

Sample Translation

*Choose me!*

(Kies mij!)

by Dirk Weber

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Translated by Laura Watkinson

## GID

GID stands for Girls in Distress. I always thought that the ‘Distress’ part was having to live at GID, but here they think that they’ve rescued us from our distress. GID is a children’s shelter and it’s in this big, strict house with a square in front and three gigantic trees with dark-red leaves. Downstairs there’s the dining room, a kitchen and the living room and upstairs are a bathroom and the bedrooms. There are twenty-three girls living here and then there’s the director, the cook and the gardener, who is also the caretaker. I sleep in room 14. There aren’t really fourteen rooms – it’s room 4 on the first floor. I share it with four other girls. The others call our room the junk room, because the girls who sleep there are all the ones that they don’t want in the other rooms. None of the girls from my room have ever gone to a foster home.

Some of the girls do still have a father or mother, but most of them don’t have any parents. I’ve been living at GID for three years now, three years and thirty-seven days.

At the beginning, I cried a lot. Because Gran wasn’t there any more and because there was nowhere else for me to go. Gran had been both my mum and dad at the same time. Everything I did, I did it with her. And now she wasn’t there any more. I was really angry with her for leaving me all on my own. But after a while I stopped crying. It wasn’t helping and I know for a fact that Gran would have thought it was just nonsense.

The other girls didn’t help me very much. Maybe they were too wrapped up in themselves, maybe I made them think back to the time when they came to live there themselves. They left me in peace and that was fine by me, actually.

When I’d been living at GID for almost a year, Maria arrived. We became proper friends with each other, but after a year she went away again. She went back to her mum. We sent each other letters to start with, but she moved house and after a while we stopped writing. You know how it goes. So now there’s no one I go around with much really, not a proper friend anyway, and I think that it

must be something to do with me. Three girls have arrived after me and they've all got friends. But it's not a problem. I'd rather have no one than have someone and then lose them again. But I do sometimes miss having someone I can tell things to.

Every evening we have an hour of Communal Tasks. The director comes to get us at half past six. The things we have to do are downstairs in the living room. Sometimes we fold leaflets, sometimes we pack things up: games, Christmas hampers, or sets of beach toys. We can stop at half past seven. After we've cleared up, we're free to do our own thing until half eight and then we have to go to bed. At quarter to nine the director does her round and the lights have to go off. We're only allowed to stay up a bit longer on Friday and Saturday. We don't have any Tasks then either. Sometimes we watch the TV, but there's usually nothing much on, because we've only got three channels and the director decides what we're allowed to watch. I prefer to listen to the radio and draw.

My school's just around the corner. It's not part of GID, but you can take a shortcut through GID to get there. If you go out by the kitchen, the gate takes you right to the rear entrance of the school. You don't even have to go out onto the street. Around the outside, it's 152 steps. To the right out of the gate, right again and you're there. Nearly all of the girls from GID go there. Only the older ones, from rooms 22 and 23, are at the middle school. It's a boring school, much worse than the one I went to when I was living with Gran. And I often get punished for being late or not paying attention or for drawing when I shouldn't be (if I waited until I was allowed, I'd never have to buy new pencils), but that doesn't really bother me.

I'm not bad at school, not really, really bad anyway. But I prefer to think about other things. And to draw. I draw all sorts of things, but I like drawing people best. The girls at home, the kids from school, just people walking past. I draw because I like drawing, just for myself. I don't have to do it for other people. My gran was the only one who ever said that she thought any of my drawings were

good and even she only said it once or twice. I drew the director once. When she saw the drawing, she put me on cleaning duty for a week.

At school my teacher always makes jokes about me, but they're not very funny and usually he's the only one to laugh. He says stuff like I should have been born in Egypt because I like drawing more than writing, or that my pencils are sharper than my mind. Which is probably true. When Margot pulled my hair yet again, I stabbed her in the leg with my pencil. It bled through her trousers. She kept away from my hair after that.

