



March 2015

Jagger Jagger by Frida Nilsson – Natur & Kultur (Swedish).....	1
Mio nonno era un ciliegio (My Grandfather Was a Cherry Tree) by Angela Nanetti – Edizioni EL (Italian).....	24
Kayıp Kitaplıktaki İskelet (Skeleton of the Lost Library) by Aytül Akal and Mavisel Yener – Tudem (Turkish).....	38
腹語師的女兒 (The Ventriloquist's Daughter) by Man-Chiu Lin – Commonwealth Publishing Group (Taiwan).....	57
마법같은 선물이야 (Trip to See the Aurora) by Hwang SunMi – SigongJunior (Korean).....	72
Allemaal willen we de hemel (We all want heaven) by Els Beerten – Querido (Dutch).....	85

For more details contact: info@rightspeople.com
<http://www.foundintranslation.org.uk>

Thank you to our judges: Anthea Bell, Barry Cunningham, Adam Freudenheim, Laura Godwin and Beverly Horowitz

FOUND IN TRANSLATION LONGLIST

Oor 'n motorfiets, 'n zombieflik en lang getalle wat deur elf gedeel kan word (About a motorbike, a zombie movie and long numbers that can be divided by eleven) by Jaco Jacobs– LAPA (Afrikaans)

Kako smo odrastali: Slobodni pad (How We Were Growing Up: Free Fall) by Mirta Stantic –Algoritam (Croatian)

Dig og mig ved daggry (You and Me at Dawn) by Sanne Munk Jensen and Glenn Ringtved – Gyldendal (Danish)

Serpina: Klintespind (Serpina: Cliff Spell) by Helle Ryding – Nyt Nordisk (Danish)

Ik Denk Dat Het Liefde Was (I think it was love) by Kathleen Vereecken – Lannoo (Dutch)

Allemaal willen we de hemel (We all want heaven) by Els Beerten – Querido (Dutch)

Vals (False) by Wallis de Vries – De Fontein (Dutch)

Ilttomien Ihnisten Kylä (The Village) by Anne Leinonen – WSOY (Finnish)

Les Brumes d'Avallach (The Mists of Avallach) by Marah Woolf – Michel Lafon (French)

Zurück nach Hollyhill (Back to Hollyhill) by Alexandra Pilz – Heyne (German)

Mein Lotta-Leben (My Life as Lotta) by Alice Pantermüller – Arena (German)

Ο Τριγωνοψαρούλης (The Little Trianglefish) by Vagelis Iliopoulos – Patakis (Greek)

Mio nonno era un ciliegio (My Grandfather Was a Cherry Tree) by Angela Nanetti – Edizioni EL (Italian)

마법같은 선물이야 (Trip to See the Aurora) by Hwang SunMi – SigongJunior (Korean)

O istorie secrete a Tarii Vampirilor (A Secret History of the Country of the Vampires) by Adina Popescu – Art (Romanian)

Pojkarna (The Boys) by Jessica Schiefauer – Nordin Agency (Swedish)

Jagger Jagger by Frida Nilsson – Natur & Kultur (Swedish)

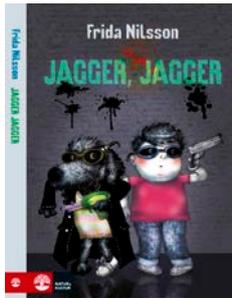
Kusinerna Karlsson: Spöken och spioner (The Karlsson Cousins: Ghosts & Spies) by Katarina Mazetti - Alfabeta (Swedish)

Jag är tyvärr död och kan inte komma till skolan idag (Unfortunately, I'm dead and can't come to school today) by Sara Ohlsson – Gilla Bocker (Swedish)

腹語師的女兒 (The Ventriloquist's Daughter) by Man-Chiu Lin – Global Kids Books, a division of Global Views – Commonwealth Publishing Group (Taiwan)

Kayıp Kitaplıktaki İskelet (Skeleton of the Lost Library) by Aytül Akal and Mavisel Yener – Tudem (Turkish)

Thank you to our readers: Abigail Osbiston, Jelena Ličina, Peter Woltemade, Laura Watkinson, Tuomas Sorjamaa, Juliette Le, Tina Moser, Rachel Baker, Don Domonkos, Aina Baraldés, Harim Yim, Christina Nan, Sofia Gydemo, Adam Kirkpatrick, Ian Giles, Chen-Wei Yu and Irem Bennetts



Jagger Jagger (Original title: Jagger Jagger)

by Frida Nilsson

Publisher: Natur & Kultur (Sweden)

First publication: September 2013

151 pages

Ages 6-9

Bengt is being bullied by the kids in the neighborhood. He'd rather not go outside at all. But every day his mom leaves a note on the kitchen table with errands for him to do, even if it's only taking out the trash. Bengt doesn't want to make his mom sad, so instead of telling her he's being bullied he goes outside.

Once, he got his hat thrown in the creek, another time there was mud on his bike seat. The time he met Jagger Svensson was when he got locked in the garbage disposal room. Jagger is a homeless down-and-out dog and not an appropriate friend, according to the parents in the building. The parents smile nicely towards Bengt and his mom and dad, talking and pretending like their kids don't bully Bengt. The only one who doesn't pretend is Jagger. He thinks Bengt should come up with the perfect revenge ...

Rights sold

France

"Empathetic and funny. The humor lies within the perfectly picked details."

"One of this year's funniest books is about bullying and revenge, and contains the sentence "Only if I hadn't been so gross, I said and cried" already on the first page. Frida Nilsson's August nominated Jagger Jagger is a story "all over the place", in the best sense of the phrase. When children's literature is divided into neat series easily categorized under "humor", "everyday" or "adventure", it's liberating to be thrown into a book that wants to be it all – and succeeds in doing so."

"Frida Nilsson couldn't avoid being funny even if she tried."

"In Jagger Jagger most characters are cowardly and unsympathetic, but Frida Nilsson writes in such a compassionate and funny fashion, that one understands and likes almost everyone. But the book's strongest glowing star is the anti-hero Bengt, who, with his plastic pistol, runs straight into the heart of the reader."

Frida Nilsson



Frida Nilsson (born 1979) is an author and translator. She made her debut with 'The Crow's Incredible Hitchhiking Adventure' in 2004, and during the following year the first book about Hedvig was published. The second book about Hedvig, 'Hedvig and Max-Olov', was nominated for the August Prize in 2006, and two other books about the street-smart country bumpkin followed. Frida's authorship is characterized by tremendous humour and great sincerity. 'Me and Gorilla', 'Me and Dante at the Dump', and 'Jagger, Jagger' is a suite of free-standing books about outsiders. Her books have been translated to many languages and in 2011 'Me and Gorilla' was nominated for the prestigious Deutscher Jungedlitteraturpreis. In 2013, she was nominated for the French Prix Tam-Tam "J'aime Lire", and won the prix Les Olympiades. She was awarded the Astrid Lindgren Prize in 2014.

JAGGER JAGGER

BY FRIDA NILSSON, Translated by Peter Graves

Me

(pp.11-23)

My name is Bengt. The summer I was eight and a half my best friend was a dog called Jagger Svensson. I sometimes wonder whether that summer was real or whether it was just a dream or something. It all seems so strange when I think about it. But at the time it just seemed ordinary.

The block I lived in was divided up into six flats. It was grey-coloured and out in the yard there was a wooden roundabout and a bench and a fir tree and a shed for the bins. Quite a lot of people lived in the block – thirty-two grown-ups, four children and some babies. The children used to play down in the yard in the summer. Not me, though.

It wasn't that I didn't want to play. Because I did. I wanted to so badly that there were times when I nearly lost it. And once I really did. I sat on the floor in my room and started howling and thumping my head as hard as I could. Mum and Dad came running in. They had to catch hold of my arms and Mum asked, 'What's the matter? What's the matter?' again and again and again.

'I wish I wasn't so horrible,' I said, crying all the time.

And Mum cried too and said I wasn't horrible at all and Dad said that Mum was right. But it didn't make any difference what they said, because they weren't the ones who got to decide who was allowed to join in and play with the others.

These are the things that were horrible about me:

Stomach (fat)

Arms (fat)

Legs (fat)

Chin (fat)

Hair (fat)

And once when we were out in the yard Astrid said I smelled of onions.

Astrid and Allan and Gustav. That's what the other children in the block were called and they were really mean to me. They did it just so that I wouldn't forget how horrible I was. Once they pushed cornflakes through my letter-box. Another time they threw my football in the river, and it was a new football with flames on it. And another time they wiped mud on the saddle of

my bike so that when I rode on it my bum got all brown. They even said I've got big boobs, but that time I told them to lay off – I had every right to say that to them, don't you think?

The day I'm going to tell you about was in the middle of June. Mum and Dad had already gone to work when I got up.

There was a note by the sink: *Bengt, Please take the rubbish out. xxx.* It was from Mum. She was forever asking me to go out and do something or the other. Buy milk or get some fresh air or pump up bike tyres. Things like that. She left a note by the sink nearly every morning.

Me, I would rather have stayed indoors until I was thirty years old. And I wanted to tape up the letter-box, too, but that would have made the postman angry. Mum said it was good for me to go out because you could never tell with the children in the yard – they might change all of a sudden. That's what she thought, anyway.

I put on my shorts and jumper and ate two sandwiches. Then I had another one and drank a glass of milk. Then I looked by the sink again.

The note was still there.

I sighed, tied the top of the rubbish sack and went out to the stairs.

All the doors looked the same. Like staring square eyes. When I got down to the front door I stopped and pressed my nose to the glass. Astrid and Allan and Gustav were outside, sitting on the roundabout as usual.

I suppose I'd better tell you what they looked like. Well, Astrid had brown hair and earrings. Allan had red hair and big ears. Gustav had fair hair and there was nothing special about him. But none of them was horrible.

I opened the door and went out quite quickly.

'What are you doing?' Astrid said.

I didn't answer. Sometimes when they said things and I answered they would say things like I WASN'T TALKING TO YOU! You just never knew.

'He's taking out the rubbish,' Gustav said.

Allan sniggered.

'Why are you doing that?' Astrid asked.

'Because I am,' I mumbled.

Astrid got up and came running over.

'What's in the rubbish?' she said, pulling at the sack.

'Let go!' I said. 'It's just rubbish.'

But Astrid just pulled harder. She said she wanted to know if the rubbish had lots of grease and fat and horrible things in it.

‘No, it doesn’t,’ I said. My cheeks were bright red – I couldn’t see them but I could feel them. I pulled and pulled and Astrid pulled in the other direction and in the end the sack broke and all the rubbish fell out on the ground.

Astrid put her hands over her mouth and screamed. Allan and Gustav screamed too. They thought it was really disgusting and really great at the same time. All three of them came up close and looked at the rubbish while I picked up some macaroons and some coffee grounds and some kitchen roll and ran over to the bin room with it.

Then I ran back and fetched some more stuff – a chicken bone and an apple core and a slimy plastic bag that had come with pork tenderloin in it.

‘Urhhhh! You’re so horrible!’ Astrid yelled. ‘Did you know there are rats in the bin room?’

‘No, there aren’t,’ I said.

‘Oh yes, there are. And they bite.’

I swallowed a nasty big lump in my throat. I didn’t know whether she was telling the truth or making it up.

‘I hate rats,’ Astrid said.

‘Why?’ Gustav asked.

‘I just do,’ Astrid said. ‘Don’t you?’

‘No,’ Gustav said.

‘No,’ Allan said.

‘No,’ I said.

‘I didn’t ask YOU!’ Astrid said.

I picked up some roast potatoes and ran to the bin room and ran back out again as fast as I could so my feet wouldn’t get bitten.

Allan started showing off to Astrid. Pretending he was tough. He said he liked rats. He actually said he thought they were cute. In fact, if he ever came across one he’d kiss its tail! Astrid shrieked so loudly it almost burst my eardrums.

‘I’m going in now,’ I said. I was sweaty. It was so hot outside that the grass on the river-bank had gone brown and the fir-tree was losing its needles. It looked as if our bit of town had been left in the oven too long.

But just as I was going up the steps to the door Astrid yelled.

‘Stop!’

I shook all over. She was good at sounding angry.

‘What is it?’ I asked.

Astrid stuck out her little finger and pointed at something. A pea.

'You forgot that!' she said.

'I don't bloody care,' I said.

And then all three of them started behaving like policemen or something. They ran up and blocked my way to the door.

'Pick it up!' Astrid said.

'No,' I said.

'Pick it up and go and put it in the rubbish. It looks horrible lying there,' Astrid said.

'No,' I said.

'No, no, no, that's all you say all the time. Can't you say anything else?'

'Of course I can.'

Then Astrid sighed and said I was annoying. She started pulling at my jumper, trying to make me go back. My body sort of automatically told me to do a thousand different things at the same time. Run away, for instance, or thump Astrid, for instance, or start screaming like an idiot, for instance. But in the end I just did what she said and picked up the pea.

I walked towards the bin room. My stomach was burning and I felt really bad. This was just the end. But I had to bin the pea. Allan and Gustav and Astrid were still standing in front of the door and they weren't going to let me pass otherwise. And at the exact moment I lifted the lid of the bin and dropped in the pea with a plop I heard them giggling madly behind me and the door slammed shut with a crash. Everything went as black as night.

I tried to open the door but someone was holding it. I heard something heavy being dragged up. There was a clunk and after that it was impossible to budge the door.

'Have a lovely, lovely time!' Astrid yelled before they all ran off.

I pounded on the door time after time.

'Come baaaaack!' I screamed. 'I want to come ouuuut!'

No one came. Through the crack in the door I could see that they'd dragged the heavy green bench in front of the door.

I sat down on the floor and cried. Every now and again it felt as if there was a rat sniffing at my feet and I kicked and screamed as much as I could. Then I cried some more.

Hours and hours passed. It was boiling hot outside, but not in the bin room. My whole body was shivering all over and my bum felt as hard and cold as the concrete it was sitting on.

At last I heard something clattering around outside the door.

'What's going on here? Stupid nonsense!' someone hissed.

I leapt up. Through the crack in the door I could see it was Qvisty. She was really old and lived up on the third floor.

‘Mrs Qvist! Help me! It’s Bengt!’ I shouted.

‘Who?’ Qvisty said, hitting the bench with her stick. It was her stick that was making the clattering noise.

‘We’re neighbours! Move the bench so I can get out,’ I yelled.

‘You dragged the bench over there yourself so you can drag it away as well,’ she snorted and then took her stick and her rubbish sack and went.

‘It wasn’t me who dragged the bench over here, can’t you see that?’ I howled. But she didn’t hear.

Our First Meeting

Hours and hours passed again. In the end it wasn't just my backside that felt like concrete, it was all over. Including my brain. I couldn't think, all I could do was shiver. I wasn't afraid of their threats anymore, because there weren't any. Astrid was nuts and ridiculous and stupid. So were Allan and Gustav. I just wished they didn't exist. Well, actually, I wished I didn't exist. That would be better. That would mean there was one less horrible fatty in the world and then Mum wouldn't have to be upset about having a son no one wanted to play with.

I had almost fallen asleep when all of a sudden I heard something scraping on the other side of the door. At last someone was trying to move the bench. I stood up and hammered. I was so sorry for myself I nearly started crying again.

'Open up!' I shrieked. 'Open it now!!!!'

'That's what I'm doing,' someone answered, panting hard.

It wasn't Qvisty.

And it wasn't Astrid or Gustav or Allan.

It wasn't anyone I knew.

After a little while the door opened.

There was a dog standing outside. Dressed in a filthy long-sleeved jumper. Pastel-coloured and almost down to his knees. His paws were covered with shoes he'd made for himself out of newspaper.

'What are you doing in here?' he said.

I didn't answer. I was a bit afraid. Dogs could be even more dangerous than rats. Not all of them, of course, but some. Mum had read in the paper about dogs that had bitten people's faces off in one bite.

The dog caught hold of a shopping trolley that he'd parked behind him. It was one of those check shopping bags on wheels that old grannies take to the shops. He trundled it into the bin room and lifted the lid of the bin.

The first thing he came across was a little pea. He held it in his filthy paws and studied it carefully. Seeing that pea again really upset me. All of a sudden I started crying so that the tears poured down my cheeks. I couldn't help it.

'Well now, if you want to be left here in peace ...' the dog said.

'I don't want to be left here in peace!' I said between sobs. 'Has everybody gone crazy?'

'What do you mean crazy?' the dog said in a sulky voice.

‘It wasn’t me who put the bench there! That shouldn’t be too difficult for you to work out!’

‘That’s obvious,’ the dog said, putting the pea into his trolley. ‘But maybe you had a friend to help you.’

‘Ha-ha!’ I yelled. ‘Ha-ha-ha-ha-bloody-ha!’

‘What’s so funny?’

‘Nothing! Nothing in all the world is funny! And I don’t have a bloody friend! Not one!’

‘That’s no reason to lose your temper with me, is it?’

I sank back down to the floor. My backside was throbbing with concrete pain, but it wasn’t important. I simply didn’t have the strength to stay on my feet, I didn’t have the strength for anything.

‘I want to die,’ I mumbled.

‘What?’ the dog said.

‘I want to die. It’s my own fault.’

‘No-o-o!’ he said, as if he thought I was trying to be funny or something.

‘Yes it is. It’s my own fault that I’m horrible. If I weren’t horrible they wouldn’t carry on the way they do. Stuffing cornflakes in the letter-box and wiping mud all over the saddle of my bike and ... shutting me in here.’

‘Who’s this they?’

‘Astrid and Allan and Gustav.’

The dog said nothing. He stared at me for a long time and then carried on looking in the bin for things to eat. He found the macaroons and the potatoes I’d thrown away and he put them in his bag. Then he found a cucumber that was really rotten, and two brown tomatoes.

‘Do you like tomatoes?’ he asked.

I shook my head.

‘Nor do I,’ he said and dropped them back in the bin.

I looked at him as he carried on rooting around. His snout was the size of a coffee cup. Grey and dry. His ears looked like a pair of oven mitts. His coat was a dirtyish sort of colour and his eyes bloodshot. But they were also quite special. Round and yellow like the headlamps of a car.

He looked as if he couldn’t care less about me, all that mattered was the rubbish. But once he’d finished going through it he shut the lid and said:

‘Now then, I’m going to tell you something. It’s like this: I know all about people like that. People who bully you and put you down.’

‘Do you?’ I said, wiping away a long string of snot that was hanging out of my nose like a worm.

He nodded. And he told me that a long time ago he’d lived in a night shelter. This shelter was a hostel where the homeless could get a bed for the night, along with a bowl of soup and soap and water and things like that. There had been masses of people living in that hostel and they were in a really miserable state. Men and women who’d lost every tooth in their mouths. But, the dog said, even though all of them were complete scarecrows all of them thought they were better than him. They said loads of nasty things to him and there was one old man called Heikki who yelled at him SIT PROPERLY!!! and elbowed him into the wall whenever they met.

There was a tear in his eye as he remembered all these bad memories and like me he wiped away a string of snot.

‘So I’ll never ever go back there,’ he said. ‘But I’ll tell you what: that Heikki, he regretted it later!’

‘Did he?’ I said.

‘Yes, he did,’ the dog said with a nod. ‘He regretted it all right.’

‘Do you mean he realised that he’d been stupid and wanted to say sorry?’ I said. That’s what Mum sometimes used to say about Astrid and Allan and Gustav. That one day they would suddenly come and say, ‘Bengt, we know now how it must feel. Can you ever forgive us?’

The dog snorted.

‘Ha!’ he said. ‘Heikki was so stupid that he’d never understand anything of the sort. No, the way he regretted it was sort of DIFFERENT from that.’ And he opened his eyes so wide that there was something amazingly mysterious about them.

Then he caught sight of an ice-cream carton which had probably fallen on the floor while he was rooting in the bin. He leapt on it and took off the lid. There was still some ice-cream left, although it was more like pink custard. He licked it all up and was left with a pink moustache around his mouth.

‘Don’t you ever eat ordinary things?’ I said.

‘Like what?’ he said. ‘Peas and ice-cream?’

He wiped his mouth on the sleeve of his jersey and closed the lid of his shopping trolley. He walked out into the sunshine and set off across the yard. The wheels on his trolley squeaked.

‘Hey, you!’ I shouted.

He turned round.

‘You didn’t finish telling me,’ I said.

‘About what?’

‘That business with Heikki and why he regretted it. What happened?’

The dog smiled, as if he’d been waiting for me to ask.

‘Come home with me and I’ll show you something,’ he said. ‘Something SECRET.’

I ran to catch up with him and after we’d gone a short distance the dog stretched and said that it was quite a long way to where he lived.

‘I can manage,’ I said. ‘I walked all the way to Mum’s work once and all the way back. Four miles each way.’

‘Why did you do that?’ he asked.

‘Because Astrid and Allan and Gustav took my door key and threw it up onto Grönstedt’s balcony. And Grönstedt was in Antalya.’

The dog sniffed and shook his head.

‘Hmm, Antalya. Some people do OK for themselves, don’t they.’

The Second Punishment

(pp.63-68)

Now I've got something exciting to tell you. A couple of days after I'd made up those stories about Qvisty I was over at Jagger's place. He was lying on a heap of cardboard boxes, paws behind his head and looking really cool in his black coat. I was wearing a green T-shirt with Be Happy on it and I was happy because I had someone to play with at last. Jagger was the best thing ever to have happened to me.

'I feel like doing something,' Jagger said.

'Me too,' I said, 'but what?'

Jagger chewed on the earpiece of his sunglasses.

'Something cool,' he said.

He walked back and forth across the floor of his skip several times, kicking the cap of a lemonade bottle.

'Punishing that Astrid girl was really great,' he said.

'Yes,' I said, 'it was.'

'If you don't punish stupid people they're never going to learn to be nice.' Jagger said.

'No,' I said, 'they won't.'

