



BOOKS FIRST

NEW IN GERMAN
SOON IN ENGLISH

CHILDREN /
YOUNG ADULTS

GOETHE
INSTITUT



Dear book lovers,

This is now the third in our BOOKS FIRST series of readers, giving you an unmissable opportunity to discover no fewer than fifteen examples of current German-language writing for children and young adults. All have appeared during the past five years, and are our top choices from amongst the many suggestions put forward by publishers throughout Germany, Austria and Switzerland.

The selection offers English-language publishers and agents a whole range of new voices and exciting books, all of which come with the guarantee of a translation grant from the Goethe-Institut (see below for further information), whilst also offering readers in general who are interested in contemporary German-language literature a comprehensive overview of today's authors and their themes.

The Reader embraces books suitable for all age groups - books for reading to the very young, thrilling stories for children embarking on their own career as readers, and coming-of-age books for readers on the threshold to adulthood.

The breadth of topics is accordingly very wide: an insomniac wolf, a zebra suddenly discovered sitting beneath a little girl's bed, a very special friendship between a mouse and a zoo leopard - these are just some of the wonderfully illustrated stories for younger children.

The myriad aspects and daunting challenges of growing up – especially daunting during the fraught periods of history at issue – play a major role in the books aimed at older children. The scenarios here range from oppositional youth groups under nazism, via the aftermath of the collapse of the Berlin wall, right through to the everyday realities of life experienced by adolescents in German refugee accommodation. In their various ways all the different protagonists display great courage, whether they are outsiders coping with being bullied at school, or road-trippers heading for Berlin on a tractor.

And whilst the stories in this collection vary enormously in nature, they have one thing in common: whether aimed at younger or older children, all of them are a cracking good read, and cry out to be discovered by people in non-German-speaking lands!

We offer our special thanks to Angelika Salvisberg of the Swiss cultural foundation Pro Helvetia, which supports the project both financially and editorially. We also offer our heartfelt thanks for all their expert advice to the literary critic and cultural journalist Michael Schmitt and to Walter Schlect of the New York Goethe Institute.

Claudia Amthor-Croft, Hannah Brennhäuser
and Sebastian Huber

Translated by John Reddick

The English-language rights are currently still available for all the books showcased in this reader.

The Goethe-Institut offers interested publishers a guaranteed support grant covering two-thirds of the translation costs (calculated on the basis of 35 euros per standard page of 1800 characters including spaces / 30 lines of 60 characters). Full details and an application form can be found on our home page:

WWW.GOETHE.DE/BOOKSFIRST

MARKUS ORTHS

Markus Orths was born in 1969 in Viersen. He studied philosophy, romance studies, and English in Freiburg and now lives and works as a freelance author in Karlsruhe. His eleventh book, *Max*, appeared in 2017. He has received numerous literary prizes including the Telekom Austria Prize (2008), the Lower Rhine Literature Prize (2009) and the Speculative Fiction Prize from the city of Wetzlar (2011). In 2017, he took on the 36th Paderborn Poetics Lectureship and in 2018, the 31st Bamberg Poetics Professorship. He also has to make up bedtime stories for his children every evening, and this is how a zebra appeared under the bed.

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS:

Der reichste Junge der Welt, Moritz Verlag, 2018

Max, Carl Hanser Verlag, 2017

Das Zebra unterm Bett, Moritz Verlag, 2015

Alpha & Omega, Schöffling & Co, 2014

KERSTIN MEYER

Kerstin Meyer was born in 1966 in Wedel. She started working as an illustrator for various animation companies while she was studying design in Hamburg. She now illustrates texts by writers such as Cornelia Funke, Martin Klein, Markus Orths and Andreas Steinhöfel. In her spare time, she enjoys travelling and gardening.

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS:

Herr Pess und sein Bär, text by Ellen Jahn, Carlsen 2019

Der reichste Junge der Welt, text by Markus Orths, Moritz Verlag 2018

Das Zebra unterm Bett, Moritz Verlag, 2015

Käpten Knitterbart und seine Bande, text by Cornelia Funke, Oetinger 2003

UNTIL THE WIND CHANGES

What on earth was that? One morning, Hanna hears a coughing sound coming from underneath her bed. She takes a look and finds a zebra called Brownlee there – an actual zebra, and he can actually talk! Over breakfast, the two of them get better acquainted: Hanna tells Brownlee about her recent move and that she sometimes feels lonely. A few of the children think it's odd that Hanna is growing up with two fathers and no mother. When it's time to go to school, Hanna simply takes the zebra with her because she doesn't know what else to do with him. It might actually be quite fun to have Brownlee there too. While he is already good at maths and language, how would it be if he let Hanna's classmates write on his stripes? Or if they could



all vault over him in P.E.? The children are delighted, but the head teacher isn't – whoever heard of a zebra in a school? So the head secretly phones the zoo and arranges for someone to come and collect Brownlee. Then, of course, the zebra must be rescued and all the other children want to help Hanna do it. Eventually, when Brownlee is freed, he sets off to look after another child, as Hanna can now manage on her own without the zebra's help.

