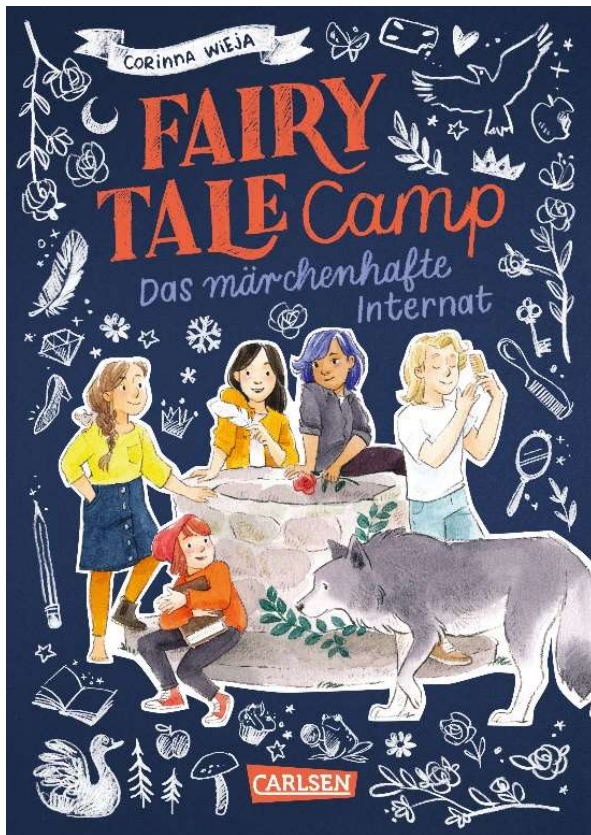


# Corinna Wieja: Vol.1, Fairy Tale Camp: The Fabulous Boarding School

## Illustrations by Frau Annika

**Bd. 1: Fairy Tale Camp: Das märchenhafte Internat**

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ENGLISH SAMPLE TRANSLATION

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## CHAPTER 1

### The beginning

#### Or the flying cake

I am not a princess. Neither in real life nor in fairy tales. If someone had told me that I would share a room with a fairy tale princess, I would have laughed out loud. Fairytales and magic don't exist. Or so I thought.

But then came this Friday. Suddenly I felt a tingling in my stomach. As if I had sucked on too many fizzy sweets or accidentally swallowed a swarm of wildly fluttering butterflies. Shortly afterwards, despite the closed windows, a gust of wind swept through the classroom and blew a piece of cake right into my teacher's face.

By the way, I'm Marie Brunner and magically gifted. That's what my teacher says. Well, the one with the cake on her face. And she should know, because she is responsible for my life becoming a confusing adventure roller coaster full of magical dangers. If I'm not careful, I might turn into a singing tree or a toad. But this Friday had actually started quite normally. Well, almost normal ...

My alarm clock hadn't rung and I was late again. So I reeled off my morning programme - shower, get dressed, pack my school backpack - at turbo speed. I skipped breakfast, gave Omimi a kiss and was on my way to school on my bike a little later. I pedalled like mad. As if a nasty fairy had fun teasing me, it was also raining.

But that was really harmless compared to what happened in the second lesson in German class.

Our substitute teacher Mrs Schneeberger rushed into the classroom and placed a paper plate with a piece of cream cake on each seat. "It's my birthday today," she

explained. "You can eat the cake later." The whole class whispered enthusiastically because the chocolate and strawberry cake looked delicious. After we had sung her a birthday song, Mrs Schneeberger gave us a lecture on the morality of fairy tales. Outside the window it was still raining. Bored, I scribbled in my notebook and drew myself being devoured by a dragon. I gave the dragon the face of Schneeberger. I was so absorbed that I didn't notice how quiet the class had suddenly become. Only when my friend Charly poked me in the side did I look up.

Mrs Schneeberger had set up in front of my table and eyed me with an ice-cube look. She also looked like an ice cube, because she was dressed in white from head to toe. Even her hair, which she had put up in a bun, was white! The only splashes of colour were her blood-red painted fingernails, her tomato-red lips and the red frame of her glasses, which were adorned with mushroom-white flecks. For the first time I noticed how small she actually was. Barely taller than me.

"What do you think, Marie?"

"Uh, yes. That's right?", I stammered, completely clueless.

The others giggled. "So Puss in Boots really existed?" Her voice sounded unpleasantly shrill. Like the squeak of chalk on a blackboard. "What makes you think that?"

