

**Ulrike Rylance**

## **My Maths Disaster – or the Long Road to the First Kiss**

Original title: Mein Mathe-Desaster oder Der lange Weg zum ersten Kuss  
February 2016  
176 pages  
Age 11 and up

### Outline

What a start to Lilly's seventh grade year! She's been saddled with the responsibility of running the school blog. Of course there's no way she can write about what's really going on. So she runs a parallel version—a Top Secret one!—in which she keeps note of who's top of the boys' hotlist, how to survive a class outing with the new art teacher (you pair the old hippie off with the class teacher!) and how to shake off annoying admirers while simultaneously taking revenge on nauseating bitches (you write fake love letters to the former from the latter). She also records a few things you really ought to avoid (such as entering the maths Olympics when in fact you hate the subject, just because the boy of your dreams is taking part.) In other words she tells the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth!

- A witty and warm-hearted graphic novel for girls aged 11 and up about friendship, love, teachers and cat-fights—in a word the everyday madness of teenage life!

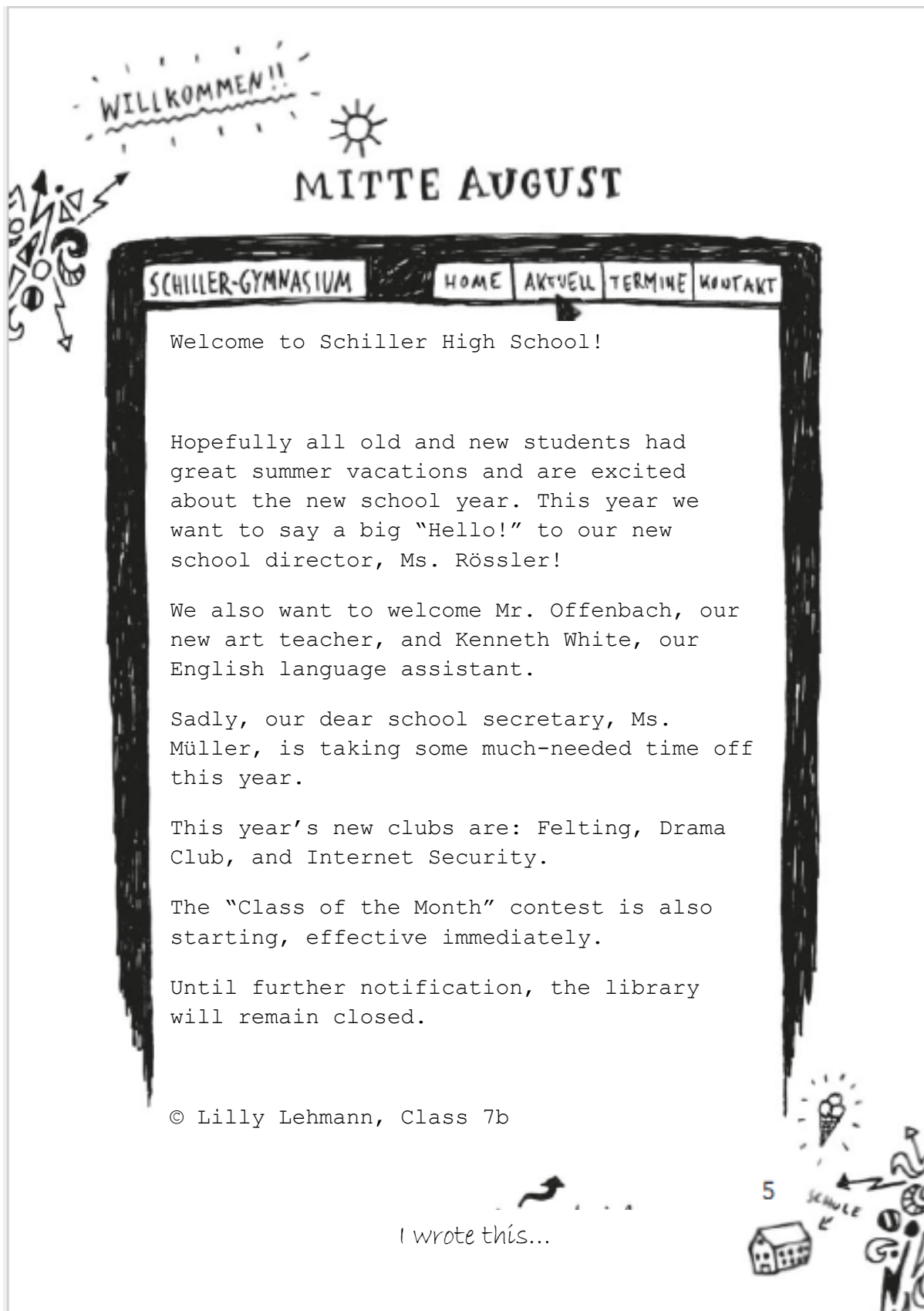
*Ulrike Rylance* was born in 1968 and studied English and German in Leipzig and London. She was an assistant teacher in Wales and Manchester, and also taught German to children and adults in London. In 2001 she moved to Seattle, USA, with her husband and two daughters.

