

By Gina Mayer

© 2021 Ravensburger Verlag GmbH, Ravensburg

www.foreignrights-ravensburger.com

© English sample translation by Elisabeth Meister

Chapter 1, in which Nora gets dizzy

The church bell gave two brief chimes. Half past four. In forty-five minutes, it would be light. The roofs of the neighbouring houses were already clearly visible against the sky, which was no longer black but a dark grey. The stars above them twinkled only faintly. And there was a pink glow on the horizon. That was the sun, ready to go.

The windowsill of Nora's and Lucy's room was still empty. What if Nora had been waiting in vain and there was not going to be a message all night?

"Impossible," she said. "There's no way Mum and Dad are forgetting our birthday."

"Mmmh-hmm." Her twin sister Lucy mumbled something in her sleep. She was sitting next to Nora, her head of blond curls resting on the large pillow Nora had placed on the windowsill after Lucy had nodded off.

They had originally intended to take turns keeping watch, but Lucy had already dozed off around ten thirty. At midnight, Nora had tried to shake her sister awake and say happy birthday, but it was hopeless. Lucy was zonked out like a bear in hibernation. Even when Nora sang Lucy and herself a birthday song, there wasn't so much as a flutter of an eyelid.

Now it was almost morning, Lucy was still asleep and Nora was wide awake. That was nothing unusual. Nora loved the night. She frequently switched the lamp on her nightstand back on after going to bed and read or drew until dawn.

This night, however, all she had done was look out the window. And wait for a letter that hadn't arrived.

"Yet," Nora said, staring so intensely into the darkness that her eyes were starting to burn.

Wasn't there something moving over on the trampoline in the neighbour's garden? There! Now a small figure emerged from the shadows and darted across the lawn.

Nora held her breath before releasing it again with a soft hiss. It was only Moritz, the fat cat of the Schroeder family who lived in the terrace house next door.

A light came on on the ground floor of the Guenzels' house. Through the living room window, Nora saw Ms Guenzel moving through the room, a cup of coffee in her hand. She probably had an early shift at the hospital, that's why she was up so early.

Nora morosely stared at the empty windowsill. The reason was this: on the morning of their birthday, the twins would always find a letter from their parents outside their window. They were eagerly looking forward to it all year.

The first letter had arrived on their sixth birthday. Back then, they had both still been in kindergarten and couldn't read. So Mum and Dad had simply drawn their birthday wishes.

Nora and Lucy had known straight away that the note was from their parents – after all, the woman on the piece of paper had the same black hair as Mum and the man was wearing Dad's red glasses and had lots of freckles on his face, just like Dad.

By Gina Mayer

© 2021 Ravensburger Verlag GmbH, Ravensburg

www.foreignrights-ravensburger.com

© English sample translation by Elisabeth Meister

They also immediately understood that the whole thing was a secret. After all, Mum and Dad were both putting a finger on their lips. That meant: *Sssh!*

For the last four years, Nora and Lucy had been collecting their birthday letters in an envelope they kept hidden under Lucy's mattress. Whenever one of them was sad or sick or they simply felt like it, they took out the letters and read them to each other. The sheets had already become soft and warped because they held them in their hands so often.

Today, Nora and Lucy would receive their fifth birthday letter. And they would find out who put their parents' notes on their windowsill. They had stayed up in order to intercept the messenger. Well, at least Nora had stayed up.

Maybe there wasn't even a messenger who brought the letters, she now thought. Maybe Mum and Dad did it themselves. Her heart beat loud and fast at the thought. Maybe she would see her parents again this very night.

They had disappeared precisely four years and fifty-one days ago. On the evening of April 30, they had dropped Nora and Lucy off in Segensberg at their Auntie Julia's and Uncle Andreas's. But they had not turned up as agreed the next morning to pick them up again.

"They phoned to say they'd be late," Auntie Julia said.

But in the evening, their parents still hadn't turned up.

"Unfortunately, your Mum and Dad have been held up," Auntie Julia explained as she put Nora and Lucy to bed. But she didn't explain who had held them up or why.

Initially, the twins had bombarded her with questions, but they kept receiving the same answer: Don't worry, they're fine, they'll be back soon.

If it hadn't been for the letters that regularly arrived on their birthdays, Nora and Lucy might even have thought they would never see their parents again.

Now a black car was turning the corner and slowly heading towards their house. It stopped directly in front of the driveway. Nora's heart almost stopped as well. It was happening, the letter was finally getting delivered!

She almost fainted with excitement when she saw the driver's door opening.

She hastily hid behind the curtain so she wouldn't be seen from outside. Unfortunately, that meant she could no longer see who was getting out of the car either.

She furtively peeked from behind the curtain towards the windowsill. As soon as an envelope was being placed there, she would step out of her cover and tear open the window. If it was a messenger, she would implore him to tell her everything about her parents. And if it was Mum or Dad ...

