



## Glück und los. Die Sache mit den Wünschen (Vol. 1)

by Dagmar Bach

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‘Careful, he’s going to crash into us!!!’ I screamed and ducked behind the passenger seat. My heart was in my mouth while the fifteen years of my brief life flashed in front of my eyes. It could be over any minute now. I had *never* seen Dad drive so irresponsibly! Next, he yanked the steering wheel to the left without so much as a warning and I crashed into the door despite my seat belt.

‘Ouch! Dad!’

‘Hey that was cool. Just like in *The Fast and the Furious*. We went round that corner on two wheels!’ my big brother Mats sounded absolutely delighted. He pointed at a vehicle ahead.

‘Let’s overtake that one next.’

But my Dad put on the blinker and took the next turning off the orbital motorway, driving slightly less recklessly and we headed towards the airport terminal.

My insides were still tied in knots, though.

‘I feel sick,’ I called from the back seat, holding my tummy.

‘Sit in the middle and look out the front window,’ Dad said watching me in the rear-view mirror. He knew all about me and my nervous tummy and so he actually slowed down and stopped speeding round the corners like a madman. I had ruined too many seat covers in the past not to be taken seriously.

Luckily we reached the car park before anything worse happened and Dad parked in the short-term parking lot.

‘Just our luck that the main car park is full, today of all days! But never mind, we’ll run through the departure hall and take the stairs to the arrival lounge. That’s much faster!’ he

said and looked at his watch in dismay as we jumped out of the car. ‘Damn, they must have landed already,’ he said and started to run. Mats and I chased after him.

‘All because you had to play another round!’ Max moaned running beside me between all the cars.

‘Me? You were the one who wouldn’t stop. Didn’t you keep saying: *Hey there’s no way I’m going to quit while I’m on a winning streak.*’

Dad had disappeared into the terminal through the sliding glass doors up ahead. We followed in between rows of parked cars and cones for diverted traffic.

‘Watch it!’ I shouted just managing to avoid a family with a loaded trolley who suddenly appeared out of nowhere. But Mats couldn’t stop in time. He tried to leap over the trolley but he didn’t make it

‘Help!’ a woman shouted as she grabbed her two small children and pulled them out of harm’s way.

‘Sorry!’ Mats gasped. He’s really sporty, but he didn’t leap high enough and crashed into the trolley, sending all the bags flying all over the place.

‘Sorry, sorry, sorry,’ he kept apologizing as he picked himself up off the ground, grabbed my hand and dragged me on.

‘Shouldn’t we be helping them?’ I protested.

‘What we have to do is meet the twins or else Bea will have our heads off! What we need is a bit of luck for a change – come on Lina! Do something! You’re the one who thinks you can make things come true. Go on, make a wish – I want this damned plane to be late.’

‘Haha,’ I snapped.

That was years ago. When I was little I did used to think I could make wishes come true, at the age when you still believe in dragons and unicorns and stuff like that. But Mats still teased me about it if he got the chance.

On the other hand, sometimes I played along and it worked! Only very occasionally, and of course that was total coincidence, but I could give it a go.

We had reached the terminal. Unfortunately we needed to go all the way to the other end of the building to get to international arrivals. And it was already half past twelve. We were almost an hour late, and there wasn’t a flight-board in sight. We had no idea if the plane had landed yet or not so I decided to try to fulfill Mats’ wish.

I let go of my brother and stood still for a moment. I would have preferred to have a quiet place to perform the ... *ritual*, but this would just have to do. Right next to a queue of people standing in the check-in line for a holiday flight to Rhodes. And without any of my usual props which was going to make things even more difficult.

I closed my eyes.

*Please, please let this flight be delayed, we don’t want to get off to a bad start as a new family on day one!*

Then I started to perform a little dance. Or it was more like a routine of steps along with a song:

*Eenie meenie minie mo  
Catch a wish don't let it go  
Lina dance to make it stay  
Don't you let it get away  
Jump up and down  
Turn round and round  
Clap clap clap  
Stamp and stop!*

While I was busy embarrassing myself in front of about a hundred and fifty people who were all staring in my direction, my brother stood on tiptoe trying to find out what time it was.

