

# *Schöffling & Co.*

## **foreign rights**

author Ulrike Almut Sandig

title Flamingos

original title Flamingos

© 2010 by Schöffling & Co.

## **English sample translation**

translated by Susan Bernofsky

copyright for  
the translation Susan Bernofsky

contact Kathrin Scheel

email [kathrin.scheel@schoeffling.de](mailto:kathrin.scheel@schoeffling.de)

phone +49 69 92 07 87 16

fax +49 69 92 07 87 20

mail Schöffling & Co.  
Verlagsbuchhandlung GmbH  
Foreign Rights  
Kaiserstraße 79  
60329 Frankfurt am Main  
Germany

www [www.schoeffling.de](http://www.schoeffling.de)

*Mutabor*

The introduction is over and the strings have missed their entrance. Where's the first violin? Mende plays a variation of the first phrase. Just before the strings are to enter, he looks over at the first violin, whose name is Iris. But Iris is looking at Mende's hands on the keyboard and doesn't move. What's wrong? Second entrance missed. Mende turns toward the audience, which has stopped digging around in handbags, taking pictures and showing the person in the next seat which of the children in the string quartet is a family member. Mende turns toward the audience and then back to Iris. He plays something or other that fits the piece. It's the Snow Waltz, which gets rehearsed ad nauseum every autumn, and now it's December, the kids know it by heart, Mende doesn't understand what is suddenly being played or rather not being played here, and he varies a transition to the introduction. Mende plays without looking. He is looking at Iris. Iris, however, is not looking at Mende. Iris is looking at the keys of the piano sinking beneath Mende's age-spotted fingers. She wills herself to concentrate, but her ears are filled with a rushing sound that is distracting her. She thinks: Where did all the music go, where is the piano? Where the hell is Mende when you need him? Iris knows that Mende is sitting there right in front of her and that it is her own blood making the rushing sound in her ears. But she thinks: My head is full of water. There's no music at all left in my head. My head is underwater. Mende looks at Iris. Iris! The other players are holding their bows poised above the string, waiting for her to finally raise her violin to signal them that it's time to start playing. No one moves. All of them are looking at Iris. But Iris is looking at Mende's hands. The keys sink beneath his fingers and then pop back up again. Iris hears only the rushing sound in her ears. Where has the music gone? Where did all this water come from? She squints, keeping her eyes fixed on Mende's piano keys, but try as she might, she just cannot concentrate, it's as if all the music has been washed away, and Iris misses the entrance for the third time now. Mende, seized with despair, goes on playing. He plays some random variation and then, seven measures later, returns to the introduction. Mende turns his head,

thinking: Iris? Iris turns her head, thinking: Anya? But Anya is not sitting behind her cello. Her place is occupied by the new cellist, whose name is Lars and who doesn't even know Anya. So Iris looks at Lars because she's meaning to look at Anya. Lars turns his head in Mende's direction. He is thinking: Herr Mende, do something, damn it, anything! Mende, sitting with his back to Lars, plays the introduction a fourth time. He is looking not at his fingers but at Iris. Mende is not thinking anything more weighty than: The music's playing. Iris? But Iris is looking at Mende's fingers, and all she hears is the loud, constant rushing sound in her head.

Lars is the one who has the least to do with any of this. He doesn't enter into things until Anya's already out of the picture, but by then the story will be over. Because if truth be told it's all about Anya.

Anya with her cello, Iris with her violin. The cherry blossoms in the first allotment garden on the way to the music school are in full bloom, and behind them are blackthorn bushes with brightly colored plastic eggs hanging from them, and the flowerbeds are full of daffodils and compost. Plastic eggs everywhere you look, says Iris. Anya: What color? Iris: All different colors. Anya puts out her left hand and lets it bump along the slats of the picket fence. Ew, it's all wet! she shouts. There's cold slime all over it, fence slime! The cello case on her back reaches even higher than the fence slats and hedges but not as high as the sign posted above the fence: "Welcome to the Stork Communal Garden!" Iris reads aloud. The violin case is straining her wrist, but she doesn't switch it to the other hand because that hand is already holding Anya. Iris looks at Anya. Almost always. Anya looks everywhere and nowhere. Always. Now she laughs and wipes her hand on her anorak. You and your violin case. Not in the mood again today, huh? Iris: You're one to talk, you and your Super Cello. Anya: Fiddle Castro, Fiddle Castro... Do you even know who I'm talking about? Iris: Nope. Anya: All right already, tell me what you see.

In the fourth garden, it smells like someone's hot lunch, in the seventh two men are just burning a pile of damp leaves, smoke rises behind the shed, foul-smelling. That's crazy, Iris says. These Romans are crazy! Anya calls out, laughing. Iris laughs as well. Behind the eighth garden is the last garden shed. On the right are fields and then the Noontime Path, which is called the Noontime Path because the

sun stands directly above it at noon. Iris reports that two white horses and a gelding are standing behind the electrified fence to their left and that warm breath is coming out of their nostrils. Anya: What color? Iris: White. (Anya and Iris have no idea what lies before them. Or rather before Anya. Or rather that there is no longer terribly much lying before Anya, whereas a great deal more still lies before Iris. At the moment all that's lying before them is the canal path and beyond it the music school.) Anya knows the way almost as well as Iris and nonetheless she reaches out her hand toward the electric fence until Iris grabs her and pulls her away. Anya screeches: A-a-h, I-i-i-i-i-i-m d-y-y-y-y-y-i-i-i-i-ng! Are you out of your mind? Iris shouts. Then the path ascends to the bridge over the canal. When they reach the concrete slabs, they grip the railing to steady themselves. Iris leans over the railing and stares into the water. Down below, big black fish are lined up in a row, swimming against the current. The water comes from the steelworks and is rusty brown. Iris reports that the water is dirty today and that you can hardly see the fish. Anya: What color? Iris: Um, reddish. Anya: Like blood. Blood is red. Iris: Come on, Mende starts in fourteen minutes.

On the other side of the canal, the path leads steeply downhill. The air in the reforested area is clammy, and high above the heads of Anya and Iris the midday sun is combing its way through the crowns of the spruce trees. Anya raises her head and opens her eyes as wide as she can, but the forest is already behind them.

Now they cross the gully and pass the gypsy encampment. This is already their second week here, Iris says. I know, Anya says. On the footbridge, two women in long, colorful skirts are washing laundry, even though the gully is even rustier than the canal, but not even Iris can see this now with all the snow-white foam floating on top. The women are wearing colorful woolen scarves over their braids, Iris whispers. And their hair is pitch black! Anya says more loudly: Actually gypsies come from India. Iris stares at the taller girls. They have strong black eyebrows and stand with their hands pressed to their hips, some of them even have breasts already. I want to go to India sometime, Anya says. Iris says: Mende starts in ten minutes.

