

Translated excerpt

**Lara Schützsack**  
***Und auch so bitterkalt***  
***Roman***

S. Fischer Verlag, Frankfurt 2014  
ISBN 978-3-596-85619-0

pp. 9-20

**Lara Schützsack**  
***So so cold***  
***Novel***

Translated by Sheridan Marshall



## Summer

The moon hangs in the sky, round and unbelievably yellow. Lucinda and I lie on our bridge and look up at the sky. It is a warm, seemingly endless night. The bridge – or rather what's left of it – is at the edge of town. No one comes here. Only us. We sneak out of the house when everyone else is asleep. There used to be a river here that you had to cross if you wanted to leave town. Both sides of the bridge are still passable, but in the middle the wooden planks have rotted and started to break off. If you get far enough forwards when you're in the middle of the bridge you can look right down. The signs that used to be at both ends of the bridge to warn people against going on it aren't there anymore. Someone has covered them with graffiti and then kicked them over.

Lucinda says that it's important for us to feel summer in its entirety. You can hear crickets chirping everywhere in the dark green grass and the bushes, the leaves rustling in the wind. There's no other place where you can smell a summer night like you can here.

'How does it smell?' I ask. Lucinda breathes in deeply: 'Damp and heavy and unsettling. Like you should never go to sleep again, in case you miss something.' Then we lie still on this forgotten old bridge. Sometimes there's a rustling as though someone were sitting in the bushes underneath. But we're not afraid. The most dangerous thing is fear itself.

'Grown-ups are always afraid,' Lucinda says. 'Everything scares them, The stars above all. They can't understand how something so bright and beautiful can be light years away at the same time. Ideally they'd like to shoot at the sky until the brightest star falls down and burns out on the ground at the peak of its brightness. Then researchers would come from all over the world to see the fallen star. They would tap into it with wires, measuring equipment and computers. They would strip it apart and assemble the results in formulae and charts. But they would have given away its secret.'

We dangle our heads into the abyss.

'What if we fall?,' I ask.

'We won't fall,' Lucinda says and bends even further down. 'Just look at how beautiful the wasteland is down there.' For a while we just look down at the dry river bed. Then we lay with our faces turned towards the sky and Lucinda tells stories about Tenebrien. Tenebrien is the country where all the people go who aren't made for our world. The thin-skinned, the fragile, those who wish for too much, those who have risked too much and lost too much. The sea in Tenebrien heals all the scars from our world. Its water is unimaginably deep and salty and lets the body float weightlessly. In Tenebrien everyone sleeps naked, wrapped in polar bear furs and tightly packed together. 'Like Eskimos,' Lucinda says.

'Everything is simple. If you love someone there it lasts forever.' Of course Tenebrien has its own national animal: the blue cat. The cat has shining yellow eyes and sea-blue fur. If you meet one it brings you luck and if you touch one it brings comfort. Tenebrien is a dark country. It is always night there and Lucinda says that the sky is full of countless stars.

Lucinda's voice is soft and deep, so deep you can feel it. She plays her voice like an instrument, softly stroking each of its strings so that you get stomach ache from longing for the things she's describing. But Lucinda's eyes are the most beautiful thing of all: small green eyes with streaks of yellow. Eyes that you can never forget. I think that somebody somewhere must always be thinking about my sister's eyes. Lucinda is the sort of girl that people turn round to look at in the street. Not just because she's beautiful, but because they can tell that she makes things happen. Things that don't happen to everyone. You can feel it in the way she moves, in the current of air when she passes by. You can see it in the slight shadow over her face and in the light that never stops flickering in her eyes.

When she stops her story we lie there for a long time, listening to the night noises. I take Lucinda's hand and lay it on my cheek. Her hand is cool and smells of metal. In the distance some dogs are howling. 'Can you hear that?' Lucinda asks, 'summer sounds different at night. As

though it could swallow you up.'

The handlebars wobble dangerously. Lucinda and I are riding along the dark street on her wreck of a bicycle. There are no cars for miles and so we're riding along the middle of the road. Lucinda steers in big snaking curves. I'm sitting on the back with my arms around her hips. Her long black hair blows in my face. We sing Reinhard Mey's song, 'Above the Clouds'. But we're not really singing, it's more like shrieking. I am the backing singer. Lucinda sings: 'Above the clouds,' and I join in: 'Eyeyeyey!' Lucinda leans deeply into the curves and sometimes I let out a quiet cry. Not from fear, but because something in my stomach is leaping from sheer excitement. We are heading right for the blue light of the Aral petrol station when a fast-moving car suddenly appears behind us. We notice it too late so that there's no time to move over to the side. The car narrowly avoids us, almost running us over. The driver honks his horn angrily. 'Above the clouds,' Lucinda yells. The vehicle breaks, almost coming to a halt next to us and then continues at the same speed as us. The window is wound down. I narrow my eyes. As a small child I always narrowed my eyes when there was going to be trouble. I used to think that no one could see me and although I now know better, I still narrow my eyes.