'Are you finished? Then come on!' he shouted and ran off again with me right behind him.

*Please let it work, I so want it to work.*

Somehow we managed to get through the rest of the hall without any further collisions. (Although Mats did get caught up in an excited Boxer-dog's lead just before we made it. The dog immediately thought it had found a new friend and leapt all over him.)

But Dad stole the show just as we managed to catch up with him. He started shouting 'Let me through, I'm the pilot!' wildly waving his licence or something that looked like it. People were so surprised that they actually jumped out of the way to let us past.

'Isn't it usually *let me through I'm the doctor?*' I asked Mats, but he couldn't stop laughing. He seemed to be having a wonderful time despite everything.

But he stopped laughing when the three of us finally stopped in front of the flight-board in the arrival hall. We stared up at it, panting and sweating like mad.

'The flight from Vancouver has already landed. More than an hour ago. It was early!' Dad said sounding worried. Mats and I both groaned.

Drat.

'All because *you* had to play that last round!' my brother started all over again and dug me in the ribs.

'All because you said, we'll carry on playing until you get another bad card. You idiot.'

'Same to you.' Mats grumbled. But then he did what he always does with problems, shrugged them away. 'It will be all right, they are probably still going through customs,' he said. 'When we came back from visiting them in Canada, I spent an hour in one of their cubby holes unpacking my dirty washing in front of a customs officer.'

'Because you always look as if you're up to something, sonny boy.'

'I think the customs officer liked me.'

'That's what you say.'

Mats and Dad have already met the twins, but I haven't yet. I didn't go with them and Bea when they all flew to Vancouver to meet them in the holidays. I am terribly scared of flying and wouldn't go. I was a bit sad, especially when I saw all the amazing photos, but

there was no way anyone was ever going to persuade me to climb into a sardine can. Especially if it was going to take off!

But my brother was wrong for once. The twins hadn't been detained in customs; they were sitting on a bench next to a little souvenir shop. I recognised them from the holiday pictures and from pictures in Bea's flat, although they were younger in most of those and happier-looking. In real life the twins looked about as friendly as a thundercloud.

'Oh dear! We could have done without being late,' Dad mumbled before shouting, 'Vincent, Arthur! Here we are!' He waved and then ran to meet them. 'How lovely to see you both again! How are you? Sorry that we're late but, er, we got held up. Let me take your bags.'

The two of them exchanged some unintelligible remarks and then got up off the bench. Standing, they were both at least half a head taller than me, even though I'm quite tall for my age. And they were more solid than Mats, as far as I could see: wider shoulders, square chests, long legs, and chin-length dark hair. They dug their hands deep in their pockets and made no attempt to say hello. They looked ... well, stormy actually.

Oh well, maybe they were a bit shy. Which suited me perfectly as I was bursting with energy after everything that had happened so far today. I could hardly keep my mouth shut.

'Hey guys, how lovely to meet you at last. It's simply amazing how identical you look. How am I ever going to tell you apart? I never asked Bea about that. Guess what? Mats just got leapt on by a dog like they've been friends for a thousand years or something. And it nearly knocked him over! It was a Boxer, wasn't it Mats? Or what do you call those dogs with the floppy lips that are always drooling? Pug dogs? Nooo, those are the small ones. Oh never mind. Anyway Mats and I ran like crazy trying to keep up with Dad who was waving his pilot's licence around like a fool, I think everyone was a bit afraid of us. And I think I saw one of his colleagues – Ronald? Is it Ronald? He pretended not to know us, which I can kind of understand. And then my wish didn't even work. I wanted your flight to be delayed and I was so sure it was going to work this time! I'm so sorry - really, really sorry that we didn't get here sooner, but we got held up! See this egg stain on my T-shirt, I didn't even have time to get changed, but we'll be living together as of tomorrow, so there's plenty of time to see me in clean clothes soon, I should think. And at least I had a shower, or what did you think? And any way you don't look great either. Look there's a stain on your jumper, too. Is it jam? Or ketchup maybe? You see?' I smiled at them both. 'What I'm trying to say is, hi, I'm Lina.'