The music school is in the big prefab building right behind the sports center. The street it's on is called Oak Grove, but there are no oak trees on this street, in fact there aren't any trees at all if Anya and Iris don't count the willow tree in front of the

Lidl supermarket that's been sawed down to its bare trunk. There are teenagers sitting in the entryways to the buildings. They've bought beer at Lidl and are passing the bottles around to achieve an equitable distribution, the first sip always gets spat out on the ground. In front of them, children with bicycles are hanging about. Three minutes until Mende, Iris says, thinking: Don't look at them, just walk right past, keep your cool. Someone calls out: Hey, look at those squirts, they're still just babies and holding hands already! In front of the next building, a boy whistles at them through his fingers. Iris murmurs: It's not for us. Anya agrees, but just to make sure she holds up her middle finger in a random direction. Iris thinks: Where exactly is India?

The music school doesn't have its own space, so all sorts of rooms intended for other subjects are filled with music students on Saturdays. The string ensemble is the only group allowed in the music room, since after all Mende has to accompany them on the piano. From the physics lab upstairs comes choppy accordion music. Tardy woodwinds sprint down the hall. Anya and Iris tighten their bows, bounce them on the backs of their hands to test the tension and then apply the rosin. The second violin and viola are in their seats already, ready to start. It occurs to Mende that the dull gleam of the rosin is like amber, a thought he has every Saturday when the string players arrive. Then he remembers that he wants to show the girls the new piece, the little Mozart minuet whose concluding passage sounds like "the soul's faint song"—who was it who said that?

Time to start! Mende announces in a loud voice, looking at the clock. Anya and Iris shouldn't stand around chattering when they're already so late, thinks the second violin, whose name is Madlen, cracking her fingers one after the other and then starting from the beginning again: crack! The viola, a chubby nine-year-old whose name, strangely, is Viola, is thinking that she didn't practice. Iris giggles because Anya is singing an Udo Lindenberg song under her breath: "You played the cello, in every concert hall in town, I always sat right up in front because you really turned me on." It's twenty after twelve, and Mende, sitting on the piano stool, turns around and plays an A. Out of the corner of his eye, he glimpses sudden motion outside the window. It's snowing for Chrissakes. In the middle of April.

Winter's here, Iris announces ninety minutes later, standing outside the front gate. Cold enough for you? Gossamery carpets of snow are drifting across the concrete. Anya presses her hands against Iris's face. She doesn't have any gloves in her pockets. Iris gives a laugh, removes Anya's hands from her face and taps a finger against Anya's dirty left hand: Did you really play Mozart like this? Anya fingers her left palm, and now she remembers: Oh, that's right, that fence was really disgusting. But let's go get some ice cream now, okay?

Twenty-five degrees. Anya and Iris are standing in front of the supermarket, frozen to the bone, Anya with her Smurf-flavored ice cream, Iris unwrapping a cone. The teenagers from before have left, the square is deserted, cash register receipts are blowing across the slabs of concrete. Anya holds onto her ice cream through the sleeve of her anorak as she licks away at it. Her eyes are pointed in the direction of the illuminated sign at the entrance to the supermarket as if she were able to read the oversized, gleaming blue letters L,I, D and L.

Iris: What are you staring at? Anya: Have a look yourself. Iris: There's just the light-up sign. Can you see it or what? Anya: Of course I see it. It's so bright! Iris: What color is it then? Anya: Bright. And what color am I? Iris: Red fingers, bright blue lips. Anya: Red and blue are jester's hues, and yellow... Iris: What about me? Anya: ...is a silly fellow! Iris: What about me? Can you see me too? Anya: Of course I see you. You look a mess!

Do Anya and Iris ever quarrel? Not really. They always come to music school together, and they always leave together too. As for who is holding whose hand, well, that's an matter of opinion. Anya always looks forward to string quartet on Saturdays, and Iris looks forward more to the walk there and back. But sometimes Iris has to make the trip alone.

Iris: What do you mean you can't?

Anya: I'm supposed to go to the eye doctor.

Iris: You lucky dog! I want to go to the doctor some time when there's music school. But of course I'm not—

Anya: I'm not blind.

Iris: —

Anya: I can see dark and light, and that's the main thing, so I'm not blind.

Iris: —

Anya: Not really blind anyhow, are you listening?

Iris: —

Anya: I'm not really blind.

Iris: —

Anya: If you ever say that again, I'm mean say that I'm blind or anything like that.

Iris: Anya?

Anya: Forget it.

This guy in his mid-40s is sitting at the edge of the sports field. He is an employee of the shipping company DRIVE 'N' FLY, and his son has just flunked his graduating exam, but that's beside the point at the moment because the cup of beer in his hand is hovering in the air halfway to his mouth. The guy in his mid-40s is listening to the Mozart minuet being played by the string quartet, and he thinks: Whatever it is those kids are playing, it sounds as though there were someone inside me singing.

Madlen and Viola, Iris and Anya are sitting on the sports field, holding Mozart's last note. "Mezzopiano vibrato" is written beneath the line of music, but the viola and the second violin can't manage vibrato yet, and Iris can't really play vibrato yet either, she just wobbles the one finger rather than moving her whole hand, which looks stupid and is much too slow, it's a good thing that Anya at least has vibrato, Iris thinks. Anya isn't thinking anything at all. Anya is playing. She's the only one without a music stand in front of her. Anya plays from memory and with her eyes open wide. At home, she ran her fingers over the individual notes. Ran her fingers over the notes until she had the entire minuet in her head. Anya can't see much. How much can she see? Does Anya see colors? At the moment all Mende can see are the black and white keys of the electric keyboard in front of him, he's working so hard he doesn't even see his hands. Before the school fair he felt stage fright, but that is something Mende feels every time his string ensemble performs. Now Iris raises her violin, meaning that it's the last note, a whole note, and then: it's over. Finished. Done, Iris thinks. Mende turns to face the girls and only afterward turns to the audience. His face is glowing. He bows, beaming. Applause!