Markus Orths has been writing successful adult fiction since 2001. His first children's book, *Billy Backe aus Walle Wacke*, published in 2015, is about the amusing adventures of a marmot. While the themes of his more recent children's books are more

serious, the same delicate humour is still evident. In *Das Zebra unterm Bett*, he combines the themes of loneliness and of feeling like an outsider with the theme of the experience of having same-sex parents. Subtly and sensitively, he describes a girl who is parented by two men, and is finding it difficult to find friends. Orths tells the story with a light touch and, in the character of Hanna, he has created a young heroine with whom children will be able to identify strongly. The book's intertextual reference to Mary Poppins is quite charming and adds another layer.

In the last few years, an increasing number of children's books on the theme of LGBTQ+ parented families have been published. Families with same-sex parents usually appear in picture books, such as *And Tango makes three* by Justin Richardson and Peter Parnell, in which a male penguin couple in Central Park Zoo try to raise a penguin chick. However, there are few books for younger readers. Markus Orths' book fills this gap, as, thanks to the large font, the plentiful dialogue and the many illustrations, even early readers will be able to manage the text. The content is presented in a suitable, age-appropriate and exciting way, even while reflecting the limited vocabulary that many readers of this age have. The colourful illustrations by Kerstin Meyer complement the text wonderfully, adding further wit. The great complementarity of this author and illustrator pairing is also evident in their most recent project, *Der reichste Junge der Welt*.

By Nicole Filbrandt
Translated by Alexandra Roesch

Mrs Jeremias scratched her head. She'd been working as a teacher for twenty-seven years, but she'd never known anything like this before. A zebra, even if it was a small one, was sitting among her pupils! And now, the zebra was raising its hoof and *speaking!* Without Mrs Jeremias's permission! "Good morning!" Brownlee said. "I wanted to ask – could I please take part in the lesson?"

Mrs Jeremias went pale. She pulled out of her bag the large book of school rules that she always had with her because she didn't want to do anything wrong, and looked under Z. There

**THIS TITLE IS GUARANTEED A GRANT
FOR TRANSLATION INTO ENGLISH:**

**MARKUS ORTHS & KERSTIN MEYER
DAS ZEBRA UNTERM BETT
[THE ZEBRA UNDER THE BED]**

Frankfurt am Main: Moritz Verlag, 2015, 72 pages, age 6+
Sample Translation: pp. 31-53

was no mention of zebras. Finally, she said: “I – one moment!” and left the classroom, returning a few minutes later accompanied by the head teacher, Mr Fleece.

The head looked at Brownlee and weighed up the situation. “To be honest,” he whispered to Mrs Jeremias, “when you said that you had a zebra sitting in your classroom, I only came with you because I thought you had gone mad. But now, hmm, well yes...” “Where did that zebra spring from?” he asked the class.



“It belongs to me!” Hanna said.

“Ah, right, Hanna!” Mr Fleece said.

“Did your – did your fathers buy you the zebra?”

“No, he just appeared. The zebra is called Brownlee.”

“A zebra doesn’t just appear!” the head said. “A zebra doesn’t simply pop up! There must be some sort of an explanation! I have never heard of a zebra that – oh well, it doesn’t matter anyway! It can’t stay here.”

“Why not?”

“It has to go! It’s not right! A zebra simply doesn’t belong here. This is a school! A zebra in school is against the rules!”



“Which rules?”

“Simply *the* rules. That’s the way it is – zebras can’t be here. First of all, in order to go to school, you have to be able to speak!”

“I *can* speak!” Brownlee said.

The head stared at Brownlee. “It – the – animal – zebra – speaks!” The head wiped beads of sweat from his forehead. “But in order to go to school,” he said, “you also need – to be able to write! In order to write, you need hands! And zebras don’t have hands!”

Brownlee got up, trotted over to the blackboard, took a piece of chalk between his lips, pushed it into the gap in his front hoof and wrote on the blackboard: “DID HANNAH SEE BEES? HANNAH DID.” Then he said: “That is a palindrome. You can read the sentence forwards or backwards and it sounds the same.”



“What about maths?” the head snorted. Brownlee said: “27 times 44 is 1188, and the square root of 1188 is 34.467376. The whole thing times pi is 108.28245.”



“Gymnastics!” the head shouted breathlessly.

