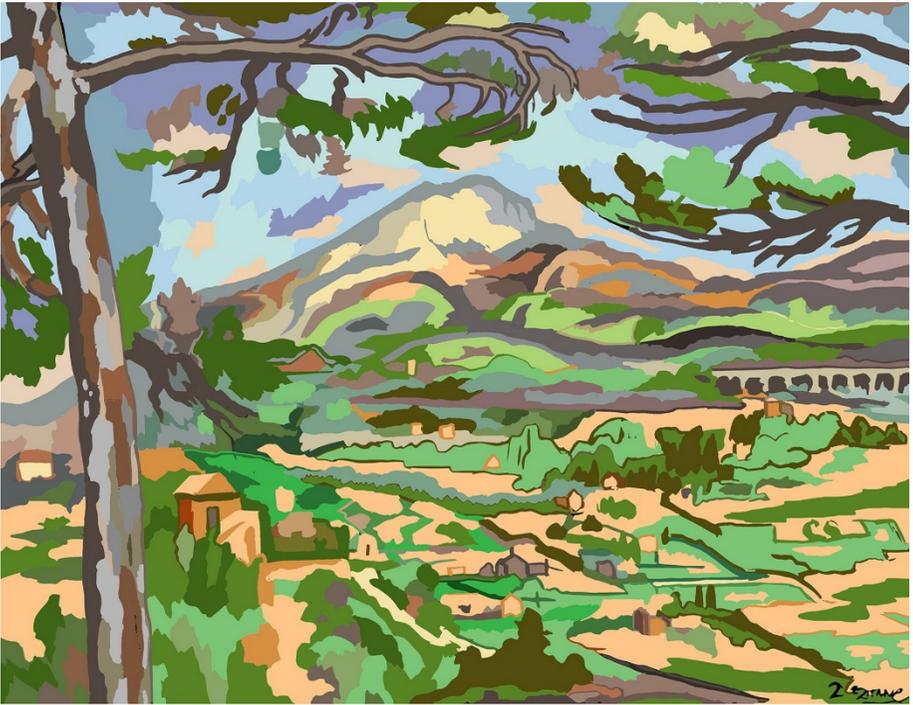


MAX and VOLTAIRE

Meet A Wise Old Bird



Mina Mauerstein Bail

Illustrated by Michael Swaim

The Max and Voltaire Series™ Book Five

CHAPTER ONE

A TRIP TO SEE ELISE AND KATE

“Tomorrow is the big day,” announces *Madame* Rosemarie to her dog, Voltaire, and her cats, Max, Say What, Tish, and Zoa. “I’ll miss you, my furry friends, but *Madame* Sweet will take good care of you.”

The telephone rings. *Madame* Rosemarie brushes past the pets into her study to answer it. Voltaire follows her. *I wonder what she’s talking about,* thinks Voltaire as he observes her sad face and worried expression.

A few moments later, *Madame* Rosemarie comes back into the living room and looks at her pets. “My friends, *Madame* Sweet has a bad cold and won’t be able to take care of you. It looks like you will all have to come with me to visit Elise in Aix-en-Provence.”

I’m sorry that Madame Sweet is not feeling well but I would really like to visit Elise, thinks Voltaire. *She takes me on long walks.*

Madame Rosemarie’s daughter, Elise, is attending university in Aix-en-Provence (also referred to simply as **Aix** and pronounced **ex-ahn-pro-vahns**).

Elise won't be coming home this summer because she has a job at a museum in Aix. Her older sister, Kate, lives close to Aix. She has recently started taking pottery classes

Early the next morning, *Madame* Rosemarie packs up the car outside her house in Ferney-Voltaire. Then, she goes next door to check on her neighbor, *Madame* Sweet. Ferney-Voltaire is a small town in France close to Switzerland and near the Alps, the highest mountain range in Europe. The journey will take close to five hours.

Madame Rosemarie places Voltaire's cushion bed in the backseat. This is where Voltaire and his furry friends, Max, Say What, Tish and Zoa will sit. Voltaire loves his cushion bed. It's big and comfortable. He won it as a prize for finding a treasure map in the Alps. He had a little help from Max and Say What and decided it was only fair to share the cushion bed with all of his pals.

"Time to go," says *Madame* Rosemarie. "*Madame* Sweet is feeling a little better. She told me that a friend will be checking in on her while we are away."

Voltaire jumps into the backseat of the car and stretches out on his cushion bed. Voltaire used to live next door. When his owners had to put him up for adoption, *Madame* Rosemarie agreed to give him a home.

Madame Rosemarie helps Max, Say What, Tish, and Zoa into the car. She adopted Max from a local bakery when he was a kitten. It wasn't easy at first for Max or Voltaire, but eventually, they were accepted into the household and now all of the furry pals are good friends.

Zoa, the only female cat in the group, likes her personal space and stakes out a spot in one corner of the dog bed and curls up. She looks like a white ball of fur. Say What, a gray and silver colored cat, likes to patrol the neighborhood and sits down near the car window. He likes to see what's going on outside. Tish, a black cat with white markings, drools and likes to cuddle. He settles down near Voltaire.