Music starts coming out of the loudspeakers again, the parents in the audience remain seated where they are or else go to get a bockwurst, the chemistry teacher, who is wearing shorts (and Uncle Scrooge socks, Iris later reports to Anya) stands with his back to Mende and the string players, clapping and announcing the next act in the school's summer festival: That's right, a hearty round of applause for our strings, but NOW, dear parents and students, class 7b is ready to present to you their fashion show TEEN BIRDS FLY HIGH! On the edge of the field to the right, three first graders are practicing the funky chicken, wagging their elbows and bottoms. The string quartet loosens their bows and packs up their instruments. Mende is just standing around, still beaming, he wants to say something but can't think of anything. It's the second to last week of school and rather warm. He's opened the top buttons of his shirt, revealing thick, snow-white chest hair. When he takes the cello case from Anya to put it away in the gym, she thinks: Mende smells of coffee, he almost doesn't smell like a grown-up at all. Mende thinks: The ending really did sound like a faint song of the soul, even with the stuttery vibrato. Iris asks Anya: Want to come get ice cream? Anya in reply: Of course, four scoops!

Four scoops each? That was the math teacher who is selling the ice cream. A festive pink garland is draped over her permanent. She has beads of sweat on her nose and lipstick on her mouth, Iris whispers in Anya's ear. Anya asks: What color? Iris: Purple. Anya says aloud: Purple, ick. Both of them grab their cones and leave her standing there. Iris is sweating. Anya is sweating too but doesn't give it any thought, she just licks at her ice cream. She has four scoops, and Iris has two. Everything is just like every year. The schoolyard is dusty, Mende is standing across the way at the bockwurst stand digging in his wallet. Parents with and without children and a bunch of teachers gradually start moving back toward the sports field. The fashion show has come to an end, now it's time for the soap box derby, starting precisely (the chemistry teacher claps his hands and bellows:) NOW! The upper classes built their own boxes, Iris sees a zinc bathtub on wheels and an inflatable rubber boat mounted on a chassis. Then she discovers a huge cardboard box with two hairy male legs in roller skates sticking out of the bottom. But Anya interrupts her: What color is my ice cream? Iris: Blue. Anya: You're lying, it's brown. Iris:



How do you know? Anya: Don't play tricks on me, Iris. Never, do you hear?  
Chocolate ice cream is always brown. Oh, it's so hot here!

Beneath the weeping willow behind the sports field it is cool. Green light falls through the twigs. Iris keeps still, licking at her ice cream and thinking about algae. How about becoming a diver, Anya?

Sure, in India for example. And dive all the way down to where the blind fish are.  
The blind fish?

They live at the very bottom of the big oceans, where it's too deep for any light to reach. It's so dark there, Iris, so incredibly dark, that only the blind fish can stand it.

Blind fish... Someone should drag some of them up to the surface.

If you drag one up it'll die on the spot.

Why?

When you drag it up it gets ripped into little pieces.

The weeping willows are planted in a thick row that runs halfway around the sports field. Anya is making her way through the curtain of twigs to the second willow trunk. Hurry, Iris, we're underwater! Anya starts running with Iris behind her, the second willow is bigger than the first, even though it didn't look like it from the outside, Iris thinks. From outside all that is visible of Iris and Anya are their blurred shadows. Anya is leading the way. She sees pale gray shadows brushing past her. Come on, Iris, we're swimming! Iris, licking her ice cream, walks slowly behind Anya. Anya is wearing her dark green dress that was light blue just a minute ago when they were outside. Now it's dark green, Iris thinks, looking down at herself. Her red skirt is now purple! Anya hangs onto a hanging branch, twirling around in a circle once and then again, laughing her head off. Her teeth are gleaming white. Anya can laugh and lick her ice cream at the same time, Iris thinks. Anya shouts: Iris! Indian Ocean! She stumbles into the fourth willow, kicking off her sandals. The grass is still damp. One of her scoops of ice cream falls to the ground, but it doesn't matter. She runs out in front, shouting: Iris! Try this! Iris too stops and takes off her shoes, and Anya, rolling her eyes to look up, walks backwards through the next curtain of algae. Anya bites into her cone, the third scoop tastes like vanilla, hmm! Iris is still sweating. She wonders whether it is possible to sweat

underwater, but is she asking this aloud or just thinking it? Anya, in any case, does not reply, she just turns around and runs under the next willow tree. Bright green sunlight is shining through the masses of water. Anya sticks out her tongue to lick the spots of light, her tongue is yellow. Iris sticks her own tongue out to copy Anya. A school of flat fish is assembled beneath the crown of the tree. Blind fish or not? Anya lays her arm around Iris's neck and pulls her under the next tree. Iris is meanwhile licking her ice cream again, it is violet or red, maybe strawberry? Anya leaves her arm on Iris's neck and reaches out her other arm to grab at a few hanging willow twigs and pull on them: the Indian Ocean is set in motion, is it a storm coming up? It's a storm, we have to get back to the diving base! Anya lets go of Iris and runs under the next willow with her arms outstretched. It's too far to the base, let's go to the coral reefs instead! Iris shouts: Let's go to the caves, we'll be safe there! Anya and Iris make rowing motions with their arms, the long twigs part, here's the next tree. This way! Anya screams, having run to the gristly willow trunk. Iris! But Iris is tugging on the branches. The ocean sways, a typhoon! Now Iris runs over to Anya: There's a coral reef up there, hurry, get in! She clasps her hands to give Anya a boost, her foot is dirty and wet, she pulls herself up, groping her way up to where the branches fork. Hurry, Iris! This storm will be the death of us! Iris reaches for Anya's outstretched hand and pulls herself up. Oh, the coral is cutting into my flesh, she screeches, having scraped her ankle on the bark. Now both of them are perched up there. The coral reef gleams red and blue and snow-white. Iris heaves a sigh: Safe at last. The storm will pass soon. She licks her ice cream. Yep, strawberry. But Anya, gaping, is looking up into the crown of the tree. She sees bright strings of light. A shark, there's a shark living in this cave, Iris, we've got to get out of here! Anya is already flying. She lands on all fours in the grass. Raising her hand with the cone in it, she laughs: Damn it, the shark got my ice cream! The scoop of ice cream is lying in the grass one meter away from her. With a screech, Iris jumps, flies and lands beside Anya. He didn't get her ice cream. Anya rolls her eyes back in her head again until Iris can barely see anything but white. There, right behind you! The shark! Iris screams: The shark, the shark! Anya and Iris make rowing motions with their arms, gasping for breath, running and running and then landing somewhere on the grass right behind the sand pit for the broad jump. Anya stumbles into the pit and collapses. Saved! India, India.

Anya and Iris side by side. Anya on her back and Iris on her belly. They dig their toes into the warm sand and listen to the voice of the chemistry teacher announcing the winners of the soap-box derby. Then the school band starts playing. Anya doesn't notice Iris raising her head and squinting at the sun and then propping her head in her hand to look at Anya.

