christine sat at the piano, going over *Mon Cœur S'élance et Palpite* from *Le Prophète*.

Mon cœur s'élance... (My heart soars...)

Du moment où l'orpheline t'aperçut, (From the moment the orphan saw you,)

Faveur divine, seul, rêvant sur la colline (Divine favor, alone, dreaming on the hill)

Un regard changea mon sort! (One look changed my fate!)

"Meh-eer!" Ayesha remarked.

"Yes, it's a lot like how we met!" Erik said. "I saw a three month old o- orphaned kitten all alone by the stairs and the moment we saw each other..."
He smiled at Christine. "It was true love."

Erik's Purrfect Deck

"True love for both of your girls," Christine said, giving Erik a kiss on the lips. "This might be a good place to stop for a bit."

"Yeah." Erik responded dreamily.

"Mm-mm." Ayesha remarked while rubbing against the piano seat. (Her way of telling him to snap out of it!)

Erik blinked. "Oh, right!" He rose from the seat.

"Ready, Christine?"

Christine nodded, reaching for the thing under the comforter while telling Ayesha, "Erik, Meg and I worked together on your present."

"Er-reh?" the little kitty asked, making Erik chuckle.

"Oui! Here it is!"

Taking it out from behind her back, Christine presented a yellow stick glued to a thin rope,

which was pasted to a red feather. Ayesha's eyes grew big at the new toy.

"I know how much you love the feather on my Red Death hat a- and that rope from the fifth cellar," Erik said. "This is from the cellar, too."

"And the costume room and the Bois," Christine added, referencing a big park filled with plenty of trees. "Meg and I painted it to match your eyes!"

"*Mrrrr!*" Ayesha replied approvingly.

Christine waved the stick around, causing the rope and feather to bounce. Ayesha watched them both, not sure which one to bat at first! She jumped up, reaching for the feather. When she caught it, she started nibbling on the rope.

"I think it's a keeper!" Erik said with a smile.

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Erik's Purrfect Deck

Ayesha received more gifts that day- hugs and kisses from Meg and a golden chain from Raoul. "This is so you'll stop eyeing my pocket watch," he told her. "Happy birthday, cat!"

"Meh-rrr!" Ayesha thanked him before chasing after the chain.

She played with her toys for the rest of the afternoon. Erik wondered if she'd ever tire herself out!

She still acts like a kitten! he thought with a smile.



That evening, Erik decided to visit the peaceful dreamery. He took a pack of cards, a deck gotten for his fifteenth birthday. He had built a card tower with Nadir... and now was looking forward to making a taller one!

Just as Erik was about to step into the boat, he heard a skittering sound. He looked down, seeing a bright stick under his feet for a split second before...

Meg's Twisted Mishap

"Another biting day." Christine remarked softly while putting on her petticoat.

"We're not living in a dog!" Meg replied, making Christine giggle.

"No, I mean it's really cold! You can tell just by seeing."

If Meg didn't know any better, she'd think it was summer. The sky was so sunny! She gasped while taking a closer look. Unlike most December days...

"What's wrong?" Christine asked.

"Look!" Meg stepped aside. "More *snow!*"

Christine's eyes sparkled. "Oh! I'm so glad it's back!"

The first snowfall of the season had occurred a few days before, leaving a freeze in its wake. Now tiny flakes fell from the sky once again. Meg opened the window shutters with a wide smile. She and Christine both shivered at the cold air that swept through their bedroom.

"Thanks for reminding me to put on my wool petticoat," Christine said, stepping out of the quilted one she wore. "It's colder than ever thanks to that snow! Too cold to just wear my scarf."

Goosebumps prickled Meg's arms as she stepped outside. Unlike Christine, she was still in her nightgown. Her arm trembled, yet she didn't let that stop her from reaching out. Tiny snowflakes

Meg and the Twisted Mishap

fell onto her hand, their chill tickling her palm. Meg smiled as she admired the little white flakes. "Girls!" Madame Giry called. "We need to leave soon!"

Meg wanted to bask in the snow, but knew today was a work day. It wasn't *too* disappointing, however. She was gearing up for the last ballet of the season!

"Remember to put on your warmest dress." Christine said while sliding her arms through the sleeves of her bodice.

"If only my ballerina outfit was warm. It's a hassle to have to change it there!"

But Meg dutifully opened her dresser and pulled on a gray wool dress with a mustard yellow collar and accents in a sunnier shade.

"I'm butter and you're waffles!" Meg remarked.

Christine touched the light brown stripes of her day dress with a laugh. The girls grabbed their capelets (green for Christine and plaid red and green for Meg) and put them on while walking through the living room.

"Are you ready, girls?" Madame Giry asked, buttoning her long coat.

