

Tabea Bach
THE CAMELLIA HOUSE (Vol.1)

Sample Translation by Alexandra Roesch



Women's Fiction

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Author's Note

It all began eight years ago, when I fell hopelessly in love – with a flower: the camellia. Its delicacy and daring, blooming in the depths of winter, touched me deeply. From that love was born the trilogy centred on THE CAMELLIA ISLAND in Brittany, with its wonderful cast of characters, which became a great success not only in Germany but internationally as well.

Last year, I discovered a new love – for Japan, the home of the camellia. And with it came the idea for my new series, the duology THE CAMELLIA HOUSE.

In it, I draw a line from Brittany eastward to the Land of the Rising Sun. Lucy, daughter of Sylvia and Maël from THE CAMELLIA ISLAND, travels to Japan on behalf of her mother to secure an essential ingredient for the cosmetics brand *Fleur de Camélia*: pure, unadulterated camellia oil from the island of Soshiba. What is meant to be a brief business trip takes a completely different turn, especially when Lucy meets the captivating Finn and spends a magical day with him in Tokyo. But is Finn really the man she believes him to be? And will she be able to complete her mission for her family's cosmetics company?

The enchantment of Japanese culture, the tension between modernity and tradition, the country's unique landscapes and the warmth of its people, the richness of its cuisine and its instinct for beauty – all of this has made me look forward, every single day, to immersing myself in the world of Lucy and Finn, of Sylvia and Maël, and painting it for my readers in the most vivid colours.

Come with me and Lucy to Japan, and let yourself be swept away by the magic of this remarkable country.

Tabea Bach

Chapter 7

Tokyo Magic

When the shrill tone of her phone alarm woke her, Lucy needed a moment to remember where she was. Then it all came back to her. Lili's unexpected absence. The missing suitcase. And Finn.

She sat up and took stock of her situation. With a grimace, she glanced down at her travel clothes on the floor. Finally, she dialled the number the man at the lost luggage desk at the airport had given her.

Once again, Lucy gave her flight details, spelt out her name, date of birth and home address. No, her suitcase still hadn't turned up. It might have been loaded onto another plane in Paris, but that was all they had been able to find out so far. They assured her that everything humanly possible was being done.

With a sigh, she slipped back into her travel clothes. She really ought to think about picking up at least the essentials until her case was returned.

When she stepped into the lobby, she spotted the top of Finn's dark head behind a large bamboo plant in the cosy reading corner, bent over a newspaper. He was lounging on the leather sofa as if he had been made for it, apparently absorbed in his reading.

'Sleep well?' he asked as she joined him.

'Like a log. And you've actually been working already?'

'I just sent a few emails, that's all.' He folded the Financial Times with care and studied her closely. 'Are you all right?'

'Yes, thanks. I'm fine.'

'Still not hungry?'

‘I could eat a little something now.’

‘Shall we order here?’

Lucy shook her head. ‘Let’s go out. There’s something delicious on every corner in this neighbourhood.’

‘Perfect.’ Finn got to his feet and stretched. Even though he seemed lanky at first glance, he was clearly in great shape. ‘What are you looking at me like that for?’ he asked, and Lucy felt a flush rise to her cheeks. ‘Have I got a stain on my shirt?’

‘No,’ she said quickly. ‘Your shirt just reminded me that I’ve got nothing to wear.’

‘Still no news about your suitcase?’

‘Sadly not. It was probably sent to the wrong place. For all I know, it could be on the other side of the world by now.’

Finn raised his eyebrows in sympathy. ‘That’s really annoying,’ he said. ‘But it’s not the end of the world.’ They both laughed.

‘True,’ Lucy agreed as they left the hotel and stepped out onto the street. ‘Would you mind if we did a bit of shopping before I show you Tokyo?’

‘Not at all. I’m the best shopping buddy ever. Especially when it comes to women’s clothes.’

‘Oh, really?’ Lucy said. ‘How fortunate for your girlfriend.’

‘There’s no girlfriend,’ he replied without missing a beat. ‘The last time I went shopping for clothes was with my cousins in Orléans.’ Lucy’s heart skipped and then thudded hard. No girlfriend. It was almost impossible to believe a man like Finn was unattached. She thought of Noah. What would he have to say about Finn?