Meanwhile Anya's and Iris's parents are sitting on benches at the edge of the sports field. Anya's father and Iris's mother are drinking pilsner, Iris's father is biting into a bratwurst, and Anya's mother is digging in her bag for the Polaroid camera, but none of them plays a role in this story. It isn't even an important story for Iris's parents. For Anya's parents, everything they can remember will be of the utmost importance. Anya won't remember at all. But Iris will. Nonetheless, the parents are there the entire time, they send Anya and Iris to music school, they accompany Anya to the eye doctor and Iris to the library, they call them to dinner, send them to bed at approximately the same hour or else just sit there and are present, just as they are now. Iris's mother is just throwing back her head and laughing because the school band is playing an Elvis Presley song. Iris doesn't see this because she's got her back to them as she stands on the dance floor, but she too throws her head back, also because of Elvis Presley: Oh man, Anya, they keep playing all these oldies, no wonder no one's dancing. Anya shrugs and grabs Iris by the arms: Come on, let's dance anyhow. How do you mean? We just won't listen, cries Anya, letting go of Iris to jump into the air with both legs.

At precisely this moment Anya's mother takes a picture: (After this she places the Polaroid beside her on the wooden bench and therefore misses the fog on the photographic paper and then the silhouettes of Anya and Iris getting darker and darker. Iris is looking at Anya. Anya is flying. At the right-hand edge of the picture, far behind Iris and Anya, Mende is sitting on a bench smiling at something outside the picture.) Click.

Iris stands still, watching Anya jump and hover in the air and then land again and spin in a circle. Iris is holding her ears closed. She hears the faint sound of Elvis and the loud sound of her own blood. Anya holds an air microphone to her lips and sings: “You played the cello, in every concert hall in town, I always sat right up in front because you really TURNED ME ON.” Iris shouts: That isn’t Elvis! Anya giggles and shouts back: Of course I’m not Elvis! Iris, jump! And Iris jumps along with her. Mende is watching from the opposite edge of the sports field as he sips his coffee from the vending machine, thinking: They look like young storks about to jump out of the nest. Mende really does think “jump” and not “fly.” Even though that would mean someone was jumping from above to below, in other words falling instead of flying. Nonetheless Mende thinks: About to jump.

Sometimes Mende really doesn’t feel like having a rehearsal. He gets up after the warm-up etudes, meaning to go over to Anya, who once again has got the bowing wrong. She can’t see how everyone else is moving their bows, but it doesn’t sound like it’s supposed to. It sounds upside-down, can’t she hear that? So Mende is meaning to go over to Anya, he turns away from the piano and gets up. But when he is standing directly in front of her, he suddenly doesn’t feel like making music any more, or at least not this string ensemble music. One or the other of the girls is almost always out of synch, the music almost always sounds clumsy. Mende then stops directly in front of Anya who has heard his footsteps and doesn’t know what to expect. Anya’s cheeks are burning. Then Mende raises his head in the direction of the windows and can’t help smiling. Anya doesn’t know he is smiling. Mende thinks: What’s the point anyhow.

The coffeemaker sits on the windowsill. Mende walks within a hair’s breadth of Anya, turns on the coffeemaker and opens the window. Anya thinks: What now? Iris is shaking out her right hand because she’s been gripping the bow too tightly yet again. The viola knows exactly what’s coming. Madlen takes her chin off the violin. Iris is staring out the window. Outside summer is at its peak. Mende and the string quartet hear a distant moving van maneuvering into a parking spot, the chugging of mopeds on the driveway in front of the school, a bicycle bell and the gurgling of the coffee machine. Anya hears a bit more as well. She hears the breath of every single person in the room, she hears that Mende is breathing out the window, that Iris is not

moving at all (Anya knows Iris is daydreaming) and that the viola is scratching her neck. Mende, sitting on the windowsill, says: The way you're playing, there's no point.

Anya does not turn in his direction. Does he mean me? Am I that bad or what? But Mende isn't thinking about Anya, he's thinking about his own ears. He casts about for examples, but all he can think of is the tale of Caliph Stork. In point of fact these girls are too old for fairy tales, or else not old enough. But all Mende can think of is Caliph Stork, and he tries to explain how the caliph and his grand vizier came to be in possession of the magic powder and that the box also held a letter written in Latin containing the magic word MUTABOR along with the warning that a person who has transformed himself into the animal of his choice must not under any circumstances laugh or else he will forget the magic word by means of which he can assume his original form once more. The caliph and his grand vizier made their way to a pond where they found a real stork parading earnestly up and down. At the same time they noticed a second stork that was just landing. Surely their conversation will be worth hearing, the two friends thought, and they used the powder to turn themselves into two large splendid white storks. And so the caliph and his grand vizier began prancing about on their long legs near the two real birds and heard the stork who had just landed telling her companion that she was practicing a dance that she was planning to perform that evening before her father's guests—and then Mende tells how the one stork performs the dance for her friend. Mende turns to face the girls, bends his arms, lifts one leg and then replaces it gently on the floor (one girl giggles), and then he lifts the other and holds it suspended for a short while in the air of the music room (two girls giggle), turning his head from one girl to another and forwards and back like a stork clattering its beak (three girls giggle), Mende is his own stork, and the violins are, by turns, the grand vizier and the caliph (three girls laugh out loud) and they lay down their instruments, convulsed with laughter. Except for Anya, who is smiling in a strange way, but Mende doesn't see her smiling in this way, he is already going on to relate that the caliph and his grand vizier are convulsed with laughter watching the stork's dance, laughing until their eyes are filled with tears, and Mende's eyes are filled with tears from laughing so hard, and then he asks the girls: What was the magic word for changing back again? But either he hadn't told it to the girls after all or they really forgot it with all that

laughter, and Mende puts his leg back down on the linoleum and turns back into Mende again, he bends down over the coffee machine which is now finished and pours himself a cup of coffee, and then Mende says: But I told you what the magic word was, did I not? I said it loud and clear, oh yes, I did. But you were laughing so hard you forgot it. Because it's a magic word, and that's exactly how it works with music too. When you're playing music, you have to forget everything. Everything. Do you understand? MUTABOR! MUSIC! MUTABOR!

That's more or less how he did it, Anya. Anya? Iris is standing in front of her, flapping her bent arms, and has lifted up one leg with the other standing stiffly in the grass. Anya is lying on her back. She hasn't said anything since music class. She is staring straight ahead. Her face is ablaze in the sunlight, but the sun doesn't burn her eyes even though she's staring right into it. Nonetheless they are watering. Anya sees white and nothing more. To hell with Mende, Anya is thinking. To hell with Mende. To hell with storks. To hell with all that violin crap. Crap crap crap.

