

Tamara Bach: The Horse is a Dog

Das Pferd ist ein Hund

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ENGLISH SAMPLE TRANSLATION

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So it happened like this.

Luze got weird at some point. Weirder than before. Little children are weird anyway, especially Luze. But then even more so.

First our neighbours from across the street, the Jakobs, moved away, and that wasn't good. I didn't care, I had nothing to do with them, but Luze was close friends with Silas, their son. So they moved away because they couldn't afford their flat any more. And Luze was sad.

Naturally.

Mum and Gregor thought that Luze would find someone at school after all, a new boyfriend or girlfriend. Mum calls that making friends.

But Luze probably didn't. And it's not as if Silas was any kind of friend. They were like shrink-wrapped in a two-pack, mum always said. I don't think you can find that again so easily and so quickly. But mum seems to have.

Upon that I went to the children's farm with Luze, but only twice or so, maybe that wasn't enough.

She didn't make any friends at school, and at home she didn't even come out of our room any more. No matter what Mum and Gregor tried to cheer her up with. Or distract her. She didn't want to bake a cake or go for a walk.

And then, and we only noticed this later, it was probably also because of Rosa from the fourth floor. Rosa was supposed to get a dog. It took ages until she got one. It took weeks. And Luze was so looking forward to the dog! For a month she only drew pictures of dogs and borrowed books about dogs from the library, and every time she met Rosa, she asked her questions. And then the dog came, but Rosa had to give it back after only a week. Luze didn't even get to see him because Rosa said the dog wasn't good with children. And that Rosa liked us better than the dog. That's why it wasn't allowed to stay here.

So the dog was gone and, as I said, Luze became even sadder, but we only noticed that later.

At one point Luze didn't even speak Polish with Gregor.

At some point she said almost nothing at all, only yes or no. Only the very smallest words.

Even I became sad. And Mum and Gregor anyway. And Mum said, "What are we going to do with Luze?", because cuddling didn't help, new crayons didn't help, and at school they didn't have a clue either, they simply said that something like that would just pass. That she was grieving or something, and no one had died. But Luze was so sensitive.

"What does that mean?" I asked my mum, and she said something about thin skin and feelings that are more and bigger than those of others. Or something like that.

Luze sat on her bed and no longer grumbled about my music or played with my toys, which she is too small for anyway, but I really would have allowed her to do so now. And she didn't talk and sing all the time like she used to. Somehow she has become smaller and greyer. I thought, one day she would just disappear. But then... Where is the best place to start?

So: First of all, Mum came up with the idea that structure helps.

And for her, that meant Luze got chores. Helping around the house. Bringing things to the neighbours. So, for example, when Tatiana from the third floor wanted to do some baking on Sundays but didn't have any eggs at home, Mum filled a basket with eggs and Luze had to take them up to Tatiana. And then Tatiana chatted a bit with Luze, but not for long, because Luze didn't talk any more.

Had this happened two months earlier, you wouldn't have been able to get Luze out of Tatiana's kitchen.

So whenever someone asked for something on the house radio (that's what they call their group chat), Luze had to bring it up. We live in a house with lots of flats, maybe I should explain. Four floors and a ground floor and an attic and then a

side wing and a back house. And on each floor there are at least two flats, sometimes three.

And in our front building, most people know each other. More than in other houses, I noticed at some point. In other places, neighbours only nod to each other when they meet.

Mum said structure and meant that Luze got tasks. She just did it, didn't grumble or complain, she was so sad that she couldn't even do that. As if she didn't care about anything.

And suddenly someone in the house needed something every day: a screwdriver or wool detergent or baking powder or envelopes or a watering can or a plunger for the toilet. At some point, even I realised that they were all conspiring with each other.

And then I started asking Luze if she would help me. With the colouring, or if she could comb the hair of mum's old dolls and dress them all nicely. She did everything, but so ... listlessly. Like a little robot, so automatic.

This has not got any better.

Until Hotte sent them to the mailbox around the corner to post a letter.