"Well, Puss in Boots certainly didn't exist. It would be rather silly to believe that fairy tale characters also exist in real life," I said.

"I'm still waiting for your explanation." Frau Schneeberger pierced me with her ice-blue gaze. My skin suddenly tingled.

My friend Charly slipped me a piece of paper under the table. "Symbol" was written on it. There was a yawning emptiness in my head.

"Yes, so ... Puss in Boots ... is ... a symbol?"

"And what is the cat a symbol of, Marie?" Mrs Schneeberger did not let up.

"For a good ghost," Charly hissed at me.

"Thank you, Charlotte, but I'm sure Marie can manage without your help." Mrs Schneeberger's gaze fell on my notepad. "What's that?"

I quickly covered the Schneeberger kite with one hand. "Er, a doodle," I said evasively.

"You know, those little doodles you make so you don't fall asleep in class."

Blimey. I would have liked to shove the sentence back into my mouth. How stupid can you be, Marie?

Mrs Schneeberger's expression froze. "Well, I know how we can prevent you from falling asleep in class," she said. "You will prepare a paper on the symbolism of fairy tales during the holidays. And on the first day of school after the holidays, you will enrich us with your new insights."

*Thank you very much.* I groaned. "But Mrs Schneeberger, that's totally unfair. Besides, I was paying attention."

"Don't make up fairy tales. The discussion is over. And I'll take this one with me. You'll get it back after class." She reached for my notepad and my mind shut down. I had only one thought left: under no circumstances must Frau Schneeberger see that I had drawn it. As a dragon, with her mouth wide open. I had also scribbled her name underneath. Charly still tried to pull me back to my chair, but I was already raging.

"You can't do that! That's mine!" My voice resounded loudly through the room and the rain outside also seemed to be getting stronger. At the same time we reached for the block.

It slipped from my fingers and sailed onto the floor. Well, great! A volcano erupted inside me and then everything happened in a flash. Thunder rumbled, a branch whipped at the window, Mrs Schneeberger wanted to bend down for the block and I grabbed the piece of cake to push it onto the picture. As soon as I

touched the paper plate, the chocolate cake was swept off the table as if by a gust of wind and landed directly in Mrs Schneeberger's face!

As she stood up, chocolate cream foam splashed from her nose onto her white blouse. The class burst into roaring laughter.

Only Charly looked at me with wide-open eyes. "I'm so sorry!" I called, startled, and rummaged for a tissue, which I sheepishly held out to Frau Schneeberger. She grabbed it and wordlessly wiped her face with it. "I don't know ..." The bell rang and the others pushed out of the room with their paper plates while still giggling.

Charly stopped beside me and looked at me anxiously. I closed my eyes and waited for the thunder.

Mrs Schneeberger looked at the closed window, then at me. With raised eyebrows, she shook her head in disbelief. Her laser gaze slid over me.

"Come see me after your last class," she said in a dangerously low voice. "We need to talk."

She bent down, handed me the note pad and wiped up the cake mud from the floor.

Dejected, I left the classroom. Charly put an arm around my shoulder. "Too bad about the delicious cake," she comforted me. "If you want, I'll give you a piece of mine. Chocolate has superpowers against frustration. It's even scientifically proven."

I nodded, but I had lost my appetite. And yet I had no idea that the cake incident was only the beginning of a whole series of strange experiences that lay ahead of me.

**CHAPTER 2****Detention for Pros****Or the strange invitation**

For the rest of the morning, I was as jittery as if I had swallowed a swarm of bees. The last class - maths - seemed to drag on like chewing gum, but the bell still struck far too early for me. I was really nervous about the talk with Ms Schneeberger.

"Shall I come with you?" asked Charly sympathetically as we walked towards the teachers' lounge at a snail's pace.

"No, it's okay." I put on a brave smile. "It's not like she's going to eat me." Still, a grumble ran through my stomach.

Charly grinned. "Nah, you'd just be monster heavy in her stomach anyway."

"Hey!" I poked her in the side.

"That was pretty weird." Charly frowned.

"What was strange?" I knew exactly what she meant, but if I denied it, then maybe it wasn't true.

"Well, the thing with the cake. I didn't see you throw it. It happened so fast. It's almost like you did magic."

"Nonsense. It just slipped over the edge of the table," I said. The rumbling in my stomach increased. I also had the feeling that the cake had already flown before I touched the plate.

