

# PANDORA

SPRING 2009 ISSUE 1

**LITERARY MAGAZINE**  
**VOLKSHOCHSCHULE FRANKFURT AM MAIN**



# Table of Contents

Borders of Selves by Peggy Rosana Preciado.....Poem.....Page	3
A Monkey by Ewa de Boer.....Fiction.....Page	4
The Last Christmas by M.P. Olinger.....Fiction.....Page	8
Lucy's Choice by Beate Fritz.....Fiction.....Page	12
Happy After-Birthday by Hye yeon Cho.....Fiction.....Page	14
Invaders by Lenore Becks.....Fiction.....Page	17
Family Margitch by Lence Timova.....Fiction.....Page	21
Spiral Obsession by Núria Planas.....Fiction.....Page	22
My Mother's Message by M.P. Olinger.....Poem.....Page	24
List of Illustrations.....Page	25

## PANDORA

**PATRICIA BARTHOLOMEW, EDITOR**

This first issue of Pandora is dedicated to Peggy Rosana Preciado, without whose creative spirit and fiery drive the writing program at VHS Frankfurt would simply not exist. Thank you, Peggy!

Pandora is a semi-annual publication of the English Writing Department of the Volkshochschule of Frankfurt, a.M. All material is copyrighted and all rights remain with the individual authors. Submissions are open to writing students of the VHS Frankfurt, teachers, and associates of the writing department. To contact the department please address correspondence to: Julia Shirtliff, English Department, Volkshochschule Frankfurt a.M., Sonnemannstrasse 13, 60314 Frankfurt am Main. Email: [J.Shirtliff.vhs@stadt-frankfurt.de](mailto:J.Shirtliff.vhs@stadt-frankfurt.de)

# Borders of Selves

## Poem by Peggy Rosana Preciado

High sea waves. Fast, violent.  
Silver spheres flatten around  
our sea-drenched sons,  
who fashion waterfalls, castles,  
and towers in the wet sand.  
But the waves erase it all,  
muting boyish cries.  
They build a deep pool instead,  
their bodies tight in the sandy cavity.  
Dark and light, a chiaroscuro  
reflection of ourselves:  
The boys lie prone side by side,  
urging the waves to overtake them.  
The waves, cool liquid blankets, obey.

We frayed the borders of our selves this year—  
splintering, puncturing, disintegrating.  
Face into face, hands into hands, body into  
body.

We opened, exploded, and then fell into place,  
together, side by side, like our sons.

In this moonlit parenthesis of time, I await you.  
Take your place beside me and let us begin anew.



# A Monkey

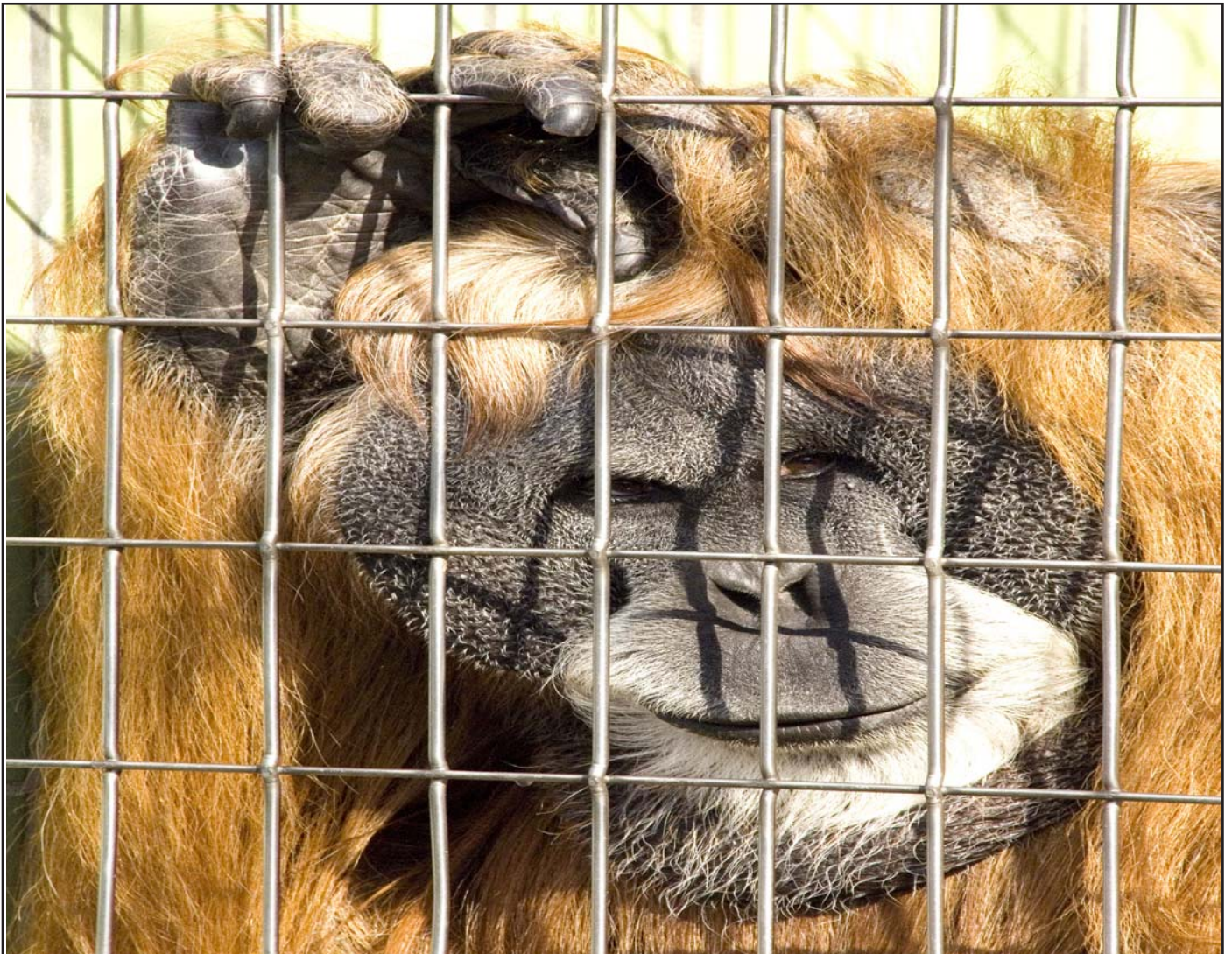
## Fiction by Ewa de Boer

Tadek could not wait to break the news to his family. He was on his way home from the factory where he had been working for years. Even the rattling sounds of his old car did not distract him from his thoughts. A monkey, he grinned with certain self-satisfaction, what a great idea! The children always wanted to have a pet, especially his daughter had dreamed of a dog. His wife Helena showed some reluctance to those wishes, but he knew that this time he would without a doubt convince her. A monkey was not like all those common animals, dogs, cats or rabbits. His children deserved something extraordinary! In his mind's eye he already saw them walking an exotic creature; how spectacular!

That day, just in the morning his colleague Jan had taken Tadek discreetly aside.

"I would like to ask you something" he whispered.

Tadek nodded. It was not unusual for people who sought advice to come to him. The times in Poland had become tougher but he always knew how to, as they called it, organize things. It was useless to go to the shop trying to buy something except essential stuff, no difference whether quality food, shoes or washing machines. Endless queues besieged the shops and even if someone was lucky enough to reach the counter, it could happen that instead of oranges there was only yeast left, so a desperate customer took some of it, hoping to be able to swap later this desirable ingredient (some needed yeast for the self-made vodka, so-called bimber) for a washer, to repair a leaking tap. One needed good connections in this system, and Tadek had them. But this time it was something different.



"Orangutan" Photo by Christian Salow



"My brother-in-law who lives in a country has a small monkey to sell, you know, a Capuchin monkey", Jan said. Tadek stared at him in disbelief. A monkey? Here?, he thought to himself, but his colleague continued.

"His cousin is a seaman, he brought the animal a few weeks ago, just as a pet for the children. But they are too small to play with it, so they decided to give it away." Before Tadek had a chance to speak, Jan added "They won't charge you much, just a symbolic sum. I thought I would ask you first before I tell anyone else."

Tadek listened with bated breath. Suddenly he liked the idea of this exotic thing. And of course, he would be the only one who had ever had a monkey here. All this was certainly due to the position he meanwhile had in the factory. Although some of his colleagues envied him, they always asked him first. And this fact pleased him even more than the monkey itself.

"Thank you" he said in a voice tinged with some complacency.

"I'm glad that I could do something for you" answered Jan. "The only thing is, you have to pick up the monkey as soon as possible. It would be great if you could make it by the end of this week".

Tadek drove with a routine he had acquired in all those years; he claimed that he could manage it with his eyes closed. This was always his best time, when he was alone. Without demands, questions, or complaints from the others, whether his wife, his children, or his colleagues. But this time he wanted to reach home quickly. It was almost four. Helena and the children would be waiting for him with an early dinner, like every day. There was usually a two or three-course-meal, with a soup and a dessert. "You should keep your wife busy, otherwise she'll start having stupid ideas" was his answer to all the marital problems his colleagues had. That is why he also appreciated the idea of a monkey so much. It would create an additional chore for Helena whose behaviour had concerned him lately. Of course, now and then she would come up with a plan to look for a job, and of course, he would not even have listened to it. He earned the money and the children needed a mother, period. But now she began to bring home books from the library. First for the children, which he actually approved of, but then for herself. The latter she kept hidden from him under the towels in the closet: some Hemingway or similar stuff, things that only infested women's brains.