It took her a little too long. But when Luze came back, she smiled for the first time in weeks. And really looked at us again, in the face, in the eyes.

And then she told us that she had met Flori on the way and had swapped places with him. And SO a great deal, five packets of fizzy drinks (she had got them from Hotte for delivering letters) for: a dog!

Mum immediately looked panicked, because she can't stand dogs. And Gregor looked around wildly to see where the dog was, and I looked around anyway.

"Is he still outside the door?" I asked, but Luze said, "Nonsense, he's already here, in the kitchen!"

But there was no dog in the kitchen.

"He's invisible," Luze said quietly, as if it were a secret. "Only I can see him!"

Mum looked at Gregor and their eyes had a conversation as if they could transmit thoughts.

And I just thought, poor Luze, now she's exchanged fizzy drinks for air, and the next time I meet Flori, I'll have a go at him. And I don't actually hit anyone. But Flori should really watch out for me.

Mum probably thought something similar, but nicer. She probably wanted to talk to Flori's parents. But in the kitchen, she first wanted to pull Luze onto her lap and hug her. But she didn't let her do that.

"No, Mum, I'm busy," she said and then marched out of the kitchen into our room. And we followed behind.

Luze and I share a room. I have my things on the left when you come in, and Luze hers on the right. So Luze took cloths and pillows and doll blankets and her old cuddle blanket and a scarf and made a nest ... wrapped. At least that's what it looked like. As if she had done it so many times before. And she talked and sang as normal as always.

With us, I thought at first. But she always said "you", and at some point I thought, oh dear, she means the dog. The dog made of air. The dog that doesn't even exist.

"Look, you sleep there when you're tired, but not now, it's daytime. But later, when I'm asleep too, you'll sleep here, this is your nest." And then she stroked the air and smiled.

Mum went out with Gregor and I followed. Luze stayed in our room.

Mum stood there in the hallway and said to Gregor: "And now?"

Gregor scratched his head, said "wow" and then he went into the kitchen and put the water on. He just filled a pot with water, put it on the cooker and turned it on.

"Gregor!", mum said. But he was watching the water get warmer, and I wondered if he was cooking pasta now, even though it was the middle of the afternoon, three o'clock or so. No pasta time.

Mum then got her laptop and started googling what to do with invisible dogs, with imaginary friends. "Isn't Luze too old for that?" she asked, maybe me, maybe Gregor, but maybe also the Internet, and that probably said: Nah, she's not. Luze was already in first grade, but you can have imaginary friends for a long time.

And then Mum read a lot and the water on the cooker boiled at some point and Luze had a dog made out of air.

"Then that's how it is now," mum said and closed the laptop again. Gregor turned around and mum said that it's not a bad thing, that it's even good for development, and we should just play along.

"Really?", I asked.

Mum first looked at Gregor, then at me and then said, "Yes."

Then she got up to take the laptop away again and stopped for a moment and said:

"At least she's smiling again. Yes."

And Gregor looked at the water, which was boiling and bubbling away, then he took two pot holders, poured the water into the sink and turned the cooker off again.

I then went into the children's room.

Luze was sitting next to the dog's nest, humming and drawing a picture, a rainbow, a sun, and underneath there was something squiggly and I asked what it meant.

"The horse."

"The horse?", I asked.

"Mmmh," Luze nodded.

"Why the horse?"

"The dog is called the horse."

And I wanted to say "You're completely crazy", but mum said that we should play along. So I just

said "OK", and then that was OK too. And because nothing else happened, I did my homework and Luze drew and hummed and there was an invisible dog in a nest in our room.

I have to explain a few more things. About Lisa. And Vincent. And anyway, maybe I first have to say that it was winter.

So THE winter. Where it was so cold!

It was already cold before Christmas, and after Christmas and New Year's Eve it got even colder. And then even colder. And in some houses the water pipes had already frozen. And the river was just a blanket of ice.

And one Friday it was suddenly so cold that they sent us home from school early because the heating didn't keep up or something. There is also cold-free. I didn't know that before.