In a small side-street restaurant, Lucy ordered rice with vegetables, *miso* soup and, afterwards, a selection of *dangos*. She let the sweet glutinous rice dumplings melt on her tongue, savouring the taste after so many years, and offered some to Finn. They drank coffee as black as night.

‘So. What now?’

‘Hang on.’ She pulled out her phone and searched for a branch of a Japanese fashion chain she remembered from before. They got lucky – there was one just two blocks away. ‘A bit of shopping,’ she said, showing Finn the screen. ‘I should be able to get the basics there.’ A pair of jeans, two T-shirts, she thought. And underwear. Luckily she’d brought her windbreaker onto the

plane; she would need it in the autumn temperatures. ‘Then we’ll go to a chemist. Done.’

‘All of that would have fitted in your hand luggage,’ Finn remarked, trying one of the sweet dumplings. ‘Mmm. Delicious. What’s it called again?’

‘They’re *dangos*,’ Lucy repeated, writing the Japanese characters on a paper napkin for him. She quickly checked her phone to see whether anyone from the airport had been in touch. Nothing. But there was a message from Sylvia: Solenn was better. She was conscious and had exchanged a few words with them. Lucy breathed a sigh of relief. Then they set off.

Finn hadn’t exaggerated. Patiently, he handed her trousers, T-shirts and blouses in the fitting room, and was keen to buy her a pretty Yukata-style dress whose colour perfectly matched her eyes. Lucy firmly refused.

‘You’ve already done enough for me,’ she said, steering him away from the till so he couldn’t even think of paying for her.

‘What exactly have I done?’ he wanted to know.

‘You stood by me at the airport,’ she said.

‘And what else?’

‘Isn’t that enough?’

‘You tell me.’ His dark blue eyes sparkled with amusement.

‘It’s more than enough. Now let’s start the sightseeing.’

‘Great. Where shall we begin?’

‘With the most famous crossing in the world.’

‘A crossing?’ The question marks were practically written across Finn’s face.

‘Exactly.’ She glanced at her navigation app and set off. It had been a long time since she’d been in Tokyo. On the drive into the city she had spotted many new things: new skyscrapers, extended motorways, dizzying highway bridges. Like many places in the world, Tokyo was changing, and compared to a city like Paris, here everything happened at a breathtaking pace. But some things never changed – like the Hachikō Memorial. One more turn, and there it was.

‘What’s this?’ Finn asked with a smile. ‘A statue of a dog?’

‘Not just any dog,’ Lucy said, pulling him closer to the life-size bronze figure. ‘Allow me to introduce Hachikō, the most loyal dog in the world.’

Finn looked from her to the proud animal's memorial. 'Sounds like there's a story there,' he remarked.

'There is. Want to hear it?'

'Absolutely.'

'So, Hachikō lived about a hundred years ago. Every evening, he would meet his master here at Shibuya Station, for many years.'

'Good dog,' Finn said with a grin.

'That's not all,' Lucy went on. 'One day, his master died suddenly at work and so didn't come home that evening. But the dog kept coming here every single night, always hoping his beloved master would return. He kept it up until his own death, almost ten years later. By the time Hachikō died, he was already a legend. And imagine, his memorial was built while he was still alive. Hundreds of people donated, and Hachikō himself was the guest of honour at the unveiling ceremony.' She fell silent. As always when she thought about Hachikō's story, she felt a lump in her throat – she found his loyalty so moving.

'That's a wonderful story,' she heard Finn say softly. 'And it's really true?'

'You can look it up online,' Lucy replied. 'But come on. The crossing's just over there.'

At first, Finn didn't seem to grasp what made this place so special. He was busy taking in the surrounding buildings, towering skyscrapers with dazzling neon signs.

'Hey,' he said. 'I've seen this in films and...' He broke off, eyes widening in surprise.

Shibuya Crossing was no ordinary intersection. For all its fame, no film could capture the overwhelming feeling that hit you at the world's largest pedestrian crossing in the heart of this bustling district. It wasn't just that five streets met here, but that they were linked by five pedestrian crossings radiating out like a star, allowing people to cross in every direction, even diagonally, when the lights changed. Between half a million and three million people used it every day. At this moment, Lucy guessed there were around two thousand people waiting patiently for the lights to change from red to green in unison.

‘Do these lights ever go green?’ Finn asked as they stood in the middle of the crowd. ‘Or are we stuck here forever?’

