



Tableau for Four Please

I appointed myself tour guide on the last day of our friends' visit in the Loire Valley. Sandy and Philippe had packed their bags and their darling dog, Sam, boarded the train from Paris and arrived for a long weekend with us in Amboise.

Leo and I normally shared the driving honors, but I drove our little Peugeot everywhere we went during this visit. Leo's long legs behind the wheel allowed no room for a passenger behind him, so I welcomed the opportunity to 'be in control', to turn here, there and everywhere my spontaneous heart desired.

That meant, of course, that we ended up on a few dead ends, but the adventures were unusual and well worth the laughs. VERY strong case in point is shown in the photo to the right! (Just in case you can't make out the wonderfully French warning sign, it depicts a car going into the water straight ahead on the road.) Oh the joys of serendipity travel!

We all reveled in the sites of the area – Roman ruins and off-road 'caves' (wine caves), local marketplaces, ancient abbeys and warmly invited wayside inns for lunch or dinner. Time with close friends is memorable. Time with special friends in France is uniquely precious!

At the end of our last busy day, I announced that we would be taking a picnic dinner to a mystery location. A couple of days earlier, I had noticed an enticing area on the quiet, island side of the Loire River. I hustled everyone to action. "We **don't** want to miss sunset!"



All of us worked quickly to gather our goods and ‘goodies’. Leo and Philippe packed wine, glasses and plates. Sandy added fruit, nuts and tablecloth. I tossed a salad of market-fresh tomatoes, greens, cucumbers and broccoli. Gruyere and comte cheeses, baguettes and fresh-from-the-patisserie chocolate éclairs completed our banquet preparation – a lovely meal any time but especially so for our special destination! Outdoor air and stunning scenery elevate the simplest cook to masterful chef!

Our timing was ideal. The air cooled, as the sun dipped in the August sky. A tableau for four by the river was the perfect reservation. Four, that is, plus bandana-draped Sam! He’s always happy but was grateful to wander the shore, loll in the grass and nibble treats, while we prepared our site.

Tablecloth spread, wine poured. Cheeses displayed with sliced apples and baguettes. We began our feast with Sandy’s appreciative toast. “To our dear, dear friends. Thank you for our wonderful visit and this magnificent picnic.” Plastic cups don’t exactly ‘clink’, but we managed to join in the spirit of the moment.



Each of us savored the evening. I slipped down to the shallow waters by the Loire to capture the changing colors. The arches of the bridge turned



golden under the warming light of dusk. Pale driftwood rested in the silt at the shoreline. Neither photos nor words do justice. When I looked toward our dining party on the shore, my ‘freeze-frame’ mental library captured the memory for all time.

Laughter – even lighthearted silliness. Calm. Sam, happily included. The act of merely **being** in a world so busy with purpose. It was a scene enriched with friendship and the simple pleasure of a picnic dinner by the Loire.



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