Brownlee did a somersault.

“What about – about – geography? You need to know about the earth!”

“The Amazon River runs through Guyana, Ecuador, Venezuela, Bolivia, Brazil, Columbia, and Peru. It is approximately 4,000 miles long. The Mississippi River is approximately 2,320 miles long and goes through 10 US states.”

“And – and – about nature!” the head called out.

“What do you mean?” Brownlee asked.

“Natural history? Theoretical physics? Applied physics? Shall I explain the laws of quantum chromodynamics?”

“Stop!” The head stamped his foot.

“You’re overqualified! You know too much. This is Year 3!”

“Yes, but I could give the pupils a bit of help!” Brownlee said.

“That’s enough!” said the head. “Under no circumstances can you stay! A school is for pupils, and pupils are human beings! And you are not a human being!”

Everyone went completely silent.

The head looked around triumphantly. But after a few seconds, Hanna piped up: “I’m not a human being either!” she said.

“What?” the head said.

“I’m an alien!”

“What? Where? How?”

“Well, I have two dads, you know that

– and no mum. So, someone must have dropped me here – maybe from outer space? Maybe I’m a girl from Mars.”

The head looked horrified and said nothing.

“And so,” Hanna continued, “if school is only for human beings, then I must leave too. You’ll have to send me away as well.”

The head wrung his hands in despair. He turned to Mrs Jeremias for help, but she just shrugged her shoulders.

“But,” the head said, a little less loudly, “a zebra will disrupt the class!”

“Why?” said Brownlee. “I will sit here quietly; just let me join in. A trial run.”

The head's mouth opened and closed.
Mrs Jeremias said: "Maybe we could actually give it a go. We could say that the zebra –"
"Brownlee" said Hanna.
" – we could say that Brownlee is an exchange student from – Africa!"
"From Africa?" the head said.
"Why not?" Mrs Jeremias asked.
Then, when the entire class howled a long drawn-out "Puhh-leeaze!" the head left the classroom, crimson-faced.

4

They all cheered, Hanna loudest of all. Mrs Jeremias gave a little cough and said "Welcome, Brownlee!"
Brownlee fitted into the class perfectly. He wasn't the slightest bother. On the contrary, it was much more fun when you didn't have to write words on the blackboard and you could write them on Brownlee's white stripes instead, using watercolours, and then brush him clean again at playtime.



In P.E., the class didn't need a vaulting horse to jump over anymore. They leapt over Brownlee's back instead – sideways or lengthways, whichever they wanted – and if Brownlee realized that he was a bit too big for any of the pupils, then he bent his knees a little so that it worked for everyone.



At one point, Brownlee asked when it was time for dream class.

“What do you mean, dream class?” Mrs Jeremias asked.

“Surely, besides P.E., maths, art, reading, writing and all that, there must also be a subject called *dreaming*?” Brownlee asked.

“What? No, we don't have that subject.”

“You don't? Why not? You have to have time to dream!”

“Yes, but – no, that is not on the curriculum,” stuttered Mrs Jeremias.

“I'm sorry.”

