

## Chapter One

### Chocolate Tartlets and Stinky Cheese

May I introduce the family Gigglesworth? Unfortunately, our name is not a joke. And dad's the one who brought this name into the family. When mum and dad got married, a long time ago, he insisted on keeping it. Although we could have had mum's former name just as easily. She used to be called Dunkerley.

But dad said: "I'd rather pay for a joke than always be a donkey."

Mum just smiles when dad makes stupid jokes. Her motto is: the wiser one backs down. That's quite convenient for her. She always gets to be the wiser one and doesn't have to fight with anybody.

Maybe that's the reason why mum and dad get on so well.

They say they knew they belonged together the very first time they met. And they met at a costume party, by the way. Because they had both forgotten to dress up they had to put on the only costume that was still left. A horse.

Mum was the front part and could stand upright, while dad was the back part and had to bend over and hold onto mum's hips the whole night. But they say there were a great team.

A year later, they got married. And they wanted to have the greatest kids in the world together. Also, their kids should have the most wonderful childhood of all time, mum and dad decided. And that's why they bought this huge old farm, just after the wedding. Together with dad's brother, mum's sister and dad's parents.

"But how could you know what kind of kids you would have?" I said to mum when she told us the story over lunch a while ago. "We could have been completely different. TV kids for example. Or we could have been allergic. To animal hair or grass."

“I’m all-urge-hick against pig doo-doo”, Lolli pipes up . She’s still in kindergarten and loves pee-pee and doo-doo talk more than anything. But mum claimed that she had known, even then, that she would have us three kids.

“Bullshit!” shouted my brother Henry, who’s already in fifth grade, fiddling with his new phone. “You didn’t know anything at all. You wanted that farm because you’re country bumpkins!”

“Bullshit is bull doo-doo!” Lolli explained to us.

That made dad angry. “If anyone puts a word into their mouth again that others have had in their bottoms, they’ll get thrown out”, he said.

Never mind, mum was right. We have the happiest childhood here that I could imagine! Because there are as many animals on our farm as in a zoo. But you can touch our animals. And most of them you can cuddle or even milk with your own hands. Like Miss Elsa and Madame Butterfly, our two cows. Their udders look like huge pink rubber gloves that someone turned into fat water bombs. And when they’re full up with milk, you can tug at the fingers of the rubber gloves and a tiny stream of liquid squirts out. Like the one from the dental jet spray that grandma Helga uses to keep her gums fresh and crunchy.

Madame Butterfly is obviously not a fly made from butter. She gets her name from the beautiful winged insect. But the likelihood of Madame Butterfly changing, like a big fat caterpillar, into a giant butterfly is very low.

My favourite animal is actually Pavarotti, our dwarf donkey, who used to be an opera singer in a previous life. Or at least he loudly screams along whenever grandpa listens to his operas with the window open. Apart from that he’s pretty lazy and just lies in his hammock that stretches between the two old oak trees. One of them is so thick that we needed an extra-long rope to fit around it. It grows right next to the barn and dad says that if this oak tree gets even one centimetre wider, it’ll punch a hole into the barn wall.

Grandpa Johannes' and grandma Helga's house stands right next to the big barn. It's not really a proper house though, more like a tiny hovel. If Pavarotti was an opera singer in a previous life, then grandma's and grandpa's house used to be a doll house. Dad even has to duck his head if he wants to walk through the door.

But in the tiny kitchen grandpa bakes the tastiest chocolate tartlets in the world. Listening to opera music with the window open. They are crispy on the outside, as if they had a cookie skin. And almost liquid on the inside. When you break through the crispy skin, the warm, fragrant chocolate flows out very very slowly. As if time was passing very very slowly, because the moment is too precious to let it flash past you in a jiffy.

In moments like these, we kids all crowd around grandpa's and grandma's table and wish that our childhood would never end. And through the little kitchen window in the tiny hut you can see the stable with all the ancient animals. Lady Milky Way, who no longer gives milk, lives there with a few old hens who don't lay eggs any more.

Mum and dad call the area where grandma and grandpa live with the old animals the 'mercy farm'.

"What's a Mersey?" Lolli asked at our most recent chocolate tartlet feast.

"It's called mercy", grandpa corrected her. "Mercy is something very nice. For example keeping the elderly alive although they are no longer useful. So you show them mercy."

Lolli became very serious. It looked as if smoke was about to rise from her ears any moment now, she was thinking so hard.

"Then we would like to show mercy to grandma and you as well", she explained. "Even when you can't bake chocolate cake anymore one day."

Grandma Helga laughed. But the rest of us went suddenly very quiet. And I wished even more that our childhood would never end. And if it had to, then I wished that someone would invent some kind of medication that could prolong life indefinitely.

I've asked mum already if she couldn't develop some pills for that. But she claimed there could be no life without death. Like there could be no warm without cold. "Nothing is made for eternity. And that will never change", she said.

I was really annoyed at her answer and stated that I was going to be a doctor, too, in my next life. And then we'll see. Mum said I could become a doctor in this life already. But in this life I have other plans. More about that later.

Mum is a vet, by the way. But she's also interested in human health. Sometimes I have a feeling that she secretly thinks of everyone in this world as her patient. And her favourite patients are of course dad, Lolli, Henry and me.

Dad is totally different from mum. He's more interested animals when they are healthy and lay big eggs or give delicious milk that he can make his cheese from. Personally, I feel that it's better to drink the milk right away while it's fresh instead of letting it age and then turn it into stinky cheese. But the people who buy cheese in our farm shop see that very differently. The stinkier the cheese the more they pay for it. It's mostly older men who've been driving a long way for this cheese. Before they buy it, they bring their big noses, some with hairs growing out of them, close to the wrapping and suck in the smell. Then they close their eyes and pretend they've just sniffed a delightful perfume.

"Yuck! That's doo-doo cheese", Lolli explained to one of these sniffers last week. Dad can't stand anyone making fun of his cheese. And he likes Lolli's doo-doo jokes even less. So therefore she's now been banned from the farm shop. Lolli can only come back, dad said, when her jokes have a bit more class.

**Wir Kinder vom Kornblumenhof, (Band 1): Ein Schwein im Baumhaus**

**We Kids of Cornflower Farm (Vol. 1): A Pig in the Treehouse**

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“How can my jokes be in class if I’m still going to kindergarten?” Lolli protested. Then she ran away and only came back at dinner time. It was as if she’d vanished from the face of the earth.

We were all very worried and kept looking for her and calling her. Even aunt Karoline joined in the search although she really never has time. That’s because she is a teacher and also has to bring up her kids all by herself. Although Sofia and Janik are mostly at our house anyway. Mum treats them almost like her own kids. Maybe that’s because mum and Karoline are twins who always do everything together. They both gave birth to a boy at the same time, and two years later they both had a girl. They only did things differently with the fathers of their children. Mum kept dad while Karoline and Uwe didn’t like each other anymore at some point. That’s why Karoline couldn’t join in when mum had Lolli.