

# Chapter 1

It was cool in the wardrobe. Everywhere else in the apartment was boiling, so brain boiling you wanted to climb into the ice box and pull the lid over your head. Amélie Dreyfus didn't mind being shut in. It's why she was so good at cache-cache, or hide-and-seek as Maman called it when she forgot she wasn't supposed to be British anymore.

Amélie pulled Maman's fur coat towards her and buried her head in it. It tickled her face, as softly as Maman's touch and smelt of her too, her perfume, an aroma of lemons and happiness. Her mother was the best-dressed person in the block, even the whole arrondissement. People expected Amélie to be like her, but she wasn't. It was her brother Paul who followed in Maman's footsteps.

Paulie stood out because he was a *Zazou*. Amélie didn't absolutely know what that meant apart from he dressed

differently to most boys. Maman said in the olden days they would have been called dandies. But they were Zazous and wore big stripy jackets and dark glasses and carried rolled-up umbrellas even at the height of summer. Paulie liked American music and was always humming a tune; bebop he called it.

He was 19, six years older than Amélie, and didn't live with them anymore but when Paulie came home the apartment came alive. Even Papa smiled. Papa never said much; he had his job for the government, his books and cared not a jot what he wore. Amélie was like Papa and Paulie was a mini-Maman when it came to being noticed in a crowd. That's what Maman's friends said and Maman had lots and lots of friends.

Amélie's mother was a never-ending bubbling swirl of laughter and disaster, the arrondissement's best dresser and worst cooker. It made Amélie happy just to be with her, even when she served up her burnt, blackened dinners or scolded Amélie for being dull, the worst crime in Madame Dreyfus's world. At least it was until the Nazis arrived.

Life was not so simple anymore. Papa lost his job. His bosses, Frenchmen like him, said there was no room for 'people of his type' in the government. Amélie had never thought of her family as a 'type' and now they were. All of

a sudden she was different to her best friend Madeleine and Madeleine began looking at her funny.

For this weekend they could forget all that. Paulie was home for Papa's birthday, which meant games of hide-and-seek and her hiding place that no-one ever discovered. The trick was to come out of it unseen and then duck behind a curtain or under the bed to emerge in triumph from there when the others gave up. And never, ever reveal your secret.

Amélie was good at keeping secrets. She sucked in the smell of her mother once more. Her legs were beginning to ache from crouching on the little shelf at the back of the giant wardrobe; the largest piece of furniture in the block the concierge informed Amélie the day they watched six sweating men heave it up the stairs. Amélie believed it had to be big because everything about Maman was large. Being hugged by Maman, clutched tight into her, it felt like all your worries were squeezed away.

Amélie took after her father, long legged and gangly, neither quite comfortable in their own bodies as if they'd forgotten to try them on before choosing. My baby giraffe, Maman called Amélie.

By now, Amélie was sure, Maman would have given up seeking and collapsed into an armchair with an exhausted sigh, calling on Papa to fix her a pre-lunch drink and

complaining about the heat. In summers gone, before the Nazis came, they would have left Paris and its baking city heat and gone to the beach where Maman's British half would float to the surface and she'd roll up her dress and tuck it into her bloomers to paddle with Amélie. Maman had lived most of her life in France and become more French, or rather Parisian, than the French. Except on holiday where having a British father meant always being a Britisher at the seaside. Sometimes Amélie's Grandfather – always Grandfather, never Grandpere – would come too and make great big sandcastles with his daughter and granddaughter.

If only they could live in a castle now, thought Amélie, as she let go of the fur coat. Shut themselves away until the Nazis were gone, pull up the drawbridge and get ready to pour boiling hot oil on any Boche who tried to get in. She giggled – the word Boche was banned by the Germans. They didn't like to be called names. So her mother called them the Hun, as the British had in the Great War.

“Amélieeeeeeee.”

Her brother's sing-song voice breezed through the apartment. He performed in night clubs but told her she was too young to go and see him.

“Amélieeeee, where are you... we can't find you... I'm...”

What he was going to say, or do, Amélie never found out

because he was interrupted by a thunderous knock on the front door.

Heavy footsteps trod into the apartment. “What on earth...” Amélie heard her mother begin before being cut off by a barked command. There was no more talking only the sound of heavy boots around the apartment. Heavy boots coming into her parent’s bedroom, coming to the wardrobe, stopping. She waited for the click of the latch.

It didn’t come. Instead the boots retreated, the front door slammed. Silence.