Lucy laughed. ‘Every two minutes. Had enough already?’ Finn shook his head gamely. Around them, people waited with astonishing patience while traffic streamed through from every direction. Lucy felt once again a surge of admiration for how perfectly timed the phases must be to keep everything moving so smoothly. Most people were staring at their phones. Many had headphones in. Friends linked arms, chatting cheerfully. Groups clustered together like families of ducks. A man just ahead of them was calmly reading his newspaper.

‘I was just thinking of my father’s motto,’ Finn said.

‘And what’s that?’

‘Go where there’s space.’

Lucy laughed again. ‘Don’t worry,’ she told him. ‘Where we’re going next, there’s plenty of room.’

At that moment, the pedestrian lights turned green — all of them at once. Even though Lucy knew what was coming, she still marvelled at the effect, watching the crowds from all five directions begin to move in perfect harmony. Finn too was silent as they advanced like a single, many-legged creature. Stopping was not an option; behind them, an uncountable tide of people was surging towards the other side of the crossing – no, that wasn’t quite right. Nobody was pushing. Perhaps that might happen in Los Angeles or Berlin, in Mexico City or another sprawling metropolis. But here in Tokyo, there was no shoving, no jostling, not even the slightest bump from those approaching in the opposite direction. As if by instinct, corridors opened up in every direction, everyone moving in such unthinking unison that, to Lucy, it said more about the Japanese mentality than any pagoda or shrine ever could.

At last they reached the other side and the pedestrian lights turned red again, the lights for the cars switching to green. Once more, the carousel of traffic began its orderly sweep across the crossing.

‘Again?’ Lucy asked, pointing to the neighbouring side of the star.

‘No need.’ Finn craned his neck. He was much taller than most people here and looked as though he was trying to keep his head above a dangerous sea swell.

Lucy couldn't help laughing. 'All right then, come on.' She drank in the magic of the city with all her senses, realising just how much she had missed Tokyo. If her memory wasn't completely failing her, there was an unusual place not far from here that she knew well. She quickly checked her phone to get her bearings, then knew the way.

'We could take a taxi,' Finn suggested.

'That would take longer than walking,' Lucy explained, setting off cheerfully. 'Come on, we're nearly there.'

It was a slight exaggeration, but after twenty minutes they caught sight of the great trees glowing in the fiery colours of autumn. In front of them stood an enormous gate, striking in its simplicity with two upright pillars and two curved crossbeams at the top, which on closer inspection were decorated with intricate carvings. Its sheer size and distinctive shape alone made it impressive.

'That's called a *torii*,' Lucy explained. 'Look, it's decorated with the chrysanthemum crest – that's the imperial emblem.'

They watched as a Japanese couple gave a small bow before stepping through the gate.

'And where does it lead?' Finn asked.

'To a special place.' Lucy gave him a quick glance. 'The *torii* marks the divide between the spiritual world and the everyday world. Are you ready to cross that boundary?'

Finn's eyes widened. 'I'm ready,' he said at last. 'What happens to us when we go through? Maybe you should hold my hand, I'm a little scared.'

Lucy laughed out loud. 'No need to panic. What this sacred forest beyond will do to you, I can't say. But I promise we'll spend a wonderful afternoon there.' She chose to ignore his remark about holding hands.

They too bowed and stepped together through the gate. Before them stretched a wide, ruler-straight path into the heart of the forest, lined with trees whose green leaves were slowly turning into the richest shades of gold, copper and countless reds for which Lucy had no names. The midday sun broke through here and there, scattering points of light and breathing even more life into the spectacular display of colour.

'Back at that crossing, I'd never have believed there was such an oasis this close by,' Finn said, gazing up at the towering canopies.

‘Tokyo’s full of surprises like that.’ Lucy delighted in Finn’s wonder.
 ‘There are so many parks here, each lovelier than the last.’

‘Let’s make it a park afternoon,’ Finn suggested.

‘Had enough of the big city already?’

‘I don’t know Tokyo, but I imagine that crossing back there was a sort of big-city essence. That’s enough for me for one day.’

Lucy smiled. ‘Did you grow up in the country?’

Finn nodded. ‘Yes. My father’s family owns land in Alabama. And my grandfather in Texas. I’m descended from a real cowboy.’

Lucy laughed. ‘Then you can ride a horse, I suppose.’

‘Of course I can.’ He threw her a roguish look. ‘And use a lasso. Grandpa was proud of me.’