Anya! Iris is still standing there on one leg. Don't you want to know how Mende did the stork? Come feel! Anya blinks and braces one elbow against the ground, then the other, now she's sitting up. She reaches out her arm, which strikes Iris's knee. Iris keeps her balance all the same, just barely. Anya reaches out her other arm and strikes empty air. Missed. Iris says: Oh, Anya. Anya doesn't say anything. She sniffs and rubs her eyes with her wrist. Then she squats down in front of Iris and puts out both her hands. Anya feels Iris's left foot on the dry grass, her left shin with the soft down on it, her knee and her right foot which is hanging in mid-air and wobbling a little. Anya gropes her way up the right leg. Iris has stuck her bottom out as ridiculously as possible and her right knee is bent at pelvis height. Now Anya has reached Iris's arms, the t-shirt is damp at the armpits, and Iris flaps her arms gently as Anya's hands run down them. That's what he did, do you see, Anya? (Iris really says: Do you see?) Iris giggles. Anya can't help smiling. Anya runs her hands all the way up to Iris's neck, so Iris sticks out her neck and slowly turns it in all directions and forward and back. Anya grins. Now her hand is on Iris's face. Iris peers between Anya's fingers at Anya, who is asking: He didn't do anything with his face? That's supposed to be a stork? Iris thinks it over. She purses her lips, raises her eyebrows and flutters her eyelashes. Anya opens her eyes wide and laughs: You

silly stork! He never did that! Anya gives Iris a light punch in the belly. She doesn't miss. Iris laughs and finally loses her balance.

So Anya and Iris are lying there in the grass at the edge of the canal. Directly above them, a buzzard is lying on a warm layer of air, observing Anya, Iris and all the hiding places of all the smaller animals in the surrounding area. Iris is looking back; Anya isn't, of course. The last week of school before summer vacation is now behind them, along with the last quartet rehearsal. It's Saturday then. Today the gypsies are packing up their camp behind the bit of woods. Men are shouting to each other. Cars are pulling out of parking spots. One of them is backfiring, and a second has all its windows rolled down with the radio at full blast. Then come four trailers creeping along in first gear, and six older girls who are standing in everyone's way as they wait for a few local boys to come say goodbye to them. A snow-white dog with red eyes and three legs is drinking the dirty water from the ditch. Then he runs over to the car with its windows rolled down and barks at the driver. Iris and Anya see none of this, but the noise makes its way through the woods and arrives somewhat muted on the bank of the canal. In the water, two big black fish are swimming in place, but Anya and Iris don't see even them, they are lying, now with their eyes closed, on their backs. Iris says: The gypsies stuck around for five months. Anya doesn't say anything, instead she sits up and takes off her t-shirt. Iris, squinting, turns to look at her. Anya, with her eyes open as far as they will go, staring at the sun. Her arms are crossed behind her head. Why do you want to get tan in the first place? Iris asks.

Anya: So that people will look at me and everyone will think I'm pretty.

Iris: But you won't even know if people are looking at you, you're blind.

During the thirty minutes that follow, Iris doesn't move at all, while Anya moves a great deal. Iris sees Anya sitting up again abruptly and then slowly, very slowly turning her head to the side (Anya hears Iris breathing in her direction. Is she doing anything else? Laughing, crying, anything! Making a remark about how that was a stupid joke just now, who knows! But all Iris does is breathe. What Iris is doing is: nothing at all), and then Iris sees Anya groping for her sandals, abruptly getting to her feet, pulling on her t-shirt, heaving the cello case abruptly onto her back, and

then turning around and walking away. Rear view of Anya with the cello case on her back, Anya stumbling at the point where the embankment meets the road, she hesitates for a moment and then walks off in the direction of the allotment gardens, Anya is walking ramrod straight, holding out her right arm. Anya's hand bumps along the slatted fences, eighth garden, seventh garden, sixth garden, Anya does not turn around, fourth garden, Anya is walking jerkily somehow and still Iris does: nothing. Iris watches Anya's cello case getting smaller and smaller until it reaches the bend in the road behind the first garden. And then she's gone. The canal is a rushing sound in Iris's ears.

In Mende's ears the winter is making a rushing sound, even though it's only the end of August. The intersection in front of the building is clogged with vacationers on their way home. The windows of the cars are rolled down, the radios turned up to full blast. Now and then a motorcycle roars past in the middle of the road, a Bofrost frozen foods delivery man rings a doorbell somewhere down the block or someone bursts into laughter. But Mende has closed the windows, he's sitting at the piano playing "A Winter's Journey" and looking at his hands (seven new age spots). Mende is singing along under his breath: "My heart, do you now recognize your image in this stream? Might such a torrent be raging, might such a torrent be raging beneath its icy crust?" Then he interrupts his playing, stretches and walks over to the TV. Just before the screen fills with an image, Mende sees himself waiting. Mende waiting, reflected in the screen, Mende waiting for something to happen. Mende with his freshly shaved chin in the dark green glass. Mende in his ironed shirt although it's vacation now and he's not going to see anyone anyhow, except of course his own mirror image. So that's what things look like, Mende murmurs, that's how things look.

Then the picture arrives. Wheel of Fortune. Someone from Göttingen buys the letter A, and Maren Giltzer turns four illuminated cubes. Mende thinks of his girls, the string players. Viola. Madlen. Iris. Anya. Anya with her eyes askew. Mende never knows which of Anya's eyes is actually looking at him. Though actually Anya isn't looking at him at all. Anya with her vibrato. Anya and Iris like storks about to jump. (Yet again Mende thinks: about to jump.) After this, Mende doesn't think anything at all for a little while. The idea he's looking for is still illegible.



The telephone rings. Iris picks up.  
Anya: Why haven't you called me?  
Iris: –  
Anya: Why haven't you come by?  
Iris: –  
Anya: Don't act as though I don't know what looks good.  
Iris: –  
Anya: Don't ever do that again—act as though I don't know!  
Iris: –  
Anya: I can see just as well as you.  
Iris: –  
Anya: Actually.  
Iris: –  
Anya: And listen, actually it's you who's always holding on to me when we walk, not me holding on to you.  
Iris: –  
Anya: Not me holding on to you, got it?  
Iris: – Listen, Anya...  
Anya: Do you get that?  
Iris: Listen, Anya. Come outside, I've got something to show you.

Sunday, the tenth of August, oppressive heat. Anya is sitting in front of the gate. Three front gardens over, someone is watering the grass. On the opposite side of the street, a German shepherd is mechanically barking at the swallows zooming at eye level through the courtyards and across the empty tarred road. Anya's feet in their sandals are dusty and sweaty. Then she hears the bicycle. It rattles across the hot tar, making right for Anya. Iris brakes right in front of Anya's outstretched hands. Iris, wow! Where'd you get that? Anya, standing in front of the bicycle, grabs the handlebars with both hands. She opens her eyes wide and pulls herself down close to the handlebars: a light gray shimmering in front of her eyes. Anya: Can I ride? Iris: How do you mean?

