



Translated extract from

**Christine Biernath**  
**Keinen Schlag weiter!**  
**Gabriel Verlag**  
**Stuttgart 2007**  
**ISBN 978-3522301053**

pp. 5-20, 25-32

**Christine Biernath**  
**No more hitting!**

**Translated by Helena Ragg-Kirkby**

1

“I only ever wanted the best for my children.” Miriam Schneider, 41

From: hiphopsandy@gmx.de  
Date: Tuesday 27 September, 09:31  
To: lauralee15@freenet.de  
Subject: Hi!

Hi Laura!

I'm Sandra and I'm supposed to be writing to you because Dudek — our word processing teacher — thinks it would be more fun typing emails instead of stupid old business letters. Not a bad idea really, but how am I supposed to start? Perhaps by following Dudek's suggestion and introducing myself? Okay, I'll give it a go. Like I said, my name's Sandra. Sandra Schneider. I'm fourteen years old, averagely tall, averagely fat (or averagely thin — whichever you prefer), and I have averagely blond hair that looks a bit like scummy cotton wool. Though I did use the birthday money from my Gran to have Rasta braids put in during the summer holidays and I've liked my hair a bit better since then. To tell you the truth I wanted to have my navel pierced but you have to have your parents' permission so no chance of that till I'm eighteen. The braids were bad enough so far as my mother was concerned. She's nearly as mad as she was at the start of the summer when I had a temporary tattoo done on the small of my back. My father just laughed. He's dead cool anyway. He's the only one in the family you can have any fun with.

My all-time favourite film is 8 Mile and my favourite music is — I'm sure you've guessed it — hip-hop. My favourite hobby is dancing. My two best friends and me started doing it four years ago. For the last year and a half we've done nothing but hip-hop and we call ourselves 'Girlz in da hood'. We meet every Wednesday evening in the Youth Centre rehearsal room. They're the best two hours of the week when we turn the music up to full volume and just practise our dancing non-stop. We even won second place in a competition. My life would be completely deadly without the dancing as I live in an utterly normal, utterly boring town, go to an utterly normal, utterly boring school and belong to about the most normal and boring family that anyone could possibly imagine.

My father would work right around the clock if he could. Even on weekends he often brings work home. If you want to spend any time with him it's best to go jogging with him. I do actually do that sometimes provided it's not in the early morning before he goes to work. And in winter we sometimes go skiing or snowboarding together. I love skiing almost as much as I love dancing.

Oops, there's the bell!

Can't wait to hear from you,

Sandy

**From:** hiphopsandy@gmx.de  
**Date:** Friday 30 September, 12:09  
**To:** lauralee15@freenet.de  
**Subject:** Hi!

Hi Laura!

Thanks for your long email. Dudek never told me your school was in Berlin. It must be brilliant living in Berlin. Not least because of the hip-hop scene. If I could have that I'd even do without skiing for the rest of my life! Have you honestly seen Samy live?! There aren't many decent gigs around here — and even when there are, no one will take me. Least of all my mother. It makes me green with envy to read that yours does things like that with you! If only I had the sort of older brother who'd smuggle me into hip-hop concerts or discos or adult films. But no! All I have is Benny the Wimp, who's probably still afraid of monsters and the dark! Damn! We've got to learn how to do tables now! Talk to you soon,

Sandy.

My earliest memory? I must have been about three. I wake up because I'm thirsty. I shout for my Mum. She doesn't come. I shout again. And again. No Mum. My nightlight is off. There's a shaft of light in my room from a narrow crack in the shutters. And so I can see it. The monster. It's crammed itself onto the little chair in front of my painting table and it's grinning across at me. "Muuuuuum!!" I pull the duvet over my head and shut my eyes tight. That helps sometimes. It makes the monster disappear sometimes.

Not today though. Today it's moaning. Right from the depths of its monster belly.

I have to get away from here and get to Mum! If I jump out of bed and run really fast perhaps I'll get to the door before the monster does. I carefully lift up the corner of my duvet and peer across towards the table. The monster has grown bigger. His monstrous body has expanded and draped itself over the table and the arms of the chair.

Trembling, I take a deep breath and leap out of bed. As I make a dash for the door, a giant fist smashes me to the ground. The monster has got me! I scream and kick, then notice that my duvet has wrapped itself around my legs. I struggle free and crawl to the door, pull myself up on the door handle, and stagger out onto the landing.