I could feel Mats start to giggle beside me. His whole body was shaking and down as he tried not to burst out laughing. And I had to dig my elbow in his side this time to make him stop.

I couldn't. Why was he laughing? Okay so maybe I talk too much, I know, but someone in our family had to say something to cover up our gaffe.

Unfortunately it was hard to say if I'd had any success though. The twins just stared at me – and said absolutely nothing.

After a couple of seconds of silence (first it was awkward then embarrassing!) Dad had a go at easing the situation.

‘Well, yes, as you can see, Lina is very pleased you are back. And so are we all!’ What was business class like? Did everything work out all right?’

Dad had used his connections to get the twins an upgrade, although it did mean they didn’t arrive until two days later. So it was a bit tight as far as going back to school tomorrow was concerned. But hey – business class! It was worth a bit of stress.

But to be honest, if Vancouver was the city with the happiest residents in the world (according to Dad’s travel magazines that is) it hadn’t had that effect on the twins as far as I could see. The two of them looked as if they’d travelled all the way on the back of a truck – their hair was a mess, their eyes were reddened, the shadows under their eyes a dark violet and the corners of their mouths turned down as far as possible.

‘Go on, admit it, you spent ten hours watching films,’ Mats said laughing. And thumped one of them on the shoulder in the nicest possible way. I couldn’t possibly say who was who, no matter how hard I tried. They still hadn’t introduced themselves and didn’t react.

‘Are you Vincent? Or Arthur?’ I asked the one on the left who was staring at me through his dark curtain of hair. Maybe he was staring at my freckles; there are hundreds of them peppered all over my face, or at the gap between my front teeth which I like as much as my freckles. So far everyone had got used to them in the end.

Seeing as the first twin said nothing, I tried talking to the other one.

‘Er, and you are ... ?’

All I got was a tremendous scowl. ‘Dog tired. Can we go please?’

‘Right Dad, you heard him. Dogtired and Mr Hush want to go home.’

Mats standing behind me started giggling again.

‘Oh you’re the clever one are you?’ Dogtired asked and stared at me with piercing grey eyes.

I smiled nicely and bit back an answer. I know boys can be odd sometimes and these two were hard work. But I could imagine that you might feel pretty uncomfortable after a long distance flight. Probably all they wanted was a nice shower and something to eat. So I decided to be nice for a change.

Dad took Dogtired’s huge rucksack and waved for us to follow him. Mr Hush wouldn’t give up his luggage and carried it all the way to the car without complaining once, or saying anything at all for that matter. Maybe he was worried that Dad would bolt with his dirty washing.

‘Bea can hardly wait to see you at last. When we get home she’s bound to be back from seeing her mother.’

He’s probably right. A meeting with Bea’s mother was not the kind of thing any normal person would want for too long. One hour is enough to traumatise you for a whole week Dad says. I haven’t actually met her yet, though.

As we headed back to the car park Dad tried very hard to start a conversation with the twins. It was uphill work as far as I could tell, since all he got were one-word replies. Poor Dad.

While the three of them walked ahead of us, Mats pulled me to one side and whispered in my ear.

‘17 to 3, Lina. It’s just not meant to be.’

‘You were the one who said I should try making a wish!’

He shrugged, ‘It’s just a silly old habit.’

I sighed. I didn’t want to admit it – but my brother was right.

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Our silly habit was based on an idea I had when I was little. While Susu my best friend at playgroup spent all day looking after her imaginary magic pony, I really believed that I could bring people good luck by making their wishes come true. And my family didn’t try to stop me. They didn’t laugh at me or anything. I think it’s because of my great-great-grandmother Gloria Peters who lived at Pearls Gate (which used to be a village but is part of our town now). In fact Gloria is a bit of a legend in our town. She was known for making people’s wishes come true. She had a P.O. box at the Post Office and people would write to her and tell her what they wished for most. (That was in the days before emails and the internet ... it must have been awful, I’m so pleased to be alive today.)