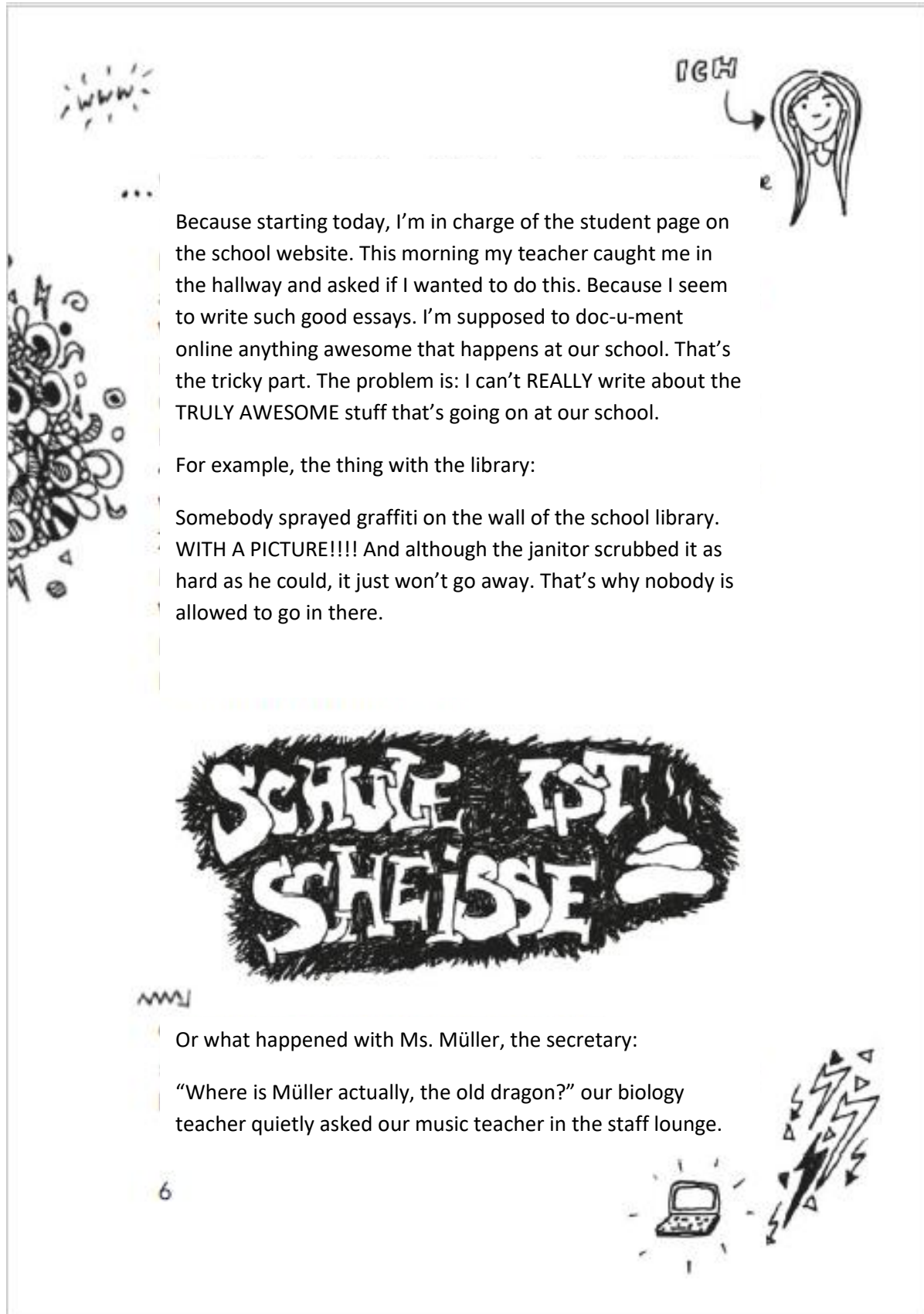


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**Ulrike Rylance: Mein Mathe-Desaster oder Der lange Weg zum ersten Kuss**

Sample translation by Rachel Hildebrandt





I heard this quite clearly early this morning as I waited on my teacher, Ms. Wenz, to give me the password for the school website.