The light's still on in Mum and Dad's bedroom. I push the door open wanting to scramble into their bed, but my feet stay rooted to the floor, as if of their own accord. I can't move a muscle. The monster's attacked Mum! She's lying on the pale carpet in front of the cupboard. Her body's all contorted. Dad's kneeling by her side patting her cheeks. "Miriam", he says in a tone of voice I've never heard him use before. "Come on, Miriam!" Then he looks up, straight into my eyes. "Go back to bed, Benny!" he says. I run back as fast as my legs will carry me. I don't care about the monster any more. I can hear the baby crying in the room next to mine.

2

"Benjamin was a real addition to our school orchestra."  
Martin Ritter, 43, music teacher

**From:** hiphopsandy@gmx.de  
**Date:** Tuesday 4 October, 09:07  
**To:** lauralee15@freenet.de  
**Subject:** Family ties

Hi Laura!

I had no idea you lot in Berlin were already on holiday. Am I jealous or what! I think it's great that you're writing to me all the same. So you want to know who Benny the Wimp is? He's my brother. He's sixteen and he likes CLASSICAL MUSIC! Can you imagine what it's like having a brother who plays piano duets with his own mother? It's hell, I can tell you!

And talking of my mother — she's a real case, she is. I don't expect her to like my music, but is it really necessary for her to moan about it EVERY SINGLE DAY? (After all, I don't complain when she's listening to Mozart!) She never stops telling me how 'anti-women' the lyrics of hip-hop are! Anyone listening to my mother would think she was a real women's libber — when in fact she never stops cleaning, cooking, washing and looking after the house and my Dad. You thought that sort of thing only existed in TV ads? No way! The perfect world of TV ads is alive and kicking in our house: the mum provides an endless stream of tasty goodies, the sheets are dazzling white, the floors gleam like mirrors. I reckon the very worst thing that could happen to my mother would be if people started talking about her because her windows weren't crystal clean. I'll never live that sort of life! I reckon it's great that your mother has a full-time job. I'll get a brilliant job too when I'm older — ideally in the music business. Or in TV. Presenter on MTV, wouldn't that be fab! Then I'd travel the world, meet the most amazing people, and have loads of fun! Hope you have loads of fun as well — you should do, with two more weeks' holiday ahead of you!

Jealous regards,

Sandy.

My mother took me to a concert for the first time soon after my fourth birthday. She made it really exciting. She just told me that we were going to do something extra special. And she looked wonderful. Her shiny black skirt rustled whenever she moved and her pullover was dotted with tiny sparkling stones. She'd tied her hair into a black and silver headscarf and she smelt so lovely that I wanted to keep sniffing her the whole time she was helping me to get dressed: black trousers, white shirt, and a jacket made of brightly coloured, scratchy material that I'd worn at Aunt Nelly's wedding.

“Are we going to a wedding?” I ask as she fixes an equally bright-coloured bow-tie around my neck. Mum shakes her head and smiles a mysterious smile.

The door to the living room is open. Dad's reading the paper and Sandy's standing up in her playpen. She's hanging on to the top rail with one hand and repeatedly slamming a wooden brick against it with the other. She doesn't like the playpen. If Dad doesn't lift her out pretty soon she'll start howling. Mum takes all this in with a slightly anxious look on her face. “Are you sure the two of you will be okay?” she asks.

“Of course we’ll be okay. Won’t we, Sandra?”

My little sister throws the building brick into the middle of the room, sits down with a bump, and burbles happily.

“There you are, you see! Everything’s under control, my darling”, says Dad. “You two have a lovely afternoon.”

Outside, the street lights are already going on.

Mum takes my hand and we walk through the twilight to a large house. A lot of other people want to go into the house as well. Mum shows a man two tickets and he lets us into a large hall with lots of chairs in straight rows one behind the other. Mum takes me right to the front and tells me “This is the stage, and that there” — she points to a wooden box with a railing around it in the middle of the stage — “is the conductor’s rostrum, and those chairs” — she points to the chairs ranged around the rostrum — “are where the musicians sit.”

I haven’t the least idea what Mum’s talking about, but I’m filled with a strong sense of occasion. She points up at a balcony and says “We’re going to sit up there — so that you can see everything as well as hear it.” We walk up a long staircase and squeeze our way past lots of knees to get to some empty seats in the front row. Once we’ve sat down the lights go dim and the buzz of voices falls away. Men in black suits and white shirts come onto the stage by a side door together with a couple of women in long black dresses. They’re all carrying instruments, and they all sit down on their chairs. The people in the hall start clapping. Then a man with no instrument comes onto the stage and gets onto the wooden box. “That’s the conductor”, whispers Mum. The conductor bows, and the people clap even more. The conductor lifts his arms. The entire hall falls silent. The lights go even dimmer. Only the stage is still brightly lit. As the conductor brings his arms down the musicians begin to play. I have never before heard anything so beautiful as this music.