I don't really like games all that much. Maybe because I'm not very good at them. I don't really get them either – I mean, I do get them, because they're not usually very complicated – but I don't understand why I'm supposed to enjoy all that running around after a ball. But they don't ask me to join in anyway. So at break I usually go and draw something. I sit on the other side of the playground by the fence so that I don't get in the way when they're playing with the ball or whatever it is they're doing. That's where I was sitting when I spoke to Wuf for the first time.

## Wuf

‘It’s a good likeness.’

She really made me jump. A good likeness? I didn’t even hear her coming.

‘It’s a good drawing of him.’ I can feel my face going red and I hug the drawing to my chest. If my teacher sees that I’ve drawn him like this, I’m going to get detention again.

‘It’s your teacher, isn’t it?’

She’s standing on the other side of the fence. I’ve seen her before, a couple of weeks ago. She was kicking through the piles of autumn leaves at the side of the road. She could be my mum – I mean, she’s about the same age as my mum would be now, but she acts young and she looks completely different. She’s a bit fat and she’s got very short hair, big green eyes and a big mouth. When she laughs, which she must do a lot because she’s got lots of wrinkles around the corners of her eyes, you can see that she’s got lovely teeth – one of them’s gold. I nod, it is my teacher. I’ve drawn him as a pig, with bandy little legs and a nose with big holes in the front.

‘I’ve seen you sitting here before,’ she says, ‘and I was curious about what you were drawing. Don’t you want to join in?’ She nods towards the children playing ball in the playground. I shrug. ‘Have you got any other drawings with you?’

I nod.

‘Can I have a look at them?’

She looks at the drawings and then at me. ‘You really don’t do them any favours, do you? Who’s that?’

‘That’s me,’ I say. I’ve drawn myself very small, almost as small as a mouse, in the school playground. The playground is completely empty – well, except for the tree – and I’ve drawn the fence around it with big spikes. There are children watching me with wide-open eyes from the windows of the school.

‘Hmm,’ she says. ‘Why did you draw yourself like that?’

I shrug again. I don't know what to say, but I don't have to say anything else because the bell goes. I jump up. 'The bell,' I say, as though she might not have heard it, and I point at the door. She smiles.

'Bye,' she says and she walks off.

In the following weeks I see her a few more times. One Wednesday she walks by with a large group of people. Wuf is at the front with a big black-and-white dog, the rest are following her. I think they're going to the park. Everyone in the group has a dog, but it really looks as though the dogs don't belong to them. The dogs are yapping and barking and pulling at their leads and they don't look anything like the person who's walking them. They just don't go together.

On a Monday, two weeks later, I see Wuf walking along and pulling a cart behind her. There are two very old ladies sitting in the cart. I think they must be bonkers. They're clapping their hands like they're little kids and they're laughing really strangely. And one Thursday after that she comes past on her bike. She's got a little trailer behind the bike and hanging from the handlebars there are three shopping bags with vegetables poking out. When she sees me standing by the fence, she lifts up a hand to wave. One of the bags skims her front wheel and she almost falls off. She waves again and laughs.

She can't live very far away, but I don't know the town very well, just a few little islands linked by the only route I know to reach them: from GID to the library, from GID to the park, from GID to the bus stop and from GID to the cinema. I don't know what's between the islands and when I want to go from the library to the park I always go via GID. Maybe it's a bit odd – I've been living here a few years now, but we're not often allowed to go off on our own. The director doesn't want us to hang around the neighbourhood, because she'll get complaints.

'What do you think of this?' At break Wuf is suddenly standing behind me. She scares the life out of me, but I'm also happy to see her close up again. She shows me a postcard of a painting. A woman and a man are floating away over

some little houses. It's nighttime, but there's a big white moon shining in the sky, lighting everything up and making it look like a fairytale. The woman's wearing a long dress and the man's in a suit. He's wearing an old-fashioned top hat on his head. The houses are small and lopsided. The artist has painted everything very accurately. The roof tiles, the wood of the doors and the bricks and stones of the walls and the street. The sky is wild and painted with great streaks, but it's not very windy, because the woman's hair isn't blowing around at all. Next to the house that they've floated out of (the window's open) there's a hen-house with a rooster with a human face standing on top of it and shouting something.

