



Élementine Rose was delivered not in the usual way, at a hospital, but in the back of a mini-van, in a basket of dinner rolls. There was no sign of any mother or father.

Pierre Rousseau, the village baker, had made several stops that morning before his last call at the crumbling mansion known as Penberthy House, on the edge of the village of Penberthy Floss. As Pierre's van skidded to a

halt on the gravel drive at the back door, he thought he heard a faint meowing sound.

‘Claws, that better not be you back there,’ Pierre grouched. He wondered if he had yet again managed to pick up Mrs Mogg’s cheeky tabby when he stopped to make his delivery at the general store. Claws had a habit of sneaking on board when Pierre wasn’t looking and had often taken the trip around the village with him.

But Claws did not reply.

Pierre hopped out of the van and walked around to the side door. A faded sign in swirly writing said ‘Pierre’s Patisserie – cakes and pastries of distinction’. He grabbed the handle and slid open the panel.

‘Good morning, Pierre,’ a voice called from behind him.

‘Good morning, Monsieur Digby,’ Pierre called back. ‘You must ’ave a full ’ouse this weekend, *non?*’

‘No, Lady Clarissa just likes to be prepared in case there’s a last-minute rush,’ said Digby.

But there never *was* a last-minute rush. Digby Pertwhistle had been the butler at Penberthy House for almost fifty years. He had started working for Lord and Lady Appleby as a young man and when they both passed away over twenty years ago their only child, Lady Clarissa, had taken charge. Digby loved Lady Clarissa like a daughter.

As well as the house, Lady Clarissa had inherited a small sum of money from her parents. But Penberthy House had sixty rooms and a roof that leaked in at least sixty places. Soon the money had all been spent and there were still more repairs to be done. So to help pay the bills, Lady Clarissa had opened the house to guests as a country hotel. Unfortunately, business wasn't exactly booming. Penberthy Floss was a very pretty village but it was a little out of the way.

Although Lady Clarissa didn't always have the best of luck with the house, she had the most incredible good fortune with competitions. It had started years ago when she was just

a child. With her mother's help she had sent off an entry to the newspaper to win a pony. Three days before her ninth birthday, a letter had arrived to say that she was the winner of a shaggy Shetland, which she called Princess Tiggy. Her love of contests had continued and everyone in the village knew of Lady Clarissa's winning ways. Mrs Mogg would put aside newspapers and magazines and make sure that she marked all of the competitions available.

Over the years, Lady Clarissa had won lots of different things that helped her keep the house running. There were electrical appliances, a kitchen makeover and even several holidays which she gave to Mr Pertwhistle in return for his hard work. She often gave prizes she didn't need to her friends in the village too. They frequently protested and said that she should sell her winnings and pay for the upkeep of the house, but Lady Clarissa would have none of it. If Penberthy House was a little chilly from time to time, or they had to keep a good supply of buckets to set around the place whenever

it rained, it didn't matter. Just as long as the people she cared about had everything they needed.

But that's all quite beside the point. This morning there was a delivery that would change Lady Clarissa's life more than any prize could.

Pierre Rousseau and Digby Pertwhistle were standing beside the delivery van chatting about the weather when Pierre put his forefinger to his lips.

'Shhh, did you 'ear that?' he whispered.

'What?' Digby replied. The old man cocked his head and frowned.

'That noise, like a kitten,' Pierre explained.

'No, I don't hear anything but I'd better take those rolls and get a move on,' Digby said as he glanced into the van. They were entertaining three guests that evening. It wasn't exactly a full house, but more visitors than in the past few weekends. Perhaps things were looking up.

Digby pulled the basket towards him. He

picked it up from the edge of the van and staggered under the weight.

‘Good grief, man! What did you put in these rolls? Bricks?’ Digby exclaimed.

‘What do you mean?’ asked Pierre, looking shocked.

Digby Pertwhistle handed him the basket and Pierre strained under the unexpected weight. ‘*Sacrebleu!* My rolls are as light as a feather. That rotten Claws, he must be ’iding in the bottom of this basket. My bread will be ruined.’

Pierre lifted the tea towel that was covering the rolls.

His mouth fell open. He looked, then gently put the basket back down in the van, rubbed his eyes and looked again.

Digby Pertwhistle looked too.

Both men stared at each other and then at the basket. Fresh white dinner rolls surrounded a tiny face with rose-pink lips and bright blue eyes.

Pierre finally found his voice. ‘That’s not Claws. It’s a baby.’

‘It’s a baby, all right,’ Digby agreed. ‘But where did it come from? And more importantly, who does it belong to?’

Pierre reached into the basket and gently lifted the infant out. It was dressed in a pink jumpsuit and had a fluffy white blanket around it. Pinned to the blanket was an envelope addressed to Lady Clarissa Appleby, Penberthy House.

‘It’s not my usual delivery,’ Pierre said. ‘But it is meant for Lady Clarissa.’

‘How did the baby get into the van?’ Digby Pertwhistle wondered out loud.

‘It must have been when I was at Mrs Mogg’s store,’ Pierre replied. ‘But I don’t remember seeing anyone in the village.’

Cradling the tiny child in his arms, Pierre Rousseau, followed closely by Digby Pertwhistle, made the most important delivery of his life.

Lady Clarissa was in the kitchen up to her elbows in washing up. A newborn baby was the last thing she expected on that sunny spring

day. But Lady Clarissa took the child's arrival in her stride, just as she did most things.

The note pinned to the baby's blanket read:

*Dear Lady Clarissa,*

*Her name is Clementine Rose and she is yours. The papers attached to this letter say so. No one can take her from you. Please do not look for me. I came on the wind and now I am gone.*

*Love her, as I wish I could have done.*

*E*

Pierre suggested they call the police. 'It's not right to find a baby in a basket of dinner rolls,' he declared.

Digby added, 'It's not right to find a baby without a mother.'

But from the moment Lady Clarissa locked eyes with Clementine Rose, a bond was struck. Lady Clarissa was in love. Digby Pertwhistle was too. And the paperwork was all in order.

The old man bustled about the house



finding this and that. He remembered that Lady Clarissa's baby things had been stored years ago in the attic and, without a word of prompting, he set off to find what he could.

Pierre disappeared into the village and returned with a box of baby requirements. He bought nappies and formula and even dummies and bibs. He had two young children of his own. His daughter Sophie was just a month old, so he knew a lot about babies.

'Mrs Mogg, she will come and 'elp tonight with your guests,' he explained.

Clementine Rose gurgled and cooed, she slept and she ate. But she hardly ever cried. It was as if she knew right from that first moment how much she was loved and adored, even though she was far too young to understand it at all. And over the years she grew up and no one could remember what life had been like before that fateful morning she arrived in the basket of dinner rolls.