Jagger walked round a bit more. He didn't say anything, just chewed on his sunglasses. After a while I said, 'Do you think we should maybe punish somebody else?'

Jagger stopped and looked at me with a gleam in his eye.

'That's exactly what I think,' he said, putting on his sunglasses. 'Let's get over to your place and check things out.'

'OK!' I said.

We ran back across patches of grass and bits of tarmac and scruffy flower-beds. Jagger's idea was that we would look for something belonging to one of them and chuck it in the river or up on Grönstedt's balcony. Best of all would be a cute little soft toy, like a monkey with braces to hold his trousers up or something like that. I thought that was a great idea, so we ran the last bit even faster.

Gustav was outside on his own when we got there. He was sitting on the roundabout, sweating and fanning himself with his cap. Unfortunately he hadn't brought a soft toy out with him.

The front door opened and out came Astrid and Allan and then all three of them went to the bike racks to get their bikes. Gustav had trouble with his lock and he spent ages bent over the back of his bike. The others started telling him they were fed up waiting and he went redder and redder. Eventually he managed to open the lock and they cycled off, rolling down the hill towards the high street ringing their bells like hooligans.

Jagger smiled.

‘Tee-heel!’ he said. ‘Do you see what I see?’

‘What’s that?’ I said.

‘His cap,’ Jagger said, nodding his head.

‘Yeaah!’ I said. Perfect! Fantastic! Gustav had forgotten his cap and left it lying on the roundabout.

‘Shall we chuck it up on to Grönstedt’s balcony?’ I said.

‘Obviously!’ Jagger said.

We were creeping quickly and stealthily towards the roundabout, but when we were almost there someone yelled: ‘You there!’

We couldn’t see who it was who’d shouted so at first we were dead scared. But then we saw it was only Qvisty standing up on her balcony and peering around.

‘Are you the one who’s been running around making up stupid stories about me?’ she asked.

‘Erm ... perhaps ...’ I said. It would actually have been much smarter to say no, but it didn’t occur to me just then

‘You’d better come up here and say you’re sorry!’ Qvisty said.

‘I haven’t got time,’ I said.

‘Who’s that you’ve got with you?’ Qvisty said, squinting her eyes even more.

Jagger turned up his coat collar.

‘Sod that!’ he shouted.

‘What did you say?’ Qvisty said.

‘It wasn’t me!’ I said.

Qvisty looked as if she was about to burst.

‘I’ve never heard anything like it!’ she yelled and vanished from the balcony like a shot.

‘We’d better hide,’ I said.

‘Why?’ Jagger said.

‘Qvisty’s coming and she’s blowing her top!’

‘Why?’ Jagger said.

‘I said some things about her that weren’t true,’ I said. ‘Come on! Let’s go!’

We ran back and sat down behind the bush. The front door opened and Qvisty peered all round with a murderous look on her face.

‘What was it you said about her?’ Jagger hissed.

‘I told Astrid and Allan and Gustav she was a boozer!’ I said.

Jagger giggled and thought it would be fun if we shouted BOOZER! at Qvisty and then ran away. I said no, absolutely no. It was Gustav we were supposed to be punishing today, not Qvisty.

Qvisty walked over to the roundabout, prodded the cap with her stick and looked around. She probably thought the cap was mine – just as long as she didn’t take it away with her as a kind of hostage!

But Qvisty left the cap where it was and headed for the door, her stick going clickety-click as she went. The door closed behind her.

‘Hurray!’ Jagger said.

‘Hurray!’ I said.

Then we set off for the roundabout at the speed of light, but after just a couple of yards Jagger suddenly stopped.

‘They’re coming back!’ he squeaked.

‘Oh no!’ I said and followed him.

We had just managed to crouch down behind the bush again when Astrid and Allan and Gustav braked to a halt by the bike rack. They had ice-lollies in their mouths. Gustav took an age fiddling with his bicycle lock while Astrid and Allan waited on the steps and kept making rude remarks about him. Eventually Gustav left his bike unlocked and ran over to join the others. Jagger and I hugged one another tight.

Just as he reached the door, however, Gustav said something to the others, then turned round and ran back to the roundabout. He put the cap on his head and ran in after the others. The door closed with a clunk.

Jagger said nothing.

Nor did I. It was all so unfair and stupid that we felt like smashing up the yard.

‘Rats!’ Jagger snorted.

He was breathing heavily, like a zombie or something. He moved stealthily over to the bikes and I followed him. He tried rolling Gustav’s bike along – it was unlocked! He thought and he thought and then he said.

‘We’re not going to be able to throw this up onto a balcony.’

‘No, we’re not,’ I said.

‘But we could throw it in the river!’ he said.

I went hot and cold all over and my heart started pounding like the big drum at the circus.

‘Yeah!!’ I said.

Jagger looked at me with his round yellow eyes.

‘Are you with me?’

‘Too right I am!’ I said.

We trundled the bike away like greased lightning, but when we tried to heave it over the fence it got stuck and just hung there. We had to pull really hard to free it. After that it was just a matter of pushing it down into the slow-moving brown water.

Splash!

The handlebars stuck up a bit and Jagger tried throwing stones to make it sink, but it didn’t work.

So we just left the yucky bike where it was and ran back to Jagger’s place instead, screaming and shouting like crazy the whole way because we were so AMAZING!

The Mums

(pp.148-152)

Jagger was gone and I didn't know where he'd moved. Maybe it was true that his mum was alive and living in a meadow with a thousand pink flowers, I don't know. No, that couldn't really be true, I knew that. But I choked at the thought that Jagger had gone back to living in some disgusting old skip again and eating rubbish. So I forced myself to think of him having a mother who lived in a meadow. I just imagined it was true.

And then time passed and as it passed I thought less and less about Jagger. I didn't have time to because Kenny and me were having a great time playing out in the yard. We were really glad whenever Astrid or Allan or Gustav came out because we used to run over and shoot them down.

One evening Mum and Dad and me were sitting watching the bingo again. It was fun and I liked the presenter's jokes. Once he put on a cap with two fists on it and he could make them move by pulling on a string.

'HAHAHAHAHAHAHAHA!!!' I said. 'FAN-TAST-IC!'

Then the doorbell rang.

'At this time of day?' Dad said.

'I'll go,' Mum said.

She disappeared out into the hall. We heard the lock click and the door squeak and then she said in her very nicest voice: 'Well, I never, it's the three of you, is it?'

After that I couldn't hear what was actually being said, just a whole lot of stuff in nice voices all talking at the same time.

'Go and see who it is,' Dad said.

'OK,' I said and got up.

But I stopped before I reached the hall because I could hear that those nice voices were talking about me.

I flattened myself against the wall like you do when you're creeping up on someone. Then I sneaked a careful look out into the hall.

There was Allan's mum.

And Gustav's mum.

And Astrid's mum.

All three had really happy faces and all three had beaming smiles and all three had their heads leaning over to one side or the other.

‘You mustn’t think we’re poking our noses in,’ Allan’s mum said.

‘No, of course you aren’t!’ Mum said.

‘The thing is, we’ve seen how easy it is for Bengt to get into bad company,’ Allan’s mum said.

‘Mmm,’ Mum said, worried.

‘And Kenny may be a really nice boy for all I know, but he does play rough games, doesn’t he?’ Allan’s mum said.

‘Mmm,’ Mum said in the same voice.

‘And the yard has been a real mess since he started coming here,’ Astrid’s mum said.

‘Mmm,’ Mum said again

Dad got up and came over quickly.

‘Who is it?’ he whispered.

‘The mums,’ I whispered.

Dad hid by the wall beside me and we stood there and eavesdropped.

‘It’s not really our business, of course,’ Gustav’s mum said, ‘but we do wonder whether Bengt ought to be playing with a boy like Kenny.’

‘Mmm, perhaps not ...’ Mum mumbled. Then she sighed and bit her nails a bit. ‘And Bengt has started to use bad words,’ she said. ‘I expect he picked them up from Kenny.’

‘Well, you do have to ask yourself the kind of things Kenny picks up at home,’ Allan’s mum said, quiet and concerned, almost as if she felt sorry for Kenny because he used such bad words.

‘Mmm,’ Mum said and sighed again. ‘It’s just that Bengt has seemed so happy recently. I think he has a great time with Kenny.’

Then the three mums stopped leaning their heads sideways and straightened them up instead.

‘It depends what you mean by a great time,’ Gustav’s mum said. ‘Just the other day they took Gustav’s hoodie and threw it up the tree.’ She carried on smiling, but it wasn’t as beaming as before.

None of them said anything, but Gustav’s and Allan’s and Astrid’s mums all looked at my mum, almost as if they were waiting for her to pronounce the death sentence or something. The sound of exciting music came from the TV. It was actually the bingo music but it was *quite* exciting.

Mum thought for a bit and then she said:

‘If I talk to Bengt and tell him he shouldn’t play with Kenny so much he’d have to have something else to do in the day. Something he enjoyed. Something that would make it easier to forget Kenny, I mean.’

The other three mums nodded.

‘So,’ Mum said, ‘perhaps Allan could come and play in our flat one day?’

‘Mmmm ... well,’ Allan’s mum said, looking a bit put out. ‘Perhaps ... but I’m not sure he would like to.’

‘I think he enjoyed it last time,’ Mum said.

‘Absolutely!’ Allan’s mum said, making big round fibber’s eyes. ‘It’s just that one or two things have happened since then. Urrm ... Allan has told me he’s actually a bit disappointed with Bengt because Bengt doesn’t keep his promises. Something like that, anyway.’

‘Astrid then?’ Mum said to Astrid’s mum. ‘If Astrid comes tomorrow morning about ten o’clock Bengt could show her his pistols. He’s got two of them.’

‘Yes,’ Astrid’s mum said, making a happy mouth though the rest of her face looked horrified. ‘I can’t say anything definite, but I can certainly ask her.’

‘Or Gustav, then?’ Mum said, looking at Gustav’s mum. ‘If you’ve managed to get those new bike parts for the money we gave you Gustav and Bengt could go for a cycle ride.’

‘We’ve bought them but we haven’t fitted them yet,’ Gustav’s mother said in a whiny sort of voice.

Mum nodded.

Then she thought a bit more.

Allan’s mum waited.

And Astrid’s.

And Gustav’s.

The music on the TV had stopped. All you could hear now was the jolly voice of the presenter and the audience roaring with laughter.

Mum said: ‘Bengt’s dad used to say really bad words when he was little. Everyone says that children grow out of it. And I was watching when the children were throwing the hoodie around. It was quite obvious that Gustav was joining in the game.’

Then Mum closed the front door right in their faces and walked back to the sofa. She didn’t say anything about me and Dad being pressed flat against the wall like wet wallpaper.

But when Dad and I sat down Dad looked at Mum and said: ‘I’m sure I didn’t say bad words when I was little. Who said I did?’

'Your mum told me before she died,' Mum said.

'Did she?' Dad said.

'Yes, she did. When she was here with us.'

Then Dad said that he had no memory of anything of the sort, but then he shrugged his shoulders and said he supposed it might be true. And he sighed deeply and a tear came to his eye, which always happened when he thought about his dead mum. She had been unbelievably kind and given him pork chops every Sunday, which he really liked.

'The best thing of all was picking them up and sucking on the bone,' Dad said with a smile.

'Yeah, yeah, you can talk,' I said.

THE END

Jagger Jagger: Synopsis

The first person narrator, Bengt, is eight and a half years old, fat, friendless and profoundly unhappy. He lives in a small block of flats and the other three children in the block – Astrid and Allan and Gustav – refuse to play with him, call him horrible and bully him by doing things like throwing his football in the river and smearing mud all over his bicycle saddle. It is the school summer holiday and since both his parents work Bengt is alone all day. One day when he is taking rubbish out to the communal bins the children lock him in the bin room and run away. He remains there weeping for hours, cold and uncomfortable, until at last someone opens the door from outside.

That someone is Jagger Svensson, a scruffy dog dressed in a filthy jumper and pulling an old lady's shopping trolley. Bengt tells Jagger his troubles and although the dog assumes a laid-back exterior he confesses that he, too, has suffered, particularly at the hands of an old man called Heikki. Bengt goes home with Jagger, who lives in an old skip surrounded by rubbish.

Jagger is a believer in making bullies regret their behaviour and he tells Bengt how he punished Heikki by stealing his prized leather jacket, which he still possesses. He admits to being frightened that Heikki will kill him should they ever meet again. Bengt and Jagger then take turns putting on the leather jacket while practising looking and sounding tough by calling each other BRUVVA! The two of them then argue about which is superior, living in a skip or living in a flat.

Bengt returns home for supper with his mother and father. Although they suspect the reality of Bengt's situation they ask him – in exaggeratedly positive tones – what he's been up to all day. He answers 'Nothing', because he knows his mother will become tearful if he tells her the truth. But he does tell them he met a dog and they take this to mean that down-and-outs and their dogs have been hanging around the block again. His mother makes him promise to have nothing to do with the dog and tells him he must try to interact with the other children.

The following day Bengt finds himself irresistibly drawn to Jagger's skip which, to his horror, he finds empty. Fearing that Jagger has moved away because of their argument Bengt starts crying, but then he hears a voice behind him: 'What are you crying for?' It is, of course, Jagger who then tells him how he had been deserted as a pup and ended up with an endless series of foster-families. The two of them climb into the skip, where they find a dead rat. There are only three

things you can do with a dead rat: '1. You can bury it; 2. You can eat it (that was only Jagger); 3. You can find something cool to do with it.'

They decide to use the rat to punish one of the bullies. First they go to Bengt's flat to find clothes to use as disguises. Jagger is rude about everything in order to demonstrate his scorn for flat-living, but Bengt notices tears in his eyes when he finds him snuggling up to and sniffing Bengt's mum's jumper. Jagger immediately pretends to be the hard man again, putting on a black overcoat belonging to Bengt's father and a pair of spangly sunglasses. To demonstrate how tough they are they call one another BRUVVA again and pretend to smoke cigarettes.

They decide to punish Astrid first and Jagger pushes the rat through their letter-box. His paw gets trapped and they only just manage to free it before they hear a scream when Astrid finds the rat. They run and hide under the stairs while Astrid and her mother come out to search for the perpetrators, Astrid shouting that it must have be Bengt because the other children are her friends. Once the coast is clear Jagger and Bengt make their way back to the skip, laughing all the way and swearing secrecy.

Since it is a warm evening the four families with children eat out on their balconies, which means they can talk to one another. The conversation turns to the rat and all the children say Bengt was responsible. Uncomfortably and unconvincingly their parents demur, saying that Bengt has always been a nice boy; Gustav's father goes so far as to suggest that a crazy newspaper boy must be the guilty party. But the smiles are all false smiles and 'over in the pine-tree there was the hoarse croak of the magpie'. The parents then arrange for all four children to play in the yard the following morning, but Bengt knows they are actually aware how badly their children treat him.

The following morning the children try to extract a confession from Bengt but he denies everything and actually feels stronger and better than ever before. When Mrs Qvist, a pensioner living in one of the flats, comes into the yard Bengt tells the others that she has a serious drinking problem and that she was the one who pushed the rat through the letter-box; he suggests that the other three go and ask her about it.

Some days later Jagger and Bengt decide it's time for the next punishment: 'If you don't punish stupid people they're never going to learn to be nice,' as Jagger puts it. They go to the yard, where the children are setting out on their bikes. Gustav leaves his cap behind but before Jagger

and Bengt can do anything with it the children return, leave their bikes and go indoors. Now, instead of the cap, Jagger and Bengt throw Gustav's bike into the river and run back to Jagger's skip feeling 'Amazing!'

That evening Gustav and his parents come to Bengt's door to enquire whether it was Bengt who threw the bike into the river. Bengt denies it, but Gustav's parents reveal that they know how much the others have bullied him and wonder whether he is doing this to get his own back. Bengt stands by his denial, although his own mum clearly believes him guilty and says how much he has changed recently: Bengt's reaction, under his breath, is 'I KNEW I had changed and I was now much better!'

Bengt and his mother meet Allan and his mother on the stairs while the latter are on the way to the shop. Both mothers comment how nice it is that their sons enjoy shopping with them and both boys rudely say how boring it is. Bengt's mother immediately takes the opportunity to invite Allan in to play and Allan's mother promises to be back as quickly as possible. In Bengt's room Allan immediately begins to pump him about the rat and bicycle, which Bengt continues to deny. Allan proceeds to excuse himself from the bullying, throwing the blame on Astrid and Gustav. He is clearly afraid he will be the next victim. Bengt assures him he can avoid danger by being 'smart', taping up his letter-box and locking his bike. Allan is impressed, tries to be friendly and is reluctant to leave when his mother returns.

Bengt tells Jagger that everyone knows he is guilty of the acts of revenge and it's time to stop. Jagger accuses him of trying to take all the glory and of having become too friendly with Allan. He also accuses him of being a mummy's boy and afraid to leave home, whereas he – Jagger – had left home as a pup. Jagger becomes emotional about his lack of a flat and a mother and then he says he knows Bengt looks down on him. He says he is moving out and he runs off leaving a distraught Bengt shouting at him not to go.

Bengt waits forlornly at the skip until Jagger comes running back, clearly terrified. He tells Bengt he has encountered Heikki, the homeless man from whom he stole the leather jacket. Convinced that Heikki was about to kill him Jagger fled back to the skip and now he insists that the only thing that can save him is for Bengt to return the leather jacket to Heikki.

Bengt creeps under the bridge where Heikki lives and returns the jacket, clearly to the surprise of the evil-smelling old man, who proceeds to spin hard luck stories and insist that Bengt stays to talk. After some time Jagger pokes his head in 'to see if he is still alive' and he realises they have given the jacket to the wrong man. They fight to get it back and when they are victorious Jagger, in a triumphant mood, pronounces Bengt to be his best friend and insists that he accept the jacket. Now, says Jagger, it's time to punish Allan, the last of the three. Very reluctantly Bengt acquiesces, recognising that he is being emotionally blackmailed.

Bengt feels very bad on the day they are to punish Allan, especially as Jagger insists Allan deserves the worst punishment since he had treacherously tried to be friendly with Bengt. Jagger is obviously jealous and suggests that they imprison Allan under the bridge where the old man was. Bengt refuses to take part and hides. Jagger approaches Allan who refuses to accompany him, at which Jagger has no idea what to do next and shouts for advice. Now everything goes awry: Allan discovers Bengt in hiding; Bengt and Jagger try to drag Allan away, in the course of which they give him a bloody nose; Allan is screaming for his mother; Bengt falls over and sprains his ankle and Allan escapes. But old Mrs Qvist arrives and since Bengt cannot escape she beats him with her stick to make him apologise for spreading lies about her.

What follows is the worst day of Bengt's life. Weeping mothers and irate fathers force him to name Jagger and tell them where the dog lives and then the fathers set off to speak to him. Bengt recovers sufficiently to tell his mother that, far from things going wrong since he met Jagger, things have been much better. He then rushes off to try to help the dog. When he arrives Allan's father loses his temper and throws Jagger into the river, at which the dog pathetically shouts for his mother: 'And when he shouted "Mamma" his voice was so dark and despairing that shivers went through me. He sounded just like a child or a puppy, a little terrified whimpering puppy'. Fortunately the river is shallow and the fathers march off home leaving Jagger sitting in the water.

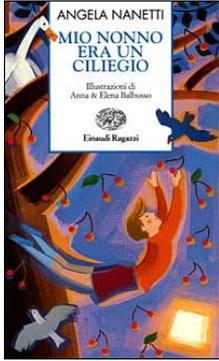
Weeks pass and Bengt misses Jagger until early one morning he hears his letter-box rattle and he opens it to find Jagger and Heikki delivering newspapers. Heikki tells Bengt how he and the dog got back together and he also tells him how he had ended up on the street in the first place as a result of boozing. But now he is turning over a new leaf in order to be allowed to see his own young son, who is called Kenny. Bengt visits them at the flat they have moved into and there he

meets Kenny and becomes friends with him, much to Jagger's annoyance, for Jagger insists that you can only be friends with one person at a time.

Kenny and Bengt start going to Bengt's yard to play and Kenny rapidly shows himself to be too street-wise to be troubled by Allan and Gustav and Astrid. Within no time at all he and Bengt have the upper hand in the yard. Meanwhile, however, Jagger becomes more and more embittered, jealous and distant. This becomes even worse when Bengt's mother decides she wants to meet Kenny's father and goes to the flat to talk to Heikki. While there she and Heikki agree that their children are the most important things in the world and when he hears this Jagger storms out.

When Bengt visits Heikki's flat the following day Jagger tells him he is about to leave and go back to his mother, that he had only left in the first place because mothers nag so much. He tells Bengt she lives in a house by a meadow with a thousand pink flowers. Bengt doesn't believe him but, taking his shopping trolley with him, Jagger leaves. As time passes Bengt thinks less about Jagger because he is so busy playing with Kenny. But when he does think of the dog he tries to force himself to believe that he really has got a mother to go back to.

One evening Bengt's doorbell rings and when Bengt's mum goes to the door she finds a delegation of Astrid's and Allan's and Gustav's mothers who say – in their friendliest voices – that they don't want to poke their noses in but they feel they must complain about Bengt playing with Kenny, who uses bad language and makes the yard untidy. Bengt's mum tells them that Bengt has a great time with Kenny and has never been so happy; perhaps if their children would play with Bengt? But the mothers are all reluctant to commit: 'Then Mum closed the front door right in their faces and walked back to the sofa'.



My Grandfather Was A Cherry Tree (Original title: Nonno era un Ciliegio)

by Angela Nanetti

Publisher: Edizioni El (Italy)

First publication: 2009

152 pages

Ages 8+

Tonino lives in the city with his rather staid parents - but loves to visit his eccentric and colourful grandparents out in the countryside. Nonna teaches him about love and affection through her passion for geese, Alfonsina in particular, and crazy Nonno teaches him to climb up the cherry tree like a cat, move around it like a bird and see things with his eyes closed. And to listen to the wind.