And then Iris is nonetheless sitting up front on the bicycle with Iris on the baggage rack. Both of them hear the wind kicking up, the clicking of the gearshift on the empty tar road, and the squeaking sound the baggage rack makes under Anya's weight. And then Anya and Iris make their way down the street, Iris is steering, with Anya holding on tight to her, and Iris is hoping that this will never end, never! And then the wind kicks up a bit more, because Iris is pedaling faster and because Anya has stuck her head out from behind Iris's back, opening her eyes wide as she faces straight ahead so she can feel the air rushing past her eyes as they race forward. And then the wind picks up even more, and from behind the canal Anya hears a first rumble, but Iris doesn't hear it. Iris hears the air streaming past them and the bell and Anya opens her mouth behind Iris and gulps down the air and then again, and then she laughs and takes another gulp (like a diver who's just come up for air, Iris thinks), until a first proper gust plunges down her throat. It feels like she's suffocating but better! Anya shouts, and the air racing past whistles in both their ears. And then Iris, exhausted, lets the bicycle coast and then rings the bell again, and Anya hears the metal blades spinning on the wind farm far behind them, she hears a low-hanging electrical cable humming above her on the left, and that Iris is still coasting, and beside her on the right Anya hears a heavy flapping of wings and shouts: Iris! Look out, on the right! Iris brakes and looks just in time to see the heron taking flight, the heron that must have been standing in the ditch beside the road. Now it flies directly above Anya's and Iris's heads across the street, clumsily disappearing from Anya's field of hearing. Iris gets off the bicycle and beams at Anya. And for just an instant Iris thinks that Anya is looking at her too. For just as brief a moment Anya thinks that Iris is looking in the same direction she is, that is: straight ahead, from where the storm is coming. When Anya hears the first heavy drops bursting against the tar, she says: My turn.

Anya, really! Iris protests, and then shuts her mouth again because Anya has abruptly grabbed the handlebars and plops her foot on the pedal. (I am not blind.) Iris lets go of the handlebars. Anya: You watch, I ride. Iris: — ok.

And at just this instant the rain starts in for real. And since rainwater landing on tar has a completely different effect than rain striking the bushes beside the road, which also sounds completely different from the rain falling in the ditch, where it also falls differently than the rain hitting the cornfield or the woods at the outer edge

of Anya's field of hearing, and since it sounds different when it strikes the sign when you first enter town, the metal struts of the first fences, the hedges and the slabs that make up the sidewalk, since the rain impinges somewhat differently on every surface, Anya knows exactly where she has to steer the bicycle, and she calmly rides back into town, she rides around the bend in the main road and directly up to the bus stop, where she brakes, gets off and finally waits for Iris who, soaking wet, breathless and in shock, has been running along behind her own bicycle.

Iris and Anya side by side on the molded plastic seats at the bus stop. Iris sees: Black bird stickers on the glass, rain streaking the pane and the last lighting flash. Anya hears: The roar of thunder, a far-off siren and the rainwater running off the street. Iris: Since when can you ride a bicycle? Anya: Oh, I always could. But only when it's raining.

And now the rain keeps coming. Mende doesn't yet know this, he opens his front door and stands outside. It's really pouring. On the median in the middle of the intersection stands a white, three-legged dog as if it had just tumbled out of the sky, barking at the traffic. Mende can't hear it, he pulls his parka up to his chin and walks the six hundred meters to the school. It's the first day of the new school year. A new game with a new jackpot. Is this the jackpot? Mende wonders. His pants are still glued to his legs until the fourth class of the day, his shoes remain wet and make a slapping sound when he walks down the hall. Four teachers have called in sick, Mende is assigned to fill in. Silence reigns in the teachers' lounge, no one feels like sharing their vacation stories, least of all Mende. The copy machine is occupied non-stop, and wet coats are draped over all the chairs to dry. During every full recess period, he goes to the vending machine for a cup of black Dallmayr coffee to ward off the cold spreading from his feet. His students are all tan and walk by Mende without seeing him. Rain batters the thin windowpanes in the music room. So this is Monday, thinks Mende...

...and then comes Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday. But on Saturday the string quartet will come to rehearse, and this he is in fact looking forward to. Four times he runs into Viola, Madlen and Iris when they are changing rooms, but they are different than on Saturdays. They have backpacks hanging from one

shoulder and walk past him without seeing him. Once Iris is standing there in front of the vending machine. She suddenly spins around and is looking him right in the face. Mende does his best imitation of a conspiratorial smile. Iris nods, says hello (morning, Herr Mende) and then walks off. As if he were invisible. Mende bites his lower lip. Is mediocre quartet coaching all it takes to become invisible? Not in his opinion! (Iris has no opinion on the matter, she's already forgotten all about Mende, she is thinking of Anya and the fact that she will surely want to go for a bike ride today since it's raining.) After this, Mende too starts thinking about Anya, though Anya isn't any different from the other girls, he thinks, it's just that she goes to a special school. She has to learn the Braille notes by heart because she can't get to them with her fingers while she's playing. She's got the best vibrato, it's just that she isn't here.

The rain keeps falling, but Mende nonetheless continues to walk to school every day and then stands soggily before each of his classes. He goes through "A Winter's Journey" with the eighth grade class. He tells them that Schubert was the 12<sup>th</sup> of 16 children and that besides him only four of the others lived to see adulthood. The eighth graders do not bat an eyelid. But in fact that doesn't have anything at all to do with music, Mende says loudly, and then turns to the lesson itself: The cycle of 24 songs for voice and piano that Schubert finished in the fall of 1827, one year before his death. The complete title: *Winterreise*—A Winter's Journey. A Cycle of Songs by Wilhelm Müller. Composed for voice accompanied by the pianoforte, by Franz Schubert. This will be on the test, so please write it in your notebooks. Mende is standing to the left of the teacher's desk, he can feel his temples pounding and hears the words of a children's rhyme running through his head: The place here to my right is free, I wish Anya were here with me.