‘Can you play the banjo as well?’ Lucy asked with a laugh, breaking into the song *I came from Alabama with my banjo on my knee*.

‘Sadly not,’ Finn replied seriously. ‘If it means that much to you, I’ll learn.’

Silence settled between them. Why on earth would he learn to play the banjo for her? And what was this strange familiarity between them, as if they had known each other forever?

‘Do *you* play an instrument?’ Finn broke the quiet.

Lucy shook her head. ‘I’m not at all musical.’

‘But that just now sounded good.’

‘That was a fluke,’ Lucy insisted. ‘Normally I can’t hit a note.’

‘What do you most enjoy doing?’ Finn asked. ‘What’s your greatest talent?’

Lucy had to think. She wasn’t musical and had no special gift for painting or anything of the sort. She wasn’t especially athletic either, and made up for it with regular yoga sessions, when she remembered in the mornings.

‘I’m afraid I haven’t got any particular talents,’ she said at last.

‘And what about the flowers?’ Apparently, Finn remembered what she’d told him earlier.

‘I grew up with camellias,’ she revealed, although her job had only a loose connection to them.

Finn’s eyes widened. ‘Really?’

‘Do you even know what camellias are?’

‘Of course. Everybody knows that.’

‘I wouldn’t say so,’ she replied. ‘Most people I know have no idea what they are.’

‘They bloom in winter,’ Finn said, as if reciting something learned by heart.

‘More precisely, there are two types,’ Lucy explained. ‘One group starts flowering about now and carries on until January, depending on the climate. The other begins in February.’

‘If you grew up with camellias... you’re not from Paris, then?’ Finn asked.

‘I lived in the capital for a few years.’

‘So where are you from originally?’

‘Brittany,’ Lucy told him. ‘Though I spent my school years in England.’

‘So you speak French, English and Japanese.’ Finn looked impressed.

‘And German,’ Lucy added. ‘My mother’s from Munich.’

‘Any other superpowers?’ Finn grinned at her.

Lucy laughed. ‘I’m afraid not. One day I’d like to learn Chinese, though. Unfortunately, it’s a really difficult language. Now it’s your turn. Where do your superpowers lie?’

‘I’ve told you already.’ Finn’s eyes gleamed. ‘Riding. Lassoing. Things like that.’

‘There’s a lovely Japanese film where a modern cowboy plays a part,’ Lucy said. ‘It’s quite old. I once watched it with my Japanese host parents. They thought it summed up Japanese culture beautifully.’ A wave of memory swept over her. Before she’d left, she had briefly thought of getting in touch with her host family in Japan. But they had moved to Nagoya a few years ago, and this time there simply wasn’t time for a visit. She promised herself she would return and see them then.

‘What sort of film is it?’

‘It’s called *Tampopo*.’ Lucy let her gaze wander over the beautiful trees. ‘It means “dandelion” in Japanese, and it’s the name of the heroine. After her husband dies, Tampopo opens a noodle shop. Unfortunately, she’s not much of a cook. But then along comes a truck driver who looks like a Texan cowboy,

hat, boots, the whole lot. He and his mate decide to turn Tampopo into the best noodle chef in Tokyo.'

'And?' Finn asked. 'Does he succeed?'

'Of course.' Lucy smiled at him. 'You know what they say. Cowboys always manage whatever they set their minds to.'

'Do they?' Finn edged imperceptibly closer to her. Lucy felt herself flush.

'At least in films,' she said quickly. 'Whether it's the same in real life, *you*'ll have to tell me, cowboy from Alabama.'

She didn't move away, and now and then their arms brushed. A silence fell between them, but it didn't feel uncomfortable. Above them, the tree canopies blazed with autumn fire.

'Hard to believe we're in the middle of a city full of skyscrapers.' Finn's voice was soft. 'Do you think it's the magic of that gate keeping the outside world away?'

'Who knows?'

Finn bent to pick up a red-gold leaf that had floated down, as though the tree in its generosity had offered them a gift. Holding it in both hands, he solemnly presented it to Lucy. It was shaped like a heart.

'Accept this gift,' he said with a slight bow, like a Japanese man, and Lucy began to doubt whether Finn was truly as unfamiliar with the customs of the country as he claimed. 'From our friend, the tree.'

'*Arigato gozaimasu*, Finn-san,' Lucy replied with equal formality, bowing as she took the leaf with both hands. She bowed again, this time to the tree. The rules of Shinto forbade taking anything, not even the smallest leaf, from a shrine complex, but she decided to keep that to herself for now.