A car door slammed outside. Suddenly, Nora's legs felt as soft as butter cream and her head was spinning. What kind of strange dizziness was this? Nora felt as if she had been

By Gina Mayer

© 2021 Ravensburger Verlag GmbH, Ravensburg

www.foreignrights-ravensburger.com

© English sample translation by Elisabeth Meister

spinning around in a circle at top speed for ten minutes straight and then abruptly come to a stop. She needed to sit down for a moment, just briefly.

She slid to the ground, her back against the wall.

She leaned her head against the wallpaper and closed her eyes. The dizziness disappeared as quickly as it had come. Instead, she felt an incredible, indescribable, irresistible tiredness rising up inside her. And then she stopped feeling anything at all.

When she opened her eyes again, grey twilight filled the room. *Dingg, dinggg, dingggg!*, the church bells went. Quarter to five.

She jumped up so quickly that she bumped against Lucy's chair, almost shoving her sister to the ground in the process.

"I don't believe it!" Nora cried. "This can't be happening!"

"What is it?" At least Lucy was awake now. She stretched her arms above her head, yawning loudly. But then she abruptly closed her mouth again.

A clean white envelope lay on the windowsill. On it, someone had written *For Nora and Lucy!* in sweeping handwriting.

The black car that had stopped in front of the house was gone.

"And?" Lucy exclaimed as she tore open the window and snapped up the letter. "Did you see the messenger?"

"I fell asleep," Nora stammered.

"Oh no!" Lucy ruffled her light blond hair so it stood up in all directions. "We've missed him again!"

"How could that happen?" Nora shook her head, speechless.

"It's obvious." Lucy yawned. "You were tired. It's perfectly understandable." She turned the envelope in her hands with a sigh. "Bummer. Now we have to wait another year for our next chance."

"I was wide awake," Nora said. "But then I suddenly felt dizzy and had to sit down. That's a bit weird, isn't it?"

Lucy looked at her sister in surprise. "How do you mean? Do you think the messenger somehow ... made you fall asleep?"

"Maybe it wasn't a messenger at all," Nora whispered. "Maybe Mum brought the letter herself. Or Dad."

Lucy opened her mouth to respond but just ended up shaking her head instead.

No. Nora swallowed. Lucy was right. It was impossible. That Mum or Dad had been here without at least giving them a kiss. It was absolutely unthinkable.

She felt tears welling up in her eyes. They had used to live in the old mill at the edge of the forest together. For their birthday, Mum would bake them a Gugelhupf cake that tasted great

By Gina Mayer

© 2021 Ravensburger Verlag GmbH, Ravensburg

www.foreignrights-ravensburger.com

© English sample translation by Elisabeth Meister

even though it was always a little burnt. Nora remembered her and Lucy blowing out the candles together, and then Dad and Mum had given them a hug.

“Happy birthday, my favourite girls!” Nora could hear her dad say. “Stay as inimitable as you are.”

Inimitable. They truly were. Even though Nora and Lucy were twins, they were like day and night. Nora’s hair was dark brown and straight and her skin was very fair. Many happy freckles danced on her nose. Lucy had freckles as well but her skin became so suntanned in the summer that you couldn’t see the little dots anymore. Nora’s eyes were blue and Lucy’s a bright green, like cough drops.

Lucy put the letter down and gave Nora a hug. “Happy birthday, my favourite girl,” she said solemnly.

“Happy birthday, my favourite girl,” Nora said as well.

And then they opened the letter.

Chapter 2, which features two more mysterious letters

Lucy’s voice wobbled a little as she read out the letter:

All the best to our favourite girls!

Today is a big day. Our twins are turning ten.

Happy birthday, dear Lucy!

Happy birthday, dear Nora!

We are so proud of you because you are everything we ever dreamed you would be. We would so love to celebrate with you all day! But unfortunately we can’t yet, so you’ll need to be patient for a little bit longer.

Your lives will be turned upside down this year. And it all starts today.

Follow the instructions to the letter and all will be well. And whatever happens, don’t be afraid. Remember: we are with you, day and night.

A magically tender kiss from

Your Mum and Dad

Lucy lowered the letter and looked excitedly at Nora.

“That’s pretty intense,” she said. “Our lives will be turned upside down.”

Nora took the sheet from her to re-read the entire thing.

By Gina Mayer

© 2021 Ravensburger Verlag GmbH, Ravensburg

www.foreignrights-ravensburger.com

© English sample translation by Elisabeth Meister

“Follow the instructions to the letter,” she murmured.

“What instructions?” Lucy asked.

“No idea,” Nora said. “But I guess we’ll find out!”

By now, the sun stood a hand’s breadth above the satellite dish on the Guenzels’ roof. The last stars had disappeared, only the moon still shone thin and translucent through the branches of the apple tree. Nora threw a glance at the clock next to her bed. Almost five thirty. She was suddenly awfully tired.

The alarm would ring at seven, so there were a good one-and-a-half hours left.

“What are you doing?” Lucy asked when Nora sat down on the bed. “You’re not going to sleep now, are you? It’s our birthday, we need to enjoy every second of it!”

“I know. But I’m pooped.” Nora’s head hit the pillow heavily. She didn’t even feel the impact because she had already dozed off.

“Happy birthday to you! Happy birthday to you, happy birthday, Nora and Lucy, happy birthday to you!” The singing was loud and horribly off key.