"Reading broadens your horizons", she claimed.

"Bollocks!" he retorted. "What do I need all those horizons for, when I don't know how to survive in this country?"

He could only laugh at the idea that books made someone more intelligent. He knew a lot of people who read a lot and they were not particularly shrewd. A son of a colleague was just working on his PhD in English literature and could not live on his salary, let alone to be able to get a lump of meat in a shop.

"Fucking hell!" In a reflex movement Tadek managed to hit the brake pedal with his heavy foot. The traffic lights were still green, but the brake lights of the car in front of him turned suddenly red, like a pair of bloodshed eyes of a tiger, staring at its prey. The squeaking noise of tyres and the flowing adrenaline cruelly interrupted his thoughts.

"Those fucking idiots cannot drive!" he roared; his voice hoarse and deep like that of a rutting deer. He could bet that a woman had stalled the engine of her car. "Always the same", he murmured under his breath. He knew why he never let Helena drive a car. He loosened his grip on the steering wheel and looked at his watch. The traffic still did not move. The last thing I need is a bloody accident! Today of all days!, Tadek shook his head and started drumming his fleshy fingers on the dashboard. He decided to get out of the car and see whether he could find a policeman. Before he opened the door, he looked in the rear-view mirror. "Wow!" he cried out like a child that secretly caught a glimpse of his Christmas present two days before Christmas Eve. A woman's beautiful face looked at him. She sat relaxed behind the steering wheel and smoked a cigarette. Tadek stared at her as though he were hypnotised. She ran her long fingers through her dark hair, aware of the effect. He now wished that the cars would never move again. The idea of going home occurred to him as almost ridiculous now. He could not take his eyes of the reflection. She was real, not like all those women that appeared in his dreams and suddenly vanished when he woke up, feeling his blood flowing to his loins. He would find Helena's body next to his, wrapped in a sound sleep, her heavy breasts moving regularly, her lungs exhaling the air with a loud hissing noise. Suddenly he grabbed the mirror and looked at himself in it. A big round face of a middle-aged man with the first signs of baldness glanced at him. "What a fucking life", he uttered. He could remember the days he had been one of the most handsome guys in the factory...

But then he could see the traffic in front of him moving. For the last time he looked at the beauty in the car behind him. She must be a prostitute, he

decided. They always drive fancy cars like that. This thought apparently relaxed him. He started the engine and followed his direction. In the end, he had great news to announce.

"A monkey, a monkey!" the children danced full of joy around the kitchen table and shouted all the possible names for the new pet: "Fiki-Miki! Chital! Linda!"

"A monkey?" Helena shook her head with disapproval. "Are you insane? In this small apartment? And how are you going to feed it? Even the children have never tasted a banana!"

In the first instance she thought that Tadek was joking. But after almost thirteen years of marriage she could read his face. She realized how much the matter meant to him, and how proud he was.

"Our monkey will eat carrots, apples, and nuts" said Ela, their eleven-year-old daughter. She came to Helena and hugged her.

"Mama, please! We'll look after the monkey! We'll walk it, and feed, and clean the mess, Marek and me! We promise, please!"

Marek, her younger brother let his gaze wander from Tadek to Helena. The children knew exactly how they could soften their mother's heart. Expectations and hope in their eyes reminded Helena of her own miserable childhood. Her parents, poor farmers, had had to provide for their eight daughters shortly after the war, and she had even no chance to ask for anything. Her best friend had been her primary school teacher who had encouraged her to learn, and especially to read. Books were not easily available in those days, so some of them she read even twice. Since she had her own children, she decided to do everything to make them happy. She took a deep breath.

"If you.." she started, but then she heard Tadek's firm voice.

"Of course, you'll get a monkey! Period! And mama will bring it to you in the next days. I cannot take a day off. My boss is away this week, and I have to cope with all tasks and people!"

Helena fought for composure. She could not believe what she had heard.

"And how should I collect this bloody monkey? On my own back, on foot?" she stuttered.

"By bus, it goes every half an hour. And I'll organize a cage and a leash. You'll manage it for sure."

Helena did not answer. She had learned not to discuss things that one could leave until the next day.

A monkey, what a stupid idea! Helena lay awake while Tadek was already snoring his way into deep sleep. Did he do it on purpose? After she had decided

that they would not have another child, he came up with a monkey instead. And if it weren't enough, she had to pick it up from the middle of nowhere and become a public laughing stock. To keep her occupied. Her life was confined to the children, the kitchen and his moods. She was an excellent cook and enjoyed creating delicious meals practically out of everything, but not every day. With time she avoided mirrors and shop windows. She did not want to see the reflection of her heavy body, once so slim and supple like this of a ballet dancer. Now that Ela and Marek were old enough, she could have more time for herself. She began to read books again, something she had neglected for years. And Susanna who worked in the library had given her some information about college evening courses. Her dream was to become a teacher. Years earlier she had followed her older sister who married in a town in western part of Poland, and who helped her to finish the secondary school. Then she met Tadek, ten years her senior, a technician with a good job and a very practical attitude to life. This ability impressed her even more than his attractive appearance. But now, after all those years she could only think of him as a kind of megalomaniac. It was true, he provided them with all the food supplies and all things that others could not even dream of, but she began missing something. Was it the reason why she read books again? She started thinking about all those stories, so different from her own life, but the soft hand of sleep already touched her mind; the sentences fell apart, random images flashed and disappeared.

Two days later, on a cloudy morning, Helena went to the bus station. She approached the counter and bought a return ticket to Nory, her destination. She asked whether she needed an extra ticket for an animal on her way back.

"What kind of animal?" the woman behind the glass spoke to a microphone, so that everybody could hear.

"A monkey", Helena whispered.

"We don't have monkeys on our price list," echoed the answer. People started looking at her.

"You could buy a ticket for a dog," the woman recommended. "But a monkey isn't a dog actually. Just take a ticket for special luggage." Helena nodded and left the building without looking around, the cage in a firm grip.

The bus crawled on a bumpy road through grey villages. Only a few cars passed by, and from time to time a woman with a head scarf appeared

on a bicycle, fighting her way against the autumn wind. It took an hour to reach Nory. Only a small sign on the side of the road marked the bus stop where Helena got out. The high poplars like dark silhouettes cut out of paper lined the road, and stretched their almost bare branches towards the leaden sky. She turned right to a field path from where she could see a few small white houses. A smell of earth, mushrooms, and burnt wood hit her nostrils and reminded her of her childhood on a farm. The fields were ploughed: rows of grey furrows, already carrying the seeds of promising yield, had to wait for their time to come; their fertility still hidden. The trees on the horizon were almost swallowed by the November haze. A cart pulled by a horse moved slowly towards the village. To her left, a lonely farmer with a rake in his hand lingered in a field. She walked towards him.

"God bless you" she greeted him with the old-fashion expression, still used in small villages. He gave her a puzzled look.

"Could you please tell me where I can find Mr. Poniwac? Does he live in one of those houses?" she pointed.

"We've never heard here of someone with this name," he answered.

"But there must be a family Poniwac in Nory!" she insisted.

The man shook his head.

"Then there must be someone here who has a monkey!" Helena did not give up.

"A monkey?" he uttered. He gaped at her and let the rake fall to the ground, then helplessly stretched his arms.

"My God, good woman, we all live here like monkeys!"

Helena stared speechless and motionless at him. He murmured some unintelligible words under his breath and left. She stood flabbergasted in this godforsaken place and did not know what to do. She closed her eyes. A sudden thought struck her mind. At first she felt like crying but the incredible comedy of the situation overwhelmed her. She sat down on the cage and burst into laughter. She could not hide her malicious joy. At last someone had managed it, she thought with delight.

When she came to her senses, she looked around. A flock of crows appeared over her head like a magic carpet. Suddenly they changed direction, dove into the air and covered the nearby field, hoping for good winter wheat for lunch. But then the birds took off, as if at a sharp command not perceptible to a human ear, and flew away with a loud noise of their flapping

wings. Helena followed them with her eyes to a huge oak on the other side of the field. They besieged the mighty tree, and she could hear them quarrelling, and chatting, and mocking at her and all the monkey business.

In the afternoon the children cried tears of disappointment. At first Tadek blamed Helena for not being able to find the right place. But after a while he bawled "I'll kill him, this stupid bastard! As soon as I get my hands on him, I'll kill him!"

The next day his colleagues informed him that Jan did not work in the factory any more. He had moved to Upper Silesia, where he had found a new, much better job. And they all grinned.

And maybe, just maybe, they were happy only because Jan had left.

We Thank The Little Taunus Bookshop for Supporting Local Writers!  
Please visit them in Oberursel today.