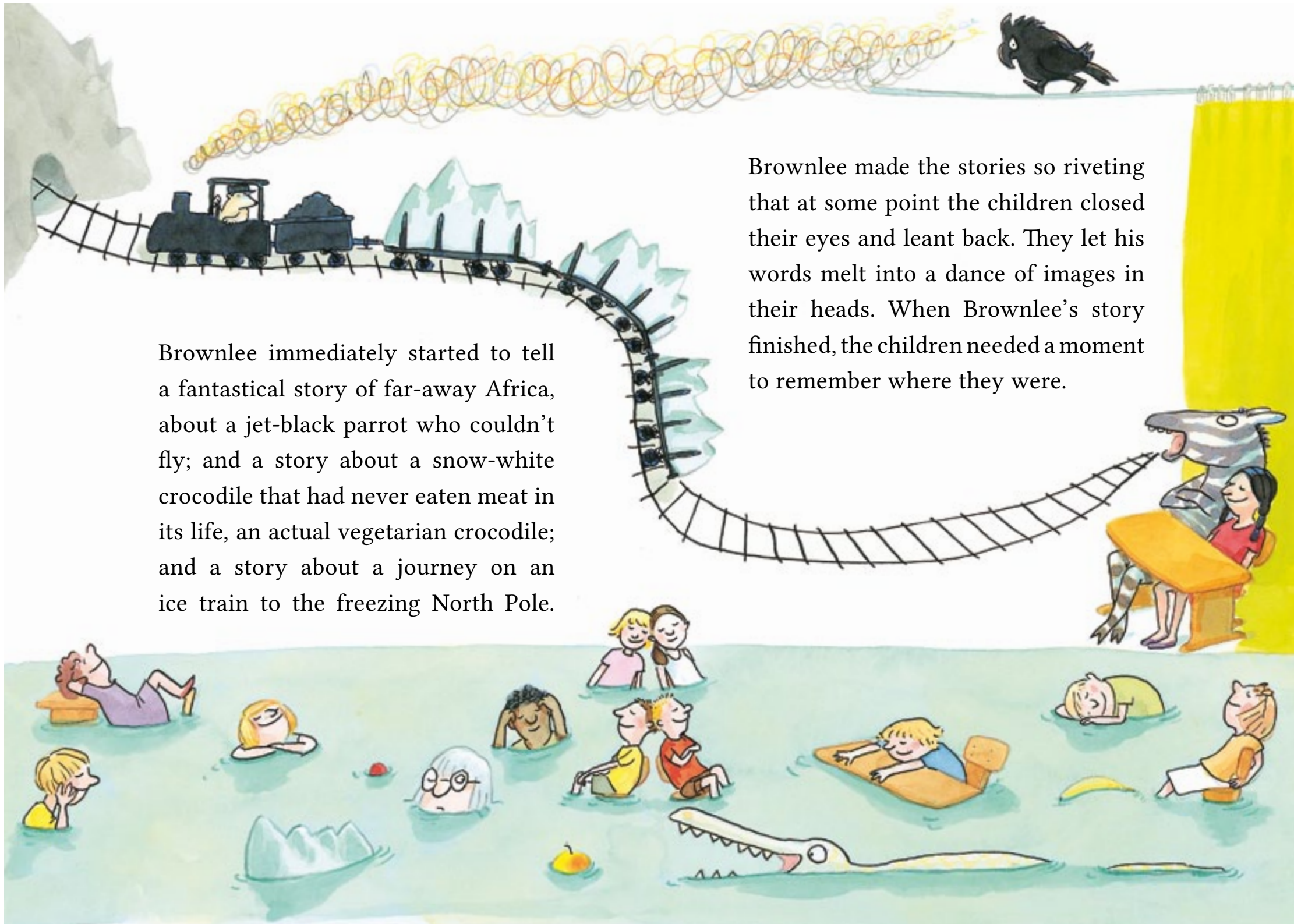
“Good!” Brownlee said. “Then we'll make time!”

“What – when? How? Where? Who?”

“Now!” Brownlee said.

Brownlee immediately started to tell a fantastical story of far-away Africa, about a jet-black parrot who couldn't fly; and a story about a snow-white crocodile that had never eaten meat in its life, an actual vegetarian crocodile; and a story about a journey on an ice train to the freezing North Pole.

Brownlee made the stories so riveting that at some point the children closed their eyes and leant back. They let his words melt into a dance of images in their heads. When Brownlee's story finished, the children needed a moment to remember where they were.



Mrs Jeremias said breathlessly: “We’ve done this before, Brownlee. We call it an imaginary journey!”

“Wonderful!” Brownlee said. “Then we can really get going now.”

The children were delighted.

But if they had thought that Brownlee himself would continue to tell stories, then they were mistaken: each child was allowed to make up their own story. All the others closed their eyes and listened, even Mrs Jeremias.



But just as Henry started to tell his story, the door opened, and the head came in.

“Right, my dear Brownlee,” he said.

“Here I am again! I have found a solution that will make everyone happy!”

Two zookeepers, each holding a long bar with an oval loop at the end, stepped into the room behind the head. The children held their breath.

“No!” Hanna said.

“Don’t you worry!” Brownlee said.

“But...”



Brownlee didn’t put up a fight when they led him outside with the snare round his neck. But Hanna felt like crying and screaming in anger.

“Right!” the head said. “Now the strange beast has gone.”

“No,” Hanna shouted. “Brownlee is not a strange beast!”



The head looked at her in surprise and said: “Come on, now! A talking zebra!?”

“Brownlee,” Hanna said, “is not a talking zebra.”

The head looked puzzled. “So?” he asked.

“What is he then?”

For a moment, Hanna said nothing. Then she looked straight at the head, and said: “Brownlee is exactly what he is. Brownlee is Brownlee, nothing more and nothing less.”

The head shook his head and left the classroom.

At that moment someone sat down next to Hanna, on Brownlee’s chair,

and this someone was none other than Henry.

“Hey, Hanna,” Henry said. “Come on! We’ll get him out! We can do it!”

Hanna looked at him for a long time. Henry! Then she smiled, and she squeezed Henry’s hand under the table.

“Yes,” she whispered excitedly, “of course we will! We’ll get Brownlee out of there, no doubt about it!”

Translated by Alexandra Roesch