'Girls, you're riding in the middle of the street with no lights! Are you crazy?' The driver is beside himself with anger. Lucinda pedals faster: 'Of course we're crazy. What do you think?'

'That's virtual suicide!', he yells.

'Absolutely,' trills my sister.

'You complete idiots!'

The man accelerates noisily and races off. We laugh. I press my head into Lucinda's back and wrap my arms even tighter around her slim body.

'Above the clouds...'

'Eyeyeyey...'

After the road sign she turns off in a reckless sweep towards the

petrol station. We stop right outside the kiosk window. Lucinda bangs on the glass with her fist. A boy from our neighbourhood, Bernd, is sitting at the till. He starts at the noise but lightens up when he sees Lucinda. Bernd is already eighteen but he is short, unimposing and spotty. The girls on our street laugh at him and call him crater-face, not caring that he can hear them. Lucinda says that he's more interesting than the others precisely because he looks the way he does.

'I don't understand, ' I say.

And she says: 'You will do. One day.'

Lucinda gets off and presses the bike into my hands. 'You wait outside!' Then she goes into the garishly lit kiosk, not without first shaking out her hair and casting a glance at her reflection in the mirror. Her step is lively. I watch her through the glass.

When Lucinda enters a room everything starts to move. There are no rules anymore. Her presence throws everything into question. She casts a testing look at Bernd and sees to her satisfaction that he is incapable of doing anything except following her with his eyes. She goes straight to the ice-cream cabinet, fishes out a colourful package and shows it to me through the window. It's a Twister – my favourite ice-cream. I nod. My sister moves as though in slow motion as she walks over to the till from the freezer cabinet. Slowly she pushes the ice-cream and a pack of chewing gum over the counter to Bernd. He reaches for the Twister without looking. She holds onto the ice-cream for a second too long so that his fingers touch her hand. He looks up and turns red when he catches her eye, looking quickly back at the till again. Then he scans the things with a shaking hand. Lucinda smiles as she turns and walks out of the petrol station without paying.

'Come on!' She gives me the ice-cream, grabs the bike and gets on. I jump on the back. We ride in a snaking line, giggling.

'Is he watching?'

As we roll out of the circle of light cast by the petrol station and into the darkness, I turn round.

'Yes, he's watching!'

Bernd is sitting by the till and staring after us. His shift has only just begun. I think that at this moment it will be stretching endlessly in front of him. I feel sorry for him because that's how nights without Lucinda seem to me: endlessly long.

'Can I sleep with you today?' I ask.

'What?', Lucinda cries, as the wind and her hair stream past her ears.

'What did you say?'

'Sleep with you, can I sleep with you today?' I shout.

Lucinda's bed isn't a bed. It's a cave. It's a boat. A cave-boat, that takes us through the night, loaded with scarves, posters, books and many secrets – stones that she has collected from all over the place and that have magic powers in the dark, stories that are so creepy I have to put my hands over my ears. My sister defies all requests and pleas from my parents that she clear out her bed. Instead the treasures mount up on the bed and take up more and more room. My sister is somewhere in there amongst them. Covered with books, notices and colourful scarves.

Occasionally Lucinda lets me sleep with her. These nights are special, filled with our whisperings, Lucinda's soft voice, and my hundreds of questions. My sister answers them all. Lucinda says that there is no truth that's the same for all people and therefore there is no question that you cannot answer. There are an infinite number of truths. The only truths for us are the things we feel. Anyone can answer any question when they have enough colours in their head.

By contrast with me, Lucinda falls asleep as soon as she shuts her eyes. For as long as I can remember I have been plagued by two fears: fear of the dark and the fear that my sister will leave me alone. And so I try to keep her awake. I ask her questions. 'What do you think the weather will be like tomorrow? Do you think mum and dad kiss each other a lot when we're not looking? Are there dogs on other planets?' When Lucinda's answers start to become slower and quieter I know that she will

soon go to sleep. 'Good night!', I say. 'Good night,' Lucinda says. Then it's quiet. I don't want to be awake on my own. 'Sleep well,' I say. 'Sleep well,' comes the reply from a long way away. 'Sweet dreams,' I add.

No answer. I worry that my sister will go to sleep forever. What if she doesn't wake up again tomorrow? 'And wake well tomorrow!', I whisper beseechingly into the stillness. I can't think of anything else then. I am alone. I lie awake for a long time before I can go to sleep.