*The Little  
Taunus Bookshop*

Strackgasse 18

61440 Oberursel

Phone: 06171-6947715

<http://www.taunus-bookshop.de/>



# The Last Christmas

## Fiction by M.P. Olinger

The snow covered farmhouse holds its breath amidst the stillness of the land. It's one of those grey snowy mornings in December, when the world retreats onto itself. Transfixed Helen keeps staring into the snowstorm. She opens the bay window, and letting the cool air in, she holds her face into the stream of flakes. Like tiny bullets some snowdrops hurtle relentlessly down, soundlessly hitting the ground. Millions more tumble towards earth diaphanous against the morning light; on landing they hug the ground. Others keep spinning in circles, not sure if they want to go up or down. Not so much different from us human beings, Helen muses. Some souls come down to earth with a bang. For a few lucky ones it's all plain sailing, and the hesitant ones are borne kicking and screaming. Helen shivers. She would love to stop the memories haunting her. She wants to put a stop to sadness; she wants to put a stop to the memories invading her peace of mind. She wants to lay the ghosts of the past to rest. A single tear freezes on her cheek as her vision blurs and time shifts.

The farm-house vibrates with the celebrations of Christmas 1964. She was twelve at the time when all their lives had been turned up side down. On Christmas Eve, the night before the drama, the household, as every year had celebrated together. Grandma Kate was the matriarch of the family and ran the household like a tight ship. Granddad Jake coped with her domineering nature in his own way. On these occasions he retreated into his study and closed the door.

On Christmas day Granddad always made an exception, and the door to his room stayed open. Helen saw him leaning against the fireplace. With the pipe between his teeth he rummaged in his pockets for matches. As the first rings of smoke circled into the air, his weather-beaten face softened, and he smiled at Helen. Their eyes met, "come on darling" he grumbled, "give grandpa a big hug." She ran into his open arms. He had a soft spot for his only granddaughter, and he held her tight. He might have been seventy-five but he was still a vigorous man. He was also a moody man who held strong opinions. Yet the constant twinkle in the corner of his eyes softened his grumpy nature.

He commanded respect and breathed charm like other people air. As he kept holding Helen she snuggled into his best tweed jacket and took a memory shot. His white moustache moved and twitched, as dancing figures of smoke escaped his pipe. She loved to take sensory memories. Her granddad smelled of tobacco, fresh mint, and a whiff of old spice. She felt safe and loved. She wanted to linger, however mother's crystal bell chimed through the house, reminding them to join the rest of the family.

Helens' 6 years old identical twin brothers, David and Richard tumbled into the room, followed by Foxy, their cairn terrier. The twins resembled blonde little imps. Their long fringes covered corn-blue eyes. Mother's pride and joy. "Come on, quick, quick, Father Christmas has come," they shouted excitedly. David's little oval face glowed with delight. He was the younger one by two minutes, slender and smaller than his brother. He was a dreamer, a sensitive and old soul. Rick was the borne leader. Never afraid of anything, he loved to climb up the tallest trees, was accident-prone, and ignored most rules. Like his granddad, Rick could charm himself out of any trouble, and was gifted with the most contagious smile. Although Mother never said as much, he was her favourite.

The family had gathered in the hall. Mother turned around as we dashed in. She looked beautiful that night. Her shiny brown hair curling softly around her strong features. Father awfully handsome stood in his dinner jacket, a glass of white wine in his left hand, and talked animatedly to aunt Janet. Grandma was just about to sit down into her favourite green velvet armchair. She was slightly out of breath and flustered from getting her presents ready. A strand of her greying hair had escaped her tight bun, and impatiently she tweezed it back. Aunt Janet, the intellectual of the family, held her head very straight looking sternly over her gold-rimmed glasses. She was always critical and didn't like anybody being late. Father smiled as he put his wineglass down, and ceremoniously slid the double concertina door open, allowing us full view onto the twinkling Christmas tree. Mother looked around, happy to have the whole family together. She tuned in our favourite carol, Holy Night. We were standing in front of the tree, singing together with full vigour, blissfully unaware that it was going to be our last Christmas together.



None of the events that followed seemed to penetrate our consciousness. There was no real tangible foreboding of things to come. The family unpacked and exchanged gifts amidst laughter and thank you kisses all round. It was only when Helen unpacked her grandfather's present, a Webley MK3, the latest air-rifle on the market, that a stunned silence dimmed the happy mood. Helen took the air rifle out of its leather protective sheet. It felt cool to the touch and lay smooth in her hands. Rick and David watched over her shoulder with keen interest. They followed every move at how she handled the mechanism, eager to learn.

"A bad idea, this rifle," father scolded Jake.

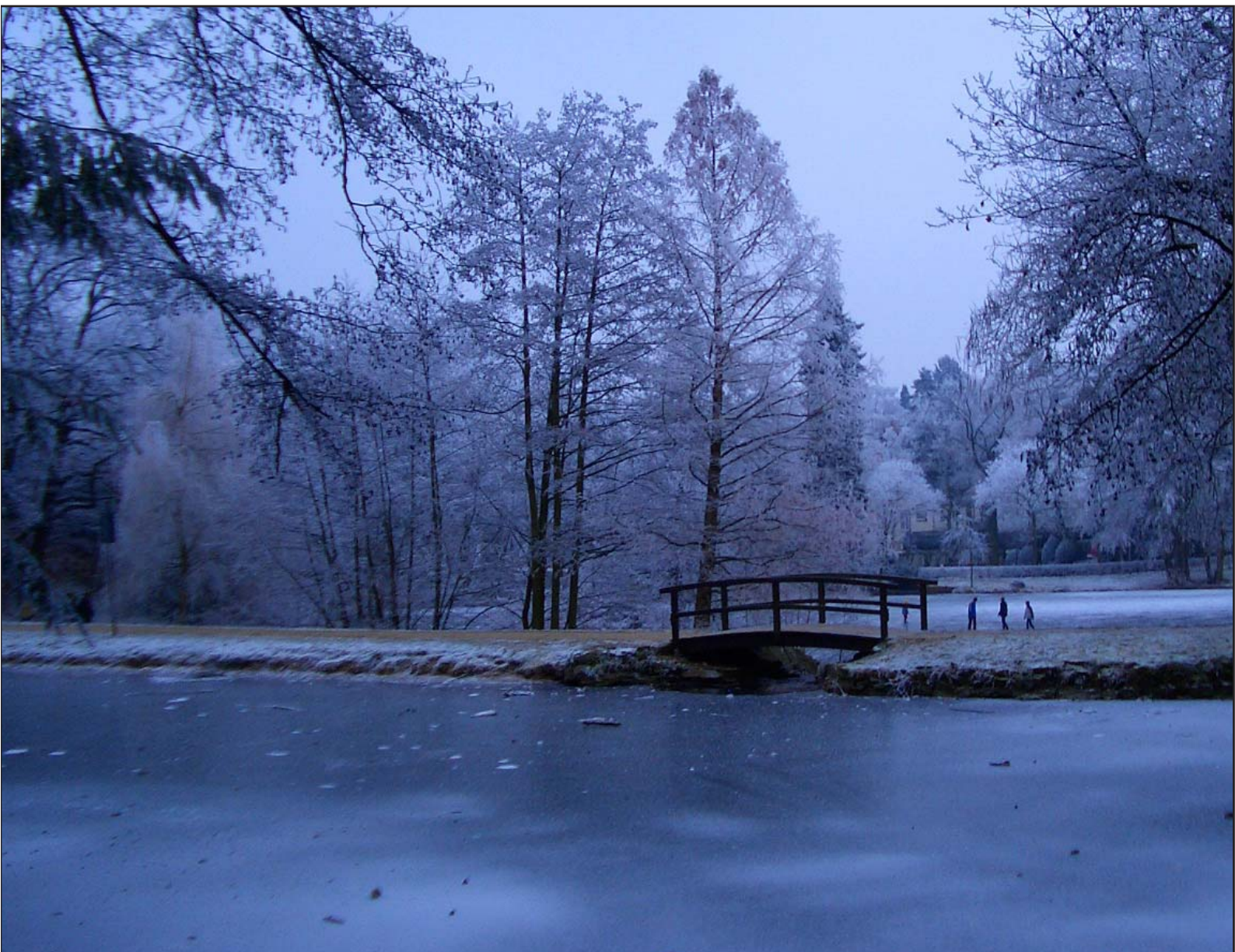
"But she really wanted one," Granddad defended his decision.

"You should have asked us beforehand," Mother said, "and certainly no airgun for Christmas". Mother's voice trembled with contained anger. Why, in God's name, did you think this air rifle would be a perfect present for Helen?"

Helen saw the unhappy look on her granddad's

face. Putting the air rifle down, she intervened. Looking pleadingly at her mother, "You remember when cousin Mick stayed a few weeks in August and brought his Merlin air rifle along? Mick and I practiced shooting pegs, in the old barn. We had a competition going, it was a game and great fun, and I was very good at it, and..." Helen got all flustered trying to explain, and looking at her Mother's stony face she faltered. Mother got up from her seat and resolutely took the gun out of Helen's hands. She left the room and after a while came back with the Christmas cake. "Anybody ready for a piece?" she said smiling. The rifle was not mentioned again that evening. Later on, they all went to bed, not realising what fate had in store for the family the next day.