'You still haven't told me the name of this park,' Finn said as they walked on.

'True.' Lucy cleared her throat. The look in Finn's eyes when he had handed her the leaf had unsettled her. They were passing another gate, made of cedar, and were now approaching the heart of the park. 'We're on the grounds of the *meiji-jingū*, a shrine dedicated to the *kami* of Emperor Meiji and his wife, Shōken-kōtaigō.' For a moment Lucy saw her sixteen-year-old self on a school trip here, listening attentively to her teacher.

'What does *kami* mean?' Finn asked.

‘It’s often translated as “spirit”, but that’s not quite right. In our Western thinking, “spirit” is something only humans have,’ Lucy tried to explain. ‘But a plant can have *kami*, too. Or a stone, a place, special objects. It’s something like the spark of the divine in our earthly world.’ She gave Finn a searching look.

But he didn’t stare at her in bewilderment or grin ironically. ‘And a shrine like this,’ he asked instead, ‘would you say it houses that *kami*?’

‘You could put it like that, yes,’ Lucy replied with relief. ‘They’re usually located at places of power. Like this one.’

‘That explains a lot,’ Finn murmured. They reached a small building that looked like an open hut with a curved roof. Beneath it was a basin with several ladles. ‘How nice,’ Finn said. ‘So pilgrims can quench their thirst here.’

Lucy shook her head, smiling. ‘I wouldn’t drink from that,’ she said. ‘It’s a *temizusha*, for the ritual purification of hands and mouth.’

‘You rinse your mouth here?’ Finn looked puzzled.

‘Yes,’ Lucy said. ‘Wait, I’ll show you.’

She took one of the ladles carved from bamboo and scooped up some water. Carefully, she poured a little over her left hand, then her right, before pouring some into her left palm, touching it lightly to her lips, and then rinsing her hand again.

‘It’s important that the water doesn’t go back into the basin,’ she said, watching as Finn took a ladle and copied her movements.

‘And now?’ He shook his wet hands in mock confusion. ‘They’ve forgotten to put out a towel.’ Laughing, they wiped their hands on their jeans.

They walked on, and soon an imposing building appeared among the trees. At the centre of the complex rose a two-storey temple, roofed with a complicated structure like a multilayered canopy with upturned ends. Everything was made of dark wood, carved with intricate designs. Above the main entrance, the carvings were gilded and painted.

‘Impressive,’ Finn said, coming to a halt. ‘Tell me more about this emperor whose... divine something is worshipped here.’

‘During his reign, Japan opened up to the Western world.’ Lucy searched her memory. ‘The country got its constitution then. In the Second World War, almost all the buildings here were destroyed. That was in the spring of 1945. American bombers reduced everything to rubble.’

Finn made a sound that was almost a stifled curse.

‘Many volunteers helped to rebuild it all,’ Lucy went on quickly, ‘and around a hundred thousand trees were planted here. They were donated from all over Japan, as well as from Taiwan, Korea, and even China.’

‘How big is the whole site?’

‘If I remember rightly, about seven hundred thousand square metres.’

‘How do you know all this?’ Finn asked, looking at her with admiration. ‘Have you memorised a guidebook?’

‘No!’ Lucy laughed. ‘I just have a pretty good memory, especially for numbers,’ she explained. ‘We came here on a school trip.’

They explored the shrine and the surrounding buildings, and more and more memories of her last visit came flooding back to Lucy. A strange sensation came over her, as if space and time were momentarily suspended: the present in the company of this unusual man was weaving together with images from the past, and now and then a scrap of the future seemed to flash before her mind’s eye, herself at Finn’s side, until she pinched herself sharply to bring herself back to reality.

‘What’s that over there?’ Finn pointed to a smaller, but no less splendid building nearby. A group had gathered there, the people dressed in magnificent traditional kimonos, as if they had stepped straight out of a stage production. ‘Are they filming a movie?’

‘Hmm, no idea,’ Lucy replied, studying the procession. At its centre walked a woman in a brilliant white ceremonial kimono, a matching, voluminous headdress crowning her head. ‘Ah, now I see. It’s a bridal procession,’ she exclaimed. Her teacher had once told them that this small, ornate building was used for special Shinto ceremonies, such as weddings. ‘It’s a wedding party!’

Curious, they moved closer.

