

## The love of writing

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"Get up and get ready for school", her mother didn't have to tell her, she knew very well that she was already much too late. She had spent the whole night writing a letter, shuffling the words back and forth in her head, finally falling into bed sometime after midnight, tired and content.

"Dear Henry," it said, "why don't you write anymore?" "Yes, why did he just stop writing? Was the address perhaps wrong? No, the address was right. 34800 Clermont L'Herault, Rue Jean Jaques Rousseau". Not far from the old church where they had last seen each other and where you promised to get in touch by letter as soon as possible. Knock on the door. "Shit, I'll be right there". "Right now," it echoed back and five minutes later Lisa was sitting in the bus out of breath. Once again she went through the letter in her mind: "A month ago came the last letter and so slowly I'm getting worried, I wanted to send you a new poem I wrote yesterday, I hope you're happy."

Suddenly there was a loud bang and the bus driver, who obviously didn't care much about his job, you could see it in his tired eyes, shouted deep into the back of the maw of the bus, "There's a piston out here or something, whatever, you all need to get out of here now." An annoyed murmur went through the bus, but Lisa knew that any sigh was in vain and got off first. But instead of taking the direct route to school, she decided on an alternative route across the Würm to the nearest post office.

Arriving at the post office, she walked with quick and almost machine-like steps towards the letterbox, at peace with herself. She would not only post the letter, no, she would immediately set off for Clermont l'Hérault. Lisa threw the letter in and was glad she had taken her wallet and debit card with her. She thought of her first encounter with Henry and knew that no matter what happened now, no one could stop her. Excited, Lisa wrote a message to her mother on her mobile phone: "Hi mum, don't worry about me. I'm going to France to visit Henry. It's important, love you Lisa". Wistfulness came up in her briefly, but she swallowed the feeling and made her way to the train to Munich to catch the first available bus to France.

Lisa thought. There was no point in this after all. She wouldn't get anywhere like this. She had to think of something. Something! Aha, there was something. A cash machine. Without thinking too much, Lisa withdrew her money. Enough money for a trip to Clermont L'Herault. Enough money to find out what had happened. In the heat of the moment, Lisa didn't care about anything else and why not? Several weeks had passed since Henry's last letter. That was not like him. What if something bad had happened to him? She didn't want to live with this uncertainty into the future. Lisa had to act.

A busy looking man with a briefcase was the first part of her plan. "Excuse me, could you

perhaps tell me the quickest way to get to Clermont l'Hérault? " After a long and incredibly complicated conversation, he had indeed been able to help Lisa. There was a bus that went directly to Clermont l'Herault, but she would have to hurry. As if her life depended on it, she ran towards the bus. "That's what you get for always sitting on the bench in sports," Lisa thought as her lungs burned and her legs grew heavy. By hook or by crook, she made it on time, even managing to buy herself something to eat. After all, it was going to be a long journey. Lisa let herself fall onto the last free seat, panting. Lucky! Although one could hardly call it luck, the whole bus reeked of sweat. Lisa wrinkled her nose. Somewhere a baby was crying.

Slowly, the light of the setting sun mixed with the red jacket that Lisa had so wildly decided to take with her on her journey. Now it lay on her lap. The girl, deep in thought, gazed at the landscape. Fields and meadows that shimmered golden, individual stalks of wheat that swayed back and forth in the wind, almost as if they wanted to wave to Lisa, flitted past her. Soon it became dark. The world, still so warm, turned cold, it was as if all life had been instantly wrapped in a blue cloth. The neon strips in the bus flickered eerily and the sputtering and groaning of the engine did not make the atmosphere any cosier. Lisa shuddered and quickly put on her jacket and plugged her headphones into her ears. A French song rang out, the individual lines she could just about translate from French class. "Jamais toi sans moi, jamais moi sans toi. Pourquoi je t'adore?" No! Lisa ripped the headphones out of her ears, which earned her an arrogant look from the lady next to her. What the woman didn't understand, what no one would understand, no one but Lisa, was that these verses took the girl back, back to a time when even the night had been warm and golden.