Boxing Day was glorious and sunny. The river that crossed the orchard behind the farm was frozen solid, and all the family decided to go skating in the afternoon. David and Rick skipped ahead in their red anoraks. Their blue boots left small irregular im-



"Frozen Lake" Photo by MP Olinger. Courtesy of MPO Creations [www.mariepauleolinger.com](http://www.mariepauleolinger.com)



prints in the snow. Foxy, his little black snout close to the icy ground tumbled happily along. Grandma carried a full picnic basket. She had prepared some sandwiches, leftovers from the cake, a flask with hot chocolate and brandy for the men. Everybody was in high spirits. Even aunt Janet smiled happily.

Drawing loops and circles over the frozen river Helen remembered thinking how much she loved her family. Bemused she watched Davy and Rick falling and shrieking with laughter. Foxy was all over them. He was very protective of the boys, licking their faces as they fell down, nudging them to get up, his hot breathe intermingling with the twins'. Grandma and aunt Janet were gliding hesitantly along the riverbank. Their long skirts flapped in the wind. Mother and Father were in a playful mood, circling each other, and stealing kisses. We had our picnic and Foxy lapped up the crumbs off the snow. Granddad was not much of a skater and two brandies later he decided to go back to the house. By then the twins were cold and tired from falling down and had become cranky.

"Why don't you take the boys back up to the house, Mother called out to Granddad, I don't want them to catch a cold. I'll be with you shortly, just a few more rounds up and down the river with Daddy," she called out to her sons.

"Sure, sure," Granddad replied, "come on boys get your skates off and lets go."

Mother gave them a last hug. Each grabbed a piece of cake, tired but happy, they waved at us as they followed Granddad towards the house.

By the time we took our skates off, the sky had suddenly darkened, and an icy snowstorm blew out of nowhere. As we trudged up towards the farm the temperature plummeted to minus ten, and we hurried up the hill. With our heads bent, we fought our way forward against the blizzard. Woollen caps covered our ears, and sounds were muffled; yet we all heard a gun being fired. We all froze and time stood still. A couple of black crows disturbed by the shot, lifted up from the frosted apple trees and disappeared behind a grey wall of snow. Then we started running. We stumbled all the way back to the farm, afraid of what we might find.

Rushing up the stairs, taking two steps at the time, we called out to them, "David, Rick where are you?" "Jack what is going on?" Father called fearfully out. The silence in the house was deafening, and we found the twins in our parent's bedroom. David crouched at the end of the double bed too horrified to move. Rick was motionless under the

covers. Foxy leaped onto the bed tearing playfully at the cover. Licking the blood from Rick's temple, Foxy kept nudging him to get up. Rick tried weakly to lift his head and with a soft smile on his pale lips he whispered, "I am sorry Mummy", he lifted his right hand, and waved a last good-bye to his twin. A pool of blood had formed under Rick. His young life, so full of potential seeped slowly through the mattress.

Mother didn't utter a word. She didn't break down, scream, or cry. She just stood frozen in the doorway. Her grey eyes, devoid of any expression took the scene in. She never uttered a word. The incident was never discussed, never mentioned afterwards. It got buried three days later with Rick into the family vault.

\* \* \*

Over time the family figured out what had happened. The twins had got bored waiting for us and were playing hide and seek with granddad. They had run into Mom and Dad's bedroom. Rick had been hiding under the covers, whilst David, being the slender one, squeezed under the bed. It was there that David discovered dad's hunting rifle. He mistook the hunting gun for his sister's air rifle and had pulled the trigger. Rick caught the full blast of the bullet through the mattress. There was just one cartridge left, and it was one chance in a million to hit his twin brother. But it did find its way into Rick's left temple. Fate is a fickle thing and guilt a heavy burden to carry. Whoever had put that rifle under the bed, had forgotten to secure the gun.

Granddad Jake died two years later of a stroke. He never recovered from the guilt. Father kept hiding behind his work and taking to the bottle. Grandma and aunt Janet coped with the events by fussing over us, stoically holding the family together. Mother hid her intense grief behind depression for years. She died a week ago, having suffered for years from dementia. Now that the old Generation is gone, the dust has finally had a chance to settle over the tragedy. But the old farmhouse is still holding its breath. Grief, guilt, and pain hide in every corner, waiting to be released.

Helen shivers, and as she closes the window she smells the aroma of freshly brewed coffee. She hears heavy footsteps on the landing, she turns, and David steps into the room.

He hugs her tightly. "Let's have breakfast, sis", he gently says. Like Helen, he is an early riser, fleeing the demons of the night.

"It's just us now," Helen softly says against his shoulder. They stand together holding each other. The storm relentlessly coils its way through the winter morning, disturbing the snowflakes' destinations. They are caught into a swirling vortex, upwards, around, downwards, and side-ways. Still in the end, each tumbling and



sparkling snowdrop merges with Earth. Like us, no matter which detour we take.



"Pen" Acrylic and Ink on Paper by MP Olinger . Courtesy of MPO Creations. [www.mariepauleolinger.com](http://www.mariepauleolinger.com)

# Lucy's Choice

## Fiction by Beate Fritz

Today, this place suddenly arouses a fin-de-siècle feel in her. Surely, the fitting-out of the old café follows that style from the turn of the century, yet there must be more.

Lucy, a dark blond woman in her late forties, turns her head and looks at her husband. Immediately, her friendly blue eyes get angry. Again, she has caught him peering over the newspaper at the attractive young waitress. "Why the hell does he have to do that constantly in my presence?" Lucy thinks, distressed, and years for a cup of good coffee. She enjoys the faint aroma of freshly brewed coffee that fills the room. The coffee machine makes a hissing sound, and this never fails to bring a smile on her face. While leafing quickly through the menu, Lucy can already feel the delicious taste of the famous walnut cake on her tongue. The wonderful yoghurt cakes were much lighter, yet as excellent as the nut cakes packed with calories.

Lucy decides to indulge in a big piece of nut cake. She needs that today. For a short moment, she will be happy. The husband prefers to drink beer. She starts looking around, dreaming about a more fulfilling life. She suddenly feels emptiness, yet pushes it away.

Then, the husband checks his watch and jumps up. "I'll be right back, dear. I have to make a call to a prospective client. Won't take long." The next moment he hurries away with a happy smile on his face. The woman remains seated, motionless. Now she looks forlorn. She knows that facial expression. This is no business call. Upon return, he will tell her another far-fetched lie to explain his absence the coming weekend.

Lucy listlessly plays with her scarf. It's a wonderful piece, matching the colour of her eyes. The scarf adds a bit of fashion to her clothes which can be described as classical, yet sporty. Lucy can already hear her husband preaching his mantra. "Unfortunately, I'll have to work this weekend. The business world is very tough nowadays, my darling. They call any time and require your presence. Nobody cares about weekends. You know that I am self-employed. I need to work when my clients want me to." Then, he will switch to promises. "One day, it will get better. Then I'll spend my weekends at home. Anyway, we often have weekdays together. Weekends are not that important, are they?"

How many times will she still be able listen to this? She feels like a bird in a cage. Looking around in the old café, she can't help thinking of the cramped salons, shown

on pictures from the turn of the century. She suddenly glimpses how those bourgeois women might have felt in their golden cages.

She lives in a different era, though. Why doesn't she simply fly away? She knows why. During the long years of their marriage she has become a little dependent. He helps her with everything and makes her life as comfortable as possible. Lucy realizes that the old café exudes this same pleasant sense of cosiness, yet mingled with an air of petty bourgeoisie. The whole place simply breathes the air of times gone by.

Usually, she loves watching the big chandeliers, decorated with small hanging glass pieces, which light the place. The atmosphere of the café is all-plush, in an over-ornate style. Everything does match, yet in a little inconsistent way. Normally, she simply adores this lovely retreat from the modern hustle, yet today it boxes her in. What is wrong with her?

Suddenly, Lucy can't help but realize how much she lies to herself. "He is such a pure guy. He always has to work weekends." His happy face upon leaving tells the truth. Lucy feels the upcoming heat streaming through her whole body. Even her cheeks go red with anger, and she almost hates herself for her weakness. Lucy wants to cry, yet she almost perfectly hides her real feelings.

Then, the husband returns and starts his pretence. Lucy looks absent. She already knows every single word. He could play a tape. "Does he really believe that I am a puppet which he can put in or out of a cupboard? Doesn't he see how I lose my dignity when he treats me this way?" The corners of Lucy's mouth drop, and her eyes begin to glitter with anger. "How much longer can I bare this?"

Then, she recognises that he must have uttered a question. His words have slipped her attention though. He has stopped talking, fidgeting nervously on his chair now. His hands go up and down constantly, and he avoids her gaze. They know each other well. She hasn't complained as usual. He hesitates again and promises. "In a fortnight is your birthday. I'll be here. What do you want to do that Sunday?"

Lucy becomes very calm. "Does she really want to spend this very special day with him? His



Sunday presence will surely require a phone call covered by an overly long stay in a public wash room or the urgent necessity of refuelling his car. It's always the same: boring but nevertheless humiliating."