When Nonna dies, although very sad, Tomino is comforted by the fact that her spirit lives on through her goose Alfonsina. But Nonno is devastated and slowly starts to slip away, until he too passes away. Devastated by his loss, Tomino is comforted by the idea that, as long as the cherry tree stands in the field by his house, his grandfather will be by his side.

But the local council decide the tree needs to make way for a new building project - can Tomino save his beloved cherry tree?

Rights sold

Brazil, China, France, Japan, Korea, Russia, Serbia, Slovakia, Spain, Turkey, Ukrain

"Angela Nanetti does not allude, on the contrary, she puts Tonino - the books' young protagonist - right by his grandfather Ottaviano's side with a clarity that reveals how their experience of life is about more than just rhetorical wisdom and lessons imparted; it is the product of a fascinating bond between Felice, the magnificent cherry tree beside his grandfather's country home, and the child who climbs its branches with him. When grandpa Ottaviano dies and the local council expropriate the land in order to build a road, Tonino finds himself face to face with bulldozers, but refuses to accept the situation. In so doing, he forces his family and the local community to join him in making sense of the life of an old man, his grandfather, who was as stubborn as a donkey, but like donkeys had a long memory which he'd left for the benefit of future generations." - Tito Vezio Viola, librarian and children's author



Angela Nanetti

Angela Nanetti started her writing career in the 1980's whilst teaching middle and secondary schools. Her first book, 'Le Memorie di Adalberto' won her several important accolades. In 1995, she left teaching to focus exclusively on her writing, producing novels which demonstrated the maturity of expression and narration she had achieved and earning her international recognition. 'Mio Nonno Ero un Ciliegio' was a finalist in the Deutsche Jugendliteratur 2002 award, selected for the Prix Chronos in France and awarded 1st prize in the "Best translated novel" category of the Slovaccchia 2008 award.

MY GRANDDAD WAS A CHERRY TREE (IL MIO NONNO ERA UN CILIEGIO)

By Angela Nanetti, Translated by Denise Muir

When I was four, I had four grandparents: two in the city and two in the country.

The city ones were called Luigi and Antonietta and they were just like everyone else who lived in the city. The country ones were called Ottaviano and Teodolinda and nobody there was like them, not even their neighbours.

My city grandparents lived in the same apartment block as we did, and I used to see them at least four times a day:

At eight in the morning, when grandpa would come back from walking Floppy:

"Hey, what's the plan for today buddy? Off to school, are we?"

At nine o'clock, when grandma would be on her way out to do the shopping with Floppy:

"Are you ready for school little bird?"

At two o'clock in the afternoon, when grandpa would be heading back out for Floppy's second walk:

"Hey, back from school, buddy, clever boy!"

Then at five o'clock, when grandma would be going out with Floppy to pick up a few things or to drop in on a friend:

"How was school today then, little bird?"

My school was actually a nursery, and I'd detested it since that awful day when mum got a job and forced me to go.

Every day it was the same story: I would cry, grandpa would come by, grandma would drop in, then the two of them would head out with Floppy.

My mum would grumble sometimes when she saw them, muttering things like, "That dog means more to them than their grandson," which worried me so much it often made me stop crying. Because Floppy looked so ridiculous, what with his football-shaped tummy and scrawny legs, I wondered how I could possibly be uglier than he was.

My country grandparents were completely different. To begin with, they had geese and chickens instead of a dog; secondly, they didn't take them for a walk four times a day; and thirdly, they didn't live upstairs from us, they lived forty kilometres away, and I only ever saw them a couple of times a month.

Sometimes Mum would sigh when she was talking about them and say things like, "They're like ghosts round here." That's when I'd imagine grandpa Ottaviano and grandma

Teodolinda with white sheets over their heads: one big, tall ghost and one little, fat one, chasing the chicken and geese around the courtyard.

Ottaviano and Teodolinda were my mum's mum and dad and they were much nicer than my other grandparents. So was my mum.

Mum was grandpa Ottaviano's only child because grandma Teodolinda, stout as she was, only ever had tiny babies who never made it past their first day. Luckily, things went better with mum, maybe because grandma tried her hardest that time, just so she could have a grandson like me, at least that's what she said.

Grandpa celebrated all day long, grandma said he even got drunk, then went out into the vegetable patch and planted the cherry tree.

I need to tell you about grandpa now. I wasn't around back then, but I guess he was already pretty special. Grandma used to say he was the most handsome boy in the village and she'd had to jump through hoops to nab him. Maybe grandma was exaggerating a bit because she adored him so; it still showed. I can't remember grandpa ever being handsome though, just tall and straight with floppy hair, the hair he had left, that is, and with a blade of grass in his mouth all the time, grass from the fields that he'd snap off between two fingers and slowly chew on. "Beats a cigar," he'd say.

So, when mum was born, grandpa went into the village and came back with a pair of gold earrings for grandma and a small cherry tree. He went out to his vegetable patch, dug a big hole, filled it with warm manure and planted the tree. Then he got a penknife, heated it up and carved the name FELICITY on it. That's what my mum's called, and it's what grandpa wanted to call the tree, but grandma pointed out that it wasn't a very good name for a tree, so grandpa thought he'd call it Felice instead. And so he did. Felice had three branches back then and by the spring, when mum was seven months old and had four teeth, the tree sprouted the same number of flowers. From then on, mum and the tree grew up together and the four of them became a family. You just have to look at the family album to see.

The first photo shows mum at seven months with the four teeth I mentioned, although you can't actually see them. Grandma Teodolinda is holding mum up high like a soft toy and whenever I used to look at that photo, I'd think that grandma would've made a great heavyweight boxer. She was young then and not fat the way I remember her now, but she had huge muscly arms that were twice as thick as grandma Antonietta's. And then there was her chest! Grandma Teodolinda had two massive squashy things on her front; they were so soft that when she used to pick me up for a hug, I'd feel like I was sinking into a feather cushion; I just wanted to snuggle in and stay there forever.

That's the thing I remember best about my grandma, as well her smell, which wasn't like grandma Antonietta's stinky perfumes, but more like mum when she's just had a bath. Mum said it was the soaps grandma used to make at home with a secret recipe a witch once gave her. I believed her at the time because grandma Teodolinda was so unlike any other woman that anything could've been true.

< cut >

Grandma Teodolinda

I don't know when grandma Teodolinda started to get sick, but I definitely remember the day I became aware of it. It was May, the month of my fifth birthday, and we were having a party at our house with grandpa Luigi, grandma Antonietta and a few friends.

Floppy was there, too; you can see him in one of the photos eating an ice-cream with us. Grandpa Ottaviano used to say that Floppy wasn't part of the canine species anymore and could almost be human if only he could speak. In other words, he was only half dog because of the way my grandparents mollycoddled him. He was a bit of a muppet, too.

So, we're all in the photo together, everyone except grandpa Ottaviano and grandma Teodolinda.

"Pigs would fly" before they ever came to see us in the city, as grandpa Ottaviano used to say, but they always made it for my birthday. Not that year, though, and mum told me it was because grandma Teodolinda wasn't very well.

Back then, the only ideas I had of being unwell were basically just a sore tummy or a cough, the kind of things I picked up two or three times a year. So, when we went to see them a week later, I observed grandma Teodolinda carefully, but I couldn't see signs of either of the two ailments. I did notice, though, that when she was running after the chickens and geese in the courtyard, she stopped several times, brought her hand to her chest and had trouble breathing.

"Does it hurt?" I asked her.

She smiled and sat down on the wicker chair beside her.

"A bit."

That's how I learned that grandma Teodolinda had a bad heart.

If it hadn't been for that chair, where I saw her sit more and more, you would never have noticed grandma wasn't well: she hadn't changed, and she never did.

<>

Her one great love was her chicken coop. Grandma used to raise chickens like they were her own children. She knew every single one of them. She'd call them all by their names

and she'd praise and scold them. They used to follow her around, hanging on her every word. Grandpa said it was because she'd hatched the eggs herself.

He said it at lunch one day, when grandma Antonietta was there.

"See my Linda?" grandpa said. "She's not your normal incubator! She's ten times better! She gets twenty or thirty freshly-laid eggs, tucks them round her in bed, and keeps them nice and cosy and warm. It only takes about a week, with all that extra cushioning she's got, and before you know it...tap! ...tap!.... the chicks pop out a treat. What an incubator! But then the chicks forget all about the mother hen and all they want is my Linda!"

Grandma Antonietta was staring at him in amazement and grandpa Luigi was fiddling with his food. I'm sure he was thinking, "Some people!", just like I'd heard him say once when he didn't realize I was listening.

"Dad!" mum exclaimed, looking serious.

Grandpa had had a few drinks and was a bit tipsy, but it was grandma Teodolinda who was having the most fun; she was shaking all over with laughter while grandpa was telling the story.

In the end, grandpa Luigi and grandma Antonietta realized it was a joke and started to laugh, too.

Grandma Teodolinda adored her chickens, but she was even more in love with the geese. I don't know why; she said they were cleverer than people, but I thought it was more because they were a bit like her. One in particular, Alfonsina, was her favourite. She was so big and fat I could sit on her and have her carry me around the courtyard. I liked Alfonsina, too. Every time I got to grandma and grandpa's, she'd run to meet me and follow me all over the place. And whatever I said, she understood it. Alfonsina was a genius, not like Floppy! She also laid the biggest eggs and when she had goslings, she'd let me touch them; not like the other geese that would peck your eyes out if you went near them!

Alfonsina was the only animal in the coop that grandma saved.

Because, as much as she loved her geese and chickens, when it was time to sell them or break their necks, she didn't give it a second thought.

"It's the law of nature!" she'd sigh and pop! the deed would be done. I used to watch her slaughter them, fascinated and a bit horrified, increasingly convinced that there was something secret about grandma Teodolinda, some kind of magic she worked on the chickens.

After all, they died so quickly and painlessly, it looked like a magic trick. Fifteen minutes later and there they'd be, five or ten of them hanging upside down, looking at me through half-open eyes, and I'd never know if it was a joke or if they were dead for real. Then

grandpa would appear, he'd put the chickens into a basket and load them onto his truck along with the fresh vegetables and eggs. Grandma would shake out her apron, rinse her hands and go into the coop to dish out the seed or put the chicks to bed.

"Cheep, cheep, cheep... come here cutie, come on now... peep, peep, peep.."

This used to happen once a week.

<>

Winter came after that and it got really cold. I kept getting sick and I didn't get to see grandpa and grandma for a while. When I did eventually go back, grandma was in bed and that's largely where she stayed from then on.

In March, Alfonsina hatched the most adorable goslings and grandma asked grandpa if he could let her see them. She was so happy when she did that grandpa started bringing them into the bedroom for a little while, right next to her bed.

Grandma would pick them up, one at a time, gently stroke them then put them back in the basket. Every now and then she seemed to fall asleep with a gosling on her chest, it too sleeping, all snuggled in, and Alfonsina would stand by and watch. She wasn't jealous at all.

That's the last thing I remember about grandma Teodolinda. When I got home from nursery school one day, mum and dad weren't there, it was just grandpa Luigi and grandma Antonietta. With very serious faces, they told me that grandma Teodolinda had gone away on a long trip and I wouldn't see her again.

"What do you mean, gone on a trip?" I cried. "Why didn't she tell me, why didn't she say goodbye? And what about Alfonsina, what's she going to do?"

I felt so betrayed and disappointed by what grandma had done that I burst out crying. That's when grandma Antonietta took me in her arms and talked about how grandma had gone up to the sky and I couldn't go.

"Did she go on a plane?" I fired back, because I'd been with mum and dad once and I'd really enjoyed it.

"No, not on a plane. Grandma Teodolinda died."

That's how I learned that dying means going on a trip to the sky, not on a plane, and that there isn't any room there for geese or children.

Things got even more complicated on the day of the funeral because someone told me that grandma Teodolinda was inside the wooden box covered with flowers and they were taking her to the cemetery. Well, if she was inside that box she couldn't be in the sky, could she, so someone must be telling lies. I started yelling, "I don't believe you! You're all liars! I want to see grandma!" so loudly that it scared everyone, especially when they couldn't calm me down.

Then grandpa Ottaviano came over and said, "You can't see grandma Linda, but she hasn't really gone, you know. She told me she was leaving Alfonsina in her place and that we're to look after her, just as if Alfonsina were her.

I looked at grandpa, feeling greatly relieved.

"Did she really say that?"

Grandpa nodded. He looked very smart, in his dark wedding suit and his hair all neatly brushed, but his shoulders seemed to sag more than usual, and he looked older.

"Yes, and she also said to say goodbye and to give you a kiss."

"But when's she coming back?"

He shrugged his shoulders and walked away. When he returned, he held Alfonsina in his arms and, with her, he followed the coffin all the way to the cemetery.

Everyone was staring, but grandpa didn't care. He held out his hand to me, leaning over every now and then to murmur something to Alfonsina, who'd nod her head in agreement.

He was talking to grandma Teodolinda at that moment, I'm sure of it.

The vegetable patch

Grandpa's vegetable patch was huge because he'd always been a market gardener, just like his dad Vincenzo and grandfather Giovanni before him. It started behind the house, to the rear of the chicken coop fence, and stretched as far as the river on one side and to the road that led to the village on the other. The vegetable patch was so nice and tidy it was like a proper garden. Grandpa had a row of apple trees on the side by the river and some grapevines down at the bottom. The rest was split into equal-sized strips with irrigation channels between them.

Each strip of soil was planted with something different depending on the season: there were carrots, salad, cauliflowers, potatoes, onions – in other words, every type of vegetable. Grandpa would sow and water in one part, and harvest in the other; that's how it worked all year round. When you walked through, it was never empty, but it was especially pretty in spring, when the apple trees blossomed, the vegetables sprouted and Felice, the cherry tree, was covered in white.

The cherry tree was in the corner of the vegetable patch between the road and the courtyard so that, big as it was, you could see it from wherever you were. Grandpa had started to spend a lot of time under the tree since he'd been left on his own. At first, it was mainly to take me there, but then he moved grandma Teodolinda's chair under the tree as well. That

way, when he'd finished in the vegetable patch or wanted a rest, he could sit on the chair with Alfonsina and the other geese around him, eyes closed, not moving, still as a statue.

I came upon him one day like that. "Are you dead Grandpa?" I asked him.

He half-opened one eye, like grandma's chickens used to do, and signalled me to sit down beside him.

"Right here," he said, moving over to make room for me. I sat down and he put an arm round me, covering my eyes with his hand.

"Now, tell me what you see," he whispered.

I replied that all I could see was the dark. "Listen," he said.

So I listened and I heard a soft chirping noise, then rustling in the leaves.

"It's a nest of great tits. Can you see the mother bringing food to her little ones?"

I still couldn't see a thing, but I could hear wings beating then a chorus of cheep-cheeps. Wow, what strong little voices they had!

"She's feeding them," grandpa explained. "Keep listening."

I heard a loud buzzing.

"That's the bees at the broad beans. They've sucked the nectar from the flowers and now they're going home with their stomachs full. Can you see them?"

I kept listening and I really thought I could see them, those poor bees, with their tummies so big and fat that they could hardly fly.

Grandpa took his hand away and asked me, "Do you see? If you listen carefully and concentrate really hard, you can see loads of things, as if you had your eyes open. Let's listen to the cherry tree breathing now."

I shut my eyes again and felt a light breeze brush across my face as the leaves of the cherry tree swished slowly.

"You're right, grandpa, Felice is breathing," I said.

Grandpa stroked my head and sat still for a few more minutes. I looked at him and saw that he was smiling.

Whenever I think about grandpa Ottaviano, I always remember the day he taught me to listen to the trees breathing.

<>

The happiest time in my life was the summer I spent with grandpa.

The first thing I remember about that time is the zabaione. Every morning Grandpa would make zabaione for me with sugar and eggs. I'd be lying in bed, still half asleep, and I'd hear him downstairs, stirring away: ting, ting, ting. I'd start to wake up, and as I waited for him, I liked to watch the sunlight peeping through the spaces in the shutters, painting bright

golden stripes in the air. Then I'd hear Alfonsina walking her goslings around the yard while grandpa would still be mixing the zabaione. Ting, ting, ting, ting.

It would take him half an hour to get the eggs as stiff as whipped cream. It might not sound special, but it really was the tastiest thing you could have for breakfast, especially because of the red wine grandpa put in that made it look like a liqueur. Basically, it was miles better than grandma Antonietta's fruit sponge and all mum's chocolate puddings put together.

When I told mum how grandpa used to make the zabaione, she yelled "I don't believe it" three times in a row. Shouting it out like that, not once, but three times, I thought she meant that there was no way the zabaione could be better than her chocolate puddings. To make her feel better, I said that, on second thoughts, her chocolate puddings were good, too, maybe as good as Grandpa's zabaione.

But she just kept saying, "I don't believe it. He gave a six-year old wine?!" That was when I realized that the problem was actually the red wine grandpa put in the zabaione. So I said, "But grandpa told me that you also used to have it when you were little. He said that's why you grew up to be so big and healthy, otherwise you'd still be the little button you were as a baby."

"I was a little button, was I?" mum snapped. But she never mentioned the zabaione or the red wine again.

To make the zabaione, grandpa and I would buy eggs every evening from a farmer called Emilio who lived a few miles away. Emilio had a cowshed with five or six cows that he treated like princesses, but he didn't have a chicken coop. That meant the chickens would lay their eggs all over the place: in the barn, under the hedge, even in the cowshed. Every time we went there, grandpa would say, "I don't understand why you don't get a coop. If my Linda could see the way you run this place, she'd give you a piece of her mind for sure!"

And Emilio would always reply, "That's why I never got married!"

Well, even if Emilio didn't have a wife or a chicken coop, he always knew where to find the eggs. It was amazing. It was like the chickens told him where to go.

As soon as we'd get there, he'd say, "They've laid five today" or "Only three, I'm afraid". And quick as a flash, he'd be right back with them.

He found two inside a pair of old shoes once.

"This is all wrong," grandpa would scold him. "You need to keep those chickens under control. My Linda would never have allowed it."

Emilio was really nice, though, even if he did have some funny ideas about chickens.

The first time we went, grandpa only bought one egg because he said that the zabaione had to be so fresh it still smelled of chicken. He stuck the egg inside his shirt, told me to sit on the crossbar, and off we went.

“Do you have to keep it there?” Emilio asked.

“Where else would I put it?” grandpa answered. To be honest, he put everything he bought inside his shirt. Grandma used to call it a “nasty habit” because he'd put everything in there: cigars, newspapers, bread, you name it; it all went in his shirt. Once he even put four or five baby chicks there that he'd bought at the market, and they pooped all over him. When grandma would grumble about it, he'd always answer that bags were for women and that he'd been carrying things that way since he was a boy and would still be doing it when he was eighty!

“If you live that long, you stubborn old mule!” grandma would fire back.

So, grandpa took his one egg and put it inside his shirt, just like I said. I don't know what happened though, maybe it was my elbow, but about five minutes later I heard a funny noise. Grandpa stopped.

“Best take a look, Tonino” he said. He poked his head into his shirt then announced, “We've gone and scrambled it!”

And so we had. His shirt was dripping with thick, yellow, eggy goo, but he didn't seem to mind at all.

“Not to worry, let's go back, but we'll get two eggs this time. That way we'll have a spare if one should break.”

Grandpa was chuckling like he was having the time of his life. That's when I remembered the time I knocked over the egg basket at home, but instead of laughing, Mum gave me a cuff round the ear. Sometimes she isn't like grandpa at all!

<>

A thorn in the heart

That summer, my mum and dad, my grandpa and grandma, and Floppy argued all the time, and all because of dad's broken leg. He was angry with his leg because he had trouble walking, mum was angry with him because we couldn't go away on holiday, and my grandparents were angry with my mum because she was taking her anger out on dad's leg. And that muppet Floppy seemed to be angry with everyone and would bark at the raised voices.

It was like a madhouse at times! I used to stick my ear plugs in so I didn't have to listen to it and go off to my room to think about my own stuff or draw.

Mum came in once when I was drawing a picture of the time me and grandpa were having a swim in the river and the fire brigade turned up. I was really pleased with the picture. Anyone could see that the fire brigade was the fire brigade, and that it was me and grandpa, but Mum was in a bad mood and she gave me the third degree, demanding to know, "Who are these people? Who's that in the water? What happened?"

So even though I'd promised grandpa Ottaviano not to talk about that day, I spilled the beans and blabbed the whole story.

It started like this: it was a really hot day and grandpa asked me, "What do you say we go down to the river to cool down?"

I thought it was a great idea so as soon as we were done in the vegetable patch, we grabbed our towels and set off.

Like I said, the river was near the house, although it was more of a canal than a river because it wasn't very wide or very deep. The two of us got undressed and went into the water in our underwear. Then, while grandpa was splashing about everywhere, spouting water like a sea lion, I started to look for fish.

I was in the middle of the river at one point and a real beauty swam past me. I dived after it, but I needed grandpa's help, so I started hollering, "Grandpa! grandpa!"

"What's up Tonino?"

"Come over here!"

I was waving my arms around to get his attention and diving under the water every now and then to check if the fish was still there.

"I'm on my way, Tonino, stay right there!" grandpa replied, scrambling over to me as quickly as he could.

Unluckily for us, Maria was going past on her bike right at that moment. She stopped to take a look then went off like a shot. Five minutes later the fire brigade turned up on the river bank, sirens blaring.

"Don't worry, we'll help you!" one of them shouted.

Grandpa poked his head out the water and, coughing and spluttering, cried out, "No need, thanks, I've got it!", brandishing the fish he'd managed to catch.

When mum heard the story she laughed so hard she couldn't stop.

"Did he really say that?" she asked, drying her eyes. "That could only happen to my dad!"