" Never you without me, never me without you. Why do I adore you? ", Lisa whispered as she went through her written texts word by word. "Pardon quoi?", a voice spoke from the small window that connected the confessionals of the church Lisa was sitting in. Lisa made a choked sound, half startled, half frightened. "Pardon me," she said, "I think my French is at the end of its tether. Do you speak German?" The boy in the confessional in front of her laughed softly. "Yes, a little," his accent was clearly perceptible, yet Lisa could understand him well. "Phew, gave me a fright. And I thought I was the only one who was so strange, disappearing into a church on a hot summer day." "Not at all," the boy replied, "it's better to write in silence and cool." "Yes, I suppose you're right. My name is Lisa, by the way." "Henry," the boy said monotonously. The idea of escaping from her writing class, which had positioned itself in the garden in front of the church in Clermont l'Hérault, into a confessional of a church seemed to get better and better by the second. Her heart gave a little jump when she looked into Henry's face. His green eyes gleamed in the darkness of the confessional, his brown curls fell into his face. "By the way, I know this song, it's one of my favourites." "Really! And I thought it would be inconspicuous to use the song lyrics for my own works, I guess I was wrong." They both laughed. This event was to turn out to be the beginning of a very special friendship, a friendship Lisa never dreamed would end abruptly after only four months. Lisa cursed herself for never asking for his number. How had they ever come up with the abstruse idea of starting a pen pal relationship without even a thought of living in the 21st century. "The love of writing", this one didn't help her much at the moment either.

The squeal of the brakes brought Lisa back to reality. The bus had stopped, they were now making a stop at a rest area. Tired, the girl got off the bus, the sky was now jet black, the stars sparkled like diamonds. The red neon "Open" sign behind the petrol station window flickered suspiciously. She could really do with a coffee now. She knew it was going to be another long night in this stuffy bus and it was time to read all of Henry's letters again and scan them for clues.

She also remembered the poems that had been written in the cool and dim church. They had passed ideas to each other like balls." Make something of the themes of 'friendship' and 'sustainability'," her writing class teacher had said. They had:

The theme of environmental protection:

We protect forests  
Forests  
Forests protect animals  
we protect animals  
protect forests  
protect animals  
protect the world

They actually had pretty much the same opinion on this topic:

Plants  
Plants instead of company  
Company instead of gas plant  
Plants instead of gasworks  
Plants instead of company  
instead of gasworks  
and forests

What was particularly close to their hearts was the theme of friendship:

Dear diary,  
I wish for a friendship that always lasts, even if we quarrel,  
that you always forgive each other  
you should laugh and be funny together

Lisa had put a lot of effort into the next poem:

Friendship  
Friendship but beautiful  
beautiful but unpredictable  
Friendship  
Friendship but unpredictable  
Friendship but beautiful but unpredictable  
but simply beautiful

She had not expected that this poem would apply so exactly to her current situation.

The engine stopped and with a jolt Lisa was jolted out of her thoughts. The air was muggy and stuffy. Lisa slowly straightened up and looked out the window of the bus. The night had turned out to be longer than she would have liked. Searching through the letters and poems for clues or any recognisable pattern that would provide answers to her friend's

mysterious disappearance had ultimately taken longer than she had thought. Lisa rubbed her forehead. The uncomfortable seat and bad air had given her a headache, not to mention the old lady who had been snoring incessantly all night to her left. "Are you all right dear?" the latter now asked, "you seem a bit upset." "I'm fine thank you," Lisa came across as perhaps a little harsh. After all, what could the lady do about it if her pen pal, who was good looking by the way, had left her with a wordless break in contact from one moment to the next. "No need to be rude," the lady grumbled with a snuffle, packed her bag and marched off the bus. Lisa rolled her eyes and exhaled in exasperation.