Isa is already waiting in the hall for me when I come downstairs the next morning. Isa is my mother. She is standing there with her hands on her hips, looking at me. I count the stairs in my head as I come down. I wish there were a hundred – but of course there are only the usual ten steps.

'Good morning!' Her eyes are not eyes, but blue laser beams that are always on the lookout for faults.

'Morning,' I say, and try to get past her into the kitchen, but she stands in my way.

'Look at me.'

I look up and then quickly look away again.

'You look tired.'

Fault identified.

I try to make the time go quicker. I sit down on the steps and start to put my shoes on, slowly and neatly.

'That was a question!', Isa says.

'I was reading,' I murmur. Isa's expression remains sceptical. 'The book about the people that sleep together naked in polar bear furs. That love one another forever. In the country where everything is simple and life is endless...' My voice becomes quicker and shriller. I can't lie. Isa looks at me as though I'm not all there. Where's Lucinda? 'Er, Tenebrien,' I try to explain. Isa is about to ask another question when a door opens upstairs.

Lucinda rushes down the stairs. Her long hair is in a dramatic up-do, her breasts and ribs are easily visible under her tight dark red T-shirt. Her

denim skirt skims her bottom. She passes us without saying anything and slips into her shoes, chunky cowboy boots that look too big on her legs. Then she stands in the hall and looks enquiringly at us.

'What?'

'You mean "pardon"!' Isa attaches great importance to manners.

'What about breakfast?' And also to our eating something in the mornings.

'I can't right now.' Lucinda heads past Isa to the front door.

'Malina?'

Finally. I jump up off the stairs and grab my rucksack from the floor.

'Lessons don't start until eight o'clock. You shouldn't go out without any breakfast.'

Isa looks reproachfully at us, but we are already half out of the door.

'But we will have breakfast!' Lucinda pulls a big piece of pink chewing gum out of her skirt pocket, sticks it in her mouth and smiles innocently at Isa.

'Ok then, ciao!'

We run down the garden path and along the street towards the bus stop.

'Did she scan you?', Lucinda asks.

'Yes.'

'And?'

'She gave me a funny look but I said that I was up late reading.'

'Perfect!'

Lucinda and I go to the same school. Sometimes I watch my sister from my classroom when she's sitting on the school steps in her short denim skirt during her free periods, drumming her cowboy boots rhythmically against the wall. Now and then – when no teachers are watching – she holds out her hand to get a hand-rolled cigarette from one of the boys in the upper school. She takes a drag and then gives it back, without even



deigning to look at the generous donor. Smoking is forbidden at our school if you're under eighteen, but that doesn't bother Lucinda. She earns respect from the boys and pointed looks from the girls. She only has enemies or admirers. Nobody is indifferent to her. The teachers say to me: 'You do look alike, but you're so different from your sister.' And then they look at me as though I should say something in reply. But I don't know what.

Bernd often stands on the steps. He stands apart from the others, near his friend Julius. He hardly speaks and always looks shocked, as though he's just realised that he's forgotten something important. Lucinda thinks he doesn't have enough feminine energy. People from our school stand on the steps in order of popularity. Right at the top there's Olivia, the queen, our head girl, who according to Lucinda is nothing more than hormones on legs. Bernd and Julius stand right at the bottom, below the last step. No one has any idea that my sister sometimes meets up with Bernd. On the steps Lucinda behaves as though she doesn't know him. My sister sits sideways on the wall. Everyone looks at her but she doesn't belong to any group. She thinks the others are laughable.

Once I was standing in the queue in the cafeteria when I heard Olivia whisper to her best friend Nadine: 'Watch out, the crazy girl's coming!' When I turned round I saw Lucinda standing in the doorway. She had braided her hair into two plaits with dried flowers woven into them. The remains of a bunch of roses that Bernd had given her. When I told Lucinda about it later she was so delighted that she wore the roses for two more days, until they fell apart. Isa says that Lucinda has to stand out from the crowd at all costs. You can hear from her tone of voice that it annoys her. 'Whatever your sister says or does,' Isa says, 'you can discount half of it straightaway.'

Lucinda rolls her eyes behind Isa's back: 'I have no idea why you get so worked up about it! You can just rise above it,' she sniped to Isa.

'Whatever Isa says or does,' she hisses to me, 'you can guarantee it'll be as dry as bread. She doesn't have an ounce of creativity in her!'

Frieder and I look at one another and don't know what to say. Lucinda and Isa are black and white. Day and night. And Frieder thinks that really they're exactly the same.'