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Lola avait l'habitude de passer ses vacances chez ses grands-parents. Ils vivaient dans une belle demeure à la campagne, avec piscine et grands espaces dans lesquels s'ébattaient deux poneys et un âne. Cette année, la jeune fille avait demandé l'autorisation d'amener avec elle deux amis, car elle s'ennuyait un peu toute seule. Les grands-parents étaient ravis. Cela mettrait de l'animation dans la maison. Ils se rendaient bien compte qu'à son âge, leur petite-fille avait besoin de copains. Marco était son meilleur ami dans sa classe et sa sœur Estelle, qui avait un an de moins, était sa copine du cours de danse.

Donc ils étaient partis tous les trois, avec les mille recommandations d'usage de la part des parents. **Ils se réjouissaient de cette quinzaine de jours** à passer ensemble en toute liberté. Lola avait dressé un portrait d'enfer de ses grands-parents, pas coincés, très jeunes d'esprit et d'allure. Avec eux, il n'y avait jamais de problème, ils adoraient leur petite-fille. Elle avait le droit de faire presque tout ce qu'elle voulait à condition qu'il n'y ait pas de danger.

Le train était bondé, comme toujours en périodes de vacances. C'était la cohue sur le quai.

Des kyrielles de gamins braillaient en traînant leur nounours ou leur petite valise remplie de jouets. Des gens s'embras-

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Lola was accustomed to spending her holidays at her grandparents. They lived in a beautiful house in the countryside with a swimming pool and a lot of land where two ponies and a donkey gambolled about. This year, the young lady had asked for permission to bring two friends with her, because she used to get a little bored by herself. Her grandparents were delighted to accept. It would give the house a bit of a buzz. They were quite conscious of the fact that, at her age, their granddaughter needed some pals around. Marco was her best classmate and his sister, Estelle, who was one year younger, was the friend she went to dance class with.

Thus, the three of them had set off with tons of the usual advice from their parents. **They were looking forward to the fortnight** they were to spend together completely free. Lola had offered an amazing description of her grandparents as not uptight at all, and as being very young in their outlook and appearance. There were never any problems with them – they adored their granddaughter. She was entitled to do more or less what she liked as long as it wasn't dangerous.

The train was jam-packed as always in holiday periods. It was very crowded on the platform. A whole string of kids were bawling their heads off dragging their teddies behind them or their little suitcases stuffed with toys. People were embracing as

saient comme s'ils n'allaient plus jamais se revoir. Les voyageurs se bousculaient pour monter plus vite, poussant ou tirant leur bagage trop lourd. Une grosse dame frisottée resta bloquée dans la porte coulissante qui s'était refermée sur elle. Deux messieurs costauds arrivèrent à la décoincer et à la pousser vers sa place. Son voisin, déjà assis, la dévisagea d'un mauvais œil. On l'entendait penser : « En voilà une qui va déborder sur mon siège, quelle poisse ! »

Un groupe d'enfants encadré de deux monitrices s'était installé dans le fond du wagon, **avec beaucoup de chahut**, de cris et de rires, qui laissaient présager un voyage mouvementé. Ça sentait la colonie de vacances, et les voyageurs les regardaient déjà d'un air désapprobateur, persuadés qu'ils allaient les déranger pendant tout le trajet.

Une femme flanquée de deux bambins réussit à grand-peine à entrer dans le wagon. L'un des enfants était accroché sur sa poitrine, dans un porte-bébé en tissu, et elle transportait un sac sur son dos. L'autre lui tenait la main droite, tandis qu'elle tirait de la main gauche deux ou trois cabas en plastique bien remplis.

Le plus petit des enfants couinait doucement en bavotant sur une écharpe qui accueillait par ailleurs deux longs filets morveux s'écoulant de son nez. Le plus grand couinait plus fort. Il avait chaud, il avait soif, il avait envie de faire pipi. La maman excédée se fâcha, cria, le fit bouger de force. Il se mit à pleurer carrément.