3

“Benny and Sandra couldn’t have been more different. He was a dreamer, but conscientious in everything, she was a real bundle of energy.” Barbara Römer, 43, primary school teacher.

My head's still full of violins and warbling flutes, kettle drums and booming double basses. I don't know why I've woken up but think it must be time for me to go to kindergarten. But where's Mum?

Oh good, the door's opening — but it's Dad who comes in. Sandra's crying somewhere. She was crying yesterday as well when we came back from the concert. Not really crying so much as howling. She was purple in the face and so was Dad.

Dad said "Our daughter has an iron will, Miriam. She'll make her mark in the world."

Mum smiled. She lifted Sandra out of the playpen and her howling stopped at once. She tried to grab hold of the shiny little stones on Mum's pullover. "You should have let her crawl around the room a bit", Mum said, and Dad's face turned an even darker shade of purple.

He sits down on the edge of my bed. The violins and flutes have gone from my head but my heart is pounding instead. I've suddenly remembered that the monster was there during the night. I heard it hitting out at the walls and cupboards. Mum screamed but the monster wouldn't go away.

"Mum's not feeling very well today", says Dad. I wouldn't be feeling very well either if the monster had been running wild in *my* bedroom.

"I have to go to work, Benny. Do you think you can stay here on your own without disturbing Mum?"

Of course I can. "But what about Sandy?" I ask.

"I'm taking Sandra with me. Frau Lorenz will look after her." Frau Lorenz works in Dad's office. She's nice and she always has chocolate in the middle drawer of her desk.

"Can I can come as well?"

“I’m afraid not, Benny. Frau Lorenz wouldn’t get any work done at all if you came too. And after all, Mum’s here. So you don’t need to be afraid. But it would be a good thing if you let her sleep. Can you do that?”

I nod my head again.

“I knew I could rely on you!” Dad kisses me on the forehead. “I’ll bring some pizza back with me at lunch-time. Mum’s sure to be feeling better by then and we can all have lunch together.” Dad stands up. “Your breakfast’s waiting for you in the kitchen, by the way.” He gives me a final brief wave before quietly drawing the door shut behind him. I hide myself away under my duvet and roll myself into a ball. I put my thumb in my mouth and shut my eyes tight.

**From:** hiphopsandy@gmx.de  
**Date:** Friday 7 October, 12:10  
**To:** lauralee15@freenet.de  
**Subject:** Girlz in da hood

Hi Laura!

Okay, that’s fair enough! Seeing that the summer holidays in Berlin end before the summer has even properly begun, your half-term obviously has to start before ours does. Thanks again for emailing me all the same.

I’m looking forward to the weekend. It’s true that I’m not going climbing with my mother (the very idea’s a joke), but Janine, Kim and me are doing a gig: there’s a hip-hop party at our Youth Centre and we’re the live act, so to speak ;- ).

Needless to say my mother made a stupid fuss about my clothes again. She only stopped when I told her that Janine and Kim were going to be wearing exactly the same baggies and tank top for the performance. Then the row started up all over again because she had this crazy idea that I’d have to be back home by ten. Would you believe it! We’re on at half nine, and she thinks she’s going to collect me at ten! I specially looked up the law on youth protection on the internet just to prove to her that I’m allowed to stay out at Youth Club events until midnight. It didn’t cut any ice with her, though. Fortunately my Dad turned up at that point and suggested she collect me at eleven.

I’m dead excited because I might see Mo there! I haven’t told you anything about him yet, have I? He’s Moritz Niederbronner, the coolest boy in this entire suburb! Black hair and



green eyes — a crazy combination! He's quite tall and thin with broad shoulders and his hips are so slender that I often wonder how his baggies stay up. Janine and Kim think he's arrogant, but I think he's brilliant. Just before the summer holidays the Youth Centre held a competition and Mo won hands down. Just amazing how he can rap like that off the top of his head! Unfortunately he's already sixteen and in the same class as Benny. Being the sister of a wimp like Benny probably makes you the lowest of the low in Mo's eyes. Have a great weekend, and carry on enjoying the holidays.

Sandy.