'It's beautiful,' I say.

'I thought so,' says Wuf. 'Bye.'

I've hung the postcard up above my bed.

'What a stupid drawing,' says Carla when she sees the postcard that evening. 'That's impossible, people flying like that. And look at that chicken – it doesn't even look like one.'

I want to kick her, but I have second thoughts. Silly moo, I think, how can anyone be that stupid! I think it, but I don't say it, and because I don't say anything, Carla backs off. When the lights are out, I think about Wuf and the postcard she's given me. Wuf is the woman floating through the sky. She's waving at me and her gold tooth's flashing in the moonlight. The man behind her in the top hat is her husband or my dad. In the background I can see GID. All the lights are off, except for one on the first floor, and I'm standing at the window and waving. The man with the hat is waving back and the woman, Wuf, is beckoning me to go with them. I open the window and float off after them. There's a price sticker on the sole of the man's shoe. He can't have done much walking in them.

The next day she doesn't come and I don't see her for the rest of the week either. I don't see her again until Tuesday, but she's in a hurry. She shouts to me from

the other side of the street and says that she'll come by again later in the week. I wait for the rest of the week, but she doesn't come and when I see her coming on Wednesday I run away from the fence.

The next day she's waiting for me. Now I can't pretend I haven't seen her.

'Are you angry?' she asks.

I shrug.

'Why?'

'You said "see you later this week".'

'Oh, did I say that? Well, something came up.'

Something came up? That's great! I did a drawing for her and took it along under my coat. I missed her, but I'm not going to tell her that. And she's not getting the drawing either.

She doesn't stay long. 'Bye,' she says again. And this time she doesn't dare say 'see you later this week'. I can't believe she doesn't realise how important it is for me.

Fortunately she's there again on Friday. It's raining and I've got my hood up, but she still recognises me. She's got an umbrella with coloured stripes that seem to catch the light, just as though someone's shining a spotlight on her.

'Hello sweetheart, how's it going?'

She takes down her umbrella and pushes it through the fence. Then she opens it up again so that I can stand under it. She's standing in the rain herself. I'm not angry any more.

'Here, for you,' I say. I've brought the drawing with me again and she can have it now. I've copied the painting from the postcard, but now the woman is Wuf, the man is my dad and I'm floating after them. The director is the chicken on the hen-house shouting that I have to stay inside.

Wuf looks at me thoughtfully. 'Would you like to come for a cup of tea this afternoon, at my place?'

My face goes red. 'I'll have to ask,' I say.

‘Yes, do,’ she says. Then she explains to me where she lives and carefully puts the drawing under her coat. ‘Would you like to borrow the umbrella?’ she asks. I don’t dare say yes, but she’s already pushed it into my hand. ‘Thanks for your drawing – it’s really lovely,’ she says. Then she walks away. The rain rattles on the umbrella and suddenly it’s not annoying any more that it’s raining.

## Bittersweet

I'm allowed to go out for an hour. Fortunately, it's not very far away. I must have remembered it wrong though, because there's a shop at number 22. It says 'The Drying Salon' on the steamed-up window. 'Open from 9 to 1 and from 2 to 6. Also open on rainy Sundays.' Inside it's nice and warm. I know what a hairdresser's looks like and this certainly isn't one. It's a strange kind of shop. Along the walls there are benches with machines above that look like cooker hoods and at the back there's a table. There's nothing else that you could buy. When I hold my hand under one of the hoods, I can feel that it's not sucking, but blowing. Warm-air showers, that's what they are. Right at the back there are three steps leading up to a door. A bell rings as the shop door closes behind me, then the door at the back opens up and there's Wuf.

'I didn't know that you had a... a shop.'

Wuf laughs. 'What do you think of it?'

'What is it?'

'It's a drying salon. When you're cold and wet, you can dry off here. I sell warmth. Look, they're the same blowers that they have above shop entrances. It works brilliantly. When you're wet, you can dry off again in quarter of an hour.'