The sun glared as the girl stepped onto the stony and sandy ground of Clermont l'Hérault. It was unusually hot for such an early summer morning, much like the day she had last visited this place. Sadly, she looked around and remembered. The bus station was not very big, a few covered parking spaces bordering several small office buildings and ticket offices were visible. It wasn't very crowded, just a few people standing here and there, mainly her own tour group and a few other passengers who had arrived with her bus from Switzerland. The stuffy old lady now started looking for her suitcase, which was hidden somewhere among all the luggage in the boot of the bus. Lisa watched what was happening for a moment. Desperately, the lady tried to climb into the boot, while the bus driver was getting ever closer to losing his last thread of patience, while explaining to her that she would just have to wait until her suitcase was in sight. Lisa had to smile. Her light luggage, consisting of her backpack and jacket, had to be stowed somewhere. Her next and only goal was to find Henry, after all, that was the reason she had endured the lady's snoring in the first place. Lisa dug out one of Henri's letters to hammer his address into her head again. "It's not like I've scribbled the address on my envelopes a hundred times," she thought to herself. Still, she wanted to make sure. Would Henry even remember her letters?

But here it was: Clermont l'Hérault. Henry's home and hopefully the place where she would find him. Let's face it, she really didn't want to have spent all that money for nothing. She stepped out of the bus station and was thrilled. Although it was obviously a small place ( even smaller than Gauting), the beauty was overwhelming. Lisa, however, shook her head. She could enjoy all that later. For now, her mission was to locate Henry. She had come this far now, she would not let that get her down. She began to climb the small sandy gravel road uphill, towards the centre of town. Climbing the small hill, she saw the bus station below her and breathtakingly beautiful nature all around her. Clermont l'Hérault surrounded by beautiful mountains, lay radiant in their midst. The lush green of the trees shimmered in the bright light of the sun and even a small castle could be seen in the distance. Lisa was amazed. Of course she could still remember the small town well, but she had not been so aware of all the colours that summer brought to this place. Lisa walked on now. She dug her phone out of her pocket and tried to enter the location of Henry's home on the Maps app.

As expected, the network was very poor, Lisa got only poor reception. Silently she cursed herself for this trip. All because of a boy she had only met once. "Old writing or not," Lisa whispered, "if I see you this time, I'll give you my number double and triple, you can count on it." She trudged on and on now. Her brittle French was the only thing she could hope for now. If her French teacher had been a little nicer, she would certainly have had more motivation to go over her vocabulary a little more often. But that didn't matter any more at the moment. Lisa now found herself in a marketplace.

Various stalls selling food ranging from apples to fish were lined up next to each other. At a small stall behind a beautiful sessile oak, a small woman was selling homemade jewellery and bracelets. At the moment she was making a necklace out of a piece of ribbon and a

small glittering amber. Lisa gathered all her courage and went up to her. " Pardon, excusez-moi? Qu'est-ce que, no, est-ce que vous m'aider, s'il vous plait?" "Oui, bien sur! Tu es allemand?" "Oui," Lisa was about to break down, she was so nervous. She smiled a little too pained, which is probably why the lady had recognised her directly as a foreigner. "I can also speak a little Allemande," she said. "Oh dear," Lisa thought to herself, "Henry was worlds better at that." "I'm looking for Henry de la Fournier, do you know him?" "Oui, oui, I know him, always good boy and always writing so much, mon Dieu, `at hardly time for everything." "I guess we have something in common," Lisa thought to herself, "I manage to still write letters anyway." "My internet is very bad here," she spoke now, "he lives at 19 rue Jean Jacques Rousseau, could you perhaps tell me where that is?" "Oui, bien sur, ce n'est pas une probleme. Straight out, à gauche, à droite, à droite!" That was rather a questionable description, but still "gauche" and "droite" were the French terms for left and right, Lisa remembered that much. Even though this description hadn't helped her much, she bought the woman's strange amber braid as a thank you for her efforts and moved on.