She eventually stopped laughing and stayed in a good mood for the rest of the day.

A bit later, she started to worry that maybe the river was polluted and that I'd got an infection. Every half hour she'd ask me if I had a sore tummy and almost looked disappointed when I said no. She said that grandpa wasn't to be trusted.

But when grandma Antonietta remarked how improper it was to be seen in your underwear "at that age", mum retorted, "Don't you think it's stupid to make such a fuss over a mutt "like that"?"

Eventually my mum realized I was fine, so she stopped worrying about my tummy and went back to worrying about dad's leg.

<>

The holidays came to an end and I went back to school. Mum and I would visit grandpa on Saturdays or sometimes he'd come to lunch at our house. Everything went back to normal, more or less, except grandma Teodolinda wasn't with us and mum said that the more time passed, the more she missed her.

She used to say things like that when she was angry with grandma Antonietta. After she'd taken it out on Floppy, then on grandpa Luigi, she'd start talking about grandma Linda and how different she was, getting all sad at times. I felt really sorry for her then and would try to make her feel better. I told her once that I didn't think grandma was dead, she'd just turned into something else.

"Turned into something else?" mum asked in a weird voice. "Like what?"

"A goose like Alfonsina."

"Whoever put that idea in your head?"

"No one, but if grandma really liked geese, why couldn't she have turned into one?"

Mum couldn't think of a plausible answer and just said that it was impossible.

"But why?" I insisted.

"Because it just is," she retorted. "Grandma's in heaven."

But I'd thought a lot about it and decided that if you don't die when someone really cares about you, like grandpa said, but you can't see the dead person, then they must turn into something else. And since they have to be something else, they're obviously going to pick something they really liked. So, there was no doubt in my mind that grandma had turned into a goose.

When we went back to visit grandpa on the Saturday, I asked him about it. He was sunning himself under the cherry tree, even though it was really cold.

Mum was tidying up inside so I sat down beside grandpa and explained my theory to him. He listened carefully, not saying a word, then patted my head when I'd finished.

"I thought something similar, you know. What do you suppose I'll turn into?" he asked.

For me it was obvious.

"A cherry tree," I said.

"What about you?"

"I haven't thought about it yet, but maybe I'd like to be a bird, so I could keep you company and eat all your cherries!"

Grandpa smiled, but suddenly I realized he looked tired.

"Are you okay grandpa?" I asked him.

Grandpa stood up and turned towards the house.

"I'm fine, I've just got a thorn right here," he replied, pointing to his heart.

SYNOPSIS

by Denise Muir www.denisemuir.co.uk *Magicamente Translations*

Angela Nanetti's **Mio Nonno era Un Ciliegio** is a children's story about a little boy's special love for his grandfather and a cherry tree, as both intertwine to bring joy and light into his life. The tree itself represents everything that is honest and good for Tonino when he gets away from a sometimes difficult life in the city to stay with his quirky grandparents in the country. It also gives him a sense of life after death when his beloved grandfather passes away.

The story is narrated by ten-year old Tonino as he looks back on his early childhood living in an apartment building in the city with his parents. His rather staid grandparents on his

father's side live nearby while his more rustic and fun maternal grandparents, Ottaviano and Teodolina, live in the country. When his mum goes back to work, he finds himself packed off to a nursery school that he detests, and when he gets home, the feeling of gloom doesn't lift as he senses the tension between his parents and the lack of any real affection from his paternal grandparents. Life in the city seems to be a troubled one.

All that changes when he escapes to the country. Ottaviano and Teodolinda are grandparents unlike any others. In his delicate, moving story, Tonino describes emotions and experiences that many six year olds go through. There are tender accounts of how his grandmother *nonna* Teodolinda taught him about love and affection through her passion for geese, Alfonsina in particular, and how crazy *nonno* Ottaviano taught him to climb up the cherry tree like a cat, move around it like a bird and see things with his eyes closed. And to listen to the wind.

Every page is filled with local flavour and contrasts with his more "fenced in" life in the city. We learn how (to his mum's horror) Nonno Ottaviano makes zabaione with red wine every morning for Tonino's breakfast and how they go off on Nonno's bike to buy fresh eggs every day. But while we enjoy these tender times, we hear the tinge of sadness in Tonino's voice, as he looks back wistfully on something, or someone, that was so fully, yet fleetingly, a part of his life.

The cherry tree evokes similar emotions, being the source of much happiness for Tonino but also the descent into something scary for his grandfather. When the local council threatens to cut down his beloved tree, Ottaviano starts to show signs of advancing alzheimers', until he very gently and very lightly slips away and floats out of Tonino's life. But not for ever. Because just as the spirit of grandmother Teodolinda lived on in her beloved goose Alfonsina, Tonino was now comforted by the idea that, as long as the cherry tree stood in the field by the house, his grandfather would be by his side.

Unless the council succeeded in cutting it down.

In terms of readership, this beautiful novel is both a voice for children like Tonino, who just want to climb a tree with someone special, and also a gentle reminder to grown-ups to take time to enjoy the simple joys and pleasures in a life full of responsibilities and commitments.



Skeleton Of The Lost Library (Original title: Kayıp Kitaplıktaki İskelet)

by Aytul Akal and Mavisel Yener

Publisher: Tudem Publishing House(Turkey)

First publication: 2011

208 pages

Ages 8+

Ceylan is a girl from Turkey whose father works as the security guard of an open air museum in an ancient city, so she can visit the ruins whenever she wants.

One day she learns that a concert will be performed within the ancient city and tries to find a way to enter the concert through the underground tunnels. But during the research her cat gets lost.

This is the beginning of an adventure in which she and her cat will find a treasury of mysterious statues, keys and tablets hidden under the ancient city.

“This is a novel which is easily read with its archeological background. The photograph collection placed at the end of the book has made it more joyful and educative.” - Tuğba Eriş, İyi Kitap (a book review magazine)

“Aytül Akal and Mavisel Yener have together created many fascinating poetry books for years. Now they come with an exciting novel. These two literary masters have created a literary feast which takes the ruins of Ephesus as a background.” - hintcevizi (a book review blog)



Aytul Akal

Aytül Akal is Turkey's second most translated author. An author since 1991, she writes books that help develop reading skills, as well as character development and self-recognition in children. Akal has authored over a hundred books.



Mavisel Yener

Mavisel Yener has written over fifty children and young adult books in different genres such as novels, poetry, tale, theatre plays and radio drama. She is also a literary critic for a national newspaper.

The Skeleton of the Lost Library

By Mavisel Yener and Aytül Akal, Translated by Canan Marasligil

Disappointment

He was getting really hungry. He ran towards the enclosed space behind the caretaker's shack that was surrounded by begonia, jasmine and fig trees. He could almost smell the delicious food even from afar. He approached licking his tongue and reached into the food bowl.

What? The bowl was empty... Completely empty! The only thing left in the bowl was a single flower. A blue wild flower...

What's that supposed to mean? Was he meant to eat flowers? Such a small one at that... And this with a growling stomach...

Efes, the cat of the Library of Celsus, was hugely disappointed. Hadn't Ceylan put out food for him today? And what about that flower? Was that supposed to be a joke?

With hope, he went looking for the caretaker of the ruins, Mr. Hilmi who has been doing his daily rounds. The crowds of tourists were already flowing on the streets of ancient Ephesus.

Every day, Ceylan would stop by her father's shack and top up Efes's food bowl. If only Efes could speak, he would complain to Ceylan's father that she has been ignoring him for a while in order to spend more time with her friends.

Ceylan was a headstrong girl who did not like receiving orders. So, complaining would be useless... And it's not like people can understand cat speech anyway! When he spoke, all they could hear was "Miaow, Miaow".

Ah, all the stories Efes could tell them. He has been through every inch of the ruins, explored every nook and cranny that humans couldn't reach. He was also knowledgeable about the mountains with their majestic plane trees growing among ancient stones. He learned all these as a tiny kitten. If they would let him, he could even become a tour guide. And yet, people wouldn't understand a word he says! All they would hear is "Miaow, Miaow..."

And now, they even started to forget feeding him! He jumped over the stones, all the while muttering angrily to himself, and entered a small courtyard. Mr. Hilmi was cleaning the information boards of the Library of Celsus. Efes ran to him and started to rub against his leg.

"Mr. Hilmi, I am so hungry. Ceylan forgot to feed me."

Mr. Hilmi smiled and stroked him.

"Have you finished your breakfast Efes? No after-meal nap today? I thought you liked lying in the sun. What are you doing here?"

“I am telling you, I am hungry! There is no food Miaowww...”

“Good for you... It’s good to exercise after a meal. Go run around a little.”

“I’m Hungryyy! Miaowww...”

“Why do you keep miaowing, I don’t get it. Are you working on a song?”

Efes had to get Mr. Hilmi to the shack. If he were a dog, he would drag him by his trousers. But, as a cat, all he could do is miaowing. He pushed Mr. Hilmi with his nose.

“What is it? Are you saying we should go out? Let’s go out,” said Mr. Hilmi, smiling. He walked through the columns outside of the Library of Celsus. He descended the nine steep steps, passed the courtyard and headed for the shack.

Efes was successful in the end. He led Mr. Hilmi to the empty food bowl with the strange flower inside.

“See? Empty! No food. I am hungry! Miaoww... Miaoww...”

“What a racket you’ve made Efes. What’s gone into you today? I get it, you’ve eaten your food. Looks like I didn’t berate you for nothing. You haven’t wasted anything. Well done...”

Efes hopelessly looked at Mr. Hilmi. His only option was to hunt for food inside the trash cans.

“What a let-down!” he murmured.

As he was dejectedly walking towards the trash can, Mr. Hilmi called out after him:

“Where are you going, Efes?”

He turned and looked. Mr. Hilmi was pointing at the empty food bowl.

“He got it! He got what I was trying to tell him! Oh joy! Miaowww!”

He hopped across the stones like a rabbit and ran towards Mr. Hilmi. He swayed his tail softly from side to side. He was happy. He finally managed to communicate miaowing...

“What is this Efes?”

Turns out, he didn’t!

Mr. Hilmi was pointing at the flower inside the food bowl.

“Is this a gift? To say thank you? Ceylan will be so happy. You are the sweetest cat...”

Mr. Hilmi reached to pet Efes on the head. But Efes was very angry; he jumped right back so Mr. Hilmi could not pet him.

“Sweetest cat! Pff!” Was he supposed to eat his tail for dessert now?

Mr. Hilmi couldn’t figure out why Efes was so agitated. He shrugged and walked away. He couldn’t leave the tourists walking around unsupervised. They had a penchant for lifting small pieces from the ruins into their pockets.

Angry and upset, Efes headed towards the garbage cans. He had to find something to eat before the garbage collectors arrived.

The Ghost of the Library of Celsus

“Here’s your food, you can eat when you’re hungry. I’m going to help my mother...”

Efes darted so fast towards the food bowl that he didn’t even wait for Ceylan to finish her sentence.

While she didn’t say anything, Ceylan was a bit taken aback. Efes would always escort her through the ruins. What was going on with this cat? Also, he had such an appetite these days. He had even eaten the extra food she put out for him yesterday.

As a last hope, she called out after him:

“What’s the hurry Efes? You won’t even say goodbye?”

It appears that Efes didn’t care. Ceylan shrugged and started walking up the hill. On weekends, she would help out her mother, as the shop was getting extra busy on Saturdays. In the beginning, some of their neighbours found it odd that a woman was running a shop by herself. But Mr. Hilmi had given them the best response when he said: “There is no such thing as a woman’s job or a man’s job. My wife and I will both work to ensure the best future for our daughter.” Ceylan was proud of her father. She also enjoyed working at the store during her free time.

Efes arrived in the courtyard and checked all corners. He decided that the best place to hide would be behind one of the pillars. From this vantage point, he could see the caretaker’s shack and, more importantly, the food bowl.

He started his watch. A column of ants was marching on the ground. A bird was singing, and sparrows took flight from a blossoming tree. A grasshopper jumped out of the weeds growing among the stones. Clearly, it didn’t notice the cat that was lying so still, otherwise the grasshopper would have been very scared.

Efes had made a game out of chasing every single grasshopper he laid eyes on. Seeing them running scared would make him laugh. As he lay there waiting for the monster that has been stealing his food, he thought, “I must look like a horrible monster to those grasshoppers as well.”

As the grasshopper seemed reluctant to move on, Efes couldn’t help himself and made the subtlest of movements without taking his eyes off the bowl. The poor grasshopper immediately jumped and disappeared among the poppies.

With bated breath, Efes fixed his eyes on the backside of the little shack. He was starting to get bored and more importantly, he was getting hungry. He was looking forward to running towards the bowl and eating up all the food inside. Maybe he should wait for the monster some other time. As he was trying to decide between waiting and moving towards the bowl, he noticed something.

He thought he saw a shadow: a dark figure moving at a deliberate pace, dragging its feet... Efes's heart was racing, he blinked. The monster was coming from the direction of the terrace houses! Among all the ruins of the majestic city of ancient Ephesus, these recently unearthed terrace houses were a favourite of both tourists and local cats. "Turns out, even monsters like these mysterious ruins" thought Efes.

The shadow moved slyly towards the back of the shack and stopped next to Efes's food bowl.

Efes huddled at the pillar's feet. Right at that moment, the hiss of a black snakelet that was crawling right next to him startled him. As he fled his position in fear, he ran into an empty metal can some careless tourist left on the ground and knocked it over, causing a huge racket.

"MauwWauwWauww!"

Startled, Efes forgot all about the monster he was tracking and headed for the back of the shack. In his flight, he ran into an ancient, large stone that almost caused him to tumble.

"MiaoooooWWW"

"What is going on here? What is all this rumpus?"

Efes calmed down and looked towards the direction of where the voice was coming from. He could see no one there... Then he suddenly remembered: the monster...

The monster must be there somewhere, he just saw its shadow a second ago. But... Where was it?

A ghost... Yes, this monster must be a ghost. It must be turning invisible whenever other living beings come around it.

"Speak, won't you, have you lost your tongue? Weren't you the one that caused all that rumpus a minute ago by yelling MiaoooooWWW?"

It can't be! The large rock was speaking. It even moved... Upon closer inspection, Efes realised this was no rock but only a turtle.

"Hey, I got you thief! You're the one who has been secretly eating my food, miaowww..."

"I am no thief. This is my food bowl. Ceylan always leaves food for me here," said the turtle.

"Don't lie smarty pants, turtles don't have food bowls" said Efes. "That food Ceylan left was for me, not for you."

The turtle showed no sign of remorse on having stolen his food, on the contrary, he insisted that the food belonged to him.

"I don't know you, I have never even seen you before. I don't recall ever running into you last summer. You must have appeared while I was hibernating this winter."

"Well, go right back to sleep then and stop pestering around my food bowl."

“Look, how many times do I have to tell you this? This bowl is mine. Ceylan always gives me food with it. She may have fed a troublemaking, useless creature like you while I was asleep, but now that I am back, you can go.”

Efes angrily slapped his tail like a whip and said:

“I am not going anywhere, you go!”

“I can’t. I don’t have anywhere else to go. I’ve been living here for a hundred and fifty years.”

Efes was stunned. He stared at the turtle in disbelief.

“Whaat? A hundred and fifty years?”

He walked around the turtle, trying to get to the bottom of this story. What fresh lie was this? A creature that lives for a hundred and fifty years... It could only be a ghost. Or a vampire... Or a space alien... Or...

“Why are you staring at me like an idiot? Don’t you get it? I am very old. I can’t move someplace else and start a new life. I find it hard enough to look for food. I have been living for decades inside the ruins of Ephesus, near the Library of Celsus. If one of us has to go, it should be you.”

Efes was still a little shocked:

“How is this possible? Do you know the times when the library was founded?”

“Of course not! The library was build by the Romans centuries ago, my great great great great grandfather used to belong to the architect who built this place.”

“Come on! You are making it all up. You are both a thief and a liar!”

“I am not making it up. When I was young, some people started digging here. They then found all these ruins.”

Efes did not believe him:

“What? You were here when they were excavating?”

“Of course. As I said, I am one hundred and fifty years old... My name is Snapsnap.”

“What a silly name. But, to be honest, it suits you well, since you have been snapping my food for days!”

“I have seen many things you did not. I know the history of this library well. This place was instrumental in bringing up many scientists and philosophers.”

After smelling the air a little, Efes interrupted him:

“I was also born here, I am a cat of Celsus, I know more than you do!”

“No, you can’t know more than I do. I know how the sun shone on these rocks, how the moon lit the caravans, what news the wind brought from the temple of Artemis one hundred and fifty years ago.”

Efes persisted, trying to show all his knowledge:

“This place used to house many parchment and papyrus rolls with precious knowledge on them. Have you seen these parchments then?”

“How could I? They were all gone when I was born. But, the Roman architect of this place gave my great great great great grandfather a parchment with a very important secret on it. If I can find it one day, I will have a huge treasure. Do you understand kitty cat?”

“Treasure?” shouted a very excited Efes.

“Yes, the parchment contains the clues that lead to the hidden treasure. To be honest, I’ve looked everywhere. My great grandfather also spent his life searching for it. He used to follow around archeologists digging here but nothing came out of it! He couldn’t find the parchment.”

“Pff what nonsense! Who would entrust a turtle with such an important document?”

“My dear kitty cat, you either need to be one hundred and fifty years old or to have read many books to be able to understand that” said Snapsnap.

“Look Snapsnap, you can’t take me for a fool just because you are older than me. My name is Efes. Either call me by my name, or else... I won’t hear you calling me kitty cat again!”

The turtle smiled:

“So, are we friends, Efes?”

Efes thought about it. It appears that he will have to share his meals with this hunk of rock, but it wasn’t so bad that he found a friend to keep him company when Ceylan was at school. And then there was the matter of the treasure. Snapsnap would not be able to manage finding it without Efes.

“So, are we sharing the treasure?”

The turtle smiled.

“Maybe we won’t.”

He explained right away after Efes stared at him intently:

“I don’t have much time left. Even if we find it, I won’t be able to make use of it. But you are young. You can have it all.”

Efes was surprised, he swung his tail fast and then slowly asked:

“Why are you looking for something if you are not going to use it?”

“I promised my great grandfather. He had also promised his great grandfather. And so on, all the way back to nineteen hundred years... But I have no children, no grandchildren. If I can’t find the treasure, its secret will die with me.”

“Well, don’t you have any other friends?”

“Of course I do, the dog who lives next to the kebab shop outside the ruins, Scraggy. They call him that because he won’t gain weight no matter how much he eats.

The field mice and the swallows that pass by each year are also my friends. Their ancestors in years past were also my friends... Now, I am friends with the grandchildren of their grandchildren...

To be honest, they all bore me; all swallows care about is traveling. The others only care about food. Speaking of which, I am so hungry...”

Efes looked at the food bowl. He was also starving. The bowl contained enough food for both of them. He spilled some food from the bowl onto the ground by tipping it with his paw.

“Come, let us share...”

They were both very hungry and started eating immediately. As Efes was chewing his food, he couldn't help but ask the question on his mind:

“Was it you leaving flowers here?”

“Yes, I was thanking Ceylan for the food...”

They stopped talking for a while, making nothing but chewing sounds.

Curious Snapsnap

Snapsnap woke up early that day. He opened his eyes licking his lips with hunger. It was good that he made friends with Efes. Now he had easy access to food.

He knew he was a liar but there was no other choice. If he hadn't made up that “treasure” story, it was unlikely that Efes would have accepted to share his food. “All that stuff about my grandfather and some parchment... How quickly he believed me. Especially after I told him that he could have the treasure...”

Snapsnap smiled to himself while walking slowly towards the shack.

“I have not spent one hundred and fifty years here for nothing. One should be able to learn a few tricks in order to survive...”

His eyes grew wide open when he arrived next to the food bowl. What was going on? The bowl was completely full of food.

“Has Efes left it all for me again? I wonder if he found something even better to eat someplace else?”

Upon reflection, Snapsnap realised that was unlikely. Efes didn't seem like the type of cat that would lie or play tricks.

“He will show up. He will run towards his bowl as soon as he gets hungry...” he thought as he helped himself to his portion of the food. When he was full, he went on his morning stroll.

He would always walk among the bushes to avoid being seen by humans. His tough shell would protect him from other animals but it was not of much use against humans. After all, haven't they made soup out of his ancestors for centuries? And what about their habit of plucking them out of their natural habitat and trying to feed them in their homes?

He walked for a while until he grew tired. He decided to take shelter under the bushes near the entrance of the passageway and nap for a while. With his hind legs, he dug a cosy little hole for himself. He crawled in and withdrew his legs into his shell. As he was pulling his head in, he noticed the clumps of fur stuck on the bushes.

“These look like they belong to Efes!”

He moved in closer to inspect them better.

“They might or might not belong to Efes. I can’t be sure. But I know someone who can...”

He needed to find Scraggy. For that, he needed to leave the ruins and walk all the way to the kebab shop outside. No easy task for a turtle. Scraggy could run for miles with his long, thin legs. Not Snapsnap. Maybe if he slept just a little while, he could gather his strength and go after Scraggy. Sleep... The very word sounded like a sweet lullaby...

His eyes went to the snagged furs again:

“Could this foolish cat have wondered in?”

He dragged himself under the bushes. This was no time for sleep. He needed to find Scraggy. His strong nose would identify the smell and tell him if the furs belong to Efes.

Anticipated Trip

The day they were all waiting for finally came by. They were going on a school trip with their teacher. The trips were planned months in advance, requiring written permission from all parents. The kids were so dizzy with excitement about this trip to the ancient ruins, they could not stand still. They all rushed to school that day. Even the fight between Ceylan and Ayda was now a distant memory.

The teacher was equally excited. She was glad to have pushed Ceylan and Ayda to make peace but she was mostly thrilled about the parchment in her hand. She had called her friend Mr. Talat and invited him to join the trip as well.