Lucy realizes like a flush that she can't have it both ways. She has to make a decision for staying or leaving and take the full consequences. "I don't care for your presence on my birthday. Do as you please or spend it with your lover." The husband looks shocked in disbelief and struggles for breath. "But...", he starts lamely.

Lucy's voice gets louder. People around them turn their heads with eager eyes full of curiosity. What an exciting interlude at coffee time. "By the way, I am fed up by your lies and will leave now."

After a pause, she continues with a mock smile and low voice. "Besides, I am going to drop my habit of spending time with someone whom I can't trust. I have

always hated dishonest people. You should know that perfectly well." Lucy takes in her husband who leans into his chair with his mouth wide open. He is middle-aged with a balding head and somewhat overweight. The unshaven chin and unsuitable clothes intensify his unfavourable impression. Today, he obviously hasn't bothered himself to make a good impression. "How could other women be that fond of him?" Lucy wonders. That moment, a bright stream of sunshine suddenly falls in the café. It seems to simply draw her out.

Lucy follows the call by hurrying out lightly before her husband can get back to his senses. She finally realised that the so-called good old times will never come back or if so, then only as a rather poor imitation. "I deserve something much better." Lucy thinks and resolutely abandons the fin-de-siècle life for good. Instead, exciting new possibilities seem just a breath away.



"Freedom" Acrylic on canvas by Selina McPhee. [Selina.McPhee@gmx.de](mailto:Selina.McPhee@gmx.de)

# Happy After Birthday

## Fiction by Hye yeon Cho

‘Beep..beep..’

“What time is it? Turn off your mobile.” Anne told to her husband.

“Well, it’s six thirty. You’d better get up now.” Austin murmured as stopping his ringing phone.

“Already? Do you really want to have breakfast this morning?”

‘.....’

Anne glanced at Austin’s face. He turned his back. Then it was clear she had to get up and make something for Austin.

“I had sleepless night again because of your mobile. Could you just turn it off while we’re in bed?”

“You know what it is like my work. If I didn’t answer them, they would fire me.”

Anne couldn’t reply. Their conversation usually ended up like this. Austin, her husband, was a man of ability. His company had recognized this and sent Austin and his family to London to a more challenging task. They moved from Seoul two years and three months ago. Since then they had had the same situation every morning. Between Seoul and London, there is time difference. It’s almost opposite the day and night. But it wasn’t taken into consideration when his company needed Austin. He had to put up with this. So did Anne. They had been selected and knew that there were a lot of competitors were waiting to take Austin’s place.

“Well, in that case....” Anne closed the door slightly. She didn’t want to disturb James, her beloved son. James was sleeping next to Austin.

‘What shall I make for this morning?’ Anne asked herself as she looked at the calendar in the kitchen. “Today is Tuesday and 12th of September. September 12th? Oh, I almost forgot.’ It was her birthday. She had decided that she wouldn’t count her age from last year but still demanded to celebrate. Anne reviewed a few appointments written on the calendar.

‘No time to hesitate.’ As usual but a bit different. Anne had planned to meet her friends, Lisa and Kay. They were James’ best friends’ mother and also her best friends now.

‘Austin must have a surprise for me.’ Anne knew that she should not have expectations like this but she couldn’t help it.

“You won’t be late home tonight, will you?” Anne hinted.

“I’m not sure but I’ll try.” He replied.

It’s eight thirty; time for James’ school.

Anne and James were off to the school. Austin should be in office and busy with flooded phone call. Lisa and Kay were at the school gate with Calvin and William, their son.

“Here comes the birthday girl!” they all shouted and gave her big hugs. The children gave Anne homemade cards and went into the gate as chattering together.

“You won’t forget our lunch, will you?” Lisa asked Anne. “Of course, I won’t. I wrote it on my calendar. Then see both of you at 12 o’clock at my house, okay?” Anne checked again, gazing at her friends eyes in turns. Lisa and Kay smiled back. Anne prepared Italian salad and pasta for lunch which was her favorite.

‘Ding-dong~’ Lisa and Kay brought flowers and a small round pink box.

“Hum~.It’s very nice. I love spicy pasta. Where did you get the recipe?” Lisa wondered.

“It reminds me of a pasta I had when I was in Venice and added some prawns to it. That’s all.” Anne responded proudly.

“What are your plans for tonight? Shall I take James for a sleepover? Then you can have time with your busy bee.” suggested Kay. It was common knowledge that they had the busiest husbands in the world.

“That’s very kind of you, Kay. James should be here, I think.”

“Open the box, Anne. It’s our heart to you and your husband.” Lisa and Kay urged her. Anne opened the box. There were tea cups and saucers for a couple.

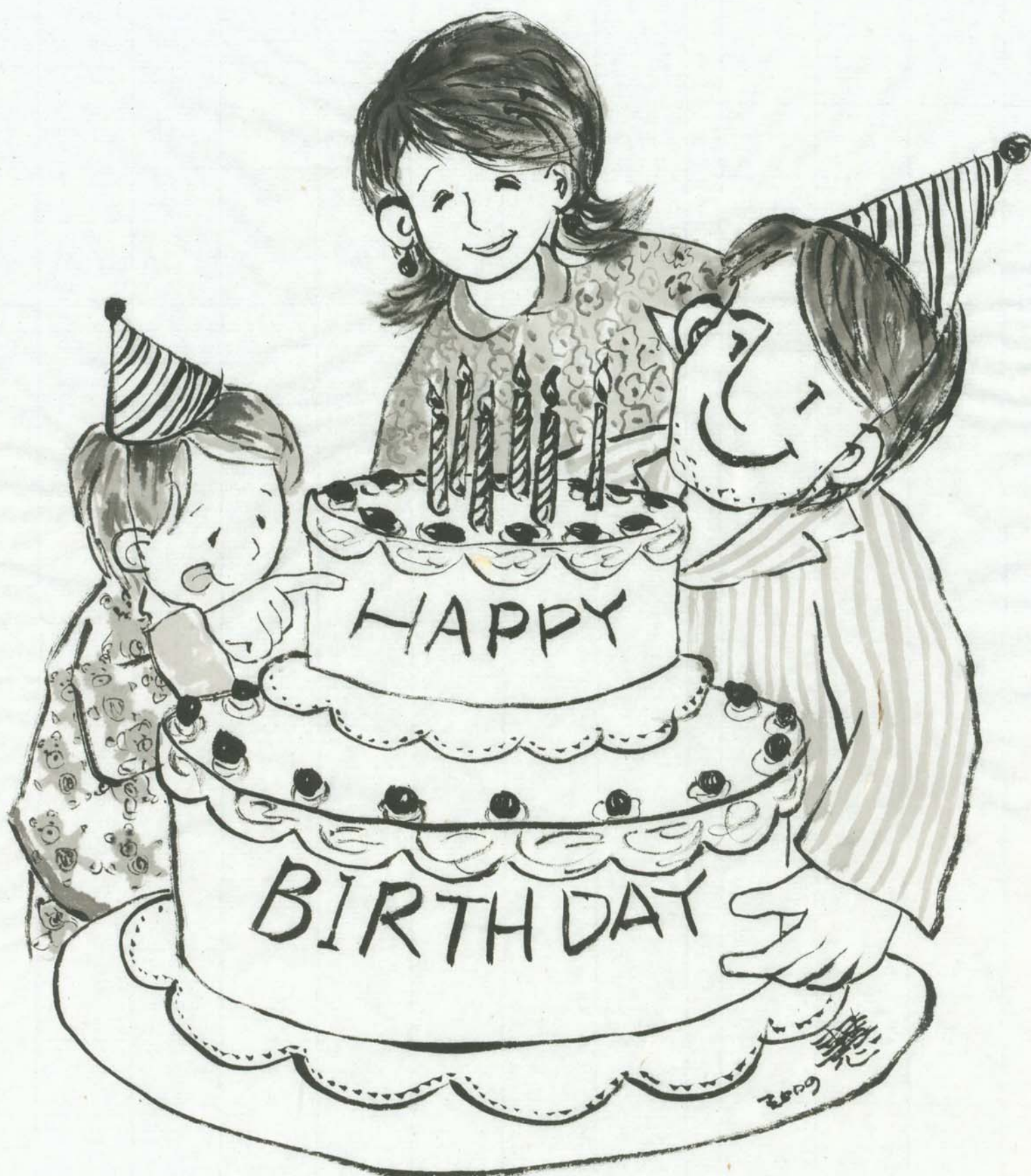
“Wow. Thanks. It’s been ages Austin and I have sat together for tea.”

Suddenly, Lisa screamed. “There is somebody in your garden!”

“Oh, it’s Mr. Parker, my neighbor. He has my garden key to take care of it.” Anne opened the back door to greet Mr. Parker. “Good afternoon, Mr. Parker. Would you like to join us for a tea?”

“What are you doing pretty girls? I have a weak heart to see all of you.” He joked as usual. “We’re celebrating Anne’s birthday.” Kay said to Mr.





“Happy Birthday” Brush and Ink by Hye yeon Cho

Parker.

"Is that true? Sarah, we have a birthday girl here." He exclaimed through the fence. Mrs. Parker bobbed over the fence. "Congratulations! How old are you then? Oh, I shouldn't have asked that!"