Straight ahead, to the left, to the right and to the right again. That might work, Lisa walked past the market, mindful of any directional cues. Eventually, however, she found herself hopelessly disoriented in some shady alley. It was cooler here, but that didn't necessarily help her think. "Come on," Lisa thought, "somewhere in this city must be that goddamn flat." Discouraged, she sank down on the floor. This had all been a pointless idea. Going to a foreign country without any clue, while having to live with the guilty conscience of leaving her worried unsuspecting parents behind.

And now here she sat, so close to her destination, yet so far away. After a while, Lisa decided that just sitting around would not earn her a place to sleep for the coming night either. Her joints were frozen from the cool ground. Lisa stretched for a moment, her mobile phone in her right hand, which she now held out to the sky. A soft "bing", a message had arrived on her mobile. Lisa stared at the display in disbelief. Just a moment ago she had seen it, a bar indicating that she had reception. Now it had instantly disappeared. "Of course," it came to Lisa, "I have to go up, there's always better reception higher up!"

Her motivation returned instantly, propelling her, bringing life to her joints and limbs. Now the girl was almost running. She ran in the direction of the castle she had spied earlier. She was not that far away and no matter what might follow, Lisa was now unstoppable. In no time at all she climbed the short stretch of forest that ran towards the mountain and in no time at all she was on the tower of the castle. It was deserted, not a sound could be heard. Only the wind howled around the castle walls.

Lisa shivered. She began to shake like a leaf from the exertion of running. When she reached for her phone, she hardly dared to breathe, so great was her excitement. Had her theory come true? Was there a possibility of seeing Henry again today? Would she have a place to sleep? All these questions flashed through my mind within seconds as she unlocked the display.

Lisa felt dizzy. "Please, please," she whispered to the device. Then the world seemed to stand still. Lisa exhaled in disbelief. Three bars, she had reception, it was all good. The girl could hardly believe her luck, she quickly opened the app "Maps" and typed in the search address. To make sure she didn't lose it later, she took screen shots of every street and every fork in the road so that she wouldn't miss any of the route.

Then she set off again. When she finally stood in front of the right building, Lisa was done with nerves. Her headache was no better, she was sweating from the heat and her feet were burning as if she were standing on hot coals. Still, she had made it. "Henry's parents will be able to help me," she was sure. She entered the building. Inside it was shady and

cool. Lisa wanted nothing more than to settle down on one of the fluffy armchairs placed in the entrance hall, but she kept going. She simply had to keep going. She found her way to the stairwell, where, thank God, she found a lift. But here the next hurdle was already waiting for her. Lisa just wanted to sit down, she had no idea which floor Henry's flat was on.

So it was back to the entrance area for her. A nice woman was working at a small desk, probably the caretaker. In brittle French, Lisa was able to find out the floor and the flat number, but despite all the escapades, Lisa was proud of herself for the first time in the last two days. She had managed to travel to another country all by herself, had made her way through in various ways and had finally arrived at her destination safe and sound, if a little exhausted. Arriving in the right corridor on the right floor, Lisa counted the doors until she thought she was standing in front of the right one. She had done all this on her own, she was so close to her goal. It was now or never!

She took a deep breath, almost to all her courage, and knocked once hard on the door. Silence! She knocked again and the third time, almost banging on the door, a few French curses were heard inside. "Oui, mon dieu, qu'est-ce qu'est important?" it rang out as the door was jerked open. As quickly as Lisa was greeted harshly, an immediate apology was made. "Oh Lisa, je ne m'attendais pas à te voir. Excuse-moi. Entré, comment vas-tu?"

A short time later Lisa was sitting on a comfortable sofa and was immediately served a large piece of cake. The hostess switched to German and asked why Lisa was suddenly at the door. "I'm looking for Henry! You know we always write to each other and share our poems. But he hasn't been in touch for weeks. I was very worried and decided to make my way here to Clermont l'Hérault."