In the evenings Mende sits in front of the television looking for crime dramas. He doesn't consult the program guide, he's hoping to just get lucky. Mende wants to see corpses, genuine TV blood and hematomas, the tears of the bereaved and criminals guilty beyond a doubt just before the final credits. He doesn't go out. Too wet. (Mende finds himself completely lacking in humor.) Shortly before midnight he sometimes sits down again at the piano. Schubert yet again, he wouldn't even consider playing anything different. Mende gazes at his hands. During the introduction, the right hand approaches the left (three new age spots). Outside a dog

is barking, but Mende doesn't hear it. But why play "A Winter's Journey" in the middle of the first week of September? Mende decides to blame his syllabus. The time is 12:05 a.m., and Mende is playing D minor and singing at the top of his lungs: "A stranger I arrived, and a stranger now I go. The month of May was kind to me with flowers of every hue."

September sixth, finally it's Saturday. New game, new jackpot, Mende thinks as he yanks open his front door. Now the rain is no harder than the spray from a spray can, and the water lands almost soundlessly upon the pond that formed between Monday and Friday in the intersection in front of Mende's apartment building. Almost as quietly, though with surprising swiftness, the traffic slides around the traffic island, all the tires half-submerged in the brackish water. Sometimes pieces of paper float past. Between the parking spots across from Mende's house, a dirty white dog is standing in water up to its belly, silent. It is a quarter to one, and Mende hasn't noticed the dog. He sets out.

At the same time, Anya and Iris have made a stopover on the canal bridge. Anya has her cello, Iris her violin. Iris is pedaling, Anya sits behind her. The water of the canal has risen to just below the arch of the bridge. Iris's violin case wobbles, but it remains on the handlebars as she leans out over the railing to spit into the water. Anya gives a start, jumps off the baggage rack and leans out so far over the railing that she can hardly keep her balance. Anya listens to the current. Is the water really high? Iris: We ought to go diving. For real, with oxygen tanks and everything. Anya: — (Anya is listening to the water in the canal.) Iris: This damn violin, I hate it. Anya: — (Anya hears the light rain falling on the surface of the canal.) Iris: Damn violin. In ten minutes Mende's starting. Anya: — (Anya is listening to the Indian Ocean, Indian piranhas, razor-sharp coral reefs at high tide.)

What happens next doesn't officially have anything to do with how this story ends. Nonetheless Iris will think that it's all Mende's fault. At the moment, Iris isn't thinking anything at all, she clenches her teeth and concentrates on her staccato. The quartet has finished its warm-up exercises: E major scale, E minor scale, an etude for shifting from first to third position and back again. Mende distributed the music for the new piece before the start of summer vacation, above all because of Anya, so that

she would have time to feel her way through it in advance. It's a song from "A Winter's Journey" arranged for intermediate-level string players, just right for the girls. And, interestingly, it is Anya who is to play the part originally for voice on her cello while the other strings and the piano accompany her. But in this first lesson after summer vacation, Anya... Mende gives a start. Anya isn't fully present. She is sitting there on her chair reeling off the notes, but that isn't music, Anya is merely PLAYING them and nothing more. She keeps staring the whole time at the window where the rain is running down the glass. Even though she can't see the window or the rain. She's blind, after all. In any case she doesn't look at Mende, not one single time.

The quartet is just working its way through the staccato passage on the first page when Mende suddenly breaks off mid-note.

All of them turn to look at Mende, but Mende doesn't say anything yet, he doesn't even turn around. Mende just leaves his hands where they are, lying on the chord he's just played. He removes his foot from the pedal. The chord breaks off. He stares at his hands. And since Mende is doing this, Iris stares at his hands as well. The second violin and the viola see only Mende's back. Anya raises her head. All of them wait. And then Mende hears himself saying;

I just cannot believe it. It's unbelievable. The music is sitting there right in front of you in plain sight, and you, Anya, you've already played your way through it all, haven't you? But listening to you, a person could think you were all as blind as Anya. All of you. It's unbelievable. Are you just pretending, or are you refusing to see? Do you really not want to see that you yourselves are nothing other than this wanderer himself? And his heartbeat—how can you not hear this?—these accompanying eighth notes are nothing other than his heart. For goodness' sake, anyone who has a heart must be able to sense this. And as for the words "with a hard, stiff crust you have covered yourself, lying motionless and cold stretched out in the sand"—are you picturing this? The staccato is the crust of ice over the river—but it's you yourselves who are frozen over, don't you have eyes in your head, don't you know what it is you are playing here, ARE YOU REALLY SO BLIND?

That was it. No one says a word. Not even Mende. The viola and the second violin stare at the back of Mende's neck. Did he really say these words? Iris is still holding her violin to her chin. Mende goes on staring at his fingers. So does Iris. Then he shakes his head as if not a word of what he said was anything but the truth. He straightens his back and goes on playing at exactly the same place he left off. Behind him, a chair is pushed back. Besides this, Mende hears only himself and the end of the last song of "A Winter's Journey," in E minor, which he's using to introduce the piece. Mende doesn't hear Anya getting up, resting her cello on the edge of her chair, loosening her bow, placing both cello and bow in their case beneath the windowsill, nor does Mende hear Anya's unsteady steps across the room, Mende goes on playing E minor until Anya has found the door handle. She presses the handle down and distinctly says: Bye. Mende turns his head. Anya does not. Anya steps through the door and is outside. Mende picks up both his hands and turns to face his string players. The ones who are still sitting there look first at the door and then at him.

Iris catches up with Anya at the bicycle rack, where she is squatting down next to Iris's bicycle working on the lock. When she feels Iris's hand on her back, she doesn't turn around. Give me a hand opening this. I'll go on ahead. Iris: You can't just leave like this! Anya finally gets the lock open, pulls the bicycle out of the rack and says: When it's raining, I can ride as well as you can. Iris: But you're still blind all the same!

Anya, flinching, turns her head to the side. She listens carefully to hear if Iris is going to say anything else and she herself says nothing. (I am not blind.) Then she lets the bicycle fall. It crashes down on the concrete. She hears the spokes turning in the drizzly air as she is already reaching out her hand to touch the metal fence of the schoolyard. She more or less knows her way home, no big deal! Her hand bumps along the iron fence posts. Then along the wall of the first building. Next is the supermarket with the illuminated sign above the entryway. Then two side streets and a right turn at the intersection to enter the sports center, and from there she can easily find her way home. Anya stumbles and keeps running. Iris remains behind. She is standing ramrod-stiff beside the bicycles when Mende finally reaches the schoolyard himself with the cello case in his hand and sprints past her. Mende shouts: Anya!

But Anya is already too far away. Mende thinks: My fault! My fault! Iris thinks: Mende's fault. Not mine.

Now Anya has reached the intersection. Since she can't find the traffic light for pedestrians, she simply takes the short cut right across the street, there's hardly any traffic anyhow. After four quick steps she stops in her tracks, listening to a car driving through the water. There's water everywhere. In the middle of the intersection. Pretty deep too. Why is she only now noticing that it's up to her ankles? Lord only knows, Anya thinks. Then she remembers Mende. Anya hears him saying: A person could think you were all as blind as Anya. ARE YOU REALLY SO BLIND? She doesn't hear Mende calling her.