"Ready!" Meg replied.

She ran out the door. By the time her mother and Christine were out in the hallway, she was already on the third floor of the Haussmann building!

Christine gave Madame Giry a smile. "I think she's *more than* ready!"



Christine giggled, her cheeks rosy as the breeze played with the fringe of her red scarf. She and

Meg and the Twisted Mishap

Meg were walking faster than usual to Palais Garnier. They wanted to beat the cold!

"Whoops!" Meg exclaimed, her foot suddenly slipping on a patch of ice.

"Be careful!" Madame Giry warned while Christine steadied Meg. "I don't want you to break a bone."

Christine squeezed Meg's hand. "And I'll make sure of it."

Meg wanted to slip and slide like an ice skater, but she didn't want to disappoint her mom. So she dutifully held Christine's hand as they carefully (yet still quickly) turned onto Place de l'Opéra. Before long, the girls were stepping inside the opera house.

"Ah, it's so toasty!" Meg exclaimed while taking her capelet off.

"Like an oven!" Christine added.

The girls took their capelets to Christine's dressing room. The small cloaks were hung in her dresser.

"Since when did you wear a bustle?" a voice asked. Erik faded into view, a teasing twinkle in his icy blue eyes.

"This is a wool petticoat," Christine told him. "I'd never wear something like a bustle."

"Didn't you know, Mr. E? The warmer the bulkier!" Meg said.

Erik looked down at his slim tuxedo. "I think I'd have to wear a thousand petticoats to get warm in that weather. The water cellar gate is freezing!"

"It's a good thing the opera house doesn't feel like winter." Meg said.

Meg and the Twisted Mishap

She started pulling her arm out of her sleeve, causing Erik's eyes to widen. He switched off the mirror as she hurriedly undressed. After her dress was off, she sat on the floor to take off her boots and stockings.

"Got a *lotta* stuff to take off!" Meg remarked.

Erik gave a muffled (and highly embarrassed!) groan, making her giggle. Christine gave Meg her ballerina outfit, which she was more than glad to put on.

"*Ah*, that's more like it!" she exclaimed, her hands on her hips. "Have fun singing!"

"And have fun dancing!" Christine replied.

"You know I will!" Meg said before leaping out of the room while humming a little off-tune song.

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"Take your places, everyone!" Madame Giry ordered, tapping her stick on the gray masonite floor backstage. "We'll begin with the wind storm scene."

The ballerinas were performing a ballet called *La Cempète*. It told of a storm's lifespan- how it started out gentle before growing into a fierce force of nature. In this scene, the ballerinas acted as the rain and wind.

Meg raised her leg from the barre in Foyer de la Danse and ran down the little steps alongside her fellow dancers. They swayed, twirled and leapt together.

Meg grinned as she did a pirouette, pretending to be a fierce tornado. The whirlwind sensation gave her such a rush of exhilarating energy! It made her feel like she could do anything in the world.

Meg and the Twisted Mishap

"Slower, Meg! You don't want to get too dizzy."

Madame Giry reminded her.

"But tornadoes are dizzy all the time!" Meg pointed out. "When they peter out, it's 'cause they're stumbling."

The ballerinas laughed as Meg clomped around them.

"Just remember to follow along with everyone else." Madame Giry said.

Meg caught the strict look in her mother's eye.

"Oui, Mama." she said with a nod that made Madame Giry give an approving smile.

Meg went along with every else's slower movements, yet her heart still longed to soar through the sky...

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The dancers went to a café for lunch. They were walking down Rue de Rivoli when Agnes nearly fell.

"Whoops! Watch out for ice." Meg told her while Fleur kept her steady.

She saw a particularly shiny piece of ice on the corner and tapped it with her boot toe.

"This patch would be perfect for a tornado spin!" she noticed.

"Didn't you just hear yourself?" Sorelli asked with a cross of her arms.

"I think you should just walk around it..." Cécile added, nervously fingering her coral necklace.

"Si, you might twist your ankle!" Elena added.

"Oh, I'll be fine!" Meg reassured her friends. "I'm on the edge, see?"

Meg and the Twisted Mishap

She gave a big twirl. The world spun, making her laugh.

"*Wheee!!* I'm the fastest tornado in the- *woah!*"

The world suddenly flipped. Meg fell to the ground, feeling a sharp pain.

"*Yow!*" Meg yelled as it pierced her. "Ow, ow, ow, ow..."

"*Meg!*" the ballerinas cried out.

As they helped her up, the world suddenly grew smaller. She groaned while leaning against Cécile.

"Quick, grab some ice!" Sorelli ordered one of the ballerinas. "No, not from the ground!"

Meg groaned again, a pit of absolute dread forming her stomach.