‘Is that the groom?’ Finn asked in disbelief, pointing to the man beside the bride. He wore wide, pleated trousers in a black-and-white striped pattern, falling like a skirt to his shoes, with a loose black jacket over the top, adorned with golden circular motifs. ‘How elegant he looks! And the bride!’

An older lady held a red parasol over the couple, while a priest walked ahead, followed by six women in black-and-white robes. From a distance came the sounds of mysterious flute and drum music. Lucy was suddenly

moved by the solemnity of the scene. They watched in silence until the party disappeared into the shrine, then continued their exploration.

‘And what’s that over there?’ Finn pointed to a wooden wall covered with small wooden plaques.

‘Here you can share your most heartfelt wishes with the spirit world.’ For a moment Lucy saw herself at sixteen, fastening one of these plaques here. What had she written on it? Suddenly she remembered. She had been madly in love with a boy from her class and had wished that he would return her feelings.

‘And do they come true?’ Finn interrupted her thoughts.

‘Yes,’ she replied with a laugh.

‘How do you know?’

‘Back then, as a schoolgirl, I hung a wish here myself,’ she said. ‘And it actually came true.’ Though in her mind she added, only on the day before she left. At the time she’d been heartbroken; there had been a tearful farewell and a few heartfelt letters. How had it ended, anyway? She couldn’t remember. Had she stopped writing, or had he? She no longer knew.

‘So how does it work?’ Finn drew her out of her reverie.

‘Over there you can buy a wooden plaque,’ Lucy explained, pointing to the kiosk. ‘They’re called *ema*. On the front there’s a design. It’s best to choose one you like or one that matches your wish. On the back, you write your wish and then hang it up here.’

‘That simple?’ Lucy nodded, laughing. ‘Do you want one?’ Finn already had his wallet in his hand.

‘Yes, why not?’

They studied the selection for a while. The plaques were decorated with all kinds of symbols, from deities promising health and happiness to images representing business success, such as the turtle or the crane.

‘Which one are you choosing?’ Finn asked.

Lucy hesitated. At first she had thought of wishing for the success of this trip. Then she decided, on impulse, on the cherry blossom. She had always loved that symbol best.

Finn grinned as she reached for the plaque. ‘I should have guessed,’ he said. ‘Someone who works with flowers naturally picks a blossom.’

‘And I suggest you take the carp,’ Lucy countered quickly. It had just occurred to her that the cherry blossom was a symbol of love, expressing the wish for a happy partnership. That was the last thing she wanted Finn to know.

‘Why the carp?’ Finn frowned at the plaque she indicated.

‘Because it stands for determination and perseverance in business matters,’ Lucy explained. ‘And this one, swimming against the current, brings even greater success than the other.’ She pointed to another plaque.

‘Against the current?’

‘Exactly. In business, you often need unconventional strategies. And sometimes you have to follow your heart.’

‘Follow your heart? I like the sound of that.’ Finn took the plaque, and they went to the older woman to pay. She told Lucy where they could find the pens to write their wishes.

‘May I see what you’re writing?’ Finn’s eyes sparkled, but Lucy shook her head.

‘You have to keep wishes to yourself,’ she said, though she had no idea if that rule applied to Japanese customs around wishes. ‘Otherwise they won’t come true.’

While Finn wrote busily and finished quickly, Lucy wondered again why she had chosen the cherry blossom. Then she simply let her hand write down what her heart had been feeling for hours: *Let me find the love of my life*, she wrote in Japanese, a precaution just in case Finn happened to catch sight of it.

At the votive wall, they found a space for their plaques.

‘And now?’ Finn asked.

‘How about a tea break?’

‘That sounds perfect.’

The graceful teahouse lay on the opposite shore; it looked like an image from a precious painting. The trees surrounding it seemed to encircle it in autumn colours like flames, reflected in the lake’s crystal-clear water. A family of ducks paddled across, rippling the reflection. The building’s architecture and the natural setting were so perfectly balanced that Lucy could hardly take her eyes off it.

‘Incredibly beautiful,’ Finn said. ‘The question is, how do we get across the water?’

‘Easy,’ Lucy replied. ‘Luckily, humankind invented something very important.’ And when Finn gave her a quizzical look, she pointed to a path running along the shore. At its end, they could just make out the graceful curve of a red-painted wooden structure. ‘What would life be without bridges?’ she asked.

[END OF SAMPLE]