'And what if it's not raining?'

'Bad luck. But lots of people like the atmosphere, so they come here even when it's dry out. To get warm.'

'And in the summer?'

'Then I get the blowers to blast cold air.'

Wuf goes up the steps ahead of me. Behind the door is a living room that smells of gingerbread and roses. There are plants everywhere and the long wall is full of drawings, photos and paintings.

'Tea?' asks Wuf.

We drink tea and between us we get through almost a whole tin of cakes made with bittersweet slivers of orange peel. Wuf asks me things about GID and about

school and she tells me about the Drying Salon and about the people in the photos on the wall and about the drawings. And about the other things that she does. She's also a chef at a restaurant, on Thursday, Friday and Saturday evenings, and she's the leader of the dog-walking club, a club for lonely people. She started off walking dogs for people in the neighbourhood when they were at work or ill or that kind of thing. A dog-walking service. But whenever she went for a walk in the park people would speak to her. People with dogs speak to other people with dogs. And so Wuf realised that she could help lonely people. All she had to do was lend them a dog and the conversations would naturally follow. So now there are seven of them walking other people's dogs. Everyone's happy. She does even more stuff, but she doesn't think it's enough because she's still got loads of plans. Restlessness, she says, maybe it's time to go and do something new again. Perhaps she should move house. Of all the things she's said, this is the thing that stays in my mind. I can't forget it – it's like a blister on my tongue. Move house. I've only just got to know her and soon she'll be gone again.

It's almost five o'clock and I have to hurry to get back on time. As I'm walking back, I think about Wuf. How nice it was at her place and how much fun I had with her, but I also think about the fact that she could leave again just like that.

## Singular – plural

It seems like a good idea not to go and sit out in the playground for a while. Not that I don't want to see Wuf. I just don't want to get too used to her. I don't want to miss her when she moves house. Which is why I've been avoiding her all week. On Saturday morning I'm lying on my bed reading when Carla comes in.

'Hey, Fienie-meanie, there's post for you!' She's waving a postcard.

I must look really stupid, but I'm so surprised. No one's ever sent me a card before.

'For me?' I put my hand out to take it, but Carla holds it up above her head.

'Come and get it.' She knows that I can't reach. She's almost a head taller than I am. 'Come on then! Take it! Don't you want to know who it's from?' I don't feel like fighting for it. So I go out of the room, leaving Carla behind with the postcard.

'Dear Fien. How are you? I haven't seen you the whole week and I can't get hold of you by phone either. There's nothing wrong, is there?' Carla reads out the postcard in a slow, whiny voice. Halfway down the stairs I stop to hear what else she has to say. The card's from Wuf! She's missed me! Now that I've run off and there's no one else listening, Carla stops reading it out. Quickly, I run down the last steps and go into the living room and sit in a chair with a book in front of my face. When Carla comes in, I slip out of the room without her noticing and I race upstairs. The postcard's lying on the floor. I read it three times and hang it above my bed. Then I go over to Carla's bed and use a drawing pin to prick holes in the back of her poster of Leonardo. With the white edges that come through on the front of the poster, the holes look just like spots. Then I go downstairs and ask the director for a coin for the phone.

Wuf sounds pleased that I've called. She asks if I want to go out for a meal with her that evening. The director only gives me permission to stay out until half past nine when I tell her that it's Wuf's birthday.

Wuf doesn't get there until eight o'clock. I've been sitting on the bench in the corridor for over half an hour, waiting for her, but when she arrives and sees me sitting there, she laughs and waves and I forget about it straightaway.

'Climb on the back,' she says, and off we go.

Carla's standing at the window of our room. She looks like one of those flat, black shadow puppets, a sad, black shadow puppet.

It's scary on the back of Wuf's bike. She pays attention to all the wrong things: a sticker on a lamppost, a crown-of-thorns plant in a window box or a boxer with a tail. In any case, she doesn't pay attention to traffic lights or to who has right of way. But she doesn't want to walk, so I sit on the back, clenching my teeth and holding onto her tightly. The dynamo's whizzing away, the beam of the front light's swaying from left to right and I hope we're not going to end up under a bus.