Because of her pretty name, her friendly ways and her gift, more and more people wrote to her. No one knows if Gloria made any wishes come true. But lots of people think so. And because it’s such a lovely story, I always wanted to believe it, too.

When she died, the letters slowly stopped coming. But then, ten years ago, a journalist dug up the legend. He did some research and found out that the P.O. box still exists and since his story was published, it has been filling up with letters again. Even lots of children send their Christmas wishes there, hoping they’ll be forwarded to Santa’s workshop. Mum and I answer them all in memory of my great-great-grandmother Gloria. Once a week we light some candles and put on some nice music. Then we spend the evening making pretty answering cards.

So when I was little, I thought I had inherited Gloria’s gift. And my parents sort of let me think that. Which I still think was really nice of them. Only Mats has always teased me about it. Especially whenever I did my little singsong dance to help make a wish come true. That was the dance I pulled off today – my silly old habit, if you like.

I really did believe all this for ages. As I remember it, my little dance routine really did work – quite often in fact. But now I’m fifteen and nearly grown up, I have to admit that I never could grant anyone’s wishes. It was either luck or imagination, not super-powers, I’m afraid. I’m nobody’s lucky charm and I can’t make anyone’s wishes come true. Not mine or anyone else’s.

But sometimes, I go a bit crazy and do my little dance routine anyway because deep down inside I still hope I can change things for the better once in a while and my brother encourages me. But only because he loves to point out that I'm nuts. So that's what the bet is all about. I already know that I'm going to lose – 17 to 3 I mean! – but I just can't seem to stop. I'm far too old for this sort of thing. But sometimes I wish I weren't.

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We reached the car park at last. Dad's car is pretty big, but we hadn't expected the boys to have so much luggage. Bags weren't just piled in the boot but on the extra seat as well, which meant I had to squeeze in between the two kill-joys. Dogtired lived up to his name. As soon as Dad drove the car onto the road, his head dropped against the car window, his body went limp and he started to breathe heavily.

Mr Hush, sitting on my left-hand side, seemed to be a bit more awake. He sat up straight staring out of the window.

It must be an odd feeling to be back home after spending a year in Canada, especially when there are going to be quite a lot of changes in your family. As of tomorrow, we were all going to be living in one big flat.

Dad and Bea Bergen, the twins mum, met just over a year ago in our friend Theresa's delicatessen just around the corner. They both went for the same glass of traditional Austrian preserves and – this does sound corny – were bowled over the minute their eyes met. They fell head over heels in love and have been together ever since. Bea always insists that she wasn't taken by Dad's good looks (he had just come back from work and was still in his pilot's uniform). She says it was a simultaneous spark of love for both of them that may have come from the jar of jam. The way she looks at Dad, I can believe it.

Ever since they discovered they actually live next door to each other, it's been divine destiny. Although their flats are in two different houses, they are on the same storey, side by side. So tomorrow a building firm was going to knock a hole in the dividing wall and put in a door. The final barrier was coming down and Bea, Dad, Vincent, Arthur, Mats and me would all live in one gigantic joined-up flat from now on. I was really looking forward to it. So was Mats, who was also going to be in the same form as the twins at school.

But we had no idea what Bea's sons might think of it all.

'Did you miss Germany?' I asked Mr Hush beside me. Maybe I could get him to talk by asking specific questions.

He shrugged his shoulders. 'Not really,' he mumbled. Well he could speak, at least.

'Well, school starts tomorrow. That's a bit tough. But aren't you looking forward to seeing your friends again? And Bea? Or are you just too cool to admit it.'

Why did I say that? Maybe because he gave me such a punishing look the moment I mentioned Bea's name.

'I like her lots, by the way.'

