



Victorian times

The following extract concerns a young boy called Robbie who has managed to travel back in time to the year 1875, although he does not realise this yet. He has met a girl called Charlotte who is showing him round the garden of her rather grand home. Robbie has visited the house and the gardens on another occasion.

They walked on slowly, along a tidy gravel driveway, until Robbie heard the rumble of wheels and the sound of hooves as a horse-drawn carriage charged up behind them. They had to step off the driveway on to the lawn to avoid being run over.

“Wow!” said Robbie. “That’s impressive. Where are the cameras?”

“What cameras?” asked Charlotte, then continued, “My mother has a friend called Mrs Cameron. She has a camera. Mother thinks it is very strange for a woman to have a new invention like that. But Mrs Cameron is coming to make a picture of me soon. She makes a portrait without using paints. Do you know how a camera works? It’s very clever.”

“No, I don’t actually,” replied Robbie, thinking briefly of his own digital camera at home. But his thoughts didn’t linger on this; instead his mind was whirring like a dozen computers. He had stubbornly held on to the idea that this was a film set but the evidence was building up against this.

Suddenly his doubts became even stronger. They had reached the old stables. He recognised the outside of them from the last time he came here with Mum and Erica and they had had a cream tea. But as soon as he and Charlotte passed through the gateway everything was so different.

There were no big glass doors; instead there were big wooden doors swung open to reveal three shining carriages. There were no wooden picnic tables; where they had been when Robbie had last visited, the carriage that had driven past them was now standing and luggage was being lifted from it. There was no gift shop; there were tack rooms with leather reins and saddles and shining brasses. There were no public toilets; there were stables, with rows of horses’ heads showing above the half-doors. Four horses were being rubbed down in the yard by four men wearing leather aprons. These were obviously the horses that had just pulled the carriage up the long gravel drive.

Robbie looked around very carefully: at the ground, at the walls and up to the roofs. There were no cameras to be seen anywhere. “What year is this?” he asked Charlotte.

“Robert Vincent Smith, do you not know anything?” she responded.

“What year is this?” he asked, unable to conceal the desperation in his voice.

“Eighteen seventy-five, of course,” replied Charlotte.