"Hm," Charly grumbled. "Still. Things like that happen to you quite often lately. You're always dropping things, blowing things away or spilling food. And just think of the thing yesterday with the burst tap in the school toilet, where you got soaking wet. It's almost like you're cursed." She put a hand on my arm. "You should make yourself a garlic necklace to get rid of the curse."

I laughed, but involuntarily grabbed my lucky bracelet. "You're joking! I'm just having a run of bad luck."

"Well, I don't know," Charly said doubtfully. "Really strange things have been happening lately. These strange break-ins, for example ... Last night all the mirrors at the Hairlich hairdresser's shattered. That's seventy years of bad luck, my grandma said. And the weather is going crazy more and more often, too. Remember last weekend when we wanted to go to the swimming pool? It was pouring with rain. Then, just for fun, you wished for sunshine and all of a sudden it became summery and warm."

"I really can't do anything about the mirrors and the weather," I said. "Climate change simply arrived in Rosenstein, too. And you are far too superstitious." Nevertheless, Charly was right. The accumulation of these strange occurrences was really striking. And the weather seemed to match my mood quite often lately. If I was in a good mood, the sun was shining. If I was sad, it rained. If I was angry about something, thunder rumbled. The day before, a water bottle had exploded. It had spilled over my phone when I opened it and damaged it. Dad had got really angry, but honestly, what could I do about it when there was so much carbon dioxide in the bottle? I was so angry that he blamed me for it, and suddenly a thunderstorm came up. Just like in the movies. You might know it: one minute the sun is shining and the next it's dark, eerie music starts - damdam-dam-dam-dam-dam -, rain pelts the window and lightning flashes across the sky. And you know: Uh-oh, now the heroine is in for trouble. It was the same with the fight with Pops. There was even scary music because Omimi was warbling a hit song off-key in the kitchen.

And then today the strange gust of wind and the cake accident. Each time I had felt the fizzy sensation beforehand. The first time was shortly after my twelfth birthday. *It's all in my head, it's just a coincidence*, I told myself. By now we had arrived outside the teachers' lounge. "Wish me luck."



"Good luck!" Charly gave me a quick hug and a wave. "Text me later how it went."

"You got it." I took a deep breath and knocked on the door.

"Come in!" barked the voice of the Direx.

I pushed open the door. The teachers were sitting at a long table eating lunch. Mr Dinkel, our geography teacher, was slurping spaghetti noisily from an aluminium bowl. A noodle was stuck to his chin. Mrs Petersen, the chemistry teacher, was stirring a bowl of nasty-looking grey mush and our music teacher Mr Karlsen was carefully cutting an orange into small slices. All eyes were on me.

"Er enjoy your lunch," I said politely. I looked around searchingly. "I'm supposed to report to Mrs Schneeberger."

A chair scraped across the floor and Mrs Schneeberger appeared next to Mr Dinkel. Due to his size, he had probably covered her. She had fixed her hair, but I still spotted a few cake crumbs in her hair.

"Very nice. You haven't forgotten. Come with me." She preceded me and headed for one of the small meeting rooms. There was only one table and three chairs in it. "Sit down." Hands folded, she looked at me promptly. "So?"

I pushed myself onto a chair opposite her. "I'm sorry?", I said, unsure what she wanted me to say. "I'm sorry about the cake. I didn't mean to do that."

"Well, that would have been even better." She tapped her fingertips together.

"That mishap is long forgiven and forgotten. Cream is good for the skin. And your gift is truly exquisite, but as to be expected, still a little unpolished. That's why I wonder why you didn't join the gifted programme a long time ago."

So she had seen my drawing after all. I felt relieved and quite flattered that she thought I was so talented. "Oh, I wouldn't call it a gift. I'm just good at drawing." Her eyebrows crept towards each other like caterpillars. "Drawing? What's that got to do with the gust of wind you started?"



"Really. How am I supposed to have caused a gust of wind?" I shook my head and crossed my arms. She bent over and came so close to me that the tips of our noses almost touched.

"You don't have to lie to me. It was foretold to me that the missing gift was in this city. I admit I didn't notice it right away. And I didn't believe it when they told me I'd find you in a normal school. But today I saw the sparkle in your eyes and your aura. The magical glitter is unmistakable."

Apparently, the incident with the cake didn't agree with Ms Schneeberger. Was she possibly under too much stress? I forced myself to smile kindly.