"I don't mind. I'm thirty-five." Anne smiled back. Mr. and Mrs. Parker were like her parents. They took good care of Anne, James and their garden. Anne couldn't keep her garden tidy without them.

"Do you have any plan for tonight?" Mr. Parker looked at Anne.

"Not really. Anyway I'm going to make special meal." She sighed.

"It's your birthday. You should drag your husband to eat out" Mr. Parker insisted.

"I know. But Austin has an important business meeting tonight." Anne lied.

She knew that they would check her front garden tonight for Austin's car.

"Nice to have you all. It's time to pick up the boys." Anne hurried.

"I can't believe time just flies by when the boys are at school."

"Neither can I." Kay and Anne agreed and giggled.

The three were off. When Anne and James came back home, there was a cake in front of the door with a message.

'Dear Anne,

I've been here to say happy birthday. I heard it from Kay at the shop. She's been here this morning. Have a lovely day.

Love Chae.'

"Wow, it's from Richard's mum. Let's take a look inside. Aren't I lucky girl?" Chae, who was Richard's mum and Anne's hairdresser, had lived on Anne's street for three weeks. Anne was so moved. She recognized how Chae was busy. Chae might miss her lunch because she was the most popular hairdresser in town.

"James, do your homework now otherwise you might not have time for that." Anne shouted at James who started to play a game.

"It's not fair. I'm just back from school." James moaned.

"I know. But I can't check it unless you finish before six o'clock. I have to cook a special meal this evening."

"Bla,bla,bla..." James called his mum as Mrs. Blabla sometimes.

"You know it's my birthday. Listen to me." Actually, Anne was too busy to care for James' homework today. She had to prepare for dinner as well as a romantic event. After she finished cooking, she changed her clothes quickly and grabbed her new nightdress and put

it on the bathroom shelf. It seemed to be the perfect surprise for Austin. Anne refreshed her lip-gloss and looked at her watch. It was half past seven.

"Mum, I'm hungry. Can we have dinner now?"

"I'm sorry, sweetie. Let's call to your father."

Anne phoned Austin, and he said he would be late. Anne decided to have dinner without Austin. 'It's fine. I'll put James bed a bit early then Austin and I can have our own time.' Anne comforted herself. When Anne and James had almost finished their meal, Austin arrived. His hands were empty.

"Austin, do you know what today is?" Anne bellowed.

"Does it matter? Not Monday. Then Tuesday? Wednesday?"

"Daddy, it's mum's birthday." James informed Austin.

"Oh, happy birthday, Anne. But we had nice dinner last Saturday. You might understand that I'm busy and tired during the week." Austin climbed the steps which led upstairs before he had finished.

"Yes, of course I remember. You gave me special bonus to buy something I like but we didn't blow out the candle. I've got a cake from my friend."

Anne looked up the stairs.

"I told you I'm exhausted." Austin responded. Anne gave up and went to bed. Austin and James were there. "Mum, I'm scared .Can I sleep with you tonight?" Anne couldn't refuse him again. She didn't want to wake up in the middle of the night to soothe her little son. "Fine, you can stay."

Anne turned off the light and lay on the bed. She felt pity for herself and started sobbing.

"Dad, Mum is crying." James shook dad's shoulder. Austin jumped out of the bed and turned on the light.

"Let's light the candles and sing happy birthday." He fluttered his hands to find his dressing gown,

"That's enough. Go back to sleep." Anne snarled.

"Dad, are you okay? You look crazy." James opened his eyes widely.

"Your mum will kill me if I skip this ceremony." Austin snarled

"Do it yourself, then." Anne hissed and went to sleep.

'Beep, beep,' rang Austin's mobile. Anne was annoyed and peeked to her side. It was empty. She checked the clock.

'I didn't oversleep. It's six thirty. Where have they gone?' Anne got up and descended the stairs. Austin and James were in the kitchen. They put the cake on the table with candles and fried eggs for breakfast.

"Happy after birthday." Austin and James shouted loudly. They were all still in their pajamas.



# Invaders

## A Memorable Morning in Ukraine

Fiction by Leonore Becks

### Astrid

I have been living for a half a year in the Ukraine when I am invited to take part in a one week teaching training organized by the Goethe-Institut in Kyiv in early March 1998. I work here as a teacher for German language and literature at the university of Luzk. Luzk is a middle sized provincial town in the Western Ukraine and about 600km away from Kyiv. For such a distance usually the overnight-train is taken for the journey, that means leaving the departure station late in the evening and reaching the target station early the next morning. Since I wouldn't be home for a whole week, I leave my spare key with Shana – the woman I am renting my flat from – so she can look after the place during my absence. This is always advisable in wintertime because of the constant irregularities with the energy supply and the heating.

Shana, a widowed woman in her 60-ties, who lives closed-by in a ample flat together with her unemployed adult son and her bedridden mother-in-law, is not only my landlady but also one of my closest contact persons in Luzk. After I came down with a serious salmonella infection right after arriving in Ukraine caused by eating in the student canteen during the first two weeks of my stay, Shana offered to prepare lunch for me to avoid such problems in future. In exchange I pay her a weekly allowance for the products. For both of us this agreement is beneficial. For Shana is it a possibility to earn some extra money, and I have somebody to chat in Russian with after my morning lessons at university. The biggest advantage is however that in this way I get to taste various examples of the delicious traditional Ukrainian cuisine.

So on the evening that I am departing to Kyiv, I walk by to Shana to drop off the spare key. Unexpectedly Shana isn't at home, but her son Andrej opens the door. I explain the situation, tell him when I will be back and leave the key with him. "Give my best regards to your Mum", I say before I hurry on to the station.

### Shana

You want to know, how I live? Well this year I turned 67 and I am facing an uncertain future. I never thought things would develop this way. I was happily married, and we had two talented sons, who were trained to be engineers. Even after the declaration of independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, which caused the rapid crash of the Ukrainian economy, my husband rapidly managed to adapt to the changed situation and used his good business contacts in the Czech Republic and Poland to build up our new existence. We were able to privatize the ample four room apartment in the center of Luzk, which was public property before and we had rented for many years already. And then Alexej, my beloved husband, suddenly died in 1993 in a car accident. He was a good driver and crashed on straight road into a wall. I never believed it was an accident, I am convinced he was murdered, as so many prosperous professionals in these times, who do not let themselves be corrupted. However this accident was never persecuted as a crime, and it seemed like all our fortune ended on this day.

What does this mean? You see, I never got any compensation. Other people took over his business and didn't pay me anything for it. Can you imagine, how low a widow's pension is in the Ukraine? You cannot make a living out of it. So much the worse, Andrej and Sascha, both our sons, lost their jobs and got divorced. Andrej is still unemployed and a few years ago he moved in with me again. He makes his living from odd jobs, which he manage to get from time to time. His ex wife denies him any contact with his son, my grandchild, since he is not able to pay them any support. Andrej is much less efficient than his father, he has much more difficulties to cope with the changed conditions of life, and I am sometimes deeply worried about his future. He avoids talking with me about this topic, but I think he really suffers by being separated from his family: as well as I painfully miss contact to my grandchild.

My other son Sascha is better off. He works in a

bank now and just started dating one of his colleagues. His son Jurij from his first marriage lives with him. Since his father is full time working, Jurij comes after school to my place and stays with me all afternoon. I must confess I am terribly devoted to my 9-year-old grandchild. Probably I feel even more tender love for him than I ever did for my own sons. He is the pleasure of my days and my emotional support. His brightness and joy of life is really contagious. I wouldn't mind having him around me all the time. The afternoons when I am taking care of him are the happiest hours of my day.

You may ask, who else is living in this flat? I usually do not tell strangers about it, but my mother in law is also living with us. I must admit that I never got along with her really well. In fact she never liked me. I took her anyway into our family because she seriously fell sick and had nobody to go to. I musn't tell you how homes for old people look like in the Ukraine in these times? What should I have done? She is in the end the mother of my deceased husband. He would have wanted me to look after her. Her care is a burden to me. My mother in law doesn't get up anymore at all. She is permanently angry and unsatisfied, bitches at me as soon as I enter her room. There is nothing you can please her with. Thank God Andrej is taking over her care from time to time. This gives me a break: otherwise, I might have long ago pressed a pillow on her face to stop her scolding.

### Andrej

I wake up with a start early in the morning. Actually I have no idea what time it is. People are talking agitatedly, and the voices come rapidly closer. I want to open my eyes, but it feels as if they are glued together. I hardly manage to keep them open for just more than a moment. Everything seems quite unfamiliar, and I try to remember where I am and how I got there.

Before I manage to orientate myself, someone yells at me: "Who are you? What are you doing here? Get out of here straight away, or I will call the police". I widely tear my eyes open, turn my head and face an angry looking old woman, threateningly raising her broom. Behind her appears Astrid, the German girl to whom my mother is renting the flat.