Finally, it was time to go. The teacher started giving directives to the students:

“Come on kids, we are on the move. Hurry up. Gather your things. Those of you with cameras don’t forget to bring them with you! Make sure you have water in your bags! Also bring paper and pencils to take notes during the tour!”

Ceylan was proud, “We are going to my neighbourhood. If anyone forgets anything, I can help out,” she said.

That made the teacher smile:

“Yes, that’s true, it’s your neighbourhood! Listen, the time we have today will not be enough to see the entirety of the ancient city of Ephesus; we will therefore focus on the Library of Celsus... We will also talk about how humans have accumulated knowledge for millennia.”

Then, she invited in the gentleman waiting outside the door.

“We have a guest, let me introduce you to my friend Mr. Talat, he is a librarian. He has agreed to accompany us during our visit and he will be our guide in the Library of Celsus. Let us thank him for his time.”

The kids quickly warmed up to the kindly Mr. Talat. “Hello children!” he said. “I am the director of the public library. Some of you might know me if you’ve ever been to the library to borrow books. I will accompany you during your visit...”

The children quickly put on their bags and in a few minutes, they were ready for the walk. They were half an hour of quick steps away from the Library of Celsus.

Has Efes Found the Treasure?

When Snapsnap heard noises, he called out, thinking Efes might have woken up.

“Are you awake Efes?”

“Hey, are you still there Snapsnap?”

“Of course I am here. You didn’t think I was going to leave you alone, did you?”

“You are a very good friend, thank you Snapsnap.”

“Have I been asleep for long? You must be bored up there...”

Snapsnap couldn’t bring himself to tell his friend how long he had slept. “No no, not long, just a couple of hours,” he waved off.

“When I get out of here, I will kiss you on both cheeks...”

Snapsnap sounded worried:

“When you get out of there... You mean when we get you out of there...”

He didn’t know what else to say, so he remained silent afterwards.

Efes said, “Call Ceylan. She will get me out of here”.

Snapsnap considered telling him that Ceylan had other things on her mind and that all the efforts of Scraggy had been in vain, but thought better off it immediately. He had to keep Efes’s spirits up. That way, he wouldn’t give up.

“Don’t worry. Scraggy is on it. You only worry about eating that stuff we brought you. Scraggy will bring you some more later.”

“I am looking forward to meeting Scraggy.”

“He is also curious about you.”

Snapsnap heard splashing noises. Efes must be spilling water from the bottle they brought him earlier to lick off. After a brief silence, Efes, having quenched his thirst, called out to his friend:

“Are you there?”

“Sure, I am not going anywhere until we get you out of there.”

“I have some news for you...”

“What is it?”

“I think I found your treasure...”

Snapsnap was confused. He had forgotten about the made up story he told Efes to initiate their friendship.

“What treasure are you talking about?”

“The one your great great great great grandfather was trying to find...”

Snapsnap remembered immediately.

“Ooo, the parchment? Umm... Here’s the thing...”

“There is something strange here. A bowl, full of cups. I think they are made of gold or something. Also, there are two wall paintings. And a whole lot of parchments. Could the one you were looking for be here?”

Snapsnap was stunned. What was this cat saying? Was he hallucinating due to the lack of food and water?

“Efes... Are you all right?”

“Yes Yes, I am fine Snapsnap. The parchment you were looking for, maybe it was the map of this place. Anyway, the treasure is here. In a secret basement under this room. I figured out how to open its door.”

Although Efes sounded like he was on his right mind, Snapsnap couldn’t believe him. But, he didn’t say that to Efes.

“He must be making it up. He is trying to make me feel good by telling me he found my treasure. Archeologists had dug here so many times. Wouldn’t they have found something? Although the excavations were cut short, they surely would have found anything like Efes is describing...”

“Come on Snapsnap, call Ceylan already. Get her to take me out of here. I am bored.”

Snapsnap didn’t know what to say. Unfortunately, Ceylan couldn’t understand them, Scraggy couldn’t manage to bring her here even when they were together in the passageway.

“Ceylan is at school,” he told Efes. It wasn’t really a lie either. In any case, Efes wouldn’t know since he couldn’t tell the difference between day and night.

“It doesn’t matter, go wait for her at the entry of the passageway. I’ll manage here. I have food and drink. Don’t worry, I won’t die.”

Snapsnap dragged his feet through the passageway and went outside to settle under a bush and wait for Scraggy.

What was going on? Had Ceylan arrived already? The small courtyard in front of the Library of Celsus was so crowded. There were children everywhere.

What is the Biggest Surprise?

On the last day of school, the adults who completed the literacy course were also receiving their certificates. They were even more excited than the children. Ms. Lulu was boasting to everyone “I am the first in class”.

Everyone was excited about the forthcoming holidays. Ceylan had no idea about the surprise that was waiting for her.

The head of the municipality and the director of the library were both attending the ceremony. After the speech by the school headmaster, the women who attended the literacy course received their certificates. Then, the head of the municipality greeted everyone. He highlighted the fact that they were living in a land that had been home to many different peoples, and that the region of Seljuk had been a fertile ground for knowledge and science. He invited the inhabitants of the region to continue that tradition.

“The hidden underground floor of the Library of Celsus has been discovered by the students of this school. It was built in 115-135 AD and its façade is visible today after careful restoration. This library has witnessed the passage of time.”

Most of the students merely pretended to listen, as they were bored of long speeches, and chose to murmur among themselves. Only Ceylan’s class was listening with full attention, taking in every word and syllable.

“Visiting these ruins and appreciating their history is key in the development of every student.

Next to the four statues that stand in front of the Library of Celsus, four female figures representing ‘Intellect’, ‘Fate’, ‘Science’, ‘Wisdom’, we now have two additional little figures. They have been found among the secret passage and are thought to represent ‘Friendship’. They remind us that not only humans but animals too have been living here and have been an equally integral part of this fertile land...”

“What kind of animals are they supposed to be?” asked one of the middle schoolers mockingly. Turning to his friend, he added, “Is it supposed to be you?”

Ali approached them and answered his question:

“A tabby cat and a turtle,” he said.

The student was surprised, he asked Ali:

“What? What have they done?”

“They didn’t have to do anything. They merely lived in friendship across centuries...”

The other student was not convinced.

“Come on! How did they figure that out?”

“From the wall painting they found in the secret passage... The cat in the painting is depicted as looking at a sidewall with a smile. When they dug up the place where it was looking at, they found a small hidden door. The key found in the entry chamber to the secret passage opened the door. That’s where they found the statues of the cat and the turtle. Two friends looking at each other, smiling for centuries.”

“As if!” laughed the middle schooler. “The weird things they make up. It’s all stories anyway... How are we supposed to know what happened many centuries ago? Where’s the record, it’s not like they had computers or anything?”

Ali replied with a calm tone and concluded his exchange with the other student:

“Parchments tell us everything. We have scripts, paintings, statues... Everything we find from the past tells us something about that period.”

Ali quietly went back to his place.

The head of the municipality first called out Ceylan’s teacher. He congratulated her for giving her students an appreciation for history, and presented her with a commendation and a pin made from gold. Then, he called out each student from Ceylan’s class one by one and handed them gifts.

After him, the director of the library took the stage. After a brief and moving speech, he revealed the big surprise:

“We should all work for the access and quality of education for every child as well as the opportunity for adults to better themselves through learning. Since the beginning of the year, your friend Ceylan has been working tirelessly to help the illiterate women of the village. She brought them books and was instrumental in setting up the course. We are thankful to her and all the educators. Therefore, we are giving this year’s “Community Participation Award” to Ceylan for showing we can all work together to build our communities. Congratulations!

The audience applauded. Ceylan was invited to the stage to receive her plaque and gift.

She noticed her mother and father among all the other parents. They were smiling proudly and telling everyone around them “That is our daughter!” while pointing at her.

At that moment she felt something sliding around her ankle and looked down. It was Efes.

“Miaowww... there was no way I would have missed this,” he said joyfully. “Snapsnap wants me to give him all the details. He is waiting for me at the ruins...”

The End

Never mind that we said “The End”. We have not yet told you about the mysterious birth mark inside Efes’s mouth, how snakelet’s favour was reciprocated, the whereabouts of Hadrian, where

Snapsnap spent the rest of his remaining days, how Ms. Lulu's life has changed and the new project of Ali and Ceylan...

Maybe Ceylan herself will tell those stories... By then, the mystery of the skeletons found in the library will have been resolved.

The Skeleton in the Lost Library - Synopsis

Authors: Mavisel Yener and Aytül Akal

Efes is a tabby kitten living among the ruins of the ancient city of Ephesus. One day, he discovers a fresh flower in his empty food bowl, usually filled by Ceylan (pronounced Jeylan in Turkish), the young daughter of Mr Hilmi, the caretaker of the ruins. Efes is baffled by this development and tries to draw the attention of Ceylan's father, all the while bemoaning the fact that humans can't understand his speech and all that they can hear is Miaow. Mr. Hilmi is an attentive, kind man who takes great pride in caring for the ancient ruins and helping visitors. Unfortunately, when Efes manages to attract his attention to the empty food bowl, he interprets the flower as a thank you from Efes to Ceylan for feeding him. Sadly, Efes settles to find food among the trash cans for the day.

Efes's mother Hadrian, another tabby, used to always feed from the leftovers of visitors. She had appeared out of the blue one day, with a distinctive M pattern on her forehead and settled on living around the Library of Celsus, despite many attempts of visitors to take her with them. Ceylan used to joke that she got her independent, almost regal, attitude due to being named after emperor Hadrianus. Although Ceylan and Mr. Hilmi managed to familiarise Hadrian to the caretaker's shack, the cat disappeared one day and left them wandering for two months until Ceylan discovered Hadrian amongst her litter one day. Efes was the only one who carried his mother's distinctive M mark and shortly became a favourite of Ceylan.

For a while, Hadrian and her kittens were competing for the title of the most popular attraction in Ephesus, with the Library of Celsus. However, after a short while, Hadrian disappeared again with her kittens, never to be seen again. Their departure devastates Ceylan until one day she discovers Efes miaowing outside their door.

Another day, Efes accompanies Ceylan on her way to school as usual and hurries back to his food bowl, hungry, to find it completely empty again, save for the single white jasmine. Efes is baffled, almost offended by this, wondering whether Ceylan is trying to get rid of him. But even if she did, Efes knows in his heart, he can't leave the ancient city. He doesn't exactly know why, but he belongs there.

The next day, Efes can hardly muster the energy to get up. He miaows desperately to Ceylan who is wondering what came over him. While Efes is trying to tell her "I am starving! I have been feeding off of trash for days!" Ceylan comments that he must like this new brand of cat food a lot since he has been licking the bowl clean for days now, which further infuriates Efes. As he slowly walks towards the bowl after Ceylan leaves, Efes sees a dark shadow leaning over his food. The darkness turns to him and looks at him with two beady eyes. Efes is terrified of this monster and scampers up to a tree so high that he has to stay there until Mr. Hilmi climbs up a ladder to pick him up.

The revelation that a dark monster has been stealing his food terrifies Efes, although he is relieved that Ceylan has not been ignoring him. He wonders whether this monster is a ghost living among the ruins. He even thinks this might be the reason why his mother had to leave. Ultimately, he decides ghosts would not be interested in cat food. He resolves to be brave against this dark foe and braces for the confrontation.

The next day is Saturday. Ceylan is looking forward to spend the entire day in the ruins and tell Efes the important events that happened in school. The reason for her excitement is that she has managed to talk to the new boy in class for the first time, thanks to the excuse of lending him a pencil. Efes is not overly interested in this story and elects to chase after a butterfly. Ceylan's mother Miss Sevim works at the gift shop and Ceylan helps her on busy Saturdays. As Ceylan leaves, Efes prowls towards the food bowl with the hopes of catching the monster stealing his food. As he lays in the distance watching, a dark figure slowly creeps to the food bowl. At the height of his excitement, Efes is startled by a black whip snakelet and bumps into an empty can laying close. Jumped by the sudden noise, Efes sprints towards the back of the shack but stumbles on a large rock. The shock is intensified as the large rock starts talking to him, asking, "what is the matter with you, making all this rumpus?" Efes realises that what he thought of as a rock was a turtle. The thief he has been looking for. However, the turtle claims the food bowl is actually his, and in fact Efes is the newcomer who adopted it while he was in hibernation. He had been leaving the flowers for Ceylan as thanks for the food. The 150 year-old turtle, named Snapsnap is wise and knows a lot about the history of the ancient city. He offers to share the food with Efes, in return of knowledge on a treasure hidden somewhere in the ruins. Since Snapsnap is very old, he offers the treasure to Efes, if they can find it together. Efes is intrigued and agrees. They start sharing the food and become fast friends.

Meanwhile, Ceylan is very excited by the fact that Ali, the new boy, remembered and congratulated her birthday. Ali came to the class during the second term as he lost his parents in the earthquake. He lives with his aunt and is generally a very quiet and lonely boy. He seems more interested in animals than in his classmates. Most of the class is preoccupied with the pop concert that will be on the Ephesus amphitheatre. This is a rare occurrence and Ceylan and her friends want to go. However, they do not have tickets. As she spends most of her time roaming the ruins, Ceylan knows a secret passageway from the ancient library to the amphitheatre and offers to sneak her friends into the concert through there, although they are frightened by the prospect, they tentatively accept Ceylan's offer.

The next morning, after completing her homework and chores, on her way to school, Ceylan scouts the secret passageway for her friends and mentally notes places to put candles beforehand. Efes, as usual, follows Ceylan on her way to school and ends up in the passageway as well. While making his way in the dark, cave-like passage, Efes is overwhelmed with the sensation that her mother has been

here. His curiosity draws him to a narrow, secret passageway and he tumbles down into a shaft where he discovers a room with two skeletons in it belonging to a human and a cat. As he is hopelessly trapped in this room, he explores his surroundings and discovers a golden key lying next to the skeletons, on top of an ancient looking tablet.

Meanwhile, Snapsnap is slightly curious why Efes didn't come to share the food with him.

Ceylan doesn't worry when Efes doesn't show up all day as she is thinking about the concert, her plans and most of all, Ali.

The next day, Snapsnap is reflecting on the fact that he has made a good friend in Efes, although he had to lie about that whole treasure business to get over the cat's suspicion. He considers this a white lie, but when Efes does not show up for a second day, he starts to get worried about his friend. He notices what looks like cat fur on some of the thorns outside the passageway and decides that his best hope of locating his friend is to enlist the help of the dog, Scraggy, that lives near the kebab shop outside the ruins.

Meanwhile, at school, Ceylan's friends are having cold feet regarding their plans to sneak into the concert. They are afraid to walk through the dark passageway. Ceylan takes this rejection very hard and a fight with her friends ensues. She is very heartbroken that her plan will not work.

Efes, waking up parched and starving in the dark cave, is desperate. He sits next to the tablet, which slides over to reveal a secret space, full of ancient parchments and a wall painting of a king with a cat, looking very similar to his mother, bearing the distinctive M mark. Efes wonders whether he found the secret treasure Snapsnap mentioned.

Mr. Hilmi was minding the ruins, watching over the tourists visiting the site. He took great pride in his work and always worried about potential damage by a careless visitor or a bush fire. When he heard the ringing of a bell, he was startled and immediately went to the tree that the bell was hung from.

In order to call Scraggy, Snapsnap had to brave the way that led to the tree with the bell hanging from it. As he can't reach it by himself, he asks help from the black snakelet, who accepts to help when he hears the funny cat that made all that noise upon seeing him the other day might be in trouble. As they successfully ring the bell, Scraggy hears it immediately and starts running to the ruins to find Snapsnap.

In school, Ceylan's recent fight with her friends brings her closer to Ali, who lends her support. She gathers the courage to ask him to stay after tomorrow's field trip to the ruins of Ephesus. Ali promises to try and get permission from his aunt. They are both very excited.

Scraggy and Snapsnap search the passageway and locate Efes. However, they have no way of reaching him. They promise to alert the humans and try to bring Efes some water and food. As Scraggy tries to draw the attention of Mr. Hilmi, the visitors become afraid of what appears to be an agitated

dog. So Scraggy and Snapsnap decide to wait for Ceylan. Meanwhile, Scraggy attempts to carry Efes's food bowl to him but accidentally breaks it, revealing a hidden roll of parchment inside. Worst of all, Ceylan, who is returning from school, catches Scraggy at this moment. She picks up the scroll after berating him for breaking Efes's food bowl.

Ceylan decides to prepare the passageway for tomorrow's school visit to the ruins, as she is planning to invite Ali there. She packs a bag with supplies and heads to the passageway, followed by an excited Scraggy. As she is preparing the candles, she does not notice Scraggy lifting a bottle of water and some biscuits from her bag to throw down to Efes. Although Snapsnap and Scraggy are dismayed that they can't communicate their plight to Ceylan, especially since she is so close now, they take solace in the fact that at least Efes has some water and food.

Next day at school, the day of the field trip, Ceylan's teacher gets a hold of the ancient parchment and brings in her friend from the local library to look at it. Two figures, a cat and a turtle are visible on the ancient scroll. The teacher and the librarian decide to further analyse the bowl and the parchment as they start the trip to the ancient ruins of Ephesus.

Snapsnap is getting anxious to get Efes out of the hole he is stuck in and he is surprised when a bus full of children arrives to the ruins with Ceylan. As the group is touring the ruins, Scraggy makes another attempt at drawing Ceylan's attention, this time scaring all the children. However, Ali is unperturbed by the excited looking dog and gathers Scraggy is trying to tell them something. He decides to follow Scraggy and the rest of the class joins in, feeling an adventure is on the verge. As Scraggy leads the group to the cave, they come across Snapsnap, and Scraggy manages to convince Ali and the other children to bring the old turtle along with them. The group, led by Scraggy and Ali, arrive to the passageway. As the entry is normally forbidden, a small group ventures in and through some teamwork, they finally discover Efes and the secret room full of scrolls and statues he accidentally unearthed.

As the field trip has happened towards the end of the school semester, the discovery of the secret room below the library marks the end of the year celebrations. The head of the municipality and the head librarian are both there to congratulate the kids on their discovery and highlight the importance of caring for historical artefacts. They also underline the importance of knowledge and education for everyone. Additionally, the speakers highlight another discovery, statues of a turtle and a cat, sitting side by side for centuries in the secret chamber, a reminder for everyone that our animal companions also share our history and our lives. They note the exemplary friendship displayed by the cat and the turtle, two statues smiling at each other eternally. Finally, the head of the municipality recognises Ceylan for her initiative, as she had led an effort to set up reading courses for illiterate women of the village earlier, and presents her with a gift. Ceylan notices her proud parents amongst the

audience, along with Efes who is watching intently as he promised to relay the events in great detail to his friend Snapsnap.

While this story ends, the mystery of where Hadrian went and the skeleton found in the secret room remains unsolved. Also, this is certainly not the end of the adventures of Efes and Snapsnap.



The Ventriloquist's Daughter (Original title: 腹語師的女兒)

by Man-Chiu Lin

Publisher: Global Kids Books (Taiwan)

First publication: March 2013

272 pages

Ages 10+

After the tragic death of Luir's mother, her father, a thwarted artist working as a doctor in the family hospital, is overcome with grief. He goes to study in South America, leaving six-year-old Luir in the care of her grandparents, promising to return with a special doll for her.

But instead of studying, her father travels to the Andes, where he meets a mysterious ventriloquist who takes him as a pupil.

Five years later, he returns home, bringing with him one of the ventriloquist's dolls. But it is not a present for Luir; instead, it becomes a menacing presence in the house, causing strife within the family. After observing her father performing strange rituals with the doll, Luir must find a way to defeat her demons - real or imagined.

Rights sold

China

"The Ventriloquist's Daughter introduces an air of mystery and suspense into a tale of family history and emotion. This is a novel describing the deep and obscure human psychology, of the father-daughter relationship within a family." - Liu Feng-xin, Associate Professor, Zhong Xin University.

"The early year's loss of parents often has profound impact upon children's emotions and character. This eminently readable book details the resulting emotion between fantasy and reality." - Wang Jia-En, Child Psychologist, Mackay Hospital, Taipei.

"Life has many twists and turns. Desire for love and to be loved, not knowing where to find love. This author sheds a light on readers, leading them to explore the dark and mysterious parts of human nature towards comfort and light." - Gui Wen-Ya, children's author.

"Following the female protagonist Liur and her conflict with the ventriloquist's doll Qili, the reader's emotion is likewise up and down. In this society, where we find difficulty in expressing our true feelings, this novel gives us insight into communication within the intimate family." - Zhang Jing-Hong, Teacher, National Taichung First Senior High School.



Man-Chiu Lin

Man-Chiu Lin is a well-known children's author in Taiwan who has published a number of successful YA novels as well as non-fiction titles. In Taiwan, she received the Golden Tripod Award for children's fiction in 2003 and the "Good Books Everyone Can Read" Award for the best children's book of 2010.

The Ventriloquist's Daughter (Original title: 腹語師的女)

by Man-Chiu Lin, translated by Helen Wang

Chapter 1

A Postcard From Afar

We were expecting Baba. But instead, we received a postcard from him, with a message saying:

I've gone travelling. When I get to the end of the road, I'll turn round.

I was with my grandparents when it arrived.

Yeye was furious. He hurled the postcard to the ground. "Don't bother coming back!" he shouted.

Nainai's face filled with sorrow. "Where is the end of the road?" she muttered to herself.

But I was delighted! Because the postcard was addressed to me!

After Mama's death, Yeye had paid for Baba to go to America. He had sent him to do an advanced medical course, not to go travelling.

*

Baba was overwhelmed by her death. He didn't talk, he didn't eat, he just sat by her grave, his face buried in his hands, his overgrown beard and his long, tangled hair. His eyes were like caves, dark and sunken. And so dull and lifeless. I'd never seen such a sad face, drained of all hope.