'This is where I cook,' says Wuf.

I get off and Wuf locks up the bike. 'Chez Ami' is written on the window and inside it looks bustling and friendly.

'I'm so glad you're here!' A woman in an apron kisses Wuf. She looks all hot and bothered. 'Ami's gone to the doctor's. Cut himself.'

'Is it bad?'

'Don't know, don't think so.'

'So who's doing the cooking?'

'No one. Well, the boys are.'

Wuf looks at me. 'It's not going entirely as planned. I'm going to have to help out for a while. Shall I take you home or do you want to stay?'

I stay. I'm actually rather curious. I follow Wuf through the swing doors. It's boiling hot in the kitchen. A man with a red head is stirring a big pot. Wuf has a taste as she goes by and nods to say that it's good. At the back someone else is chopping vegetables. They talk for a moment and then Wuf goes to change her clothes. I go and sit on a stool and make sure I don't get in anyone's way. When Wuf comes back, it looks as though she's become someone different in those

clothes. Now she's the boss. She takes an order from the board and then she begins. She looks like a surgeon. She raises a hand, signals or shouts something and the two assistants come running up with some vegetables, a fish, a sauce or something else. She throws it into a pan and fries it or simmers it or whatever it's called, gets it ready in a flash, rings the bell and pulls the next order from the board. It's a beautiful thing to watch. The way she moves, so quickly and without making any mistakes. It looks as though she doesn't even have to think about it. *Ping* goes the bell. *Ping*.

The swing doors fly open and a big black chef with a wild grey-black beard steps through. There's a thick bandage on the middle finger of his left hand.

'ELISABETH!' he roars. 'ELISABETH! I'm so sorry. Why did this have to happen tonight of all nights?'

Wuf wipes a drop of sweat from her nose with her sleeve. 'Oh Ami, I can't leave you alone for a moment.'

'True, it's all true. And this beauty here must be the Fien that you talk about so much.' He takes my hand and kisses it.

'What still needs doing?' Ami nods towards the board. 'And have the two of you had something to eat?'

Now Wuf looks startled. 'Oh blimey, Fien,' she says.

'Shocking,' says Ami. 'Listen. The boys and I will finish up here. And I'm going to make something special for you two.'

'But your finger...' protests Wuf.

'Oh, it's nothing. Come on,' Ami pushes Wuf and me out through the swing doors and takes us to a big round table at the back of the restaurant. Then he disappears into the kitchen.

'Elisabeth?' I ask.

Wuf nods. 'That's my real name. But no one calls me that any more. Only Ami. I've known him for such a long time. I used to cook with him on a cruise ship.'

It's already late. Some people are still eating their main courses, but most of them have started on dessert or are drinking coffee. Here comes Ami. He's serving us himself.

It tastes absolutely wonderful, but Wuf looks as though it's just so-so. I see Ami looking at her. He's a little bit nervous and a little bit curious. 'Well? Well?' he keeps asking. Wuf laughs.

'Yes, Ami, it's really good.'

Ami laughs and looks around triumphantly. 'Really good. Did you hear that? *Really good.*' The people in the restaurant look up and I look at my plate. 'And what do you think of it, Fien?'

'Really good, really tasty,' I say, and Ami repeats it so that everyone can hear.

'Fien thinks it's really good, really tasty.'

I suddenly feel really hot. The whole restaurant is looking at us as though we're food critics, but I don't know anything about food. Wuf doesn't seem to mind the attention. She tastes and chews carefully and smiles at Ami.

'They need you,' she says to him, nodding in the direction of the kitchen. The two assistants are standing in the doorway of the kitchen and watching us. Above their heads, a large cloud of smoke is drifting out of the kitchen. Ami swears and they dash back into the kitchen. Even when the door's shut I can still hear Ami ranting away.

'He's just like a highwayman, don't you think?' she whispers.

'A pirate,' I say.

