

They walked quickly along the cloister in front of the north wing of the palace, and then down the eastern cloister.

"Why can't we just go straight across the garden?" Joe asked. "That would be much quicker."

"We can't walk there!" Lucy said, scandalised. "We'd be noticed. Only my parents walk there, and then only when they have important visitors."

"You're not allowed to play in the garden?"

"Of course we are. Just not this one. This is the formal garden. There would be no point going into it, even if we were allowed to. You can see there's nowhere to hide, and the cypress trees wouldn't be much fun to climb. These espaliers wouldn't be any good either, and the gardeners would be furious. We have other gardens on the side where we live. We can do what we like there."

Joe looked around as he followed her. It was so hard to take in. He felt like his brain was still shouting

at him all the time, that this couldn't be real, there must be some kind of trick or optical illusion or something like that. Perhaps he was in a film set. But that didn't explain the way this other world had sprung up around him, in a fraction of a second. And it didn't explain the fact that the modern houses he'd wanted to magic away earlier had genuinely disappeared.

Time travel didn't happen, not in real life, he told himself. But the alcoves in the hedges now had statues and fountains in them, just like they'd said in the information film. And around the sections of hedged lawn was a whole palace just like the computer simulation he'd seen earlier.

It was a series of big low buildings like four sides of a square, with roofs made with large red tiles, like something out of Italy. Along each side of the square there was a covered cloister - colonnades, he remembered they were called - and they were all the same, except for the one on the west side which was grander. He wished he'd paid more attention to the model in the museum earlier on. Then he would have known what the different parts of the palace were supposed to be for, assuming the archaeologists had got it right.

Of course, he could always ask Lucy. But at the moment, he felt he would rather not ask her more than he had to. In any case, he thought, the archaeologists seemed to have done pretty well with their reconstruction. They'd be pleased if they knew.

Suddenly, he wondered whether one of them had been here and had a look, like he was doing now. That would explain how they'd managed to get so much of it right. After all, if he really had slipped through time by mistake himself, why shouldn't someone else have done the same? Maybe there was some kind of hole in the air, like an invisible doorway.

But he hadn't noticed anything when he climbed through the rail to look for his St. Christopher. He was just in the present one moment, and here - wherever here was - the next. It was completely baffling. This other world felt just as real as his own. But everything looked different.

As they stepped out of the shade of the colonnade at the end of the east wing, he realised that there was something else that was different too. Back at home, it had been cloudy and cool. Here, it was really hot, in a way it never was at home, more like it had been when they went on holiday to Italy last summer.

"What's in there?" he asked, pointing to a building with curved roofs on the end of the east wing.

"That's the bath house," Lucy said. "We go there once a week."

Joe remembered the pictures of Roman baths he'd seen in books at school. They looked like swimming pools. "Can we go there?"

Lucy was shocked. "Not together! It's men and boys in the afternoon. I go in the mornings with the

women."

"That's a pity. It would be nice to cool off."

She looked surprised. "It's warm today, I suppose, but it gets quite a bit hotter than this. Where do you come from?"

Joe didn't answer. He didn't know what to say.

Beyond the bath house was another garden. This was quite different from the formal garden in the centre of the palace. Here, there were bushes and trees, many of them of kinds that he didn't recognise, dotted around an enormous lawn. The lawn itself ran the full length of the south wing and further, sloping down towards the sea. There were flowers too, in huge flowerbeds like in a park back at home.

"Is all this yours?" He gazed around. "You could get lost here!"

Lucy beamed. "It's wonderful, isn't it? We only moved here last year. It took quite a while before the palace was ready for us, but it was worth the wait. It's much nicer than where we lived before."

"Where was that?"

She frowned vaguely. "I'm not sure. Somewhere near Verulamium I think."

"Where's Verulamium?"

"Oh, two or three days journey from here."

"Walking?"

"Goodness, no! With horses. We have a dozen horses. In fact, there's one of them over there." She pointed. A black stallion grazed in a circle around the

stake it was tethered to. "My father had him brought over from Hispania. The horses here aren't as handsome as that." She spoke proudly.

"You must be very rich," Joe said.

"We are," she said, carelessly. "My father is very important. He goes to Rome quite often to report to the Emperor on the province. Of course, before he can do that, he has to travel round Britannia to see for himself what's going on. Sometimes, he's away for months at a time."

The way she was talking made Joe think of the kids in his class who boasted about their parents' business trips. "Do you miss him?" he asked.

She shrugged. "Not really. Even when he's here, he's so busy, we hardly see him."

Joe thought of his own dad. He was a history teacher and had seldom been away. Until now. For the first time, he decided to put Dad out of his mind. "I wish we were rich," he said instead.

"Mmmm." Lucy seemed not to be listening. "Let's sit down in the shade of that tree for a bit."

They crossed the grass together. "Now then, you know the first thing we need to do about you?"

Joe settled himself beside her, glad to get out of the sun again. "What's that?"

"We have to decide who we're going to say you are. People will ask, and it would be better to have an answer ready."

"I'm Joe Hopkins, I told you that."