‘Bully for you,’ he mumbled again and turned back to the window. His body language was telling me that he wasn’t looking forward to sharing a flat with his new step-sister. He kept trying to move further away from me, to make sure there was as much distance as possible between us. He obviously didn’t care what I might think. But now probably wasn’t the best time to start preaching about manners.

I didn’t think very much was going to change after the wall between Dad and Bea’s flats was knocked down. They both would have their own kingdoms still. The new door would simply mean that we didn’t have to go downstairs and out on to the street in our pyjamas whenever we wanted to have breakfast together.

I think it’s a brilliant idea.

To cover up the awkward silence in the car, I started telling Mr Hush about the building work going on. I didn’t care whether he wanted to know or not. How everything was ready for work to begin tomorrow. That the plastic screen they’d set up in our hall looked like one of the shabby showers at an awful camping site by the Adriatic Sea when I was on holiday. It wasn’t my best holiday. Apart from the awful shower, I got stung by a jellyfish and then I caught a tummy bug from the kids in the tent next door.

But I might as well have been talking to the rucksack. There was no kind of reaction whatsoever. Mr Hush didn’t answer. He didn’t even look at me.

So in the end I just held my tongue and was very relieved when Dad parked the car in front of our house.

Apart from a mumbled ‘Thanks, see you later,’ my new step-brothers didn’t utter a word before they grabbed their bursting bags and disappeared into the house entrance leaving the three of us standing out on the street.

‘They’re nice,’ I said.

‘They’ll be all right,’ Dad said. He hadn’t missed my sarcastic tone. ‘Give them a good night’s sleep and they’ll be like brand new people.’

Yes, two new people would be good. I didn’t find these ones that great so far.

## 2.

The first day of our new life together started the next day, at 7 am on a Monday in September. It was the first day back to school – which was exciting but nowhere near as exciting as what was happening at home.

‘When you kids get back from school, we’ll be done, if you ask me. Then you can come and go, back and forth, from one place to the other just as you please. There’ll be a door that looks as if it’s always been there.’

Dad, Mats and I were standing in the hall of our flat staring at the massive plastic screen that Mr Gieseke from the building firm had installed already.

‘No worries, I’ve put three layers of fibre mats on the wooden floor so that nothing can happen. I mean, we don’t want lumps of wall falling down and crashing through the ceiling do we now. Whack! Onto your neighbour’s dining room table downstairs!’

I tried to imagine Mrs Clement’s facial expression if a piece of wall weighing a ton were to land on her beloved terrine of bouillabaisse after having destroyed her ceiling.

Dad was obviously imagining the same thing.

‘We really don’t mind if it takes a bit longer. Let’s try to avoid that soup scenario shall we?’ Mrs Clement (or Madame Clement as she preferred to be called seeing as she comes from France) has a passion for hand-painted porcelain from Marseille. Lots of hand-painted porcelain! Her whole flat looks like one of those souvenir shops Mum can never resist buying something in. She is always sure the shopkeepers won’t be able to make ends meet because they sell so much rubbish unless she buys something. Though Madame Clement obviously does buy things whenever she gets the chance. Mats and I were not allowed to visit her until we were eight years old because Dad always said that his insurance wouldn’t cover the costs.

Mr Gieseke and a man with a moustache were busy discussing the best way to proceed. It didn’t appear to be quite so simple after all. They needed a special saw to cut a door-sized hole in the wall which was nearly one metre thick. Then it had to be broken out bit by bit, to make sure the soup scenario with Madame Clement didn’t happen.

‘I think I might call Mike to give us a hand,’ Mr Gieseke said and went out onto the stairs with his phone.

Dad obviously approved, as he started nodding immediately. He’s a very peace-loving person and likes to get on with his neighbours.

Mr Gieseke had been commissioned to do the work because he happened to be Kathrin’s brother and had connected two flats like this before. Kathrin lived on the second floor in Bea’s house and she and Bea were friends. So when Bea and Dad decided to join up their flats, Kathrin was able to recommend Mr Gieseke straight away.