Lisa was briefed on the latest events. "So Henry is no longer in touch? I'll have to have a word with him. It'll probably be because of his book." "His book?" Lisa looked confused. Henry's mother laughed briefly. "Henry entered a writing competition shortly after you first met. He promptly came first and signed a book contract to boot. Now he hardly has any time for me or his father, and then probably none for you. Didn't he write to you about it?" "No, this is the first I've heard of it!" Henry's mother looked at her questioningly, "then I don't know either." A thought occurred to Lisa, "Maybe he's at the old church?" "I have to go!" Lisa jumped up, intending to go through the door she had just passed through. Her plans were promptly thwarted, however, as two pieces of cake were thrust into her hand. Now nothing stood in the way of your meeting.

Lisa ran. As quickly as she had entered this flat, she now stormed out again, leaving her parents standing there with questioning looks. The church, how had she been so stupid. The place she should have thought of first was the one she had thought of last. With long strides, the girl now ran out of the building, across the market square, on towards the centre of town. Never in her life had she been so nervous as at this moment. She hadn't seen Henry for a year, he just had to be in that church. The only place she connected with him, the only place he would write on a hot summer day, was this church.

Lisa breathed heavily, from a distance she could already make out the building, sand-coloured it shimmered in the light of the sun, almost shone. Lisa rummaged the amber braid she had bought from the old lady at the market out of her pocket and squeezed it tightly in her hand. "Henry," she thought, "if you're not in that confessional now, you'll soon be somewhere else entirely."

With bouncing steps, Lisa climbed the few steps that took her towards the entrance, a large portal made of wooden oak. Lisa exhaled and inhaled deeply. What would she say if she looked him in the face? What would she not say if there was nothing in this sacred space but dust, gold ornaments and a few old wooden benches? Without thinking any

further, she pushed open the oak door and stepped inside. re thinking, Lisa walked towards the confessionals in the left row and began to count off the numbers excitedly. Four, five, six, this should be it. Confessional number seven. Lisa's breath caught, all the efforts, all the escapades and difficulties, it all ended here, at this moment. And then she just did it, she opened the door. In the next moment, many things happened simultaneously. First, a sharp scream could be heard from a boy, which in turn made Lisa scream, a pile of books and paper fell from the confessional with a loud thud onto the church floor. The sound now echoed loudly off the walls. Then there was silence. Until another scream made the church tremble once more. "Where have you been?" cried Lisa, upset. Henry stared at her with wide eyes. " Lisa, how, what are you...?" "Here?", Lisa interrupted him. "what am I doing here? Hmm, three guesses." "Lisa," Henry said soothingly, "calm down, we may be alone, but this is still a church." "I don't care, well you're probably right, but still! How could you do this to me?" "I wanted to answer your letters, I really did! But other things got in the way. You know that feeling when you want to do something tomorrow until you put it off until the next morning and then that happens again and again until you end up doing nothing at all?" "So you've been putting off my letters. Is that seriously your excuse?" Lisa didn't even know why she was so upset. Sure she was angry at Henry for never getting back in touch, yet somehow she had imagined the first reunion differently.

"Is this a good excuse, maybe?" Henry pulled a stapled-together stack of several white papers from the back of the confessional. "Is this ...?", Lisa looked at the stack of papers in disbelief. "My first manuscript," Henry finished her sentence. "But how, how did you, is it really true? You're writing a book and you got to finish it? Henry. That, that's every writer's dream, that's amazing!" "Well, there are still a few little things missing and I have to check it again for mistakes too, but roughly it's finished, yes." "I can't believe it!", Lisa's eyes were still wide open, her mouth as well.

"Lisa," Henry's voice was low and calm, "please don't tell me you travelled all the way here from Germany." "Henry," Lisa's eyes filled with tears, "I missed you, you know? Sure, you have your life here, with your books and your works, but I have a life too. And I want you to be part of my life, too, and I beg you never, ever to just disappear from it again, will you?" And as a tear ran down her cheek, Henry embraced her. She knew that this was the end. The end of the break in contact.

When she thought about it like this, it could also mean the beginning. The beginning of a rekindled friendship and maybe, who knows, something more.

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