All at once my memory comes back. I glance back – yes, Tanja is there too, slowly awaking from her coma-like sleep. I remember taking the spare key off the hook last night, before I was restlessly and

aimlessly roaming through the streets of Luzk, pitying myself and my unfortunate existence, being deeply frustrated with the hopeless economic situation in the Ukraine, which has forced me in the age of 30 after my disastrous divorce to live together again with my mother and grandmother in one flat. I already had some beers, when I by accident met Tanja, a former colleague of mine, in the pedestrian zone. She looked miserable, but I was happy that she accepted my invitation to have a drink with me in a bar and afterwards agreed to come with me to the flat, where we continued to celebrate our reunion with a bottle of wodka. I did not want to let this opportunity pass, having a place to get together with a woman where the indignant gaze of my Mum would not disturb us ...

Alarmed I sit up in the bed. "Is Astrid back already? I thought she would only return tomorrow". My mouth is terribly dry, and I have a sour taste on my tongue. I have the strong desire to drink some water. While I still sort my thoughts and slowly start to realize what had happened, I hear that Astrid is calming down the old woman: "Oh, I know him. That is Andrej, the son of my landlady. I will get along with this. Thank you for your help." The old woman looks at me amazedly, seems to grasp the situation and then grumbling leaves the flat. I have a splitting headache. There is a pulsing pressure under my skullcap so that I can hardly concentrate my thoughts. Finally I get up and smile embarrassedly at Astrid. "How was the weather in Kyiv?" I ask.

### Neighbour

I usually get up early in the morning. This might be a sign of beginning ageing, but I also enjoy the calmness of the early morning hours before daybreak. Since I live together with my daughter, my son-in-law and my two little grandchildren in a two-room flat, it becomes crowded and noisy as soon as everybody is awake. On this morning I am already up as well for about an hour and busy with preparing a warm breakfast. My son-in-law needs a solid meal, that takes him over the whole day, nobody can afford buying oneself something for lunch in these days anymore – when the doorbell rings. I rush to the door, to avoid a second ringing, which might wake up the kids, wondering who this might be, anyhow it is still before 7 o'clock.

"Sorry for disturbing. I am your neighbour, the German teacher. I am afraid somebody broke in my flat during my absence. And it looks like the housebreakers are still in. Could you please help me, I am really scared?" explains the young woman in front of my door.

I know her of course, like everyone does in our house.





She lives opposite our flat and is a foreigner. She is already the second German who came here to teach German language at the local university. Actually I don't talk to her much, as less as I did to the former one. They are quite decent girls, and as I could observe, they lead a modest and ordinary life. However I am rather reserved. They are certainly not interested in talking with an old, dull woman and besides I do not know what to talk about with them. I guess our way of life is quite different. I mistrust these strangers. They could live a much more prosperous life in their own country. Why do they come here at all? I do not understand it.

“What do you want? What are you saying?”

“There is somebody in my flat. I just arrived with the overnight-train from Kyiv, I have been on a business-trip. They are lying in my bed. I am afraid to wake them up. They might be aggressive, or? I thought, it would be a good idea, if

somebody came along with me.”

I finally grasp the situation. Somebody broke into her flat. How stupid to stay overnight! “Wait, I am coming”, I say. I rush back in my flat. Gosh darn it! I am afraid, too. Thieves can be unpredictable. I better take something along for defense. Without reflecting I snatch the broom, which by chance stands near the entrance.

“Ok, lets go”, I say to the girl and enter first the open door to her flat. “Where are they?”, I shout now excitedly, and at the same time I see that somebody is lying in the bed in the room straight ahead. I sprint forward and start angrily to scold “Who are you? What are you doing here? Get out of here straight away or I will call the police”. There are two young people in the bed, naked, a man and a woman, who startled sit up and look amazedly at me. The German girl is right behind me and now seems to recognize the invaders “Oh, I know him. That is Andrej, the son of my landlady. I will get along with this. Thank you for your help”.

This is Shana's son? I didn't recognize him. It's cer-

tainly a while ago, since I saw him last time. Shana, of course, I know quite well. She was friends with the old couple living in this flat until they died. We sometimes meet in the stairway, when she looks after the flat nowadays. She is quite a respectable and nice person. I wonder that she would tolerate such a behaviour. I watch while Andrej starts explaining the situation to the German girl and decide it is time for me to withdraw from the flat. "I will tell your mother about this", I grumble while I head for my own flat. This is really scandalous! After all Andrej is not a teenage boy anymore but a grownup man. And the woman with him looked terrible. Did she had any teeth at all? It's still early in the morning, but I decide to call Shana right away. I wonder how she will react. This is really something to gossip about.

### Shana

I adore coffee. It is the first thing I need in the morning. And except for the 3 to 4 cups of coffee I usually don't have anything else until noon. For me the way the coffee is prepared is highly important for the true pleasure of its taste. I brew my coffee in the Turkish way. I boil the coffee in a little coffee pot with a long handle on my gas stove. I possess several of these coffee pots in many different sizes and forms, which are all neatly hung up above the stove. In Russian language they are called "kofevarka". If I prepare the coffee only for myself I take my favourite coppery coffee pot. I fill in two spoons of the imported coffee, which Astrid brought me as a gift from Germany, and one spoon of sugar. Then I fill the coffee pot up with water. I always pay attention that it is just the right amount of water, so the coffee will not that easily overboil. I never move away from the stove while the coffee is brewing. I love to observe the process how the water is heating and finally boiling. And besides I believe for the best taste of the coffee it is essential to take the coffee pot from the fire, just at that moment, when the coffee froth threatens to spill over the edge. First thing I do, after I took the coffee pot from the fire, is to take off two spoons of this coffee froth and put it in my cup. Only afterwards I pour the rest of the coffee in my cup. So I get a nice coffee cream. What a delight to enjoy a perfect cup of coffee on my own in the early calm morning hours.

When the telephone rings shortly after 7 o'clock on this morning, I was already awake and had been quickly used the bathroom, before Andrej will rise. I am just about to prepare my first cup of coffee. I hardly can believe, what the woman on the phone

is reporting me. This is a nightmare. While still being on the phone I knock on Andrej's door to check if he is in his room. No answer. I open the door, but he is not there. I didn't notice that he hasn't returned home last night. It often happens that he comes home after I already have retired to my bedroom. "I'll be coming, right away," I say to Ljudmila. I am really upset now. How could he dare to do such a thing? How distressing? What will Astrid think about him? And I sometimes dream of them becoming a couple, Astrid would be the daughter-in-law I always wished to have ... No time for any distracting thoughts, I need to get there as soon as possible.

### Astrid

It rings and knocks at the entrance door. I hardly had open it, when Shana already flounce into the flat. I am startled by her unfamiliar view. She looks pale and her hair is undressed. Her long blond curly hair, that is usually thoroughly dressed, sticks out wildly from her head. I know how much effort she puts in her hairstyle. She asked me to bring her special hair care products and conditioners from Germany to preserve the extraordinary gloss and density of her hair. The hardness and the high iron content of the tap water in the Ukraine let the hair dry out much faster. Shana successfully fights against this process and for a woman in her age she managed to keep magnificent hair. This morning however everything is in disorder. "Where is he?", she shouts furiously and already found her way into the kitchen, where Andrej awkwardly rises from the chair. Shana cuts him off, when he, gulping down the sip of coffee he had just taken, tries to find the right words. "Get out of here, both of you. I don't want to hear anything. How could you dare to go here? Get out of this flat, right away. I don't want to see you here anymore." She drives the unlucky couple out of the flat and hastens on into the bedroom. Totally out of herself she tears down the bedcovers and -sheets. "Did they sleep here? Did they use your bedclothes? I am going to wash it." - "Shana, please calm down, everything is alright. I am glad, it was only Andrej and no real housebreakers. Nothing terrible has happened. I don't mind.", I say, finally managed to intervene. Shana collapse on a chair, heavily breathing and suddenly looking quite old and desperate. I feel sorry for her. She looks so deeply offended and embarrassed, bereaved of all her tediously sustained dignity. I never saw her before so upset. I realize that this event apparently is only the tip of the iceberg. This will be for all of us a memorable morning!



# The Family Margitch

Fiction by Lence Timova

The family Margitch lived at the edge of a small village in an old cottage. Mr. and Mrs. Margitch and their children, Alex and Marta were forced to live a very modest and poor life. Mr. Margitch worked the whole day to earn their living.

Year after year their fears grew. One day in late autumn, afraid they wouldn't survive the following winter, Alex who had grown into a young man decided to leave the house and go abroad for a better life. His departure wasn't hard for his family. There was actually the hope that he would live a better life. It certainly couldn't be harder than it was, thought his mother.

In time, Marta, the sister, married and moved out.

Twenty years passed. Although they hadn't hear from him, the hopes that Alex was living a good life hadn't disappeared.

One day a stranger appeared at the front door. He introduced himself as a passer-by who needed a room to spend the night. Because they were hospitable

they let him in the house although they didn't have anything to offer him for dinner. He looked unusual and possessed things that they couldn't imagine.

They were so curious about what he was carrying that they couldn't sleep and had nightmares. They became obsessed.

The stranger slept deeply, exhausted from his journey.

Suddenly Mr. and Mrs. Margitch stood up and looked at each other. They both had the same idea. Mr. and Mrs. Margitch went to the room where the stranger was sleeping. Suddenly Mrs. Margitch thrust a blunt knife through the stranger's heart. They didn't feel the happiness they had expected. A deep sense of despair overwhelmed them.