That day I also had a fight with Lisa. It had nothing at all to do with the cold, but ... No, I'll tell you later. We've never argued that badly before. And we've known each other since kindergarten. When you argue so badly that you start shaking at some point...

from all the arguing, that you turn red and loud and clench your fists and stomp and then don't make up again, but still have an argument, only then both are silent and still, that's the bad way to argue, with gnashing of teeth and no longer looking at each other and at the same time being so angry and so sad that it's unbearable. And by one I mean me. Sure.

So it was actually lucky that suddenly everyone was told to go home. Because in the excitement no one cared what I had said to Lisa before and Lisa to me. Or what we shouted.

And in all the confusion, I'm out of school really quickly.

So quickly that I forgot to wait for Vincent. And now I might have to tell you about Vincent too.

In a moment. Yes, the same.

On the way home I stopped by Luze's school because Mum sent me a message saying that Luze was off school too and that she wouldn't get home from work on time and if I couldn't So: Mum sent me a voice message.

It always takes a long time. I just answered "OK" and then went to pick up Luze at the primary school. She was already waiting for me and was sitting in the corridor on a bench in full costume, hat, gloves, scarf, winter boots, satchel, everything.

The horse and dog had only been with us for two days. According to Luze.

And still no one could see the horse but her.

Outside, I asked Luze how she could see the dog if it was invisible.

"Because, it's not invisible to me, only to you."

"That's right," I said and then tried to get Luze to run a bit faster. Because it was so cold that it already hurt.

"What does he look like?", I asked.

And then she looked and said, "Like a dog!"

"And how big? Or is it small? Is it a boy or a girl? Long hair? Short? And what colour?"

Then Luze sighed and rolled her eyes and said, "Man, it's easy!"

And then she snorted again, so loudly that you could hear it even through the scarf she had in front of her mouth, and said that the horse was very soft. And then she hummed and then said or sang that the horse is sometimes very big, even bigger than a horse.

She said, "So big up to the ceiling". And she hummed so much that I thought she was making it up, she was now composing a song for the horse, for the dog. "And sometimes she's so small, so small that she's lying next to me on my pillow."

"Aha, her! So it's a girl!" I said.

Luze looked at me and shook her head and pretended I didn't understand anything, and just kept singing about all the colours the dog horse, the horse dog has. All black and all white and red spots and golden hair.

And then I thought that she could never make up her mind.

For example, we went out for ice cream in the summer and Luze was supposed to choose two flavours. It took ages, and at some point she started crying and said "But if I choose raspberry, then strawberry and blueberry are sad!", as if she had chosen raspberry for her team in PE class and not the other two.

We didn't eat any ice cream that day. Gregor bought us spritzers and we drank them and Luze stopped crying again.

So the dog may be a girl or a boy or nothing at all and very big and very small and has all colours and all skins.

Because Luze perhaps likes all dogs best. Then that's the way it is.

I briefly thought about whether I should tease her now. Saying that it's not possible. That no dog can have all the colours. Or that she herself doesn't know what her own dog looks like.

I'm sure she would have cried at some point.

That would have been mean. I think I was just still so riled up, as mum calls it. Argumentative.

But quarrelling is never fun. Sometimes you want to hurt someone because you are hurting yourself.

But to be honest, I was quite happy that Luze was singing again. And since the dog was there, she also smiled again and even laughed. Giggled. She hadn't done that for ages before.

But there was also a lot of talking to the air.

Mum, of course, told all the adults in the house chat.

And I don't think a single one made fun of it. They're all pretty damn CUTE. And then I wondered if they were as nice to Luze and her invisible dog at school. So I asked if the horse had been to school with us. Whether it goes home with us now. Luze said that it was there, but that nobody knows because animals are forbidden at school.

She looked at me and held the glove in front of the scarf and shushed.

I nodded. And then I asked if she had told anyone at school about the dog. Secretly.