Yeye couldn't stand his dejectedness, and tried to encourage him to pull himself together. But Baba didn't seem to hear. After a few tries, Yeye grew angry. Exasperated, he insisted that Baba went back to work at the hospital.

"What kind of doctor am I, if can't even save my own wife?" Baba replied coldly.

"Kai Xiang, it wasn't your fault that Shui Ye died." Yeye's tone of voice softened, "it would have made no difference if Mingde had done the surgery. If Shui Ye could hear you now, she wouldn't blame you."

"She would! She would blame me!" Baba roared like an angry wild animal. "I'm a doctor, and I didn't even know she was ill! And even if she'd didn't blame me, I'll never be able to forgive myself."

Then he burst into tears, "I let her down. I'm responsible for her death."

Yeye's tone changed. "Pull yourself together," he said crossly. "Men don't cry like that."

Nainai was annoyed too, but she tried not to let it show.

“Kai Xiang, try and pull yourself together,” she wanted to comfort Baba. “Your father’s not getting any younger, and the future of the hospital depends on you.”

“Ma, can’t you see? I’m not suited to being a doctor! If you put the hospital in my hands, it’ll be a disaster.”

Yeye flew into a rage: “You lazy good-for-nothing! Look at Mingde, he works hard and takes his responsibilities seriously. If you were half as good as him, there wouldn’t be a problem.”

“I told you ages ago to let him have the hospital. I’m trapped here. You won’t let me go. If you’d let us go our own way, live our own lives, then Shui Ye would still be here.”

“And what would you be living on? Without your family’s support, Shui Ye wouldn’t have died from ill health, she’d have died from hunger.” Yeye’s face was black as thunder. “You don’t know what’s good for you. You’re a waste of time.” Then he stormed off.

Nainai let out a big sigh, and followed after him, leaving Baba in the depths of his sorrow.

I’d been crouching behind the door, out of sight. I waited until Yeye and Nainai had gone, and then quietly went up to Baba. I didn’t know what to say, so I just pressed against him gently.

Baba glanced at me, his lips quivering as though he was going to say something, but before the words could come out, there were tears rolling down his face.

“Don’t cry, Baba,” I said, wiping away his tears.

He wrapped his arms around me, and mumbled in my ear: “Liur, be a good girl, don’t make a fuss, just go and play.”

“Only if you’ll play too,” I said, putting on a girly voice.

He sat there, stiff and numb. “Be a good girl, and tomorrow I’ll buy you a doll.”

“Really?”

He nodded.

“Tomorrow I’ll go to work and I’ll bring a doll home for you, I promise.” Then he reached his little finger towards me to make a pinky promise.

I thought he would cheer up and pull himself together after that. But he didn’t.

He went from bad to worse. He started drinking all day.

The atmosphere at home was heavier than ever. Yeye’s face grew tighter and tighter with the strain. Nainai’s face was clouded with worry. This went on for over a month.

Then Yeye put a stop to it, by sending him away.

I'll never forget that day. Ah Fen came to pick me up from nursery. On the way home, she said, "Hurry up, your Baba's about to leave."

I panicked, pulled my hand away from hers, and ran home as fast as I could.

When I got there, I was gasping for breath. Baba was just about to get into the car. The moment he saw me, he flung his arms around me and held me tight.

"Where are you going?" I asked hurriedly, my heart pounding inside my chest. "Where?"

He didn't say a word. Again, his face was streaked with tear stains.

As Yeye pulled me away from him, he said, "I'm sending him on a course in America. It's very difficult for him to get back on his feet here."

I didn't reply. I could feel my heart shattering into little pieces.

Yeye told Baba to get in the car. He took a couple of steps forward, then came back and hugged me.

"I'll bring you back a present," he said, choking through his sobs.

When Baba left, my heart went with him. I became very quiet and the only time anyone heard my voice was when Qing Qing came to the house.

Qing Qing and I were closer than sisters. She was my cousin, Uncle Mingde's daughter. He and Baba had played together as children and grown up together. His family had not been well off, and Yeye had helped him go to medical school. Since graduation he'd been working in Yeye's hospital. He was very close to our family.

After Baba left, Uncle Mingde was even kinder to me than before. My auntie looked after me too, and often sent Qing Qing over with nice things to eat. I would have been so lonely if they hadn't been there.

"What kind of present do you think your father will bring back for you?" Qing Qing asked me one day.

"A doll," I said, without having to think.

"How many dolls do you want?!" she asked. "Didn't he buy you one with blonde hair and moving eyes for your birthday?"

I looked vacantly into the distance. "I didn't ask him to buy one, but I have a feeling that's what he'll bring back."

"When's he coming home?" she asked.

I shook my head. I didn't know.

Baba had sent us a letter as soon as he arrived in America, but after that we heard nothing. Yeye wrote to him many times, but he didn't reply. At first, Nainai would say

“America’s such a big place, it’s bound to take ages for letters to arrive.” But as the months went by, she started to grumble and complain. Yeye was worried too, but he reassured himself that his son must be very busy on the course, and didn’t have time to write home.

At first, I kept hoping that the postman would bring us news from Baba. But the days came and went, and there were never any letters from him. In the end Yeye couldn’t stand it any longer, and made a long distance call to America to try and get some information. That was when we learnt that Baba had dropped out of the course within the first month.

Yeye was furious. Nainai was worried sick. I didn’t know what to do with myself. Where was he?

What if something had happened to him? Yeye asked someone to find out, but he drew a blank.

Yeye’s face crumpled. Nainai sighed. I felt completely lost.

That autumn I started at primary school. Everything seemed to be a great big muddle. Then Baba’s postcard arrived, and I settled down. I only knew a few characters and I couldn’t read what he’d written, but I was so happy, and so full of hope that there’d be another postcard soon.

Every month or so after that, I would receive a postcard from Baba. Often, he simply wrote where he was, and sometimes he didn’t write anything at all. I wanted to ask Yeye where Baba was, but I daren’t, because Yeye was still angry. He didn’t want to know about the postcards. He didn’t even look at them.

When he learned that Baba had gone travelling, Yeye started spending even more time at the hospital. When he was at home, he frowned and stared silently into the forest at the back of the house. Nainai did the same. I heard them talking a few times, saying that Baba wasn’t coming back, what they should do about the hospital, and things like that. But mostly I just heard them sighing silently.

I could understand their sadness, but I didn’t want to comfort them, because they had never comforted me. In their eyes, I was just a girl, and a girl couldn’t carry on the family business. I hated them for putting so much pressure on Baba that he went travelling, and for giving Mama such a hard time insisting that she produce a son. If I wasn’t a child, I’d have run away too, just like Baba.

But I couldn’t run away. My heart was with Baba, so I followed him through his postcards. They consoled me when I was sad, and missing him. They also opened my eyes and before the end of First Grade I could name many of the states in the USA and knew that Mexico was a different country.

One day a postcard arrived with a picture of someone lying on a stone slab, his heart scooped out, and a crowd of people kneeling and prostrating themselves. It terrified me. There was no written message, so I ran over to Qing Qing's and asked Uncle Mingde where the postcard had come from.

He said it was from Mexico, that the picture showed an Aztec sacrifice, and that it was an Aztec custom to offer a human heart to the gods. He told me a lot about Aztec religious practices, and about local customs and traditions in Mexico. He showed Qing Qing and me some photographs of Mexico. It was so different from anything I'd ever seen! The houses and forests were different, even the people looked different. I held the postcard up to Mama's photo and told her,

“Baba's been to such unusual places! Look, this house is made from dried cactus!”

Although I was very interested and curious about Mexico, the idea of human sacrifice filled me with fear. I don't know how many times I dreamt about Baba being captured and tied up on the sacrificial altar, and the priest holding up his sharp knife, ready to slit his chest, remove his heart and offer it to the gods. I was so scared that I screamed in my sleep. I even managed to wake Nainai.

Qing Qing knew I often had nightmares, but she didn't comfort me. Instead, she laughed at me.

“Didn't you hear what my Ba said? When the Mexicans were under Spanish rule, they became Catholic, so there aren't any human sacrifices there now.”

I knew I was taking it too seriously, but it troubled me.

Although the postcards could not ease my longing for Baba, they did create ripples in my otherwise stifling childhood. When Baba left Mexico, I followed his postcards and toured the islands in the Caribbean, then headed due south to Guatemala, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Cuba, Haiti... Places to which I had no personal ties became focal points in my life. I spent ages looking at the postcards, thinking about Baba travelling there. In my heart arose a desire – when I was grown up, I would travel to all the places he had been and experience his feelings for myself.

In the summer holiday after Second Grade, Yeye had a stroke. He'd been as fit as a fiddle all his life, but he'd now lost control of one side of his body, he couldn't talk properly and he spent all day lying in bed, his temper getting worse and worse. I often heard him banging on the bed frame, and sometimes he would shout, but Nainai was the only person who could understand what he was trying to say.

A few months later, Yeye had another stroke. He slipped into a coma and was unconscious for a few weeks. Uncle Mingde said Yeye was waiting for Baba to come home. When Nainai heard this, she was overwhelmed with sadness and burst into tears.

In the end, Yeye didn't wait for Baba. He died in the hospital he had built up himself.

Without Yeye, the house felt even more deathly quiet than before. It was a big house, and there were only a few of us there: me, Nainai, Ah Fen the servant, and Mr Chen the driver. Nainai asked Uncle Mingde to look after the hospital, and spent her days reciting Buddhist sutras. She seldom paid any attention to me. I carried on with the same routine, going to and from school every day. And I started wandering about by myself in the forest behind the house.

Chapter 10

The Water Gods Festival

[While Liur's father was in South America, he learned a new skill, and travelled around performing as Carolo the Ventriloquist, with his cloth doll, Corola. He arrives home in time to perform at the Water Gods

Festival, the town's most important occasion of the year. Liur has been grounded, and when the day of the Water Gods Festival comes, she can't believe that Nainai has told Ayi to take her to see the show.]

I noticed some movement in the audience in front of me, then over the loudspeaker I heard the host introduce Baba and welcome him on to the stage. Everyone watched him come out, in his stage costume, with his hair slicked back and a big smile on his face. He looked so different from the drunk I'd seen curled up in the corner of his room. Carola looked full of life too. Her lips looked red and shiny, as though she'd just applied lipstick. And her eyes were glistening.

When Carola started to talk, the audience burst into applause. Children asked if the doll could really speak. Grown-ups were enthralled too.

Then with a shake of her body, her expression changed. Carolo and Carola began their exchange:

Carolo: You look scared, Carola. What's the matter?

Carola: You're a bad man, Carolo. You know that I'm scared of the Water Gods Festival. Yet you still brought me here. I'm not staying. If you won't leave with me, then I'll go by myself. Goodbye.

Carolo: Wait a minute! You're a doll, how can you go home by yourself?

Carola: I'm not a doll! If I was, I wouldn't be able to talk, would I?

Carolo: You can talk because...

Carola: Are you going to say that I can only talk because of you? Again?! I can't stand any more of this.

She stepped forward, and, facing the audience, raised her voice: Ladies and Gentlemen, Boys and Girls, look carefully! His lips don't move at all. He can't possibly speak for me. You know what they say: you can't play two flutes at the same time!

Carola put her hands on her hips, and thrust her nose up in the air. Her angry pose had the audience roaring with laughter.

Carolo: Don't get all worked up. I'm sorry if I said something that upset you.

Carola: That's more like it. ... Carolo, you told me that these people aren't afraid of drought any more. So why do they have a ritual ceremony for the Water Gods?

Carolo: Since the reservoir was built, there hasn't been a water shortage. The ritual is to remind everyone to think about where their water - and everything else - comes from.

Carola asked the audience: Is this true?

"YES!" cried the audience.

Carola: Then there's no need for me to be scared! Carolo, let's go and wander around the market!

Carolo: Why don't you tell them what it's like where you come from?

Carola: I come from a place high in the Andes. It hardly ever rains there, so we melt the snow on the mountains to get our water. If the weather's too warm, then the snow melts by itself, and there isn't enough for us. And if it doesn't snow enough in winter, then we have the same kind of problem.

Carolo: You come all the way from the Andes! What's it like there?

Carola: It's beautiful! Our village is at 3000 feet, high up where the mountain peaks are white and the sky is blue. The view is fantastic. It's like living in the clouds!

Carolo: 3000 feet? That's high! Can you still breathe so high up?

Carola: With difficulty! And when people sing in the thin air up there, it sounds incredible!

Carolo: Could you sing a song for us now?

Carola: No, there are too many people. I'd be embarrassed!

Carolo shouted to the audience: Would you like to hear Carola sing?

"YES" the audience shouted back. Carola waved her hand frantically in the air, as if to say no. Her shell bangles rattle.

Carola: They're very insistent.

Carolo: Yes! You must sing for them!

Carola: I'm touched... I'll sing them a folksong from home.

And with that, Carola started to sing.

Her voice was as clear as if it had come from a mountain valley. The melody was beautiful, and although we couldn't understand the words, she enchanted us. Like the rest of the audience, I couldn't take my eyes off Carola. Then she started to dance, beautifully and gracefully. She looked just like a real girl. Why couldn't Qing Qing see that?

All of a sudden, I remembered that Baba was terrible at singing! And if he couldn't sing, then how could he sing so beautifully as a ventriloquist? The thought startled me. I looked at Baba, but all I could see was the smile on his face, and his body moving in time with Carola's. He didn't seem to be controlling her at all. She appeared to be singing all by herself.

When Carola had finished singing, she thanked everyone profusely. The audience loved her.

When everyone had settled down again, the host asked the very question that was on my mind:

“Carolo, please tell us how you sing so nicely?”

Baba was about to open his mouth when Carola interrupted: “That’s a very strange question to ask. Carolo hasn’t sung a single word all afternoon, so how can you possibly know how he sings?”

The audience roared with laughter.

The host was full of praise for Baba: “Mr Carolo, what an astonishing achievement! Your performance was perfection...”

Carola was livid. She was leaping about and shouting like a lunatic: “It was my performance! Why aren’t you asking me?”

The host wasn’t sure what was going on: “But isn’t it a ventriloquist act?”

Carola was indignant. “A ventriloquist act?! It was my performance! It had nothing to do with him.”

There was a look of surprise on the host’s face. He raised his voice. “Really?” he asked.

“If you don’t believe me, why don’t you ask him to sing?” Carola said smugly.

Carolo pretended to be angry: “You’re determined to embarrass me, aren’t you, Carola?”

She ignored him. “You see, he can’t sing!” she told the host.

By now the host was intrigued. “Mr Carolo, how about a few lines? Surely we want to let everyone know whether the doll is speaking the truth or not?”

Carola was pushing him too. “Come on, Carolo, sing!”

I saw Baba’s face flush red, and heard him clear his throat. Then he started to sing.

His notes were all over the place, he couldn’t keep to the tune, and his voice kept catching in his throat, which made everyone wince and frown. The host made a show of covering his ears. I could feel the emotion rising inside me – because at last I’d seen the Baba I remembered.

When he finished singing, he seemed very self-conscious, “Well, you did ask me to sing,” he said, defensively.

The audience gave him an enthusiastic round of applause. The host said admiringly, “Unbelievable! Astonishing!”

Carola was indignant again. “Do you not understand? His singing was awful! Why are you praising him?”

The host smiled at her and apologised, “I’m sorry, Miss Carola, I was so excited. I feel terrible now. May I ask you to sing another song for us?”

Carola made a few adjustments in preparation to sing again. “I can sing a few songs, but this time I want you to be clear about what he does and what I do. And that my performance has nothing to do with him.”

The host gave a little laugh. “You are a remarkable singer, Carola. We’re all ears!”

So Carola sang, earning even more applause from the audience.

But while the audience was caught up in the Carola’s performance, I overheard a conversation that distracted my attention.

“Everyone says that if it had been the old doctor who’d operated, his wife might still be alive today.”

“He’s not cut out to be a doctor. It took him ten years of medical school to qualify. Thank goodness his family had its own hospital, or he’d never have found a position.”

“I’ve also heard that it was the old doctor who pushed him to do the operation. He was trying to train him, shape him, but he could never have expected that his son would end up killing his own wife, and that he’d have to force him to leave.”

“He had to go though. Murder means going up against the law...”

“It was more like professional negligence than murder.”

“There would still have been legal consequences. So it’s hardly surprising he was away for so long.”

I focused in on this small group, and recognised one of them as a cleaner from the hospital. I didn’t know if what they were saying was true or not, but it shocked me.

Had Baba really been responsible for Mama’s death? No, I couldn’t cast doubt on him. Yeye had said the outcome would have been the same no matter who had done the operation. But if he had made an error, it would explain why he’d been so despondent. And if he was no longer fit to be a doctor, it would explain why he never went back to the hospital. Perhaps he had run away not just because of grief, but also because of guilt?

I kept my eyes on the men while I thought it over. They seemed to have a lot to talk about.

“The key thing is not whether he was negligent during the operation. The man was a doctor and he didn’t even know his wife was ill. How ridiculous is that?”

“It *is* strange. When you’re ill, there are usually some symptoms, and if he hadn’t noticed any then the family probably wouldn’t have noticed anything either.”

The last sentence hit me like a hammer blow to the head.

I knew Mama had fainted, but I hadn’t said anything. Didn’t that make me responsible too? The first time it happened she told me not to tell Baba, but she went on to faint a second

and a third time, and I carried on behaving as though nothing had happened. How could I have been so naive?

But it wasn't naivety. I'd been scared that whatever was wrong with her would steal Baba away from me. How could I have been so evil? I looked at Baba on the stage, and was filled with remorse. My eyes began to blur with tears.

SYNOPSIS: THE VENTRILOQUIST'S DAUGHTER (MAN-CHIU LIN)

Liur lives with her grandparents (Yeye and Nainai) in a small Chinese town. Her grandfather has worked hard, and expanded the private hospital founded by his ancestors. The three of them live in a big house overlooking a forest, with their servant (Ayi) and driver. On the whole, Liur's grandparents' traditional values have served them well. But the atmosphere is heavy with disappointment and frustration. Liur feels she is suffocating.

*

When Liur's mother (Mama) died five years earlier, Liur's father (Baba), a doctor in the family hospital, was overwhelmed with grief and guilt. How could he be a doctor if he could not even save his own wife? Hoping that a change of scene might be helpful, Liur's grandfather sent him on a medical course in the USA. But Liur's father never attended the course, and went travelling instead. He sent postcards to Liur from the places he visited in the USA, Central and South America. For Liur, the postcards were a lifeline to her father, and she treasured every one of them.

Liur's grandparents were angry. They could not understand their son's attitude. Their plan was that he should take over the hospital, but now they would have to ask their son-in-law (Uncle Mingde) to take care of it.

Liur liked Uncle Mingde and his family. His daughter Qing Qing was like a sister to her. Uncle Mingde read what her father had written on the postcards and told her about the places he had been.

*

Liur's grandfather dies. With Uncle Mingde in charge of the hospital, Liur's grandmother spends her time in Buddhist devotion. Liur spends a lot of time on her own, wandering in the forest, where she visits her mother's grave.

One day, Liur is delighted to see her father at the grave. She recognises him, though he looks different from how she remembers him.

That night, she hears her father talking to someone (a girl's voice) in the next room. The next day she looks in her father's room and discovers a cloth doll. She thinks it is for her.

After school, Qing Qing and Liur go to see him. The doll (Carola) talks to them, but they know it is Baba talking. The doll says she has special powers. Qing Qing and Liur don't believe her, but Liur senses something strange.

Qing Qing's parents invite Liur's family for dinner. Liur's father tells them about his travels, and how he found Carola and became a ventriloquist. It was an emotional turning point for him, and since then Carola has been a support for him. He travelled south, earning money as Carolo the ventriloquist.

It begins to annoy Liur that she cannot talk to her father alone. Carola is always there. Maybe he doesn't want to talk to her directly? Or maybe Carola has some kind of influence over him?

One day Liur discovers an altar in her father's room. He is slumped in the corner, drunk, with Carola in his arms. Carola tells Liur that she's in charge, and wants Liur to go away.

At Qing Qing's suggestion, Liur writes a letter to her father, and leaves it on her mother's grave. He reads it and weeps. Liur tries to comfort him but as soon as he sees her he runs away. Liur assumes that he doesn't love her any more.

Liur feels ill. She wakes in the middle of night. Out of the window she sees her father playing the flute, Carola and a line of cats. Liur is frightened. Is it real? Or is she imagining things because she's ill? It seems to be a kind of ceremony. Liur wonders about Carola's power and intent. But no one believes Liur.

Qing Qing and Liur agree to test whether Carola is real or not. When Carola appears to be simply a doll, Liur refuses to accept it. She hurls the doll to the floor and stamps on her. Liur's father is furious. He bans her from going to the forest, and from seeing Qing Qing. The girls are angry with each other. Liur is more isolated than ever.

Liur's father agrees to perform at the town's annual Water Gods Festival. Carola and Carolo sing. But Liur knows her father can't sing well, and is suspicious. She overhears people saying her father was responsible for Mama's death. Liur feels responsible too.

Liur is grounded during the school summer holidays. Needing to get out of the house, she asks Ayi to take her to the library. Liur lies, and feels she is turning evil.

In the library she sees a magazine with photos of dolls just like Carola. The article is about child sacrifice in the Andes. Liur convinces herself that Carola is the soul of a sacrificed child, who is living in the cloth doll, and that Carola wants Liur's father all to herself.

Liur sees another night ceremony. Her father cuts his arm with a knife, so Carola can drink his blood. Carola senses Liur is watching. When a cat leaps up to attack Liur, she puts her hands up to protect herself.