After driving for a few hours, *Madame* Rosemarie stops the car in front of a store, in a town called

Montelimar (pronounced **mohn-tay-lee-mahr**). *Madame* Rosemarie helps her furry friends out of the car.

“Let’s go for a little walk so we can all stretch our legs,” suggests *Madame* Rosemarie.

After the walk, *Madame* Rosemarie takes her four-legged friends back to the car and gives them some water to drink.

“I’ll be back soon,” *Madame* Rosemarie tells them.

“I wonder what she’s doing,” says Zoa, as she watches *Madame* Rosemarie walk into a shop.

“We’ll find out soon,” replies Max.

Shortly, *Madame* Rosemarie returns to the car carrying some packages. She places the packages on the front seat of the car.



"I don't want any of you to touch these packages," declares *Madame* Rosemarie. "These are very special sweets called nougats. Montelimar is the nougat capital of the world. These sweets are made from honey, almonds, pistachios, sugar, and egg whites. I bought them for Elise and Kate. They love nougats."

Madame Rosemarie starts the car and drives away. After a few more hours of driving, *Madame* Rosemarie arrives at the outskirts of Aix-en-Provence. She pulls over to call Elise and tell her that they will be arriving soon.

"Good news, *Maman*," says Elise. "One of my professors is going to be out of town for a few weeks and he said you could stay at his apartment. He left this morning and gave me the key to his place. The apartment also has a backyard. It will be more comfortable for you and all your furry friends."

"Good news, indeed," replies *Madame* Rosemarie. "See you soon, my dear."

Madame Rosemarie and her furry friends get out of the car.

"Let's take a short walk," says *Madame* Rosemarie.

They breathe in the scent of lavender; fields on both sides of the road are filled with rows and rows of the fragrant purple plant.



Soon afterward, *Madame* Rosemarie stops the car in front of Elise's apartment building and sees Elise waiting for her on the sidewalk.

“*Bonjour, Maman,*” calls out Elise. “I’m so glad to see you. Did you have a good trip?”

Madame Rosemarie gets out of the car and hugs Elise.

“It was a lovely journey,” replies *Madame* Rosemarie. “I made a short stop in Montelimar to buy some nougats for you and Kate.”

“*Merci, Maman,*” says Elise as she hugs her mother again. “I can’t wait to eat some. I’ll help you take Voltaire, Max, Say What, Tish, and Zoa inside.”

“The apartment looks charming,” remarks *Madame* Rosemarie. “It’s been three years since we went apartment hunting together.”

“Yes,” replies Elise. “It was a lot of fun decorating the apartment with you.”

“Time passes quickly,” says *Madame* Rosemarie. “But you are right. It is a small apartment. I think we will be more comfortable at the professor’s apartment. Our four-legged companions do need their space.”

“I’ve prepared some lemonade,” says Elise. “I thought you might be thirsty after the long drive. I’ve also made some sandwiches.”

“That’s very sweet of you,” says *Madame* Rosemarie. “I’d love a glass of lemonade.”

“Where are the nougats?” asks Elise.

“I was wondering when you were going to ask me that question,” replies *Madame* Rosemarie.

Madame Rosemarie and Elise sit down in the living room. It's a cozy room with a small gray couch that opens into a bed and two sitting chairs. Off to one side is a dining table. Large windows open to a balcony.

Max, Say What, Tish, and Zoa follow Voltaire to a large pillow on the floor near the balcony and curl up next to him.



“Tell me about your summer job at the museum,” says *Madame* Rosemarie.

“The job sounds like a lot of fun,” mumbles Elise

with a mouth full of nougat. “The museum has special events for young children and I’ll be helping out with this program. The job starts in three days, and I’ve already begun my training. I hope you’ll come and visit the museum.”

“I’ll certainly plan on visiting the museum,” says *Madame* Rosemarie.

“The museum has over 600 paintings, sculptures, and archeological pieces. There are works by Picasso, Matisse, and many other artists. The museum is particularly proud of its collection of paintings by Cézanne, a famous painter who lived in Aix. Among the paintings are the *Portrait of Madame Cézanne* and the only known painting by Cézanne of the famous French writer, Emile Zola. The people who work at the museum are very knowledgeable. Every day I learn something new and interesting,” explains Elise.

“I’m glad I decided to take this trip to Aix,” says *Madame* Rosemarie, sipping her lemonade. “There seems to be lots to do.”

“There are a number of museums in Aix,” Elise tells her mother. “I’ve visited a few. One of my favorites is the Natural History Museum. They have dinosaur fossils which were found near Aix.”

“I’m also looking forward to going to the Aix International Music Festival,” says *Madame* Rosemarie.

“I know you enjoy listening to music,” states Elise. “This festival is world famous. The operas and concerts take place in various locations throughout the city.”