Mats and I both think Dad’s girlfriend is pretty cool. A lot of our friends were probably hoping that Mum and Dad would somehow get back together, but Mats and I don’t see things that way. Bea is far better suited to Dad in the long run. And Mum is bound to find her knight in shining armour one of these days, I’m sure.

My parents met more than seventeen years ago when they were both backpacking through the Peruvian Andes. A few days and nights spent together on a yak farm without water or electricity was enough to make them start looking for a joint flat as soon as they got back home. They quickly moved into a one-bedroom flat without any yaks and fleas and my brother Mats arrived nine months later.

At that stage they were both in their mid-twenties and so in love that they didn't really need food or sleep (so Mum says). They lived their young lives to the full and simply dragged my brother along wherever they went. Even as far as the Himalayas where I was created a year later (it does seem very ironic that me with my fear of heights and flying started out somewhere between Kathmandu and the Mount Everest base camp).

When Mats' and my baby years had passed, my parents realised that eternal love wasn't going to work for them. They separated as friends and remain so today. Mats and I stayed with Mum, and Dad lived just five minutes down the road. We saw him so often that it didn't make any difference that he didn't live in the same flat. Mum and Dad were both always there for us and I never felt as if I was a child from a separated family.

Then just over a year ago, Mum was given the opportunity to work in New York for two years. We were going to be separated by an ocean all of a sudden! But although we knew we would miss her terribly, Mats and I encouraged Mum to fulfill her dream and fly to New York. We moved in with Dad who still lives just down the road and everything has stayed the same. Dad is a long distance pilot, which means he is home most of the time except for a few days each month when he's in L.A. or Dubai or Singapore or somewhere. Then Theresa our godmother keeps an eye on us.

It works really well, even though I do miss Mum. So we phone or Skype as often as possible and there are very few days we don't speak to each other. And there's Bea as well. But she hadn't been over to see us yet this morning. She probably had her hands full getting the twins up in time for school. They were so tired yesterday that it can't have been easy. But she'd already announced a big family dinner for this evening. The first family meal in the new joined-up flat.

I was really looking forward to it.

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While Mr Gieseke was on the phone and plugged in his machines, Mats and I grabbed our bowls of muesli from the kitchen and sat down on the shoe-bench in the hall so as not to miss anything. I think the only person more curious than me was Dad, who kept pacing up and down in front of us all. Turning the two flats into one was a big deal for him, especially seeing as the twins were back now, too. Although everyone agreed that he didn't have to play Dad for the two sixteen year olds, he was still a bit nervous.

'Relax, Dad.' Mats said as he spooned some more muesli into his mouth. 'Everything's fine.' It's going to be great. Even Mum thinks we should break through the wall.'

‘Hmm ... but what happens if they don’t like me?’ Dad dug his hands into the pockets of his cargo trousers and stared at the plastic sheets.

‘Who? The twins? What could they possibly not like?’ I asked. ‘They loved you when you met them on holiday. And putting them in business class will have earned you a few brownie points, too. Bea said so. It’s going to work out. As long as Mrs Clement’s porcelain doesn’t get broken, everyone is going to be happy. Ah there he is again. Are things getting started now? Is it going to be very loud?’

Mr Gieseke had reappeared in the hall holding a cable drum in either hand.

‘Old buildings are pretty hopeless as far as the electrics are concerned,’ he said panting hard.

‘I had to swap some plugs down in the cellar by the washing machines. But everything should work now.’

His colleague with a moustache helped him set up the huge saw.

‘Are you ready? This could be a bit loud.’

‘No problem,’ all three of us called back at the same time and Mr Gieseke nodded.

‘Then let’s get started.’

He disappeared behind the plastic sheets. And then things really did get *loud*. If anyone anywhere in the house had still been asleep, they were definitely awake now.

But sadly it didn’t last long - two minutes later the first neighbours *arrived* at our door. Not Madame Clement by the way. Unfortunately.