For the first two weeks my mother took me to school and collected me afterwards. But then Sandra gets ill and Mum asks me if I'm up to going on my own. Of course I am! She said as well that Moritz might walk home with me. Moritz lives one street further along from us. And sure enough, there he is waiting for me in the playground after school. With his friends Dennis and Yannick. Yannick's almost a head taller than me because he's repeating Year 1. "You little creep" says Moritz.

I don't know what he means.

"Sucking up to teacher — we don't like that!"

Frau Römer said today that my picture of autumn had turned out really well, and that Moritz would have to make more effort.

Before I really know what's happening, Yannick snatches my satchel off my back and flings it across to Moritz. He catches it and throws it to Dennis. But he doesn't throw it hard enough. The satchel falls to the ground and the fastenings break open. All my books spill out. I'm just going down onto my knees to pick them up again when I get a hefty kick in the back. I land flat on my face. Blood streams from my nose and drips down onto the grey tarmac. At exactly this moment Frau Römer happens to cross the playground on her way to the car park.

"Benjamin, what an earth has happened?" She kneels down next to me, fishes a clean hanky out of her huge bag and carefully dabs my nose with it. "Are those your books?"

I nod.

"Benjamin tripped over", declares Moritz. "His satchel burst open and everything fell out. We were just going to give him a hand." He bends down to pick up my reading book while Dennis gathers a few exercise books together.

“That’s so nice of you.” Frau Römer is still busy dabbing away at my nose. “Is that better now?” she asks.

I nod again.

Moritz is just shoving the last of the books into my satchel. Behind Frau Römer’s back he moves his flattened hand across his throat and grins.

“Look, there you are, your friends have put everything back in your bag.” Our teacher helps me back onto my feet and hands me my satchel. “See you tomorrow, children!” She walks off towards the car park and disappears with a wave.

“I know I’m pretty much on my own in thinking this — but I always felt there was something not quite right about the Schneiders.” Dr Beatrice Niederbronner, 42, neighbour

Frau Römer has promised us we’ll be reading by Christmas. My father wants to check my progress for himself. I’m sitting on a stool in front of his armchair with my reading book on my knees. Dad is tap-tap-tapping his fingers on the chair arm right in front of my face. I ought really to be looking at my reading book, but I can’t take my eyes off his drumming fingers.

“Benjamin! What are you waiting for? Get on with it!”

I stare at the open book. When I was practising with Mum this afternoon I could read every single word accompanying the brightly coloured illustrations — but now all of a sudden the black letters on the page don’t make sense any more. The drumming of Dad’s fingers becomes even more rapid. De-dum, de-dum, de-dum.

“Come on now, Benjamin! I want to find out what you’ve learnt, that’s all.”

“U- ... U- ... U- ...” I swallow, I choke on the words. They just don’t want to come out.

“Miriam! Miriam!”

Mum comes into the room. She’s been baking biscuits and her hands are white with flour. She wipes some sweat-drenched strands of hair from her forehead with the back of one hand.

“Didn’t I tell you to practise this with Benjamin?”

“We did practise it, Matthias. Benny can read the whole book.”

“Then come over here and join me in savouring his brilliant reading skills, my dearest.” Dad taps the arm of his chair and Mum obediently sits down on it. “Start again, Benjamin.”

I can’t take my eyes off Dad’s hand, which sidles up Mum’s back then buries itself in her hair. This makes her jump. “Come on, Ben”, she whispers, “show Dad how well you can read.”

I try again: “U – U – Ut...”.

“Just listen to that, Miriam. Whatever made you think you could teach thirty children when you can’t even manage to help an intelligent six-year-old to read?”

“Benny read it all perfectly this afternoon, Matthias. He’s tired.”

“Are you tired, Benjamin?”

I dig my teeth into my lower lip to stop myself crying.

Dad tousles my hair. “Then go off to bed now and have a good sleep. Tomorrow when I get back from work you’ll read that page to me. Okay?”

I nod.

I dream the whole night through about letters. Letters that dance around and swap places with each other every time I think I've worked a word out.

**From:** hiphopsandy@gmx.de  
**Date:** Tuesday 18 October, 09.22  
**To:** lauralee15@freenet.de  
**Subject:** Welcome back!

Morning Laura!

Welcome back to school ;-) and thanks very much for your sympathy! Friday really was terrible! As if an E and two Fs weren't bad enough, we then had a Chemistry test during last lesson, believe it or not! Needless to say I didn't have the faintest idea about anything. After all, I want to be a journalist or something, not a chemist or a mathematician.