Toward the end of the afternoon, *Madame* Rosemarie, Elise and their five furry friends get into the car and drive over to the professor’s apartment.

“It’s not far from here,” Elise tells her mother.

They stop in front of a small, older building near the center of town and park the car. The apartment is on the ground floor. Elise opens the front door and they walk down a hallway to a simply furnished sitting area with a brown sofa, two brown armchairs and a fireplace.

“Let me show you around,” proposes Elise. “There’s a small fenced garden off the living room, where Voltaire, Max, Say What, Tish, and Zoa can play. The two bedrooms and the study are down that corridor. The kitchen is small, but I’m sure you’ll find everything you need. The professor told me that he thought you might like to stay in the guest bedroom.”

“I’m sure I’ll be very comfortable here,” says *Madame* Rosemarie.

Voltaire, Max, Say What, Tish, and Zoa bound into the garden, delighted to be out of the cramped car.

“It’s a nice garden,” says Max. “But it’s a little small.”

“There are pretty flowers growing in this corner,” observes Tish. “They smell lovely.”

“I hope *Madame* Rosemarie will take us on some long walks,” says Voltaire.

“Me, too,” answers Say What.

“I see a few nice spots where I can relax and enjoy the warm sun,” chimes in Zoa.

“The professor’s mother lives just next door,” notes Elise. “He asked me if you wouldn’t mind looking in on her from time to time. She sits in her garden on most days when the weather is good. I can introduce you. Her name is *Madame* Marcel.”

“Of course I’ll check on her,” says *Madame* Rosemarie.

Madame Rosemarie and Elise go to meet the professor’s mother. They knock on her door.



A petite, elderly lady, with snow white hair, opens the door. *Madame* Rosemarie introduces herself and Elise.

“*Bonjour*,” says *Madame* Marcel. “Please come in. My son told me that a lady would be staying in his apartment. It’s nice to meet you.”

They follow *Madame* Marcel into her living room. They sit down on a beige couch facing an open windowed door with a view of her garden.

“I see that you have a parrot,” says Elise.

“Yes,” responds *Madame* Marcel. “Her name is Lady. She keeps me company.”

“*Bonjour*,” says Lady. “How are you?”

“Lady likes to talk,” explains *Madame* Marcel. “I’m glad someone will be staying in my son’s apartment. I get lonely when he and his wife travel. He told me you also had some pets.”

“Yes,” says *Madame* Rosemarie. “I have a dog, named Voltaire. I also have four cats — Max, Say What, Tish, and Zoa. They’re all well behaved. I will introduce you and Lady to them tomorrow.”

“I like dogs and cats,” says *Madame* Marcel. “I hope they’ll like Lady. She’s very friendly.”



After visiting with *Madame* Marcel, Elise helps her mother bring her luggage into the professor’s apartment.

“I think I’ll unpack my bag now,” states *Madame* Rosemarie. “I went through your closet and brought some summer clothes for you.”

“*Merci, Maman,*” says Elise.

“How are your studies going?” asks *Madame* Rosemarie.

“I like my geography classes,” replies Elise. “As you know, this past year I’ve been studying geographic information systems. Making maps is fun. Next year, I want to apply for an internship with the International Union for the Conservation of Nature. It’s the world’s oldest and largest global environmental organization. It’s based in Switzerland, not far from our house in Ferney-Voltaire.”

“That’s excellent,” says *Madame* Rosemarie. “It’ll be a fantastic experience.”

“I’ve made a reservation at a restaurant on one of the side streets, near the Cours Mirabeau (pronounced **coor-mee-rah-boh**),” says Elise. “It’s not far from here. After dinner, we can take a stroll on the Cours.”

“I like walking on the Cours,” notes *Madame* Rosemarie. “It’s such a picturesque boulevard. I especially like the trees lining the street.”

Later that evening, Elise and *Madame* Rosemarie arrive at the restaurant.

“This looks like a charming little restaurant,” says *Madame* Rosemarie.

A waiter seats them at a table with a view of the street.

“What are you going to order, *Maman?*” asks Elise.



“Everything on the menu looks good,” replies *Madame* Rosemarie. “I think I’ll have the bouillabaisse (pronounced **boo-yah-bess**).”

“Me, too,” says Elise. “I love seafood stew. It’s a typical dish of this region.”

The waiter arrives with the saffron infused seafood stew of freshly caught Mediterranean fish and shellfish in a lush tomato broth. He serves this with a toasted *baguette* covered with aioli (pronounced eye-**oh**-lee), a traditional creamy garlic sauce.

After dinner, *Madame* Rosemarie and Elise walk over to the Cours Mirabeau.

“This is certainly a busy and lively area,” observes *Madame* Rosemarie.

“I like to walk here during the day, under the shade of the plane trees,” says Elise. “There are interesting things to see on the Cours, like the 17th-century mansions and the ornamental fountains. It’s also a great shopping street.”

“I’ll definitely come back and explore this part of town while you’re working,” says *Madame* Rosemarie.