‘Why on earth have you unplugged the DSL router downstairs?’ Mandy shouted, who lived on the ground floor together with her boyfriend Ralph. They both study sociology and spend an awful lot of time at home. I know, because their desks are by the window so they can look out all the time.

Whenever I walk past there is always at least one of them sitting there, if not both. Maybe it’s some kind of research as part of their degrees. They spend all day every day watching people. Oh and they’ve got cushions on the windowsill so it’s extra comfy! And if you say hello or wave or anything, they just stare at you like cows chewing the cud. Which I happen to think is pretty rude really, so is staring at people if you ask me. Do I like them? Not so much.

But if anyone ever dares mention that to them they always get really mad and start accusing every one of judging them by appearances and being full of prejudice.

I don’t have any prejudices; I really couldn’t care less how someone looks or what they like wearing. But Mandy and Ralph are special. Mats and I counted: in total they have nine piercings on their mouths and noses, twenty-three earrings and about a square metre of tattoos. Not cool ones like entwining flowers, theirs are more ugly: skulls and crossbones, anchors and crosses and things like that. Still, it’s a question of taste I suppose. Although the two of them obviously enjoy looking different, Dad always says that they are the biggest pair of squares he’s ever met.

And the ugly brown patterned dressing gown and lamb’s wool slippers Mandy was wearing this morning seemed to prove his point.

‘We need the Internet,’ she squealed nearly as loudly as the saw had been. Mr Gieseke took a step backwards.

‘The leads in the cellar weren’t labelled, so –’

‘We, we, have to ... *study!*’ And use the internet. How inconsiderate to come and switch it off. I, we, have a right to use the internet!!!’ Mandy got more and more worked up and pink blotches started working their way up her throat towards her silver earrings.

‘I actually think they spent the whole night gaming,’ Mats whispered to me. We’d gone back towards the kitchen to be out of the range of fire.

‘They were probably on the last level of some online shooter game when Mr Gieseke pulled the plug.’ He cleared his throat and said in a louder voice, ‘You poor people, do you really have to study at this time of the morning?’

The red-rimmed glassy eyes and a look to kill from Mandy said it all.

‘I’m actually still thinking about whether I should study or not,’ I said just as loudly, ‘Mandy makes it look so hard. I’m not sure I’m up to it.’

‘You two in there just shut it,’ she barked and tried to flip her shoulder-length hair out of her face with an awkward toss of her head.

‘There’s nothing wrong with her ears, at least,’ Mats said, giggling again, but I dragged him into the kitchen out of harm’s way. She had suddenly started looking at the builder’s sledgehammer with a nasty look in her eye.

Better not risk it.

‘Hey guys, shouldn’t you be off to school?’ Dad asked and I looked at the kitchen clock. Oh dear!

‘Quarter to eight, Mats hurry up!!!’

My brother swore, dumped his bowl into the sink and grabbed his rucksack. To get out, we had to get past Mandy, who unfortunately now had moral support in the form of Ralph, who was standing behind her like a bodyguard (although he looked at least as tired as she did) yelling at Dad and Mr Gieseke.

Judging by Dad’s face, he wasn’t amused, but I knew that he liked to keep things peaceful, so he was staying calm.

‘Check your mobile, before you go into school,’ he whispered to us, ‘If I haven’t sent a message in fifteen minutes, they’ve probably slaughtered us. In that case call the police and don’t come back here whatever you do.’

He might be pretending to whisper, but I could tell by the way his eyes sparkled that those two gamer zombies were meant to hear every word.

‘All right Dad,’ Mats promised with a dead straight face. ‘I’ll ask them to send the SAS if that happens, ok?’

‘That would probably be best. Well, just in case we don’t see each other again: I love you both.’ He coughed dramatically. ‘It was amazing being your Dad. But if we do, then have a great first day back at school. See you later.’

Mats and I pushed past Mandy and Ralph, in fits of laughter as we charged down the stairs.

So what happens next to Lina and her new patchwork family? And what about Lina's odd little dance? Does she have some special powers after all?