I still haven't let on at home. I mean it really gets on my nerves when my father does these great big sighs and rolls his eyes and says "You're not exactly at a grammar school, Sandra, you really ought to be able to cope." If my mother knew what marks I've been getting she wouldn't let me go to the Youth Centre any more, that's for certain. And I'm absolutely not having that. I mean we're just working on a new bit of choreography that we're going to do at a competition next spring.

Have to go. Dudek wants us to do a fast-typing session. Ciao for now,

Sandy

**From:** hiphopsandy@gmx.de  
**Date:** Friday 21 October, 12.07  
**To:** lauralee15@freenet.de  
**Subject:** Flying fingers

Oh wow! Or rather: Hi Laura!

We've just done a test. Reckon I must have hit a record number of keys! Should be really useful in my career at MTV or Bravo TV. Don't suppose anyone will show the slightest bit of interest in that though, nor in my B in German. All they'll be interested in will be the two Fs I got recently and the D in Physics, plus the E in Chemistry that I'll be getting next lesson..

Fact is, my mother went to a parents' evening yesterday so she's now completely in the picture about my marks. Needless to say she had a real go at me about it at breakfast this morning. She's banned the Youth Centre — including hip hop rehearsals — and TV as well. She's even confiscated my mobile. Arghhhh!!! Medieval torture that is, don't you think?!

I tried to explain to her that I'm absolutely hopeless at science, and that it certainly won't matter a damn to the people at MTV so long as I can do dead good interviews, in English or German regardless. My mother simply didn't listen, she just kept banging on at me, then at some point I'd just had enough and I screamed "What on earth are you on about, *you* haven't got a career!"

She went completely quiet, turned as pale as anything, then whispered "At least I made it to university."

"You did school kids' music, then ploughed your exam. Really great!" She just clouted me one and ran out of the kitchen in floods of tears.

My father often tells my mother she can count her lucky stars that she landed a fool like him — a fool who's prepared to feed and house her even though she can't even cook properly.

Hope you're having more fun than I am!

Have a great weekend — mine certainly won't be up to much,  
Sandy

## 6

"When Matthias came back from work all tense I always got the children into bed as early as possible in order to avoid trouble. But sometimes he flew into a rage just like that, completely out of the blue." Miriam Schneider, 41

We're sitting at the lunch table. Dad's in a really good mood. It's Saturday, and he's spent the whole morning playing with us in the garden. Hide and seek, cops and robbers, boules. Now we're all hungry.

"So what's the main course?" Dad asks as he dips his spoon into his vegetable soup.

Mum's face turns as white as her blouse. "This *is* the main course", she whispers.

"Vegetable soup?" Dad has such an incredulous look on his face that Sandra can't help giggling. "At the weekend?!"

“I didn’t have time to go shopping.” Mum sounded like one of the three little pigs when the wolf came knocking at the door.

“I looked after the children all morning and you still didn’t manage to get to the shops?! You really can count yourself lucky to have landed a fool like me. Who on earth else would be prepared to feed and house you despite the fact that you can’t even run the household properly?” Dad tries the soup. “Or cook.” He pushes his plate away.

Sandra, who up to now has been stirring away at her plate, lifts a spoonful of soup right up to eye level and growls in a deep voice “Ugh! Whatever is this?” Then she lets chunks of leek and carrot tumble back into her plate. Soup splashes almost as far as the middle of the table, and I hold my breath. But Dad laughs. “There you are, my dear,” he says, “Sandra doesn’t think much of your cooking either. Perhaps the best thing would be to get rid of your soup altogether and order something decent to eat instead?” And with that he picks up his plate and sends it sailing through the air like a frisbee. It smashes against the wall. Soup trickles down the wall and soaks into the carpet amidst fragments of plate and bits of vegetable.

Thrilled by this, Sandra bursts out laughing. Picking up her own plate with both hands, she tries to fling it through the air, but most of the soup spills onto her lap and the plate ends up on the floor.

Dad’s not laughing any more. “It’s high time you taught this child some manners”, he says, then stands up and storms out of the dining room. We hear his footsteps in the hall then his study door slamming shut. Only now do we dare to breathe.

Mum carries on eating. I hear her spoon clinking against the side of her plate, and after each clink I hear the sound of her swallowing. My throat feels as though it has been squeezed tight shut. I wouldn’t be able to get anything down, not even the tiniest drop of soup. Even so, I keep my eyes glued to my plate.

“Don’t cry, Mummy”, I hear Sandra whisper.