Wuf laughs. 'Some dodgy character in any case.'

'Stop talking about me behind my back,' shouts Ami from behind the swing doors, 'or I'll have a thing or two to tell Fien about you!' Wuf has to laugh.

When we've finished, Ami clears away the plates.

'I've got something, specially for you,' he says to me, as though it's a big secret. 'Just a moment.' A little later he comes back with two plates that each have three little balls on them. Around the balls of ice cream there are pieces of orange and orange flowers. It's a kind of ice cream, only lighter, and it's got a

fresh taste: a bit like flowers, a bit like orange and a bit like lemon. And a bit like marzipan too. ‘Look,’ he says. He takes a menu from another table and points to the desserts: it says ‘Grand Dessert Elisabeth’. ‘She invented it – it’s her recipe.’ It was already the nicest pudding I’d ever had, but now it’ll be my favourite pudding forever and ever.

‘What do you think of it?’ asks Ami.

‘It’s the nicest thing I’ve ever eaten,’ I say and I shock myself by how loud I say it. The other people in the restaurant are looking at us again, but this time I couldn’t care less.

Wuf goes to get changed. The restaurant’s empty now. At the front, the woman in the apron is clearing the tables.

Actually, I only know Wuf a little bit. She’s not just the Wuf that I know. She’s Wuf from the Drying Salon and Wuf from the dog-walking club, she’s Elisabeth, Ami’s friend, and she’s Wuf the chef. Who else is she? Maybe it just happens that way – when you get older you become plural. I hope so, because I’m singular: Fien from GID. I can hear Wuf laughing in the kitchen. I want to know all of her. She has so much life that doesn’t include me. And then I think: she really doesn’t need me at all. She’s much more important for me than I am for her, because she doesn’t need me to make her feel whole. That’s what I think as I’m sitting on my own at the round table and waiting for Wuf to come back.

They come out through the swing doors, laughing together. Ami kisses Wuf on both cheeks and me on the hand, the way you kiss a queen or the pope, and he walks us to the door. He waves to us with his left hand until we’ve left the street.

Wuf is cycling fast, she’s panting and joggling from one side to the other.

‘Wuf?’

‘Mmm?’

‘Am I your friend?’

Wuf looks around in surprise. The front wheel touches the kerb, the handlebars swing to the other side and Wuf’s foot shoots off the pedal. I try to hold on, but I

fly from the luggage carrier and land with a thump on the road. Wuf and the bike fall down next to me on the ground.

‘Have you hurt yourself?’

I rub my knee. ‘A bit. You?’

‘A bit.’

We sit next to each other, next to the bike with its twisted handlebars, and Wuf puts her arm around me.

‘Dear Fien, I am your friend and I hope that you want to be my friend too.’

There’s a hole in my trousers and it’s bleeding a bit, but it’s not bad, because I feel warm and happy and a little bit plural.

## Malinka

‘Children, this is Malinka,’ says the teacher. ‘She’s new. Make sure that she soon feels at home. Malinka, go and sit next to... Fien, there.’

Malinka’s really, really tall, even taller than Jochem and he’s the tallest in the class. She’s got red cheeks and these really prim plaits, but she’s wearing a checked shirt and jeans with braces. She looks like a lumberjack doll. She tries to sit down next to me, but she can’t get her legs under the desk. This makes everyone laugh, including Malinka. So the teacher has to go and fetch a bigger desk first. Malinka isn’t at all nervous. She looks around calmly and smiles. The teacher comes back with a bigger desk and then he can continue.

She’s odd. When she writes, she sticks the tip of her tongue out of her mouth, as though she’s not quite all there, but when the teacher asks her a question she always knows the answer and when she has to write something on the board, she does it in lovely handwriting and without making any mistakes.

The other children are staring at her too. Next to me, she looks even taller. I don’t think there can be two other children at school who look less like each other. And she can play football too. At break she’s leaning against the fence and suddenly the ball rolls in her direction.