"No," she said quietly. And at first I was happy, because other children can be really mean. But then I looked at Luze and thought that it's also sad when there's no one at school to tell your secret to. Or wants to. And I thought about Lisa. And then I said to Luze that we really had to hurry home because otherwise we'd freeze.

When we got home, I turned on the radio and they were saying that it was insanely cold and would get even colder and that the politicians were meeting because of it. And in the evening, when Mum and Gregor were home again, they said that all the children would probably have to stay at home and wouldn't be allowed to go to school. And old people would have to stay at home too.

"How old?" I asked. Because Gregor is also quite old, so I said, "As old as Gregor?" He stuck his tongue out at me, which is quite childish, but it doesn't make him any younger. And then he tousled my hair.

"Older than us," mum said. And with that, the cheese was eaten.

And then on Sunday, the politicians were done with meetings and speeches and had also eaten their cheeses (Käsen?) and decided that all the children who were not yet in the upper school would have to stay at home. And just the old ones. But they said "seniors".

"No school!" I shouted and jumped around the flat a bit, shouting "No school!" again and again. And then I wanted to write to Lisa, but then I remembered that we had fallen out. And when you have a row with Lisa, when you, no, when I have a row with Lisa, she keeps quiet. Then she acts as if I don't exist. Which is really disgusting. Like a toothache.

Beautiful is different. Friendship eh.

(I didn't tell them about the fight at home. It didn't matter anyway).

So I stopped rejoicing and went back to the kitchen, where Mum and Gregor had just made supper, or were supposed to make supper, but then they had to talk, plan. Because Luze and I were supposed to stay at home. So Mum and Gregor talked about who was more important at work. And at some point Mum hissed and Gregor said stupid things, and then Mum hit the table and said that was silly, "We do half and half".

And both of them would have to stay at home for a while. Gregor said that it wasn't that easy for him, and mum said she could call Gregor's boss and explain to him how easy it should be.

I don't understand why Gregor still thinks he can argue with mum like that. She argues everyone into the ground.

So Mum said that she would just stay at home for the first few days, but that she expected Gregor to deal with his boss on Monday.

I'm just saying that because that's what she said.

I only know what arguing is because of mum. Then she saw me and said that it was almost evening. And that I should tell Luze.

So back to our room, where Luze read a book to the horse, the dog.

So not real. Luze had only been at school for six months. For the first few months, she went to school every day. Counted it. Every time we met someone in the hallway or something, or someone said, "Hey, Luze, how is everything?", then she said something like "I've been at school for 28 days".

She stopped counting at 60 days.

Anyway, Luze sat there and read a picture book to the dog, the horse, even though she still didn't think much of letters after the first six months.

But that doesn't matter, she said, because she knows the stories anyway, and if she forgets something, she just makes up the rest. Or told what was happening in the pictures.

"It's time for supper," I said. But Luze just kept on reading.

And because I was angry, even though I didn't know why any more, I said to

Luze: "We're not allowed out from now on."

And because she didn't react, I also said:

"Because it's so cold. You also have to be careful that the horse doesn't go outside. Because otherwise it will freeze. That's pretty stupid, because you have to walk him too. Or doesn't your dog ever have to go?"

Luze sighed, closed the book, put in a little paper as a bookmark and then stood up, stroked the air above the dog's nest and only then looked at me and said:

"The horse already knows that. And so do I."

"So what?" I said.

"And if the horse has to go, it goes to the bathroom." Then she went into the kitchen.

I was still angry and thought it was because of the dog and because of my little sister.

And then I also went into the kitchen and sat down at my place.

When it's dark and Vincent is in his room, you can see it from our kitchen. There is a lift in the courtyard and the lift shaft is made of glass. And Vincent has his room directly above our kitchen.

I was sitting in my seat and I saw that the yellow paper lamp in Vincent's room was on. And I saw a bit of his head, but only the top.

I think I want to tell you a bit about Vincent.

Vincent is the most beautiful boy in the world.