“Rehab,” the music teacher whispered back just as quietly. “She had a thing for red wine, lots of it.”

Then the two of them snickered. That would have REALLY been something interesting for the website.



SCHILLER-GYMNASIUM

HOME

AKTUELL

TERMINE

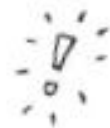
KONTAKT

Last year, our beloved school secretary, Ms. Müller, enjoyed guzzling buckets of red wine in her office, and she is now recovering comfortably in a rehab clinic.

But grrrr... that won't fly. Or the parents will be climbing the school's walls.

That's why from now on I'll have to secretly record on the side what really is happening.

After all, the truth should not be concealed, so one more time:



Mid-August (for real!!!)

Seventh grade REALLY started off good for me. And also for my best friend Felicitas. Since she was able to sit behind Hendrik on the bus today.

“He looked SOOOOO cute as always, staring dreamily out the window,” she told me. “You know how his hair falls in his eyes. And when he smiles, the saliva on his teeth always shimmers so mysteriously. Look, I took a picture.”

All you could see on the photo was the back of a head covered with black hair, and it was pretty blurry at that. He actually looked more like a Russian fur hat.

“Really cute,” I agreed with her, although personally I thought a Russian fur cap was a thousand times more interesting, intelligent, and entertaining than Hendrik. But Felicitas has been crazy about him since third grade, so that’s that. She’s my best friend after all, and just at that moment, the top drama queens Melle and Mara walked up, craning their necks to see the photo.

“So, Felicitas, that’s your new boyfriend? Are you going out with a bear skin or what? You’re perfect for each other, ha, ha!” Over the summer, they’d managed to become even dumber and more stuck up than before. Besides that, they now wore striped nail polish, and their eyes were lined so thickly they looked like pandas. And they were wearing such high-heeled shoes that when they ran, it sounded like a string of firecrackers.

But their laughter was just as acidic as it had been last year. And then suddenly two STRANGE people walked into the classroom:

1. A funny-looking man with long hair and a beret and paint splatters on his arms, wearing a t-shirt inside out. All he did was poke his head in the room and call out, “Aha, Art Nouveau windows!” Then he was gone. A nut case?
2. Another funny-looking, younger guy with red hair in a black suit, white shirt and tie. At first, we thought somebody must have died and this was the undertaker who had come to pick up the body. But the undertaker just sat up front, as calm as could be, eating a bag of potato chips as he played with his phone. Strange. He also said something, which no one could understand. It sounded something like “Himynameskenneffite.”

Himynameskenneffite simply wouldn’t go away, but just sat there in front of us, and that was inconvenient since I actually wanted to tell Felicitas everything about Lukas Meyer, my crush from summer camp. But Himynameskenneffite just sat there like he was nailed to the seat, at least until our teacher, Ms. Wenz, walked in and informed him that he needed to be in the eighth-grade class and was in the wrong place. And she told us that this is our new English language assistant, Kenneth White. Ah, okay. He’s supposed to teach us English. Not bury someone. Phew, close call.

Ms. Wenz then explained that we have a new school director named Ms. Rössler, and that, starting now, we’re in the running for the title “Class of the Month.” We can stay in the competition by doing things like voluntarily cleaning up the schoolyard. Of course, absolutely NOBODY wants to do that. In the schoolyard, there’s such things as:

- used pieces of gum
  - wadded-up, floppy-damp tissues
  - cigarette butts
  - squashed, rotten pieces of school bread
  - scrunchies WITH strands of hair in them
  - beat-up pairs of lonely gym shorts, and
  - lots of moldy, mushy clumps of stuff that you don't really want to know what it is!!! Gag!
- (Felicitas and I even found a condom there once!!! Ewwww!)

We had art for the next hour, and who should be standing there at the chalkboard, grinning in anticipation?

The crazy man from earlier!

The crazy man was our new art teacher, Mr. Offenbach!

First off, Mr. Offenbach wanted to know our names and write them down, but somehow this managed to take forever, because he kept forgetting the names as soon as he heard them.

“What’s your name again? Melle? Say it again. How do you write that? Two E’s, two L’s? How exactly?”