The next day the daughter came running to the house to tell them the exciting news. It was enough just to mention Alex's name, and she realized something was wrong; Alex had been forgotten.



"The Skaters Have Left". Photo by MP Olinger Courtesy of MPO Creations. [www.mariepauleolinger.com](http://www.mariepauleolinger.com)

# Spiral Obsession

## Fiction by Núria Planas

She wanted to write; she had to write; but it was not possible. For some years, now, she had this obsession: write, write and write. However, she was not self-disciplined; she only wrote whenever she had an “inspiration”. Julia still remembers when she was at school, and they were supposed to write about something: some of the classmates wrote so well! On the contrary, she was not able to do it. She did not have the skills and ability to sit down, to think about something and to sculpt it on paper. In addition, I assume that she did not even consider that she could do something like this: write.

She used to intensely dislike those language classes where they had to write and read. Yes, every single week they had to read a book and afterwards summarize the book. Oh my God, she used to hate them so much! She was bad, or at least, she thought she was bad and did not have any kind of talent: “Julia you are not very smart”, “oh Julia your legs are not very nice”, “Julia there are so many intelligent people out there and you...”. Her upbringing was like that, never any encouraging remark or positive reinforcement. Consequently Julia grew up completely convinced that she did not have any talent either in writing or reading or in anything: she had self-low esteem. In addition, I do not think that she ever thought about the possibility in being able to write: it is one of these things that exist in life, but one considers that it does not belong to you, like for instance, everybody plays to the lottery, but everybody knows that he/she will never win it.

Time passed and Julia began to read, read and read: nobody told her that she had to read! In addition, from time to time she used to write short poems. She still remembers one time in high school that she had a kind of “inspiration” and since she did not have any kind of paper she wrote it with a pencil on the table, and afterwards she read it and before erasing it, she thought: “mm, it is not bad”, so she copied it on paper. Thus, she began to write in an “amateur way”, but always without any perseverance. In Julia’s mind there had been always this idea: “at some point in my life I would like to write a book, however it is so difficult. I admire people who do it!”

More years went on and Julia did not write a book or anything close; merely, from time to time she wrote some thoughts, or feelings. She considered that they were not bad, but always with an idea in the back of her head: I want to write a book, I have to write it, I want

to do it.

Julia, due to several circumstances in life, became good in a language that it was not her mother language. She loved it, and she wanted to have good command of it; in addition, her husband spoke that language and her children spoke that language with him, so she did not want to be behind them. She learnt it tenaciously; she began to read books and wrote using that language. Julia could be very persistent and hard worker, but not in writing.

Julia decided to take a class where they would teach her some techniques to write stories, essays, and articles. She thought that it would be a way to keep fresh that language she loved so much and, maybe, they would even teach her how to be a little more disciplined and write something. However, there was no use, she always had an excuse: now fold the clothes, now wash the dishes, now vacuum, now shopping, now pick up the kids, now I do not know what and always like this, excuses, excuses and excuses. Besides, Julia did not really think that she was able to write a nice story, and whenever she did think so, afterwards had the feeling of being too arrogant: “come on, how a person like me can ever write something nice? Come on, I am just a normal person!”

Julia sometimes used to call a friend of hers who is a writer and asked for advice. She still remembers what she told her one day: “listen Julia I am going to give you some tips. First at all, write, write, and write, it does not matter if you have an idea or not: WRITE! Secondly: be consistent; do not try to write during many hours one day and afterwards, not writing anything for many days. Third, be patient; I think that a writer is a medium between your characters and the paper. Listen to them, they will talk to you, but at their own pace, and there will be a moment when the characters are going to tell you what you are supposed to write. And fourth and last thing: Julia, nobody is a writer until he/she does it”.

One day it happened: she had an idea that she thought could be transformed into a nice story. She had a main character, an eight-years-old kid with desires and frustrations; a beginning, a climax, and an ending; a setting or better said, different set-



tings; other characters very important for the “creation” of her main character; and a plot and a mystery. Now she needed to be consistent and believe that she could create this story. Actually, she was indeed very excited about it and began to work with it. Going to the classes had helped her enormously, but it was too much: she was a little overwhelmed with so many characters, settings, schemes and plots. How to organize all these elements and put them together with some sense? Anyway, she decided she would do it, patiently, listening to her characters. However, time was compelling her to turn in a finished story: she could not do it, at least not this story! Furthermore she told herself once again: “what a stupid idea and how come am I so arrogant believing that I can write a nice story? Forget it, and plus I have to write something shorter so I can finish it soon and turn it in”.

“Psst, psst, hey wake up!”

“Mhmm, mhmm wh...who ar...are you?”

“I well, we, yes we!”

“We? Who are these we?”

“Haki, Sara, Charlotte, Khadi, Maalik, and Robert, and Patrick and Debby. They are WE!”

“OK, great, but let me sleep now, please!”

“Sleep if you want, but remember this: do-not-give-up! You created us and now you have to finish your story, well our story, otherwise we will not be able to rest”

“Come on guys, you are only a product of my imagination, so don’t annoy me and let me sleep!”

“Well maybe we are a product of your imagination, but, do you know? We exist because you made us exist and in order that for us to stop being a product of your imagi-

nation you have to keep writing our story and once it is finished we will be molded in paper not being anymore a product of your imagination. We are still going to exist, but only on the pages of your book, and we will only become alive whenever a reader opens the book and reads it. So, I would finish if I were you, otherwise, since we are only a fantasy, a product of your imagination, we will bug you coming every night! Do you hear us?”

“I...I he...heard you guys, but go away! Gotcha?”

Julia woke up the next morning, and she was not sure if she had had a dream or somebody had visited her the previous night. Nevertheless, she thought about the “strange dream” and decided that she would keep trying writing their story (somehow she did not want to have those “sensitive, strange visitors” every night). However, at that moment she had a different issue: she needed to turn in a finished story. Suddenly, she had an idea: she would write about somebody’s writing’s desire; maybe... her own desires and frustrations? And of course, she would write in third person! Probably she would start the short story saying:

*“She wanted to write; she had to write; but it was not possible. For some years, now, she had this obsession: write, write and write. However, she was not self-disciplined; she only wrote whenever she had an “inspiration”. Carla still remembers when she was at school and they were supposed to write about...”*



Detail from “Dreamer” Acrylic on Canvas by Selina McPhee. Selina.McPhee@gmx.de

# My Mother's Message

## Poem by M.P. Olinger

“Life is a twinkle at a time - life is short” my mother used to say.  
The day she departed, when her heart gave way,  
I looked at my hands, looked at the way, how they changed.

For as she had gone home, departed from earth,  
Her hands became my hands, her smile my smile.  
The next day I heard her call three times my name,  
Whispered with force in a certain way.

Her sound, her perfume, her presence imprinted on me by choice,  
And I felt deep within my soul, the touch of fluttering wings  
Knocking against my aching ribs. Breaking the sadness of loss,

And against all the odds, bubbles of pure joy and bliss escaped my heart.  
Rising up from the deep well within, curling along my spine,  
Love connected us now through time and space,  
And I knew, that she had reached the safety of the other side.

The next day as I woke, she communicated with conviction,  
“Life is not just a twinkle at a time, for life is eternal.”



“The Soul's Flight” Oil on Canvas by M.P. Olinger. Courtesy of MPO Creations. [www.mariepauleolinger.com](http://www.mariepauleolinger.com)



# List of Illustrations

“Remember” Mixed Media on Paper by M.P. Olinger.....	Front Cover
“Orangutan” Photo by Christian Salow.....	Page 4
“Frozen Lake” Photo by M.P. Olinger.....	Page 9
“Pen” Acrylic and Ink on Paper by M.P. Olinger.....	Page 11
“Freedom” Acrylic on Canvas by Selina McPhee.....	Page 13
“Happy Birthday” Pen and Ink by Hye-yeon Cho.....	Page 15
“Sky Spirit” Oil on Canvas by Al Preciado.....	Page 19
“The Skaters Have Left” Photo by M.P. Olinger.....	Page 21
Detail from “Dreamer” Acrylic on Canvas by Selina McPhee.....	Page 23
“The Soul’s Flight” Oil on Canvas by M.P. Olinger.....	Page 24

Congratulations to our VHS students on such a wonderful selection of their work. Courses in creative writing in English were introduced at the VHS by Peggy Preciado in October 2006. Since then our team of writing skills teachers have encouraged their students (many quite new to writing, not to mention writing in a foreign language) to develop their skills and share their work. Following the publication of two beautiful anthologies in 2007 and 2008 I am now thrilled to witness the birth of this semi-annual literary magazine, conceived by our VHS teacher, Patricia Bartholomew. I feel sure that this will embolden many more budding writers to join our courses and discover for themselves how they too can write creatively in English.

Julia Shirtliff  
 Director of Studies, English  
 Volkshochschule Frankfurt am Main

NOW AVAILABLE ON AMAZON.DE OR  
ON FRANKFURTWRITERSGROUP.DE/ANTHOLOGY

a place between worlds  
an anthology by



the frankfurt writers' group