"Honestly, I have no idea. The cake slipped out of my hand. It wasn't a gust of wind. Of course I'll pay for the cleaning." I glanced at her blouse and noticed that it wasn't stained at all. That was a super-duper-extreme-express-cleaning.

"Nonsense. That's not necessary." Frau Schneeberger tilted her head. "You don't look like her at all. That's why I didn't recognise you right away."

"Who am I supposed to look like?", I asked in amazement. "Well, your mother," she answered impatiently. "Gwendolyn Holle." Mrs Schneeberger pulled a fountain pen out of her bun. She played with the cap, twisting it open and closed, and a faint smell of cheese and cinnamon wafted through the room. "If I'm not mistaken, Gwendolyn married a pastry chef."

I nodded curtly. "Yes, my dad owns the pastry shop *Cake Atelier*."

A glow lit up Mrs Schneeberger's face. "Oh, I had my birthday cake bought there. It was fabulous!"

"Yes, thank you. How do you know my mother? Are you friends with her?" A tugging sensation made itself felt in my stomach. As it always did when others seemed to know more about Mom than I did. I barely knew her myself. When I was four years old, she had left me and Pops. Just like that. Since then there had been no contact. She had disappeared off the face of the earth. All I had left of her was a photo and the lucky bracelet. I leaned forward tensely and waited for Mrs

Schneeberger's answer. "Uh... I used to be. Back in the day." Mrs Schneeberger's expression became impenetrable. She rummaged in her bag. "Where did I put it?" She cleared a crumpled tissue onto the table, throat lozenge, a curled sock, a mirror and a book bound in green leather. "Ah, there it is." Triumphant, she pulled out a sunshine yellow envelope and a small lemon yellow box. Both she slid over to me. The cinnamon-cheese smell intensified and I wrinkled my nose. "I've been carrying it around a bit longer," she said apologetically. "Read it." Astonished, I looked at her. There was nothing written on the box. "Come on, read." She tapped the box. To finally get the whole thing over with, I took the box in my hand. If necessary, I would think of something. The main thing was to get out of here. To my astonishment, I suddenly discovered curved writing on the box. As if someone had hastily scribbled the letters in invisible ink, which now became visible through the warmth of my hand. "With friendship and a lot of imagination, fairy tales and magic prevail", I read. "Yes, exactly. That's what it says. Fabulous!" Frau Schneeberger clapped her hands enthusiastically. "We already thought your branch of the family clan was lost. The Magic Council will be delighted."

She might as well have been speaking in a secret language. I did not understand a word.

"Is it like a magic circle?", I wanted to know. "With card tricks and hidden rabbits in the hat?"

"Haha, a good joke." Mrs Schneeberger tapped on the green book. "Please read this through until Monday."

"But today is the last day of school," I grumbled. "You can't give me detention during the holidays."

"Who's talking about detention?" She looked at me over the rim of her dotted glasses. "It's about nurturing your gift and putting it on the right track. Or are you going away for the holidays?"

"No, we're staying here." Like every year. Once again, there was not enough money for going on holiday. Besides, Pops couldn't close the pastry shop for a long time.

"Good, good." Frau Schneeberger tapped the letter with her fountain pen. "It would indeed be most unfortunate if you did not attend. For you and for us. Your presence at the camp is invaluable."

In my head, one question mark followed another. Why should it be so important that I took part in a drawing camp?

"By the way, the support programme is free of charge and includes room and board," Ms Schneeberger continued. She put the pen back in her bun and stood up. "I'll expect you at Fairy Tale Castle on Monday at twelve o'clock sharp."

"But the old castle has been uninhabited for years!" I exclaimed in shock.

"There's probably nothing there but cobwebs and dust. Is this supposed to be some kind of survival camp?" I had often cycled past it. You couldn't enter the grounds because they were privately owned. It was surrounded by a huge hedge of roses. Apparently, the former owner had also been a rose grower. Our city is famous for its roses.

"Don't worry. You won't lack comfort." Frau Schneeberger smiled apologetically.

"Please don't take offence at my frankness. You really need the training badly, as incredibly unknowing as you are. There's a nice piece of work waiting for us. But don't worry, we'll get there." She patted my shoulder.

*Hey!* I thought indignantly. *My drawing skills are not that bad.* As gently as possible, I tried to tell her that she probably couldn't count on me. "That's really nice, but I don't know if my father will let me do it and ..."