The next morning, Liur has scratches on her arms. No one believes her story. She knows there will be a fight with Carola, and she knows she has to face it alone. The next time her father leaves the house, Liur goes into his room. Carola is there waiting for her. Liur hurls a

candlestick at Carola. The room catches fire. Liur is trapped. She hears Carola say that she will be the ventriloquist's daughter when Liur dies.

Liur wakes up in hospital. Convinced no one believes her, she refuses to talk. Uncle Mingde gently builds up her trust. Once she begins to open up, he helps her to see things from different perspectives. She learns the truth about her mother's death. She is also willing to consider that she may be projecting her feelings on to the doll.

Uncle Mingde has also been talking to Liur's father, who comes to pick her up from hospital. Finally, she has a chance to talk to him alone! But Carola is in the front seat. Liur and Carola fight. Liur's father loses control of the car, trapping Liur beneath the car. When the emergency services arrive, she hears them talking about a child. She hears her father shouting to them to leave the doll, and save the child under the car.

While Liur is in hospital, her father repairs the house. They both have to accept that their memories are of the past, that they have both changed in the last five years, and that they have to rebuild their relationship in the present.

*

The years pass. Liur studies psychology at university. Her father dies. Liur buries his beloved Carola with him. She decides she will fulfil her childhood dream, and follow her father's journey all those years ago.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE on the names of the characters.

I have created the names Carola and Carolo. In the source text, the names are Jili and Jili, with different Chinese characters for *li*, one suggesting a male name, the other a female name. The names are pronounced slightly differently. Jili/Carolo is Liur's father's stage name.

Essentially, this is a story about a young girl growing up and asserting her identity. To do so, she must survive the oppressive atmosphere at home, struggle against the inherently sexist values of her grandparents, learn to manage her disappointment and frustration when her father returns, and acknowledge that her own memories are subjective. In the process, she also comes to understand the terrible consequences of her father's failure to assert his identity as a young man.



Trip To See The Aurora (Original title: 마법같은 선물이야)

by Hwang SunMi

Publisher: Sigong Junior (Korea)

First publication: March 2014

85 pages

Ages 6-9

Jaeha's mum has just had a baby - so it's decided that to give her a break, he and his Grandma will visit family - in far off Canada! Jaeha is especially excited to meet his cousin Eddie, who is about his age - but the two boys don't hit it off. Eddie's mum decides to show Jaeha the beauty of the Aurora - can the trip in the northern wilds of Canada bring the two boys closer together?

"I never imagined trivial stories between children could be so touching. I was enchanted. Children's rough and clumsy emotions are well described."
- Song MiKyung (Author)

"'The Magic Present' (direct translation of the title) may be the aurora, but it also symbolizes Jaeha's making up with Eddie." - Book Review Readers

"I learned that right now, right here, my family are the magic presents from this great book." - Book Review Readers

Hwang SunMi



Born in 1963, Hwang was unable to attend middle school due to poverty, but thanks to a teacher who gave her the key to the classroom, she was able to go to the school and read books whenever she wanted. She enrolled in high school by taking a certificate examination and she graduated from the creative writing departments at the Seoul Institute of the Arts and Gwangju University, and from graduate school at Chung-Ang University. She lives in Seoul, South Korea and is an adjunct professor at the Faculty of Literature in the Seoul Institute of the Arts. Hwang's career as a writer began in 1995, and since then she has published nearly 30 books in various genres. She is most famous for her work 'The Hen Who Dreamed She Could Fly' which was also made into a movie that broke Korean box office records for animated films, earning nearly seven billion won in its first month of release.

A Trip to See the Aurora (Original title: 마법같은 선물이야)

by Hwang SunMi, Translated by Young-Sook Kim

A Strange Place

“Whew! It must be because I’m old. Nothing’s easy,” said Granny, heaving a sigh of relief after spotting our luggage. “Now we just need to get out.”

Granny took Jae-ha’s hand. Her hand was wet. The immigration officer’s fast talking and gruff looks made Granny nervous. Jae-ha felt afraid. This was his first time in Canada. He just arrived here to visit his aunt’s family.

Actually, they came to Canada because Granny wanted to see Eddie. Eddie’s birthday falls on Christmas and she had never celebrated his birthday with him.

Eddie was his aunt’s son, born in Canada and the same age as Jae-ha. Though they were cousins, this was only their second time meeting. Well, it was more like the first time, since they were babies the first time they’d met and he remembered none of it.

There was another reason for their visit. Granny had chosen to come to Canada for the sake of his maternal grandmother’s comfort. Jae-ha’s mother had just given birth to his younger sister, Jae-hui, and his maternal grandmother was staying at his home to help his mother.

“They aren’t nice here. Everyone is so quick-tempered,” complained Jae-ha as Granny led him by the hand.

Granny said nothing back to him. Maybe she didn’t hear him. Jae-ha was not happy about the whole situation, because Granny had decided everything on her own. Still, he had thought that at least the plane ride would be fun. He was also smitten by the idea that they might meet Eskimos. The Eskimos he had read about in a book lived in igloos in a land covered in snow.

He felt like he had been cheated. Riding in the plane was not as fun as he had imagined. Sitting in a chair for ten long hours was boring. The view out of the plane window was not of a snowy land and there was nothing even close to igloos, either. He figured that staying home with Jae-hui would have been better. He didn’t even know what Eddie was like.

Heading toward the exit, Granny took the big bag and Jae-ha took the small bag. Although he didn’t want to, he had to hold Granny’s hand tightly now. Losing her in this strange

place would not be fun.

“Granny, what is Eddie like?”

“You saw him in the pictures. He looks just like his Dad.”

Jae-ha could not remember his uncle, so there was no way of knowing how Eddie looked. Though he had seen Eddie in pictures, someone in a picture is not a real person. A real person can walk, talk and play, but a person in a picture is as flat as a piece of paper. The worst part was that Eddie looked dumb in pictures.

“Granny, is Eddie tall?”

“Well, the last time I saw him he was a baby.”

“He must not be that great if he looks like he does in the pictures.”

“Oh, my! So many people!”

Jae-ha asked again as he chased closely behind her: “Why is Eddie’s name Eddie?”

“I hope they’ll recognize us.”

Granny only cared about what lay beyond the gate. When Jae-ha saw all the people waiting outside, he began to worry again. They all looked so different and spoke a different language. What should he do if Eddie only spoke English? His aunt also spoke a bit oddly in the video chat.

“Whatever. I’ll be fine without speaking. It’s only a few days . . .”

Just then his aunt ran toward them, waving her hand above the people.

“Mom!! Wasn’t the trip tiring?”

His aunt hugged Granny and jumped up and down. Though he had seen her when he was younger and had talked to her on the video chat, Jae-ha felt awkward around his aunt.

Still, it was good to see relatives without any problems.

“Mom, you look really tired!”

“No, I’m okay. Just my rear end feels a bit stiff.”

“How is Jae-hui? Does she look like a person?”

“How can you say that when you are an aunt?”

“I was just curious about my newborn niece.”

“She’s very smart — just like Jae-ha.”

“Ahh, Jae-ha!”

Only then did his aunt look at Jae-ha.

Jae-ha was fiddling with a bag handle and looking at the two male figures behind his aunt.

A curly haired man with a bulging belly. And a skinny boy with curly hair. It was Eddie.

“Hey little fella, you’ve grown up!”

His aunt crushed him in a hug. She smelled like fruit. It was a scent that told him she was a good person.

Granny hugged Eddie hard and patted his butt.

As they were being hugged, the two boys looked at each other. Jae-ha had never thought Eddie would be taller than him. Yet Eddie was tall and he didn’t look like an average seven-year-old boy.

Raising his hand, Eddie said hello first.

“Hi, Jae-ha.”

Jae-ha could not raise his hand nor open his mouth.

Having missed the timing, he felt awkward saying hello.

Jae-ha blushed. He felt like an idiot.

Cousin Eddie

His aunt could not leave the computer.

“The problem is that weather forecasts here are pretty accurate. Snow on Christmas Day! We’d need a miracle for the forecast to be wrong!”

Sighing, she flipped through a stack of documents. She was a reporter. They were going on a trip up north for her work. She wanted to work and take a family trip at the same time.

“You don’t like snow on Christmas Day?” he asked.

She stared at him for a while, blinking her eyes. She had that look whenever she had something to think about.

“Snowing means a cloudy sky, and a cloudy sky means we won’t be able to see the aurora,” Eddie blurted out.

He shrugged his shoulders as if to blame Jae-ha for not knowing that fact. Jae-ha didn't like the look. That smart aleck Young-jun was just like him.

"I know that it snows on cloudy days."

"Ah, you do? How about the aurora?"

Jae-ha was speechless. He had no idea what Eddie was talking about. In fact, it was his first time hearing the word "aurora." Until now, Jae-ha was thinking that the trip up north was all about Eskimos and igloos. Now he found out it was an aurora trip.

"How about you? Do you know what an aurora is?"

"Psshh! Who cares?"

Eddie tossed aside the book he was reading and lay down on the couch. Then he started working on a Rubik's Cube, making a *dududuk-dududuk* sound.

"Jae-ha, come here," his aunt called to him while unfolding a map. As she spoke, she gently rubbed his shoulder.

"Why wouldn't I like snow on Christmas Day? But this Christmas it has to be really, really clear because we need to see the aurora. If you can't see one on an aurora trip, how can you write an article? It would be like *jjimbbang*—steamed bread—without the red-bean paste."

"*Jimbbang* without the red-bean paste! Christmas without a cake!" Eddie repeated after her with the voice of someone with a stuffed nose.

"Eddie, you can have a birthday without a cake. Instead of a cake, you have Granny and Jae-ha here to celebrate with you. The whole family is going on a trip. It's going to be more special than a cake."

"Eddie, let's have a yummy cake when we come back from the trip," said Granny, trying to appease him, as she walked out of the kitchen.

Eddie must be the only kid with a birthday on Christmas. That must suck. You only get one gift instead of two.

Jae-ha had only brought one gift for Eddie. It was actually from his mother.

"We're going to the airport along this road here. It's very far. You two should go to bed early. We're going to leave very early."

"Whoohoo! Am I getting on a plane again?"

Jae-ha let out a sigh.

"We can't help it because it is so far away. It would take at least two or three days by car. That's not a good way to go. It's dangerous driving up to 60 degrees north. The road is rough

and it is extremely cold.”

“It’s an Inuit area near Yellowknife, in the Northwest Territories,” Eddie interrupted in a sulky tone. He had already gotten up from the couch and was staring at Jae-ha and his mother. Jae-ha stared at Eddie. He’d heard what Eddie said but couldn’t understand any of it. He felt bad, like he’d been insulted. Not only that, but the book Eddie had been reading a few minutes before was in English.

Then there was the Rubik’s Cube that Eddie held in his hands. Jae-ha also had one at home. But he could never solve it as quickly and as perfectly as Eddie did.

“Eddie, if you speak in that sulky tone, don’t you think it will bother Jae-ha?”

“Eddie didn’t speak in a sulky tone,” Eddie retorted to his mother, then lay down on the couch, facing the wall.

Though Granny patted his butt and his head, he didn’t move. Jae-ha whispered to his aunt to try to keep Eddie from hearing him.

“Auntie, what’s an Inuit?”

“An Inuit means an Eskimo. People call them Inuits these days.”

“Um, okay. Then, what’s an aurora?”

“Hmmm. An aurora is a natural event where the sun’s energy reacts with the air and gives off light. A wonderful light pattern comes out in the night sky, moving like a living thing, and the colors are supposed to be great, too.”

“Have you ever seen it?”

“No, but I’ll see it this time. But then, that light left the sun a long, long time ago. It takes a really long time for the light to get here because the sun and the Earth are so far apart. So the light is coming from the past. Isn’t just the thought of that amazing?” his aunt muttered, gazing in the air as if dreaming. Jae-ha couldn’t understand everything she had said. The sun is always in the sky, and light isn’t some train or something. What was all this about the light departing and how long it took to get here?

“But do we have to go so far to see an aurora?”

“It’s too bright in the cities for us to see natural lights,” his aunt kindly explained to him.

His aunt who smelled like fruit. Jae-ha liked his aunt. Though Eddie hurt his feelings, it was okay since she was trying to comfort him.

“Tomorrow’s breakfast will be sandwiches. What kind do you like, Jae-ha? What should I put in your sandwich?” his uncle asked him, poking his face out of the kitchen. He was a cook.

“Dear Jae-ha only eats about the tear of a chick,” Granny answered for him. “Dear Jae-ha is a chick.”

Eddie pouted, still facing the wall.

Jae-ha pouted his lips and glared at Eddie. The adults must not have heard Eddie’s pouty words. No one scolded him.

“Now that he has to go to school, I’m getting worried,” Granny said while making a *tsk tsk* sound with her tongue. “He’ll be eating cafeteria food and he has such a small appetite. That’s why he doesn’t grow tall. Look how much taller Eddie is, even though they’re the same age.”

“It will be a hard flight if you don’t eat breakfast. We’ll be flying six long hours, and the airplane doesn’t give breakfast. I’ll prepare turkey breast and pickles on soft bread . . .”

Suddenly, Eddie stood up and walked over to his Dad.

“Daddy, why didn’t you ask Eddie first?”

“Daddy knows what Eddie likes. Peanut butter and cheese and two slices of ham.”

“I don’t like that anymore. I want turkey breast and pickles on soft bread.”

Everyone looked at Eddie. Eddie lifted his chin and walked to his room, stamping his heels.

“It’s going to take some time,” said Granny, laughing, after repeating the confusing words.

“Ha ha! Eddie is even willing to eat pickles!” His uncle laughed, too.

“Eddie will get better. He waited for you quite eagerly,” his aunt whispered to him, but Jae-ha couldn’t believe it. Eddie had flashed him a smile when they first met, but had been pouting ever since. Just because this was his house, he felt he could act up and show off, and didn’t try to do anything with him. Eddie must have fallen asleep because he lay motionless, facing the wall.

The couch was where Jae-ha slept. He didn’t like sleeping in Eddie’s room, but he liked the couch. It was interesting how it changed from a couch into a bed.

“I’ll turn off the light for you,” said his aunt. “You need to go to sleep now so you can get up early tomorrow.”

But Eddie didn't move.

"Even if you turn off the light, I'm not afraid."

"You aren't? Good night. You too, Eddie, have a good night."

Flick! The light was off.

Jae-ha looked up at the dark ceiling for a while. He didn't think he could sleep because his feet were cold. He pulled the blanket up to his nose to cover his cold shoulders. He never felt cold sleeping at home in Seoul. His mother wouldn't let him get cold. His nose hurt a bit, then tears filled his eyes.

Screech! Screech! Screech!

Just then, he heard scratching sounds on the wall. They came from Eddie's side.

Screech! Screech! Screech!

"Sleep! Sleep! Or you'll have to play with the goblins."

Jae-ha opened his eyes wide and stared at Eddie.

Eddie was teasing him by making weird sounds.

"Sleep, babies. It's now the goblins' time," said Eddie, his sharper voice making it even scarier. He must've been trying to frighten Jae-ha, but instead of getting scared Jae-ha laughed. He was used to the lullaby. When he was a baby, Granny would sing it to him softly to put him to sleep. Eddie knew the song, too. Now he felt like a real cousin.

Pulling the blanket all the way up to his head, Jae-ha muttered: "I won't. I won't. I will play with the goblins. I will."

Birthday Present

It was windy and extremely cold. The stars were shining in the sky. The bus stopped a few times on the way to the airport. At each stop, people who would be traveling with them got on the bus. They were all strangers. Jae-ha removed the blanket covering him and stared out the window. It was still dark. Though the humidity clouded the window, he could see trees and snow-covered fields. He could even see a Christmas tree twinkling in a distant house. The Christmas tree in his home in Seoul would also be twinkling.

"How nice it would be if all of this were a dream. How nice it would be if this were the

way home. Then he'd be good to his mother. He'd be kind to his sister, Jae-hui, too. But it was not the way home. Where on earth were they going in this darkness with all of these strangers? Everybody told him they were going north to see the aurora, but he couldn't picture anything. Eddie was asleep, his head lying across his father's lap. Sucking his finger like a baby. His curly hair looked messy. It would be interesting to have curly hair like that. You wouldn't have to wet your hair that stuck out every morning. His uncle and Granny were also nodding off. Only his aunt was awake, jotting something down in her notepad or taking photos through the window.

An aunt with a job. Eddie's mom. No matter how kind she was, she was not his mother. It was hard to start talking to her. Suddenly, something hot got stuck in his throat and tears started flowing. Jae-ha swallowed his spit and held back his tears. He wasn't a baby anymore. Soon he'd be going to school, and he was the big brother with a younger sister. There were a few other children on the bus but they were older than Jae-ha. They were all asleep, beneath blankets. It was interesting to sleep on a bus with a blanket and a pillow. One man was even snoring. The bus rolling quietly through the darkness was like a big room. Jae-ha pressed his nose against the window, looked out at the snow-covered world, and began mumbling.

"Sleep. Sleep. Or you'll have to play with the goblins.

Sleep, babies. It's now the goblins' time.

I won't. I won't. I will play with the goblins. I will.

To the fields, to the sky, and to the whole world. Goodbye. Goodbye."

"Ha ha! Jae-ha's a sleepyhead."

Hearing Eddie's laughter, Jae-ha quickly opened his eyes.

Eddie was laughing. He must feel better now. Jae-ha hurriedly rubbed his eyes and looked at Eddie. But Eddie was already busy taking his bag, and didn't look at Jae-ha.

"Hi, Eddie . . ."

Jae-ha had wanted to say hi but ended up mumbling it to himself.

"Jae-ha, you should hurry and take your bag, too," his aunt told him, slinging her bag across one shoulder.

Jae-ha hurried to grab his bag, and put his hat on, too. He didn't wait for Granny to help him. If Eddie did things by himself, then he couldn't act like a baby.

Everyone was getting their bags. They had arrived at the airport. Everyone went to board the airplane, the children carrying small bags and the adults carrying or dragging big bags.

The older kids seemed to have already gotten close, because they were talking and playing with one another. Eddie was with them. He sat next to them on the plane while Jae-ha just looked out the window. Although he wanted to be with them, he couldn't. They were all speaking English. His aunt and Granny were also talking to each other. Though they talked and talked, it was never enough because they hadn't seen each other in a long time. His uncle was dozing off.

"They left me all alone, like some outcast."

Jae-ha read all the books he had brought. He also changed his robot into a car, then switched it back into a robot, and then a car again. But he got bored with it, and put it back in the bag. He took out a small box buried deep in the bag. It was the birthday present for Eddie that his mother had prepared.

Silver Fox

"Where are we going?" Jae-ha whispered to his aunt. She just put one arm around him.

Jae-ha heard what the adults were talking about. They had to go to some distant field in the middle of the night and wait for the aurora. But he didn't know why they had to. It was his first time taking this strange trip. A trip where they either rested in hotel rooms or swam in an indoor pool, then traveled at night until three in the morning.

The bus crossed a field covered with snow. It was heading to a forest to see the aurora. It was heading to a frozen lake in a very dark forest. Everyone looked like bears because of their puffy jackets and furry hats. They said if we didn't bundle up like that we would get frostbite. No question about it. When they boarded the bus a little earlier, the electronic display said -30°C. That meant 30 degrees below zero. The weather forecast said it would go even lower, to -35°C, at night. It was so dark everywhere, it scared him. It seemed like they were all being kidnapped and taken somewhere. Jae-ha held Granny's hand harder. Here and there, he could see a light from a house, and he thought it must be a very lonely house. Other people were looking out the windows in silence, too. The trip into the deep darkness seemed to make them feel nervous and

strange. On top of that, they had witnessed an unpleasant scene earlier in the hotel lobby.

“Mom, what did that lady do wrongly?” Eddie whispered, pulling down his mouth mask a little. Jae-ha also turned to his aunt.

It happened when they were in the lobby waiting for the bus.

Jae-ha was getting excited about the idea of staying on a frozen lake in a forest from late at night until dawn. He would be allowed to stay up in the middle of the night. And it would be in a forest.

There were foreign travelers in the lounge, where a lady was sleeping on a sofa. No one sat near her because she smelled bad. Suddenly, two policemen showed up and awakened her roughly. The lady moaned a few times but did not open her eyes.

The policemen then took out their handcuffs, put them around her wrists, and took her away in a police car. It was the first time Jae-ha had seen handcuffs. And of course, it was also the first time seeing police arrest someone with handcuffs.

No one was bringing up the story, so he kept quiet, too. But his heart was still pounding and he was quite curious.

“Mom, was she a criminal?” asked Eddie.

His aunt just patted Eddie on one shoulder.

“Auntie, is that lady going to jail?”

Eddie stared at Jae-ha. He also looked scared, like Jae-ha.

“No, she’s not. The police must have taken her away for . . . protection.”

“To protect who?” Jae-ha and Eddie asked at the same time, then giggled at the same time.

Just then, Jae-ha remembered the music box in his pocket. He wanted to give it to Eddie now, though it was already late. Because it was Eddie’s from the start. But Eddie had said music boxes were for girls. It was obvious that he didn’t care about it. He had walked past the music box at the hotel, barely glancing at it.

“The police protect weak people.”

“But the police were acting terribly, Mom.”

“You two must have been very scared. Don’t worry. We grown-ups are here.”

“They weren’t trying to protect her because they weren’t nice to her.”

Jae-ha pouted his lips as he remembered the immigration officer with the brusque look. Then he looked out the window.

The place was so desolate and cold. Snow blew around like powder. You couldn't make a snowman with that snow. It wouldn't hold together. Even the snow felt unfriendly, like the policemen.

“The lady was sick, sick because of alcohol. She was dangerous to keep around travelers and children. The police must have done that to protect her and us.”

“If she were sick, they were supposed to be nicer to her.”

Jae-ha and his grandma visit his aunt in Canada while his mom cares for his newborn sister back in Korea. Jae-ha is a bit scared of going to a strange country where people speak an unfamiliar language, but he's also excited to meet his cousin Eddie, who is the same age as him.