The intersection is a wide, shallow canal with a slight current, cars cross in front of Anya like large, wild, softly purring beasts, but she's veered a bit off course and the water is swallowing the sound of her shoes on the road. All around her there is nothing but water, even the rain has stopped now. It's much too quiet here, Anya thinks, but what does it matter, it's not as if I'm blind. But in fact it really is far too quiet, and therefore it's impossible to understand how the back end of this car that has suddenly materialized beneath her hands has managed to cross her path. Anya stands still, listening to the water gurgling all around her. Behind her, a bus with a humming motor and wet tires makes its way around the traffic island. Like a humpback whale, Anya thinks, and decides to grope her way along the row of cars parked at the edge of the road until she finds her way back to the sports center.

The metal of the cars is warm and slippery. Some of them are parked far apart from one another. Anya thinks of Iris and her big fish in the canal, always swimming against the current in a single line, without ever getting anywhere. At the same moment Anya hears the splashing in the empty parking spot. The dog must have jumped into the water right in front of her. Anya hears him barking—deep, hollow barks—and her own blood is rushing in her ears. Anya jumps to the side. The dog barks directly behind her.

The truck belongs to the shipping company DRIVE 'N' FLY, and in the driver's seat sits a man in his mid forties whose oldest son flunked his graduating exam this past summer, but that has nothing to do with this story. What's that dog doing here, he only has three legs, the driver thinks, he's three-legged and he was probably white



once, maybe even snow white? My dog, it has three corners, three corners has my dog (it's supposed to be "my hat," but the driver is really singing "dog" nonetheless, and in a moment he'll have forgotten all about this), and when he pulls out of the parking spot the driver doesn't feel any resistance, which is why he doesn't slam on the brakes until the right rear tire seems to have rolled over some sort of obstruction, once and then once more. What's that supposed to be, he thinks. Could be anything with flooding like this.

Mende is still holding on to Anya's cello case, he stands in the middle of the intersection, in the path of a city bus, and doesn't see any dog. All Mende sees is Anya suddenly leaping out of a gap in the row of cars and her face and chest slamming into the back of a moving van that was just backing out of a parking spot. Mende then sees Anya flying through the air and landing on the surface of the water, and the next moment he can no longer see her at all because the truck is still backing up. Mende thinks yet again that Anya looked like a stork just now. Like a stork about to jump, Mende thinks and doesn't notice that Anya didn't look like this at all.

So now everything there is to tell about Anya has been told. Everything that happens afterward is no longer part of this story:

On September thirteenth, the first Saturday without Anya, Iris doesn't come to class either. Even though she'd wanted to come, since they really ought to be doing something, she thinks as she walks past the allotment gardens, they should do something that Anya would like. Would have liked. But when she pauses on the bridge over the canal, holding herself steady on the iron railing and leaning far over to see the big fish again, her violin case slides off her handlebars and between the bars of the railing, hurtling toward the canal where it slams into the water. Just like a black, clumsy bird trying to hunt, it occurs to her. Then she drops her bicycle, runs down to the edge of the canal and through the bushes in pursuit of her violin case, which is drifting with the current. When Iris plunges into the water, she briefly thinks of Anya. But she doesn't want to think about Anya. All she wants to think about is that damn violin, which she just barely manages to catch hold of in the chin-high water. Back on shore, Iris squats down in the limp September grass, opens the case and lays the violin, the bow and herself in the pale sun to dry. Iris is lying on

her back. At one point a snow-white airplane flies across her field of vision. Iris doesn't think about Anya. Iris thinks about India and starts crying. (When the bow is dry, the horsehair it's strung with simply snaps in the middle. It takes the violin a full week to dry out, but afterward it sounds much better than before.)

Mende doesn't cry. Mende walks to school every day and then back in the afternoon. On Saturdays he rehearses his string ensemble. The street the school is on is called Oak Grove even though there are no oak trees here. In front of Oak Grove is the intersection. In the middle of the intersection are flowers for Anya. Mende finds it inappropriate to lay bouquets of flowers at the site of an accident, and so every day he tries to walk past as quickly as possible. But since Anya's mother attached a Polaroid to her bouquet that shows Iris looking at Anya while Anya has apparently just jumped into the air, since her feet are hovering in the air beside Iris at knee level, her hair is standing up in all directions and her eyes are rolling back in her head with pleasure—since, in other words Anya is hanging in midair as if she were stuck there, Mende looks at the bouquet with the photograph every time he walks past. Mende tries not to think: Like storks about to jump. He also tries not to think: One jumps and the other doesn't. Mende doesn't cry either. But every morning when he looks at Anya, he also sees himself sitting far behind Anya at the edge of the sports field, smiling out at the space outside the picture. At school he then drinks two pots of coffee until he's dizzy.

The new cello player is named Lars and is only ten years old. He has almond-shaped gray eyes with which he observes Mende and the string players. While they are unpacking their instruments in the music room, he sometimes shouts out a name: Viola? Iris? Madlen? When Viola, Iris or Madlen looks up, he grins and has nothing further to say. Madlen finds this amusing and starts grinning back at him in the first week already. Viola's grin is vaguer. Iris never grins back and speaks neither with Lars nor Mende if it can at all be avoided. Mende doesn't grin at all in any case, and doesn't say much either. Only what is absolutely necessary, Mende thinks—just the necessary, and then back out to Oak Grove and home.

Before the first lesson without Anya (and also without Iris), he stands with his back to the piano, folds his hands and asks the string ensemble to join him in, as he says, a moment of silence, during which he closes his eyes tightly and sways a little. Not one of the string players closes their eyes. Lars look at his music stand. Viola and Madlen look by turns at Lars and Mende. He smells like too much coffee and looks as if he's about to lose his balance altogether. As if he were drunk, Madlen thinks. Lars doesn't look at all like Anya, Viola thinks. Why should he. After this, the Schubert song is played through from beginning to end for the first time. By the time of the Christmas celebration, all of them know the piece inside out—leaving aside the missed entrance for the moment—and receive applause from the assembled parents, who are wearing turtleneck sweaters and raincoats even though if truth be told enough rain for the entire season fell already in September this year.

For further information on international rights for this title please contact Kathrin Scheel at [kathrin.scheel@schoeffling.de](mailto:kathrin.scheel@schoeffling.de)

This excerpt is presented for informational purposes only – any use or copying for commercial purposes is strictly prohibited.