"Ah, you're worried that your father might be concerned about the external dilapidation of Fairy Tale Castle." Frau Schneeberger wrinkled her nose. "Well, that's understandable." She retrieved the fountain pen from the bun and pulled off the cap. Again, a slight smell of cheese spread as she scribbled something on

the letter. "This should solve all your problems." She folded the sheet and put it in the envelope she handed me.

"But...", I started again. At least for a few questions in my head I would have liked answers.

"Nonsense, no more excuses!" she interrupted me. "Attendance is compulsory for the gifted. If you ignore the invitation and your gift continues to grow without you learning to control it, you could put yourself, your family and your friends in danger. I will see you on Monday. Be on time." She marched to the door. There she turned around again. "Don't forget the brooch. It's part of the basic equipment and it's your entrance ticket." The door closed behind her.

Taken aback and at a loss, I was left behind. I briefly thought about just getting up, leaving everything and leaving, but I was just too curious for that.

I pulled the lid off the little box and discovered a pretty little brooch in the shape of a crouching, moss-green frog on a red velvet cushion. Glittering white stones formed the eyes. I stroked it with my fingers. The material felt unexpectedly warm. The comforting warmth seemed to spread from my fingertips throughout my body. Astonished, I withdrew my hand and took the sheet out of the envelope. In squiggly writing it said:

*Invitation to the funding programme of the Grimm's Guild*

*This letter entitles the Gifted Marie Brunner to participate in the Grimm's Guild Support Programme. Participation is compulsory. Please be at Fairy Tale Castle in Rosenstein at 12 noon on Monday to further your gift. Initially, the classes at our camp will last for a fortnight. After that it will be decided if you will receive the scholarship for particularly gifted students.*

*We ask you to devote the necessary attention to your studies in order to avert possible dangers to your environment and to do your best to preserve our cause.*

*The brooch given to you serves as proof of your authorisation and to open the portal. Take good care of it so that it does not fall into the wrong hands.*

*We look forward to a pleasant and successful cooperation.*

*Yours sincerely*

*Count Hubert Von Rosentau*

*On behalf of the Magical Council of the Grimm's Guild*

*PS: To all parents and guardians: Board and lodging will be provided for the participants. In order to support the gifted students in the best possible way, we kindly ask you to refrain from visiting them. The use of mobile phones is prohibited.*

It was all rather strange. How did Mrs Schneeberger know my mother? Why should drawing be a danger to my environment? And who was this Grimm's Guild? Did they own the castle?

Or was someone trying to pull my leg? But if so, who? I couldn't stop myself from looking around to see if there was a hidden camera. No, nothing.

I sighed.

If I wanted answers to these questions, I would likely have no choice but to ask Ms Schneeberger on Monday.

**CHAPTER 3****Apple pancakes****And a princess with a frog in her throat**

There was no incident on the way home. No rain, no gust of wind, not even a lukewarm breeze. The sun shone brightly from a cloudless sky. When I opened the door at home, a tempting aroma wafted towards me. *Mhmm.*

"You're just in time," Omimi greeted me. She wiped her hands on her apron and brought a plate of fruit-faced pancakes to the table.

"Where's Pops?" I put my backpack down and gave Omimi a kiss. "He still has a cake to deliver for a child's birthday party. With a big picture of ..."

"Let me guess ..." I grinned. "The Ice Queen." The motif was all the rage in the confectionery.

"Exactly. 100 points for the candidate." Omimi laughed. "How was school?"

"Oh, as usual." I thought about showing her the letter, but then decided to wait until I had decided what I wanted to do. On the one hand, I would like to take professional drawing lessons during the holidays. On the other hand, I didn't feel like spending my days off with the weird Ms Schneeberger. I could also watch YouTube videos with drawing tutorials, they didn't cost anything either.

After dinner, I went to my room to look at the green book. Curious, I opened it.

*The Legend of Arcantus*

*Once upon a time, long ago, humans and magical families lived together peacefully. The magical clans helped the people with their gifts, protected them from harm and stood by them as advisors. People revered them and spread the stories of their miracles throughout the land. However, there were others, such as the evil wizard Arcantus, who abused his gift. Arcantus deeply detested the non-magical humans and enjoyed playing evil tricks on them. His hunger for power grew and at some*

*point he decided to subjugate the humans and become king over the magical clans. Soon Arcantus found followers whom he promised wealth and power if they supported him. He built traps for his opponents, such as magical paintings or mirrors, to banish them in and appropriate their gifts.*

Uh, creepy. I got up and got myself a chocolate bar. Nibbling on it, I continued reading.