When Jae-ha actually meets Eddie, however, he finds it hard to get along because he thinks Eddie is a smart aleck. His aunt, who is a newspaper reporter, suggests a trip to northern Canada to see the northern lights and celebrate Eddie's birthday, as well as to write an article about it.

As their long, cold journey to see the aurora begins, Jae-ha struggles with the harsh weather and lack of sleep. The more he suffers, the more he misses his family in Korea and resents and envies Eddie, who is surrounded by his own family. Jae-ha becomes so upset that he opens Eddie's birthday present – a music box. Though he immediately regrets it and looks for a way to give it to Eddie and apologize for opening it, he cannot find a chance.

When Jae-ha tells everyone that he saw a rare silver fox in the woods, Eddie says it's a lie. Eddie even refuses to look Jae-ha in the eye the whole time they're waiting for the aurora to appear. Jae-ha is upset and disappointed throughout the journey deep into the forest.

When they finally arrive at base camp for the aurora trip, Jae-ha enjoys activities he has never before experienced. During the day he goes ice fishing and watches as the fish freeze right after they're caught. Jae-ha and Eddie ride in a sleigh pulled by ten sled dogs and have their first decent conversation, about an injured dog. At night he eats sweet potatoes and makes friends with other people in the teepee while waiting for the aurora.

The weather doesn't help, and even after a prolonged wait they cannot see the northern lights. Finally, they decide to go back. Then, Jae-ha realizes that Eddie's music box is missing and starts to cry. Eddie offers to help look for it and together they search for the music box. Suddenly, the aurora appears magically in the sky. Eddie finds the music box and gives it to Jae-ha, who hands it back to Eddie, telling him that it was his birthday present. Eddie winds up the music box and lifts it high up in the air. As they both see the mystical aurora through the box, their envy for each other melts away, giving way to laughter and warming feelings.



We All Want Heaven (Original title: Allemaal willen we dehemel)

by Els Beerten

Publisher: Querido (Netherlands)

First publication: 2009

498 pages

Ages 15+

The war is over, but it looks like it has just started. Because nothing is what it seems.

1943. It's the height of the Second World War. A hard battle is being waged against the Russians on the eastern front. The Germans suffer huge losses and urgently require reinforcements. Younger and younger men – naïve and idealistic as they are – hear the call and set off for the frontline, full of notions of heroism. Ward is one of those who chooses the 'wrong' side and goes off with the Germans to fight against the Bolshevik troops. His best friend Jef Claessen ends up on the 'right' side, but it's certainly not out of any definite conviction. He's actually a coward, who becomes a war hero entirely by chance. When Ward returns to Flanders after the war, the onetime friends find that they are now diametrically opposed.

1945, the war is over, normal life has started again. In a few months Renée will graduate from high school. And then what? Maybe she should look for a job, like her brother Jef, who works in the mines, like all men in the village. Jef is nothing special. Until people find out that during the war he rescued several members of the resistance. He is honoured with a medal for his heroic behaviour. And with the medal, Ward returns. Ward, who in 1943 had left and gone to the east front to fight. Ward, who used to be Jef's best friend, and high school sweetheart of Renée ...

"A gripping, smoothly written, layered story about dealing with heartbreaking decisions and moral dilemmas in difficult times." - De Morgen

"Els Beerten has surpassed herself. Allemaal willen we de hemel is a beautifully written book about the thin dividing line between good and evil, about love, friendship and growing up in wartime." - De Leeswelp

"In Allemaal willen we de hemel, Els Beerten creates subtle nuances in wartime notions such as cowardice and heroism. Her young characters seem like real flesh and blood and make the reader wonder: could I be a hero or would I be more interested in saving my own skin? [...] Allemaal willen we de hemel is a nuanced, touching, but hard-hitting book [...] a clever crossover novel with literary appeal and characters that stay with you, which adults will also be able to appreciate." - De Standaard

"Allemaal willen we de hemel is a layered, touching and cleverly written novel about dilemmas in times of war. [...] A gripping young-adult novel about moral choice and the search for happiness in dark times; a book that remains with you for days after you've finished it. [...] It has everything it needs to become a classic: a carefully constructed plot, a daring story and a surprising conclusion. A marvellous book for readers of all ages." - De Standaard

Els Beerten



Els Beerten (1959) worked for some time at a magazine for children and young people before she started teaching Dutch and English at a secondary school. Her debut 'Scènes' (1987) was followed by a wide range of children's books. Her oeuvre includes books for the very youngest readers and more substantial teen reads. 'Lopen voor je leven' won the Gouden Zoen award in 2004, the Kleine Cervantes prize in 2005, and the first prize from the Flemish Children and Young People's Jury in 2005. She won the prestigious Bokenleeuw for 'Allemaal willen de hemel'.

We All Want Heaven (Original title ALLEMAAL WILLEN WE DE HEMEL)

By Els Beerten, Translated by Stacey Knecht

1945

Heroes

The trip is taking much too long.

‘Martin, where are you going?’

‘To the john. Be right back.’

I feel her eyes on me. I turn to look at her. She smiles. A fat man on her right, a small gray-haired woman on her left. The empty seat opposite her is mine. For the rest, two women in our compartment. Suddenly their heads turn towards me. Our eyes meet. I feel them taking in my every feature.

My face tenses. I can’t help it. Isa nods at me, she’s still smiling. I don’t know anyone who can smile like Isa.

I pull the door closed behind me and walk into the aisle. The train is going fast. I hold on to the railing under the windows in the aisle as I walk towards the restroom.

It’s ‘unoccupied’.

I stand in front of the mirror.

Heroes never tell their own story. They get their story from the people around them. Once upon a time, and then the hero did something really brave, and then he or she lived forever.

I’ll never get a gift like that.

My name is Martin Lenz. I was born in Berlin. Our neighborhood is gone, but I’m still here. My parents are gone. My grandparents, my friends, the house where I once lived, all gone. There’s only me.

I’m still here.

They were English bombs. Last October, when I was at the front fighting the Russians. I wasn’t home, I was lucky. Pure stupid luck.

My accent? My mother came from Flanders. My first language was Dutch, I learned German later on. I had a German father. I was raised as a German.

These are my papers. Twenty. That's how old I am.

Of course I miss them. I miss them every single day. But a person has to move on with his life.

We're on our way to Cologne, Isa and I. Isa Hofmann. I'm going to marry her some day. She is from Cologne, the past few years she has been working at the front as a nurse. I was wounded in Dresden, ended up in the field hospital, Isa was the nurse who took care of me, and we fell in love.

I don't have to go back to the front. I'm no use to them anymore. As soon as I was able, we left for the west. Isn't everyone heading west these days? I'm glad we can go to her parents'. As I said, a person has to move on with his life.

I don't stammer anymore when I tell the story. I've told it so many times, one day it will be all mine. But let me tell it again anyway. My name is Martin Lenz. I was born in Berlin. Our neighborhood is gone. Along with all the rest.

The mirror reassures me. I don't blink so much anymore. Don't tilt my head. I look people right in the eye, but not the whole time, back straight, arms at my sides. No fidgeting.

I'm still here, but a little less each day. Less and less, until I'll be nothing but my story. This one story. I could live with that.

Medal

My brother Jef is a hero. A real one. It was even in the paper. He got a medal, too. It has been hanging on our wall for a week now. It's really shiny. 'Don't touch, Remi,' says my mother, if I reach out even a finger. My mother polishes the medal every day. 'What our Jef did – there are simply no words to express it,' she has said about fifty times.

Whenever my father walks into the house, he stands in front of the medal, his arms crossed, and gives a deep sigh: 'Yes. Ah, yes.' At least a hundred times a day.

Our Jef is lucky. With that medal, he'll definitely go to heaven. However much he swears or lies, they'll *have* to let him in, they won't have a choice. All good people go to heaven, says our pastor, but heroes go first.

I wish I had a medal, like Jef. But if you're ten, you can't be a hero. I don't think. I have to be patient.

The house smells of cigarettes, of pipe and coffee. It's Saturday, and my mother has baked four cakes to celebrate the medal. Our house is full of people. My father and my mother, me, Jef of course, my sister Renee, a few of the neighbors. The medal has been taken down from the wall so we can look at it more closely. It has the king on it, and something in French. Something about being brave, my father says.

A hero is brave, says my mother. Otherwise, he's not a hero.

'He'd better not come back,' she says suddenly.

The house goes silent.

'He' is Ward. Ever since the medal has been on the wall, they sit around all day whispering about him. But not a word when I'm in the room.

'If they catch him, there'll be hell to pay,' says my father. 'Just look what they did to his mother! That woman is still in jail, and she certainly didn't do anything serious.'

My mother gets up and wipes her hands over and over on her apron. 'Who knows if he's still even alive,' she says.

I look at her, shocked.

'Of course he is,' says my father. 'If he were dead, we would've known by now. In a village like ours, nothing stays secret for very long.'

'It's all his own stupid fault.' Renee gets up, her chair scrapes loudly across the floor. She goes to the window and looks out. As if there's something really amazing to see out there.

There's another silence.

'Who wants more cake?' says my mother suddenly. Before anyone can speak, she has put another piece on each plate. It's my third. I'll get a bellyache from eating so much.

'*What's* his own stupid fault?'

'You're too young,' says my mother, smiling.

'I'm ten!' I say angrily.

‘Exactly,’ she smiles. ‘Anyone for more coffee?’ She gets up and fills each cup to the brim. Soon the room is filled with chattering again, as if I haven’t said a thing, nothing at all.

I *have* to know. What’s going on with Ward. And if he’s ever coming back. I get up and go over to Renee. Ward was her sweetheart, so she should know. I tug at her arm. ‘When’s he coming back?’ I whisper.

‘How should I know?’ she whispers back.

And she really doesn’t know. She doesn’t care, either.

‘He promised me,’ I whisper.

She shrugs her shoulders.

‘He was going to teach me saxophone,’ I say.

She shakes her head. ‘Oh, Remi.’

‘What’s going on with Ward?’ I ask loudly.

‘Shut up, pipsqueak,’ says Jef. He looks at me like I’m dirt. When all I did was ask a question.

‘Ward is my friend,’ I say angrily.

My mother smiles at me. ‘One day I’ll tell you everything.’

One day, always one day. As if I’m just a big baby.

‘Let’s drink a toast to Jef. To our Jef, and his medal,’ she says.

I walk outside. It’s drizzling.

I haven’t seen Ward for a long time, but I haven’t forgotten him. He taught me how to whistle through my fingers. We practiced for hours, until I could do it. And once I could, it was forever.

Jef can’t whistle at all, let alone through his fingers.

What I want

Another four months and I’ll have my high school diploma. It’s up to me what I want to do after that: work or college.

My mother says I'm very musical and that I should do 'something with music'. Go to Hasselt, Renee, she says, to the music school, then you'll find out for yourself.

My father says I'm lucky, because I have a choice. And he doesn't mind telling me that I owe it to my mother. Because if it were up to *him*, well! And he doesn't quite understand. Why women are always making it so hard on themselves, when they've got plenty of work around the house.

'You're not a woman, so you *can't* understand,' my mother said to him.

So here I am waiting for the train to Hasselt.

What I myself want, I don't know yet.

Jef could've gone to college, too, but he went to the mines. Everyone worked in the mines, he said, so it couldn't be that bad.

My father works there, too. It *is* that bad, he said, Jef would find that out for himself, he was just scared to spread his wings, there was no bigger scaredy-cat than our Jef. A teacher, that's what he should be, or a lawyer. A notary public, or a doctor. Those were the men who kept the world turning, said my father.

The world would turn without him, said Jef. He'd spread in his wings in the mine. And he was sick and tired of being called a scaredy-cat.

Ever since the picture in the paper and the medal on the wall, our Jef can do no wrong. My father walks around singing his praises, while Jef keeps grumbling that it's enough. He still has to get used to being a hero. Because that's what he is. Even though he works in the mines and never became a doctor. But Ward. What a coward. If he ever comes back, they'll shoot him, says my father, because that's what happens to traitors.

He says things like that when Remi isn't around. Remi still lives in a fairyland, where friends stay friends forever. And Ward was his closest friend. And my love. My first, my dearest.

I can't even remember what his sax sounded like.

My mother, last night.

And Renee, how much did you love him?

Very much.

How much is that? If the house were on fire and he was inside, what would you do?

In the old days, I would've run in and saved him.

In the old days?

Of course. Now he doesn't have to bother coming back.

Never again?

Oh, Mama! Of course never again.

The way my mother began nodding, until her head nearly fell off. She was nodding at me *and* at herself. Dear girl, she said after a while, things should've worked out differently.

But things worked out the way they did.

The tram is here, I get in.

A few stops on, a man sits down next to me. He looks about twenty-five, but could just as easily be thirty. 'Do you mind, Miss?' he asks.

It's Renee, not 'Miss'. I think it, I don't say it. He's not getting my name. 'Go ahead,' I say, and turn my head to the window.

I've brought along my trumpet, just in case. I figure I'll have to play something, how else will they know what year I should be in?

'Are you going to Hasselt?' he asks.

None of your business, I want to say. I nod.

'Me too,' he says.

Big deal, I think.

'So, are you from around here?'

I sigh. Why doesn't he just shut up?

'Are you?' he repeats.

If I don't answer, he'll just keep asking. I tell him.

'I know the name,' he says, 'but that's it.'

I nod again and turn back to the window. Of course he doesn't know our village, it's no bigger than a pocket handkerchief. A few houses, a few shops, a square with a church, a town hall and a brass band. Our Desire – that's the name of the hall, *and* the brass band.

We all belonged to Our Desire, my father, Jef, and me. And then Ward joined. If anyone ever had a gift for music, it was him. That was something I could never understand later on. How someone could play so well and at the same time have such strange ideas.

Nobody knows where he is now. He has probably heard what happens to people like him, he won't come back, he's not stupid. *People like him*. Never thought I'd talk that way about the boy I loved.

I've always known, says my father, whenever Ward's name is mentioned.

He never knew a thing. He loved Ward as much as the rest of us. Everybody loved him.

'What instrument is that?'

I jump at the sound of his voice, too close to my ear. Why doesn't he just leave me alone?

'A trumpet.'

'I love music.'

I look at him, as uninterestedly as I can.

He nods to himself, moves three inches away from me, as far as the seat allows. He gets it.

Finally.

My hands glide over the trumpet case in my lap.

The war is over, Ward is never coming back, and my mother is right: I have a gift for music. I'm going to play like I've never played before, and my head will be filled with music again.

My Secret

Last week they gave me a medal.

The men from the Secret Army arranged the whole thing. They were grateful to me. That would've been enough. I really didn't need a medal.

The ceremony was in the town hall. There were five of us. Four men from the Secret Army and one civilian. I was the civilian.

The village heroes, they called us.

Before that, nobody knew I was a hero. At home I was just Jef. Jef who worked in the mines. My boss was happy with me, I didn't drink like a fish, and I went to bed on time. I wasn't involved in any monkey business. I was nothing special.

Until one day, without any warning, there they were. In the middle of our living room. Three big men, with guns in their belts.

It was September '44, the war had just ended and the village had to be cleared of everyone who had sided with the Germans. People were dragged out of their homes, shoved onto a cart, their heads were shaved, their faces and skulls painted with swastikas, and then, with the whole village dancing and cheering, they were taken off to who-knows-where.

It didn't make sense that those guys had come barging into our house. We hadn't had anything to do with the war.

'There must be some mistake,' my father stammered.

'We're here for your son,' they said.

Everyone turned to me, my mother, my father, Renee, Remi, and the three men. Seven heads staring at me as if I were from another world.

All I could do was stare back. 'For me?'

I saw the fear in my parents' eyes, but I myself was too surprised to be scared. 'For me?' I asked again.

The biggest of the three came and stood in front of me. He looked me up and down. 'Jef Claessen?'

'Yes, that's me.'

'Let's go,' he said.

'What do you mean, let's go?' asked my father, horrified. 'My son isn't going anywhere.' He planted himself firmly in front of the three men. My mother went and stood behind him. 'We're good people,' she said.

'We just want to ask him a few questions, and who knows, maybe he'll be right back. Or maybe not,' said the man. He looked at me closely. 'You were there,' he said. It sounded almost friendly, but I knew that friendliness was often a mask people wore to get to the bottom of something. My mind began to race. What on earth was he talking about?

He saw me thinking, and frowned. 'Or am I wrong?' He sounded hesitant, but still friendly.

'Let me refresh your memory. Last May, the soccer canteen.'

I was so shocked, my legs nearly gave way.

'Were you there that night, Jef?'

He knew. How could he? Nobody had seen me. I was sure of it.

'We just want to ask you a few questions about that night, Jef. We want to be sure we've got all the facts.'

The hairs stood up on the back of my neck. This was the moment of truth. Never before had I told anyone what had happened that night. It was my secret, I'd take it to my grave.

My legs were shaking as I followed them out the door. My father followed me. 'You stay here,' the men told him. 'We need your son, not you.'

My father nodded. He stood there in the doorway, biting his lip. As soon as we had turned the corner he started swearing till he was blue in the face. But only after we were gone. My father was the biggest scaredy-cat of us all.

I went with them to their headquarters. I was pushed into a little room. The three men disappeared. Two others came in. Wanted to know if it was true. If, on that May night, I had helped prevent a raid by the collaborators. And saved four Resistance men. Four men from the Secret Army. Four of their ringleaders.

I nodded. It was true, I said.

That was what they wanted to know, they said. They sounded relieved.

How had I known about the raid? they asked. Pure chance, I answered. No, I wasn't a member of the Resistance, and I wasn't a spy, either. My father would never have let me get mixed up in the war.

'But you did,' they said, grinning. 'And now we can tell the world. Jef Claessen is a hero!'

The months passed and I heard nothing more about it. Meanwhile, they were still combing the village for anyone who had helped the Germans. When the worst was over, it was time for the medals.

A few weeks ago my heroic deed appeared in the paper. My father memorized the article word for word, my mother wondered how I could've kept it a secret for so long. Said I was far too modest. Other newspapers came to get my story, so I gave it to them.

Last week they gave me the medal. My family was there. Everyone hugged me and said I was the biggest hero of all.

I hope Ward stays where he is, because here, they'll tear him apart. We all will.

Synopsis

Told by four narrators, the book is divided into very short chapters, with frequent changes of point of view. Most of the story is set in the period from 1942 to 1947, with two framing chapters set in 1967. *Allemaal willen de hemel* focuses on a group of young people in a small Flemish village: Jef and Renée Claessen, their younger brother Remi and their friend Ward. The Germans have invaded Flanders and the family has to stand by and watch as the Nazis take charge of the village. The locals are split between those who collaborate, those who keep a low profile and those who resist.

Beerten sketches the everyday wartime life of the Claessen family, as they suffer deprivations and attempt to keep the village brass band going in spite of the Nazi presence. She focuses not only on the war, but on all the usual concerns of young people: Remi's desire to be taken seriously and not be seen as the baby of the family, Renée's uncertainty about what to do with her life. Although things are not easy for the family, the contrast with Ward's later experiences as a soldier could not be stronger. Beerten depicts the close friendship between Jef and Ward and the romantic relationship that develops between Ward and Renée. Remi also idolizes Ward, who is popular with everyone in the village. As the war progresses, however, Ward falls under the influence of Catholic priests at his school, who tell him that if the Germans lose on the eastern front, the Russians will sweep through Europe and religion will be banned. Ward feels that he needs to step up and defend his homeland and his religion, even if that means fighting for the Germans. Jef also wants to fight, but his father forbids him.

Ward sets out to be a hero, but is viewed as a traitor to his homeland, whereas Jef, who has always dreamed of being a hero, has to remain at home. However, after the war, he is declared a hero for having saved four members of the Resistance. This event is key to the story of the two friends and to the narrative as a whole.

It transpires that Jef had met up with Ward secretly when he was on home leave, even though most of the other villagers despised Ward as a collaborator. Jef was still thinking about joining up with the German army and, in order to prove that he was brave enough to fight, he followed Ward as he went on a secret mission to deal with some members of the local Resistance. Ward realized that the man he was supposed to kill was in fact his own uncle and he shot into the air as a warning to the men, giving them a chance to escape. However, Jef, hidden in the bushes, thought that Ward had missed his target, and decided to help him by shooting the man himself. When Jef realized who the man was, he was horrified, but he let Ward take the blame for the murder

and was himself feted as a hero and given a medal after the war, as people believed that he was the one who had fired his gun as a warning and allowed the Resistance men to escape.

However, in 1947, Ward returns to Flanders and is taken into custody as a traitor to his country and a murderer. Jef is expected to stand as a witness against his friend in court, but is terrified that the real story will come out. Will Jef lie and get his best friend executed? Or will he tell the truth and ruin himself and his family? The climax is unexpected. In the courtroom, Jef identifies Ward as the killer, but then he shoots his friend dead, so that his version of the story remains unheard. A few days later, a letter arrives for Jef, written by Ward and smuggled out of jail by his lawyer. Ward swears in his letter that he would never tell the truth about the murder and betray his friend.

Jef has finally had to confess the truth to his parents as the trial approaches. Beerten depicts their moral dilemma, anger and shame with great sensitivity. Ultimately, Jef's crime and duplicity destroys the family. His mother dies of a heart attack some time later and his father rides his bike into a canal in what looks like a suicide. Renée leaves to study at a conservatory in Brussels and also has to take care of Remi, who never finds out the truth about his brother and Ward.

Jef leaves Flanders and becomes a priest in the Congo, where he remains until he dies in a car crash in 1967. His body is returned to Flanders for burial, which features in the framing chapters of the book.

The story ends on the solemn note of the funeral. Jef's death has not brought a resolution and the family's guilty secret still remains hidden. However, as Renée and Remi walk away from the funeral, there is a sense of relief and a feeling that they are now able to move on.