

What a small world!

« What a small world! ». As a child, I often heard my mother repeating that sentence again and again. As an experienced businesswoman, she knew pretty well how relationships work in a professional context, and how close people could be. She warned me several times for the purpose of teaching me how to avoid any misunderstanding. Hearing this, I thought it was just common sense. But I really understood the meaning of this advice at the age of thirteen when Paula, a childhood friend of mine, invited me for the first time to her home in Annecy. I discovered that the world can be very surprising for better or worse.

Paula Diarra was my best friend until the end of adolescence. I first met her at primary school on a soccer field. She ran fast on her black legs, and had a pretty good sense of play! She was tall, clever, and considered as one of the best player. She had a tomboy's reputation, and quickly joined my gang of friends. We've made such a good team, and lived unforgettable moments. Then, when we got to middle school, we were separated. Paula had to move to Annecy with her family whereas I stayed at Evires, my native village, with my other friends. Nevertheless, I decided to keep in touch with her. As we both loved soccer, we joined the Scionzier team. Scionzier was a town located between Evires and Annecy. So, we could see each other once to three times per week.

Each time we met, we told each other everything. Our success stories, our concerns, our projects, EVERYTHING. She was very close to me, much more than my classmates were. She was my confidante; I was her go-to guy. I told her what I liked at school, and what I hated. One day, I confessed to having some trouble with my English teacher. Her name was Christine Desbiolles. This old and nasty woman was definitely the worse person I met. Her course was incomprehensible and disorganized. Moreover, she was far too much severe. She was particularly evil with me. I got a one page long punishment every week for chatting. Okay, I talked from time to time with Bob, who was sitting next to me, but not too much! I was not disturbing her class! Mrs. Desbiolles seemed to hate me, and so did I. That's why several times; I decided to take revenge on her. One day for instance, I stuck a chewing gum on her chair before the beginning of the lesson. Another day, I tagged her name and some of my favorite insults on the wall located behind the middle school's building.

When I told that to Paula, she didn't seem to appreciate it. She asked me: « Why have you been so evil with her? She is old and more tired than us. She is less patient. You must understand it. ». Upset, I answered: « What am I supposed to understand?! I am not guilty! I like to talk a little bit with Bob, but I am not a dunce! She is always punishing me, whatever I do. I can't stand it anymore! ». Hearing this, Paula decided to change the subject of our conversation in order to calm down my anger. We talked about our plans for the coming holidays. We both enjoyed the subject. But while I was telling her what I planned to do, I saw in her eyes a bit of resentment. Maybe she didn't expect me to be so « evil » with « the poor old teacher » as she mentioned. No matter. Mrs. Desbiolles got what she deserved, that's all. Finally, my mother came by car to pick me up. I kissed Paula and said her goodbye.

Three days later, we met each other at the same place as usual. Paula was here and smiled me. She seemed to be happier than the last time we met. Perhaps she forgot about our discussion about Mrs. Desbiolles. Perfect! I didn't want to hear about her anymore. I asked: « Hey, how are you doing today? » - « Fine OK. », she answered, « And you? » - « Pretty good! Shall I ask you for some help in mathematics? I have some homework to achieve for next week. » - « Okay. I accept to help you. But I have a problem too. And it would so be nice of you to help me. ». Amazed, I said: « Okay. What's up? » - « My godmother, who stays temporary in my house, broke her leg a few days ago and must stay on bed. As my parents work, I have to take care of her. It's demanding. If you could help me this week-end, I would appreciate it so much. ». I immediately answered, « No problem! It's a pleasure for me to help a friend like you. ». Paula smiled and said: « Thank you! I knew I could count on you. Goodbye! » - « Goodbye. ». I was happy at the moment, but I didn't know yet what surprise I would meet.

At the beginning of the weekend, my mother drove me to Paula's home. During the trip, I wondered what her godmother looks like. She certainly was a tall black woman, like Paula was. Was she interested by sport? Was she shy or easy-going? I would certainly know that soon. As I arrived, I knocked the door. I heard: « Yes? ». I said: « Paula. This is Michael. Can you open the door? ». Paula came, opened the door, kissed me, and then brought me to the room where her godmother was lying. At this moment, I understood how small and surprising can be the world. Paula's godmother was actually Mrs. Desbiolles. My god! How could it be possible! How could my dear Paula live with this awful person? I suddenly realized that this week, the English lessons at middle school had been cancelled. Indeed, Mrs. Desbiolles had been said to have her leg broken. But I would have never imagined I could see her in front of me a few days later. How could I guess that ? Paula was black. Her parents too. Hence I thought her godmother should certainly be black. What a mistake ! I stared at Paula with scared eyes. Why didn't she tell me that she knew Mrs. Desbiolles on the other day ? Was it a trap ? Would they take their revenge on me ?

Paula smiled at me. She approached, put her hand on my right shoulder, and murmured in my ear: « I can imagine how surprised you are. But you have been evil with my godmother. As you are my best friend, I give you a chance to redeem yourself. I appreciate you Michael, and don't have any doubts on your kindness. ». She kissed me and said: « I accept to help you for your homework, but you have to take care of Christine. That's the deal. ». Amazed, I didn't know what to answer. After a few seconds, I answered her: « Don't worry, I will do it. You are my best friend Paula. ». But if I knew how much Paula was nice, I was more doubtful about her godmother's niceness. She looked at me with suspicious eyes, so did I. Would this be the end of the problems between us or the beginning of an even worse conflict?

The End

Can we be sure that all is well
that ends well?