*To strengthen his own power, he also stirred up hatred and spread rumours about the Fairy Clans who did not want to join him. Humans and the Magically Gifted found it increasingly difficult to distinguish truth from lies. Friend turned on friend. Each distrusted the other. Did the Wolf family really eat little children? Did the vain Krimhild distribute poisoned apples to women who were too beautiful for her? Who was good, who was evil?*

*The evil pranks and magical accidents increased and distrust grew. From then on, people lived in constant fear of the Magically Gifted and drove them out of their villages. The Fairy Clans in turn feared Arcantus and his followers and had to hide their abilities to protect themselves.*

*However, a small group of rebels, the Grimm's Guild, rebelled against Arcantus in the so-called Fairy Tale Riots. With great courage, they managed to defeat Arcantus and his henchmen with the help of a magic book and a frog brooch.*

*Wait a minute. I beg your pardon?* The brooch pictured underneath looked suspiciously similar to the one Mrs Schneeberger had given me. I picked up the small box I had put next to the letter on my desk and opened the lid. Just like in the picture, the frog had a crown on its head and was holding a golden ball in its left hand and a red rose in its right.



Carefully I took it from its velvet bed, put it on my shirt and looked at myself in the mirror. Again, this comforting warmth flowed through me, as if I had wrapped myself in a cosy blanket. Suddenly the frog winked at me. I rubbed my eyes. Hm, no. I hadn't. Of course not. *Don't go crazy, Marie.*

I thought about whether I would have to give the brooch back to Mrs Schneeberger if I didn't take part in the support programme. I really liked it. The frog looked funny and I'd like to keep it.

I stuffed the last bite of the chocolate bar into my mouth and reached for the book to continue reading.

*Now there was peace, but everything was different than before. Before his downfall, Arcantus had put a curse on his opponents. Since then, they have had to regularly renew their gift in Arcantus' magical paintings in order not to lose it and suffer certain death.*

*The magic stories known as fairy tales were collected in the magic book by Count Heinrich von Rosentau, the leader of the Grimms' Guild. He called it the Book of Fairy Tales and asked Wilhelm and Jacob Grimm to spread the stories to remind everyone of the effects of greed and hatred. There are many copies of the fairy tale collections, but only the original brings together all the magic of the fairy tales. For their own safety, the surviving Fairys decided to live among the humans without being recognised. But they still exist. They have sworn to protect humanity from dark forces. Count Heinrich founded a secret academy for this purpose. There, the children of the Fairy clans are trained and their gifts are nurtured so that the magical power of the fairy tales lives on in them.*

*A fairy tale, I thought. Why did Mrs Schneeberger give me a fairy tale to read?* Perplexed, I looked at the remaining pages. Under the heading "Clans of the Grimm's Guild" there were various crests. On one, a painted woman smiled at

me, shaking out a pillow. A bracelet with various pendants adorned her right arm. Below the coat of arms was the name of *Frau Holle*.

A memory flashed through my mind and overwhelmed me. I rummaged frantically in the bookshelf for the old photo albums and flipped to the only picture there was of my mother. We were sitting on a picnic blanket, an open book of fairy tales lay in Mum's lap. In her hand was a feather she must have found, and dangling from her hand was a bracelet. My lucky bracelet. She - or rather Pops - had given it to me. I let the pendants slide through my fingers: the red flower, the snowflake, a loaf of bread, a star, a fountain, an apple ...

*Shake me, shake me,  
we apples are already ripe.*

The words appeared in my head out of nowhere and I had to smile. Lost in thought, I stroked Mama's photo face. *Where are you? And why have you never been in touch again?*

Tears burned in my eyes and I closed the book. There was no point in brooding about the past, I couldn't change it.

Determined, I put the album back on the shelf and switched on my laptop. On the internet I started a search for this Grimm's Guild, but I found absolutely nothing. Except texts about the Brothers Grimm, the famous collectors of fairy tales. I had more luck with the name Heinrich von Rosentau, but that information didn't help me much either. Apparently, he was a knight who had also been known as The Iron Henry. Supposedly, his story had provided the material for the fairy tale *The Frog Prince*. However, he had been dead for over two hundred years.