In the meantime, Felicitas had drawn two large hearts on the table - we were in art after all, so it was okay - and in one she wrote “Felicitas B. + Hendrik K. = forever!!!” and in the other “Lilly L. + ...”

“What’s the name of that boy from camp again?” she whispered at me. Unfortunately at the very moment that Mr. Offenbach pointed at the open chair to the left of mine and asked: “Who sits there?”

“Lukas Meyer,” I said quietly to Felicitas.

Yet Mr. Offenbach somehow managed to hear that. “Lukas Meyer, okay. Where is he today?”

And before I could even react, Felicitas cut in: “Lukas Meyer is still at summer camp.”

Then she giggled and poked me in the leg under the table. The others in class were giggling now, too, but Mr. Offenbach had not noticed a thing. He was just staring dreamily into nowhere.

“His name is Lukas, eh... Like Lucas Cranach, the most brilliant German painter of the Renaissance. I’m sure you’ve heard of him, right?”

After class, I wanted to go straight to Mr. Offenbach in order to tell him that there was no Lukas Meyer, but suddenly I saw HIM. The cutest boy in the world. He had such gorgeous brown eyes and a sweet smile and such a cool haircut, and he was not a dwarf like most of the seventh-grade boys and not as pathetic as they were, because he had just picked up a pencil that Emo-Annie had dropped and handed it back to her with: “Here you go!” Totally nice, right? And Emo-Annie had blinked at him through her jet black curtain of hair and SMILED! Emo-Annie never smiles! Never!!

“Who is that?” I asked Felicitas.

“The new boy from 7a,” Felicitas answered. “I think his name is Freddy.”

Freddy!

Unfortunately the bell rang at that moment, and I didn’t see Freddy any more. Crud. And the toilets in the girls’ restroom were all clogged, and this was only the first day of school! Betty Bauer from the tenth grade furiously ripped down the off-limits tape and yelled loudly: “What is this, some stinking JUVY HALL?!” (Felicitas and I think Betty Bauer is SUPER COOL. She’s our idol. Sadly she’ll never know this because she never talks to us.)

Once the classes ended, the new clubs met for the first time (except for theater, which Mr. Offenbach was in charge of and which he somehow forgot about.) At least twenty people stood in line for “Internet Security” - all boys who want to be hackers.

“Felting with Ms. Unger,” our history teacher, was in the next room. She sat there lonely and alone in front of a mountain of yarn, like a shrivelled Sleeping Beauty lacking beauty sleep, and I felt so sorry for her that I almost lost all self-control and went in to sign up for “Felting with Ms. Unger.” But Felicitas yanked me back at the last second.

“Are you nuts?”

## Early September

This year, the theater club is going to perform the play Twilight. Anyone interested in being involved should notify Mr. Offenbach by September 10.

The “Internet Security” club is full! “Felting” is unfortunately being canceled due to insufficient interest.

The biology field trip for all the seventh-grade classes to the birds’ paradise was a smashing success. We learned so many interesting things about the various representatives of the bird world, and we’ll never ever forget all the vultures, raptors and owls.

The Class of the Month for September is Class 6a. Congratulations!

The library will remain closed until further notification. The girls’ restroom on the first floor will remain closed until further notification.

© Lilly Lehmann, Class 7b

## Early September (for real!!!)

The trip to the birds’ paradise really was unforgettable. But for completely different reasons. It started out well enough, because all the seventh-grade classes rode over there together. That included 7a = that included Freddy. Which is why I spent so much extra time on my hairstyle that day, and I got up an extra hour early in order to wash my hair. Grandpa was the only other one up at that time, because he was looking for his glasses. But despite the fact I used the Shine Activator Shampoo and the Brilliant Control Boost Conditioner and the Ultimate Mega Mousse with Extra Strong Hold for my hair, it still didn’t look any different than usual. But then I unfortunately didn’t have time to eat breakfast, so I just grabbed a yogurt from the fridge. At least I found Grandpa’s glasses, which were sitting in the butter compartment. Grandpa was happy and commented that now they felt cool on his skin, and he thought that was nice.

(And I was glad that Mom hadn’t seen this, otherwise she’d just have nagged Grandpa again about the fact that glasses don’t belong in the fridge.)

All of the seventh-grade classes were already standing around at the school, waiting on the bus and chatting with each other. Melle and Mara were wearing little feathers in their hair today. Because that’s in. But they actually looked a little dumb, like plucked chickens.