Un grand énergumène vêtu d'un T-shirt et d'un jean flasque-crado, essayait de progresser derrière elle, protégé du

if they were never going to see one another again. The travellers were fighting their way through the crowd to get on the train more quickly, pushing or pulling along their luggage that was too heavy. A frizzly-haired fat lady had got stuck in the sliding door that had closed back on her. Two well-built men managed to release her and push her in the direction of her seat. Her neighbour, who was already seated, looked her up and down critically. You could almost hear him thinking "Just my luck! That one's going to take up half of my seat as well as her own!"

A group of children under the care of two group leaders had set up at the end of the compartment **making a right racket** with much laughter and shouting going on suggesting an eventful journey was in store. It was rather like a holiday camp atmosphere and the passengers were already giving them dirty looks, so convinced were they that they were going to bother them throughout the whole trip.

A woman accompanied by two toddlers managed with much difficulty to get into the compartment. One of the children was tied on to her chest in a cotton baby carrier and she had a rucksack on her back too. The other child was holding on to her right hand whilst in the left hand she was dragging along two or three packed plastic shopping bags.

The smaller of the children was softly whinging and dribbling on a scarf which was also catching two long lines of snot running down from his nose. The bigger one was whinging louder. He was hot and thirsty and he wanted to go and have a wee wee. The distraught mum got cross and shouted at him shoving him forward. That started him crying for real.

A tall bizarre individual dressed in a T-shirt and some dirty old sagging jeans was trying to make his way behind her protected

tumulte par des cheveux longs, sales, et une barbe incertaine. Tout le tirait vers le bas. Il avançait dans le couloir comme il pouvait, derrière la mère de famille quasi hystérique qui cherchait partout ses places dont elle ne se rappelait plus les numéros. Elle se retourna et se trouva nez à nez avec l'énergumène qui tenta un sourire édenté en lâchant un « Zen ! », destiné à calmer l'excitée.

Le visage de la femme se transforma illico façon halloween. Ses yeux lancèrent des flammes. Sa bouche éructa :

– Zen, zen, aidez-moi donc, grand couillon !

Le grand couillon ravala sa tentative d'apaisement oriental dans sa barbe hirsute en haussant les épaules.

La dame enfin trouva sa place. Tous les voyageurs étaient à peu près installés, le train prêt à démarrer.

Le voyage devait durer environ trois heures. Trois heures de pleine campagne, à longer les forêts, les champs, les rivières. Lola aimait beaucoup ces balades en train, où l'esprit flotte en regardant par la fenêtre. C'est une situation qui incite à la rêverie. L'imagination court le long du paysage, sans effort. De plus le temps était idéal. Du soleil avec juste une petite brise pour faire bouger les arbres et quelques nuages légers pour habiter le ciel.

Les trois amis avaient la chance d'être assis l'un à côté de l'autre dans un carré. La difficulté avait été de choisir les places. Ils voulaient tous un côté fenêtre. Finalement Estelle y eut droit en priorité, ainsi qu'au sens de la marche, assurant que, sinon, le train lui donnait la nausée.

from the uproar by long dirty hair and a fuzzy sort of beard. He certainly had no redeeming feature. He made his way along the aisle as best he could behind the half-hysterical mother who was looking all around for her seats whose numbers she couldn't remember. She turned round and found herself face to face with the oddball who attempted to give a toothless smile and blurted out "Keep cool!", a phrase that was supposed to calm the frantic woman down.

The woman's face went straight into Hallowe'en mode. With her eyes aflame and fuming, she said:

"Keep cool, keep cool – just give me a hand, you great wally!"

The great wally shrugged his shoulders and his verbal endeavours to calm her down oriental-style were swallowed back up into his shaggy beard.

The lady eventually found her seats. All the travellers had more or less settled down and the train was ready to set off.

The journey was to last about three hours. Three hours of rolling countryside, going past forests, fields and rivers. Lola very much enjoyed these train journeys where your mind could drift off while you looked out of the window. It was a situation which made you daydream. Your imagination effortlessly ran wild as you passed by the scenery. What was more, the weather was ideal – it was sunny with just a little breeze to make the trees sway and a few fluffy clouds dotting the sky.

The three friends were lucky enough to have their seats all together with a table in the middle. The difficult part had been to choose who took which seat. They all wanted to sit by the window. In the end, it was Estelle who got the right to the window seat facing the direction the train was going, adamantly stating that, otherwise, she would get sick.