Thoughtfully, I bit my lip.

A knock jolted me out of my thoughts. Immediately, Pops poked his head through the door. "Hello, Princess." I grinned. "Well, how did your cake delivery go?"

"It was a real buzz." Pops came into the room and gave me a hug. "Oh, is that new?" He knew my passion for pendants and brooches. Most of the ones I owned were either on my bracelet or stuck to my backpack.

I touched the frog on my T-shirt. "Yes, my teacher gave this to me." "How nice of your teacher." He sat down on the bed.

"Yes, maybe. She would like me to attend a summer camp," I blurted out. "To give me drawing lessons. At Fairy Tale castle. It's a free holiday support programme run by the school." I handed him the letter. Glancing over Pops' shoulder, I noticed that the lines mentioning the brooch and the dangers were missing. Strange.

With a furrowed brow, Pops lowered the paper. "And you would like to go?"

"I don't know. A drawing camp like that would be great, but I had planned to help you in the pastry shop." I leaned against him. I didn't want to tell Dad about the strange conversation with Mrs Schneeberger. Because then I would also have had to mention the cake incident. But this strange guild had awakened my detective ambition. "Do you know the Grimm's Guild?", I asked.

"No." He shook his head. "But it does say here that it's an association for the promotion of young talent that works with the museum." Pops pointed to the letterhead.

"Oh yeah?" I was one hundred percent sure that I hadn't read anything about it. But when I looked now, I actually found a small addition under the squiggly logo of the guild. "I had completely overlooked that." But why couldn't I find anything about this mysterious association on the internet?

"I'll miss you, of course. But I don't want you to sit around at home all holiday again because of me. That just makes me feel guilty." Pops smiled contritely.

"Especially since the vacation with Charly also didn't work out. I think you should do this sponsorship programme. Besides, it's a great opportunity."

He was right. I would have liked to go on holiday with Charly, but she was flying to the USA with her parents. That was too far away for Dad's liking and also too expensive.

"All right, then. If you don't mind, I'll go." Maybe this way some of the question marks in my head would disappear into thin air. Besides, I really wanted to find out how Frau Schneeberger knew my mother.

"I'll call your teacher again later. And of course you can always come back home if you don't like it there." Dad cleared his throat and scratched his nose. He only did that when he was nervous. "By the way, I wanted to ask you something too." His face turned tomato red. "When I delivered the cake, I ran into an old acquaintance. She's the new museum director. Funny coincidence, isn't it?" I smiled. "Yes."

"Anyway, she invited me for tonight. Is that all right with you?"

"Sure! Why not?" Pops hadn't dated a woman in years. At least none that I knew of. I wondered if he still loved Mum and was missing her. "I'm happy for you that you're finally getting out and dating."

"This is not a date." Pops screwed up his face. "It's a professional appointment. We want to discuss whether our pastry shop can supply the museum café. That would be good financial security for us. But I'm glad you wouldn't have minded a date either." He tapped my nose.

"That's great, Pops. I'll keep my fingers crossed that it works out." I gave him a big hug.

Pops gave me a kiss, then he got up to talk to Mrs Schneeberger on the phone and I updated Charly via our chat. She was stoked.

Charly: Ingenious. You will be the first of us mere mortals to enter Fairy Tale Castle. You absolutely have to send photos.

Marie: Can't. No mobile phones allowed.

Charly: Damn. That's weird. Okay, then remember everything well, I want to know every last detail of what it looks like there.

Marie: Deal. I'll make some sketches.

Charly: Ask your dad if you can stay at my place tomorrow. We have to have a farewell party.

Marie: Great idea. Will do. CU :\*

While Paps met up with his old acquaintance in the evening, I played cards with Omimi, but my thoughts kept wandering. I stroked the brooch and wondered what awaited me at the castle on Monday. Pops and Omimi hardly spoke about Mum. They had only told me that one day her lucky bracelet, which I now wore, had been in the letterbox. Together with a letter saying that Mum had to go away. Where to and why, she didn't say.

Since then we had never heard from her again. I used to imagine that Mum was a secret agent, chasing bad guys somewhere. Or a researcher who discovered secret treasures. And who knows, maybe that was even true. In any case, I was determined to get to the bottom of Mrs Schneeberger and her friendship with my mother. Maybe she knew why she had disappeared without a trace all those years ago. And maybe, I cautiously continued to think, she even knew where she lived now.