He has green eyes that look like they've been coloured in with a felt-tip pen, and freckles all over his face, and then he also has curls that are so corkscrewed and so wild and yet look so soft that I always have to hold my own hands to keep from reaching in.

And his nose goes up a little bit, but just a little bit, and when he walks, he looks like he has a really cool song in his ear and is walking to the beat. So casual. A stupid word. But it fits.

Vincent is two grades above me, and have I said how beautiful he is? You can't say that often enough.

So beautiful that my heart always aches a little when I see it. Even without it being cold.

That sounds pretty corny and cheesy and all that. But there is no other way. It's all true. Even the part about the heart.

But I only knew how beautiful it was from the outside.

That is important, but not everything. And maybe it's not so important again. If you are ugly on the inside, you can be the most beautiful queen of beauty on the outside, but that doesn't make it any better.

In any case, Vincent is pretty cool on the outside, and whether he's cool or not on the inside, I didn't know.

We even go to the same school. With the same route to school and so on. But that didn't interest Vincent.

But the most beautiful thing about Vincent is his laugh.

Everything gets better when Vincent laughs.

Unfortunately, Vincent laughs very rarely.

And that winter he usually looked angry. I didn't understand that. Well, in the morning on the way to school, I know from other people that they don't want to talk in the morning. Or they're tired. Or not looking forward to school. But Vincent looked like that in the morning and at lunchtime too (I always waited for him and then went halfway home with him).

And in the house, when I saw him there, too. When he had to take the rubbish down or something.

Anyway, I then resolved to making Vincent laugh. With jokes. Sure.

Because I'm always happy when someone tells me a new joke.

I told him one in the morning and he just raised his eyebrows, and at lunchtime on the way home, and when I met him in the courtyard by the rubbish bins, there again.

At some point he rolled his eyes. And later he even put headphones in his ears as soon as he saw me.

But I didn't care. I kept picking out jokes. And Gregor helped. He knows some good ones. Mum tried too, but she's not so good at it because she can't remember jokes and then tells them badly, which is actually funny. But anyway. They didn't know why I collect jokes. I tried them out at home and when someone laughed, I told the joke to Vincent. Because I thought that if I told the right joke, he would laugh just once, so great, then he never has to be angry again. Maybe all it takes is a good joke and a good laugh.

But as I said, it didn't work.

And then I sat there at the dining table and saw the top five percent of Vincent in the lift shaft glass and thought that we don't go to school now. No school means no way to school. No joke in the morning, none after noon.

And I asked myself when I should still see Vincent, that is, him and not just five percent of him, and those mirrored as well.

But then Mum started talking about how that didn't mean I was on holiday. Or Luze.

"I'm sure your teachers will get back to you and send you on assignments." And then she looked at both of us and I thought that mum is certainly stricter than our teachers. So no holidays.

Except that now we could do maths in woollen socks. That doesn't really make maths any better. And I like maths!

And then the light in Vincent's room went out and I only saw us in the kitchen window and outside everything was dark.

Cold as a pig and dark as night.

In the morning I woke up to Luze making a very loud and sudden noise and sitting upright in bed. I rolled over again and wanted to go back to sleep, but then Luze stood next to me and tapped me and kept saying "Clara, Clara, Clara, are

you awake?" until I opened my eyes and stared at her, and even then she didn't stop right away.

"WHAT?!", I said. And thought: I don't have to get up. I don't have to go to school. Outside I heard Gregor and Mum, who didn't wake us up because they probably thought that we didn't have to get up.

"They're painting our wall!" Luze said, looking quite horrified.

"What wall?"

But she already ran out of the room, in her pyjamas, barefoot, she left our bedroom door open, and I saw Gregor and Mum standing in the kitchen, and we looked at each other briefly, and Mum said "Luze, hello, we ...", but Luze was already out of the flat.

So I jumped up and went into the hallway to see where Luze had gone, also barefoot, but luckily we have a carpet in the stairwell, because it was really cold. And Mum stood in the doorway and watched Luze rush into the flat opposite, where until recently her best friend in the whole world had lived.