When they saw us, they started whispering again. They kept pointing and giggling at Felicitas’ new purple jacket. (It was unfortunately a little big, because Felicitas’ father had bought it in an Ebay auction.)

„Hey, Felicitas – is that a jacket or a one-man tent? Muahaha! OR a parachute? In case you fly away? Muahaha! Oh, that wouldn’t happen, since you’re much too heavy, muahaha!”

“Just make sure they don’t accidentally lock you up in a parrot cage in the bird park,” was my response. A couple of people laughed, and Melle looked at us POISONOUSLY. And fired right back: “Oh yeah? You need to make sure that you’re even allowed to get on the bus. Lilly’s backpack is melting like old cheese, ha, ha.”

Crud, crud, crud! I had been wondering the whole time what was so damp against my back. On the way over, the stupid jogurt had burst and had seeped through the fabric! So disgusting!

Melle and Mara laughed, high fived each other, and shook their feathers, while I cleaned my disgusting backpack with tissues the best I could. As a result, I was the last one on board and had no chance of sitting anywhere close to Freddy, so I had to sit with Felicitas way up front in the first row. Where you couldn’t see anything that the other cool kids in the back were doing.

Felicitas was also in a bad mood, since Hendrik was sitting unbelievably far back, where he was smilingly, silently and attractively gazing out of the window. (Her words, not mine) Felicitas couldn’t even take a photo of him, since somebody was constantly jostling into the picture!

Our teacher Ms. Wenz had checked to make sure that everyone was there, and then suddenly Mr. Offenbach showed up. A giant camera was hanging around his neck, and he was carrying a sketch pad, in order to draw the birds.

“Aaaaah, birds in art... So, which bird is the most famous heraldic animal?”

“Budgie? Flamingo? Penguin?”

“Uh, well. Eagle.”

The boys then wanted to know if in the birds’ paradise there were real birds of prey and if they could grab something relatively small, like for example Sven Hübner from our class, and carry it as food up to their nest? Mr. Offenbach didn’t know the answer to that either.

There was an animal handler in the birds’ paradise, who gave us a tour and explained the birds to us.

... and the silent flight of the owl, the swift and nimble hunt of the falcon, the flight characteristics of vultures, steppe eagles and bald eagles, and...

It was completely lame, and most of the birds just sat on the trees, bored, or they slept. Makes sense - they had already heard the man’s lecture a thousand times.

[[Thought bubble of irritated bird:]] “Come on, man, recite something different, you slowpoke!”

But there was something totally sweet: a baby owl! It was so cute that all of us girls began to squeal in delight

And then we were finally allowed to run around, and along with Felicitas and my other friend Sarah, I stuck right at Freddy’s heels.

Unfortunately Melle and Mara also ran after him. And they could have hardly been more conspicuous. They giggled as loudly as possible, and shoved each other back and forth, until he noticed them, but at the very moment that Freddy finally turned toward them, something MARVELOUS happened. A fat dove appeared out of the middle of nowhere and flew over Melle and suddenly something white splattered across Melle’s head.

BIRD CRAP! - MUHAHAHAHAHA!

“Eeeeeew!”

There was a flight show before we left. A vulture flew around in circles and landed on the trainer’s arm. The boys thought that was extremely cool, Freddy too, and even Mr. Offenbach took pictures like crazy. And when the trainer asked if anyone would like for the vulture to land on their arm, I felt like I’d been struck by lightning. I yelled out loudly: “Yes, me!” I wanted to impress Freddy at all costs.

But as I stood there all alone in the middle of the area and had to stretch my arm out, and as that vulture rushed toward me like a pterosaur, I was so unnerved that I threw my hands up over my face. And that’s why that perverse vulture landed on my HEAD and fastened its gristly talons into my hair.

It was horrible! And because I had used so much Ultimate Mega Mousse with Extra-Strong Hold on my hair, the bird’s feet just got more and more snarled up and stuck. Fortunately the trainer was able to disentangle the vulture, which she comforted and stroked, though I was the one who had just been through a traumatic experience!

But then a miracle happened. As I boarded the bus, exhausted and shaking, Freddy suddenly materialized next to me.

“That was totally wicked!” he exclaimed. “Cool vulture hair massacre!”

I was SO happy. For Freddy, I would have probably let an entire flock of vultures land in my hair. I just acted as if this were something completely normal for me.

“Ah, it’s nothing special to have a bird of prey like that on your head. I do that often.”

Felicitas and I sat close to Mr. Offenbach on the drive back, and we discovered something interesting. Mr. Offenbach had not taken pictures of any of the birds. Not a single one. Not even the adorable baby owl. The only thing Mr. Offenbach had photographed was: MS. WENZ!!!