Twenty tea lights were flickering on the table, and around them sat Nora and Lucy, Auntie Julia, Uncle Andreas, Tim, Tom and little Ture.

When Nora and Lucy had moved into the Sanders’s terrace house – that was Julia’s and Andreas’s surname – back in the day, there had only been Tim. Tom had been born three years ago, Ture thirteen months ago. And soon a new baby would arrive, Auntie Julia’s belly was already quite big.

They were all over the moon with joy, especially because it was a girl for a change, but nobody really knew where she was going to sleep. Tim, Tom and Ture were already sharing a room and another bed was definitely not going to fit.

And the same was true for Nora’s and Lucy’s room.

“Oh well, I’m sure we’ll find a spot,” Julia liked to say.

“Why don’t you open your presents already!” Tim squawked. “I want to see what you got.”

Nora and Lucy blew out the candles and then went to work on the presents lying in front of their plates.

Lucy had received a book and new pyjamas with yellow flowers (yellow was her favourite colour) and a new table-tennis bat. Nora had also received a book and new pyjamas with blue flowers (that was her favourite colour) and watercolours.

“Mum had colours like that,” she said dreamily.

Auntie Julia immediately looked a bit sheepish, the way she always did whenever someone mentioned Mum.

And Uncle Andreas said: “Yes, yes, but that was really a long time ago.”

By Gina Mayer

© 2021 Ravensburger Verlag GmbH, Ravensburg

www.foreignrights-ravensburger.com

© English sample translation by Elisabeth Meister

Afterwards, it was time for Nora and Lucy to brush their teeth and go to school. As they raced from the house, they almost bumped into the postman who was just getting off his bike.

“Stop, don’t move!” he yelled at them.

But it was just a joke, the postman was actually a really nice guy.

“I’ve got something for you girls,” he told them with a wink. He pulled two letters from the yellow bag attached to his handlebars. “One for Nora Lichtblau. And one for Lucia Lichtblau. That’s you two, isn’t it?”

“That’s exactly right!” said Lucy. Lucia was actually her real name.

The envelopes were made from glossy paper. Nora’s envelope was dark blue and printed with silver and gold stars. Lucy’s letter was a pale blue, with a big golden sun emblazoned next to the address field.

That fit them perfectly. Nora was a night owl and Lucy was a day person. She was wide awake at six in the morning, even on weekends, and at night she never fell asleep later than nine. It was a miracle she had held out until ten thirty last night.

Nora, on the other hand, couldn’t sleep during the night at all and was incredibly tired in the morning. The first thing she always did after school was lie down and sleep for half of the afternoon. Towards evening, she would perk up again, and then the whole cycle began anew.

However, at the moment she wasn’t the least bit tired, even though she had been up almost all night. Excitedly, she studied the envelope with the stars on it. What kind of letter was that? Had Mum and Dad sent it?

Nora weighed her envelope in her hand. It was neither very heavy nor very thick.

“*School of Day and Night Magic*,” Lucy said.

“What?” Nora said. Then she saw that Lucy had turned her letter around and read out the sender on the back.

Nora turned her envelope around as well.

School of Day and Night Magic
111 East West Avenue
Segensberg

“Have you ever heard of this school before?” Lucy asked.

Nora shook her head.

Lucy ripped open her envelope, pulling out a sheet that was the same pale blue as the envelope. She smelled the paper.

“Smells like suntan lotion,” she murmured.

By Gina Mayer

© 2021 Ravensburger Verlag GmbH, Ravensburg

www.foreignrights-ravensburger.com

© English sample translation by Elisabeth Meister

Nora opened her letter as well. It was dark blue and printed in silver writing. And it also emitted a mysterious scent. The paper smelled moist and mossy, like a very, very shadowy spot in the forest.

This time, Nora read out the letter.

Dear Nora,

*we would like to invite you to an interview at the School of Day and Night Magic.
Your appointment will be on June 21 at midnight sharp. We are very much looking forward to meeting you!*

*Best regards
Eleonore Luna
(Head Teacher)*

PS: Not a word to anyone!

Lucy's sheet had the exact same text in golden print, except it said *Lucy* instead of *Nora*. In addition, hers was signed by someone named *Karim Karibu*, and the time was different as well.

"They want me to come to the school at midday," Lucy said.

Nora excitedly looked at her sister. "Remember how Mum and Dad said our lives would be turned upside down? I'm sure they meant this school!"

"I don't know." Lucy looked at her letter sceptically. "Maybe someone is just pulling our leg and the invitation isn't even real. I mean, what are you even supposed to learn at a school like that?"

Nora didn't reply because she was still thinking about those strange words: day and night magic. It sounded beautiful, even if she didn't know what to picture any more than her sister did.

Lucy looked at the address and frowned. "Do you have any idea where this East West Avenue is?"

"No, but we could ask Oscar," said Nora. "He's got a phone with internet access."

"Midday could get tricky, though," Lucy said. "That's sports – your favourite class."

Nora smiled at her. "I guess it'll tragically have to take place without us today."