‘Over here, over here!’ shout the boys. Malinka flicks up the ball with her left foot, and then bounces it a few times from one knee to the other, just like real footballers do, and then catches it on top of her right foot. Then she flicks it up again and, before it touches the ground, she slams it back to the boys. I see them watching her. Then one of them comes over and asks whether she wants to play. Even I can see that she’s fantastic at it.

I see her walking past after school. She’s got this really irritating, smug laugh. There are three boys around her, as though she’s been at school with us for years. So, am I going to have to learn how to play football then?

## Look at that!

The first time Wuf came to pick me up, she had to show her passport, but now she only has to phone for permission. Yesterday she phoned and now she's coming to pick me up. She talks a bit with the director and apologises for last Saturday, saying it was all her fault that I got back so late.

'Oh, these things happen,' says the director and she laughs like some kind of saleswoman.

*These things happen.* She fined me five points! I don't care though, because I wouldn't have wanted to miss it, not even for a hundred points.

We go for a walk along the river and then carry on back into town. I'm not really sure whether Wuf knows the way or not. Every time I think we're lost we come out somewhere where Wuf does know the way. So, we're actually only a little bit lost. 'Look at that!' she says, so I do. I look at the way they've paved the street, at the way someone's made a windmill out of a plastic bottle.

It's the same town, but I see a different one. I see a bike tyre around a lamppost and the way two neighbours are using mirrors to spy on each other. I see a child's umbrella in a tree, she sees a plastic loaf of bread in a display window. It means that even places where I've often been before still seem special.

We go and sit in a park by the river and talk about the week gone by.

'D'you still want to move house?' I ask as casually as possible.

'Not right away. Why?'

'Oh, no reason.'

'How's the drawing coming along?'

I tell her about our art classes at school. That we had to do a drawing of a Happy Event and the teacher made me start again because I'd drawn a picture of a big fire at GID.

That makes Wuf laugh.

‘I know someone you should show your drawings to some time. Remind me to give you his address.

‘Are you really late?’ asks Wuf when she drops me off at the door.

‘About three points,’ I say, ‘but that doesn’t matter.’

‘Yes, it does, I don’t want any trouble with the boss.’ She looks at me. ‘About moving house. Why did you ask me that?’

I look at the pedal. ‘I really wouldn’t like it if you went away.’

Wuf laughs. ‘That’s what I wanted to hear. Are we going for another walk next week? You show me so many lovely things that it’s like I’ve just come to live here again.’

I don’t really believe it, but it’s nice of her to say so.

## Nighttime thoughts

I can't sleep tonight. I needed a wee and when I got back to bed I couldn't get to sleep. Carla's snoring and it's windy outside, which makes the roof creak. The heating's ticking and I'm thinking about Wuf. Since I've got to know her, it seems as though I belong somewhere again. I'm so happy that she's my friend, but at the same time I'm scared that it won't keep getting better, that *good* and *better* won't be followed by *best*.

[Picture captions]

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This is GID. It's night and it's dark, the sky's purple, the way it sometimes is when there's a storm. In real life, the building isn't that big and there aren't so many windows. There's a light on in one of the rooms. There's a girl standing at the window and that's me. If the window's an eye, I'm the pupil.

page 16:

What sort of animal would Wuf be if she was an animal? I've done a lot of rubbing out, so the paper round her's got a bit rough. To start with, she was a bit cattish, then bearish, then cowish and then something in between. I just don't know. First I wanted to throw the drawing away, but then later I thought it was actually a nice one after all. All the rubbing out makes it look as though Wuf's giving off light. She's standing behind a fence with her umbrella over her head and she's smiling at me.

page 24:

It's just like those action figures for boys that can do everything: Wuf from the Drying Salon, Wuf as the leader of the dog-walking club, Wuf as chef, Wuf with the two old ladies. I've drawn all of the Wufs next to each other. I'm standing right at the side, next to Wuf as Wuf.

page 34:

This is the first drawing I did of Malinka and it's pure chance that I kept it. She's in the playground and she's bouncing the ball from one knee to the other. In the drawing, the ball is right in front of her face: a football with plaits.