As we drove up at the school, the kiss-ups from the sixth grade were in the process of cleaning up the filthy schoolyard. “We want to be Class of the Month!” one of them crowed loudly. Good grief, some people really have nothing better to do.

The girls’ bathroom on the first floor was completely closed the following day, so we had to climb all the way up to the second floor and wait in line with a thousand people. That was so annoying, but also interesting since we had a chance to listen in on lots of conversations and learned the following:

1. Betty Bauer is going to have her tongue pierced soon. How cool is that?
2. Betty Bauer hopes to be in the play. (That’s why Felicitas and I are going to immediately sign up as well.)
3. The kiss-ups from 6a were actually named Class of the Month. And as a prize, they won a pizza party. Just because they picked up a few scraps of paper, come on!

The sign-up for the play was at the end of the week. I was amazed - about half the school showed up wanting to participate! It had to have been because they had all heard that Betty Bauer was going to be in it. Of course, the top drama queens Melle and Mara were also there, as well as a large number of boys, including a few of the would-be hackers. Even Hendrick was there! Freddy was not, unfortunately. ☹ Mr. Offenbach could hardly contain his delight.

“What young enthusiastic theater fans! Who would’ve thought I would experience something like this?”

Ms. Wenz was also there, “in order to help Colleague Offenbach.”

Probably so that somebody would finally listen to him.

Felicitas and I just grinned at each other knowingly. Only to help, obviously. Offenbach was crazy about Ms. Wenz, guaranteed. But did she feel the same about him?

Then we all had to audition, and I really put everything I had into it, since the role of Bella was practically tailor-made for me.

“Jacob, you’re really a werewolf? May I brush your fur?”

But then Betty Bauer read, and it was clear to me that I would never get the role of Bella. Betty was unbelievably SUPER! “If I have to die, dearest Edward, then only as the result of a jagged bite of your sharp vampire teeth. And preferably in the carotid artery, that would be the fastest. And before that, you can kiss me.”

Betty got the role of Bella, of course. And this awesome guy from the eleventh grade, whose name Felicitas and I don’t know, sadly, the one with the leather jacket and the tattooed snake on his arm, he’ll be playing Edward Cullen. Besides that, there were:

- a pack of werewolves (most of the hackers)
- a few nasty vampires (two of which are Melle and Mara, how appropriate)
- a cook (Felicitas)
- a mute Indian (Hendrik)
- Bella’s father (a boy with braces from the tenth grade)
- Jacob (Nazim Öszal from the twelfth grade, who wants to become a bodybuilder)
- an ancient vampire grandma (Ms. Unger)
- vampires from the Cullen Circle (a ton of conceited people from the eleventh grade)
- several students (all the rest, who had not qualified for the larger roles)

AND ... drum roll ...

Jessica, Bella’s Friend = Me!!!

YAHOOOO!

As you can see, September would have had a totally amazing start, if it hadn’t been for this ONE dumb thing...

We had art again and had to draw self-portraits, and Mr. Offenbach wanted to know where Lukas Meyer was this time. I had completely forgotten about Lukas Meyer and wanted to FINALLY admit that he didn’t exist, when one of the boys at the back called: “Lukas Meyer is sick, sad to say.”

“Oh, the poor boy,” Herr Offenbach said. “Does he have that flu that’s going around right now?”

“Yes,” Felicitas claimed coldly. “He’s coughing and sniffing like crazy.”

Everyone giggled, and now, of course, I could no longer reveal that there was no poor, sick, coughing Lukas Meyer!

“Could someone take him his assignment?” Herr Offenbach wanted to know. Good Lord, didn’t the man have any other problems?

“Uh... he’s going to be... uh, sick for a pretty long time,” I stuttered.

“Well then, see there!” Mr. Offenbach was growing more enthusiastic. “He should also draw a self-portrait so that we can have our entire class. Will you tell him that, Lilly? He can then give you the picture. Just don’t get sick!”

Mr. Offenbach had laughed cheerfully, and that’s how it happened that on one of the last sunny weekends, I had to sit at home and draw a stupid self-portrait of Lukas Meyer. I was totally frustrated as I started on the drawing of the pseudo-Lukas Meyer, and because I was so angry, he just got uglier and uglier. I couldn’t help it. To be honest, by the end, Lukas Meyer looked like the illegitimate child of Frankenstein and Godzilla. At least, I felt better.