Because the door was also open. And there were people inside. Painters.

So I went into the flat behind Luze, and there she was, in Silas and Halina's nursery.

"NO!" Luze shouted so loudly that the painters who were painting there were really frightened (frightened?), they really flinched. And looked around.

And Luze shouted, "Nonono, don't move it!"

Because the painters have painted over the picture that Luze and Silas have painted for years, the painting that has taken up almost the entire wall, to which the two have made up stories and whatnot, they have painted over it with white. With thick white, with boring, meaningless white. With a white that pretended there weren't a hundred and five stories underneath.

"BOSS?!" a painter shouted.

And from the other room came another man who said, "What's going on here? Visitors?" and wanted to play nice, but Luze was furious.

"You're taking away the whole beautiful picture!"

Mum also came over, pushed herself between the boss and Luze and said something about "I'm sorry" and "I'm sorry".

"Come with me, Luze" I muttered and tried to push Luze out of the flat again.

"Mum, look!"

"Yes, I saw it," mum said.

"But ..."

"I know," mum said.

Mum and Luze are quite similar. That's what happens when you're the other child. The child who is not so similar to mum.

Mum just had to say "I know" and Luze came along, let mum take her in her arms and carry her back into our flat, into our kitchen.

Mum sat down and had Luze on her lap and stroked her hair and Luze cried a little. And Gregor brought her socks and put them on her and rubbed her feet a little. Then he tickled her.

And she even laughed a little.

"Is the horse awake yet?" mum asked.

"Of course," Luze snorted, "I know about the picture from him."

"Mmh," Mum said and looked at Gregor, who shrugged his shoulders and also didn't know how an invisible dog could know that about the mural of Luze and Silas.

Gregor quickly put out breakfast for us, took his own bread and thermos cup, then he got dressed a lot, pressed kisses on all our hair one after the other and went out into the cold.

"Don't freeze, you!" mum still said.

"Haha," Gregor said and then the door slammed shut.

Mum looked at her watch.

Then she asked Luze if she could sit alone again. And I knew that mum had an appointment or had to do something else for work, and I thought, ouch, Luze will

probably start crying again, but she said it was OK and called for the horse and put a bowl of nothing on the floor for him.

"Luze," I asked, "is the dog food invisible too?"

"No," she said.

Okay, I thought, and didn't ask any further.

Then I stirred my oatmeal and thought that we should have at least taken a photo of the mural. Because that was epic. Because that's what it was. So big and colourful and full that you need a special word like epic.

Such a big word that you can only say when you are sitting or standing upright.

Then I thought about it and looked in the closet to see if we still had the wallpaper roll from the previous tenants, and it was there. And then I unrolled it in the children's room as far as I could and took my oatmeal with me and sat down on my bed. And thought.

Luze also came and sat down next to me.

"There were mountains somewhere," I said.

Luze nodded and then she jumped up and fetched crayons and watercolours and markers and wax crayons and stickers from her desk.

"There!" I said. "That's where the mountains have to go, right?" Luze nodded and then she lay down on the floor.

squatted and started to paint. Sometimes she hummed, then told the horse to get off the paper because the paint wasn't dry yet. I watched her and finished my oatmeal. I can't paint. But I can watch. And when Luze looked up and said "Clara, what was there?", I thought and remembered and told her that there were sunflowers or a bakery or three cloud brothers, or I told her not to forget the carriage and the whale in the carriage.

Mum was standing in the doorway at one point and saw Luze crouching there and painting and the wallpaper getting more and more full.

Then she put some leaves in my hand and told me that this was the first half of my tasks. But she had more sheets in her hand and they were for Luze.

Mum didn't say anything to Luze, just put her chores next to me on the bed, then went out for a moment and came straight back again with her mobile phone.

Took a photo of Luze, but especially of the picture.

There was a thudding upstairs. There was a bang upstairs that made me flinch.

And then a door opened in the stairwell and I heard shouting and arguing.

And how someone shouted out loud "VINCENT, IT'S ENOUGH NOW!".