

Usch Luhn

The Sassy Foursome – Here comes the Star Court Gang!

(Translation pages 7 – 18)

Chapter 1

Snuff is gone!

"Lille! Liii-lle! "

A stream of paper missiles shot through the open window and dropped onto Lille's bedspread. Grumbling Lille burrowed deeper into her pillow.

"Lille, you lazybones, wake up! Snuff is gone! " exclaimed a girl's voice brightly.

"What?!" Lille shot straight up from her bed in alarm.

A second later she was leaning out of the window checking the yard. There below stood Karolina with a homemade catapult at the ready. The next paper ball Lille hit in the face.

"Ouch!" Lille cried indignantly, rubbing her nose.

"Sorry!" Karolina drooped her shoulders and pushed out her lower lip guiltily. "But Snuff is still gone!" She looked as if she would burst into tears at any moment.

"How long ago?" said Lille. "I'm coming down." She quickly slipped on her flip-flops and raced outdoors in her pajamas.

It was the summer holidays, the very first day of vacation. Finally, a chance to sleep in. Indeed Lille had firmly intended to stay in bed until lunch. But Snuff was important.

"I was just about to give Snuff a ride out. But when I got to the paddock, she was gone. She must have jumped over the fence, "explained Karolina breathless. "I bet she's trotted over to the stupid Brims again." She chewed nervously on a lock of hair. "What is so wonderful over there?"

Snuff was Karolina Haflinger's horse and Karolina loved her dearly with her snow-white mane.

Lille giggled. "Maybe she has fallen in love with a pig."

"Very funny," grumbled Karolina. "Will you come and help me look?"

"Sure. Just give me a minute to pull some clothes on," said Lille and hurriedly ran back into the house.

Farmer Brims was a neighbour of Lille and Karolina. He had recently built a huge pigsty right in next to their houses. This did not please anyone at Star Court, except perhaps Snuff. Since the arrival of the pigsty she snorted at every opportunity and walked curiously around farmer Brims' yard.

On the stairs Lille almost collided with her mother who was descending, balancing a stack of books in her arms.

"Hello, sweetheart!" Selma shouted in surprise. "You're up already?"

Lille's mother was a librarian who really wanted to be a crime-writer. She had given up work for a year to write her first novel. While Lille was stuck at school and her father was busy in his old bike shop mending old bicycles and selling new ones Lille's mother was hidden away in her attic office, weaving together her thoughts and knitting them into a highly adventurous story.

"Snuff has gone off again!" Lille explained to her mother.

"Uh-oh. If you need help, let me know. I just have to nip over to the library and return these books. "

"Thanks, mum," Lille said. "But we must look after Snuff on our own."

Moments later Lille was dressed in jeans and top and her brand new, bright green sneakers. She raced back out to Karolina.

Just as the two friends were starting to climb the fence at the top of the garden they were stopped by a loud whistle.

"Hey, where are you going then?" Maja's tousled head stuck out from the chicken coop in curiosity.

"Snuff has gone again!", Lille and Karolina chorused.

"Back over to Brims, I bet," added Lille.

"How annoying! I have been watching that man. Wait, I'll come with you. "

Maja pulled her boots off her feet and slipped into her sandals. She hopped with one bound over the fence and followed Lille and Karolina across the paddock. You just follow your nose to find farmer Brims.

Not only did Lille, Karolina and Maja live close together on the same farm estate but the three of them were also in the same class – Year three in the village school.

Punctually at six clock in the morning the school bus stopped for them on the corner by the farm. Star Court was in the middle of the flat land and too far from the school to get there by bicycle.

Star Court itself was almost a real farm and over 150 years old. Almost real because it was no longer farmed. Lille's godfather Paul had inherited it, along with a hundred dairy cows and twenty goats. But uncle Paul already had a profession - he was a pharmacist – and he didn't want to become a farmer. Therefore, he sold all the animals except one goat, Moses and the farm duck, Daisy. And he converted the stables into nice cozy flats. But he himself lived mainly in the city and rarely stayed over on the farm.

In addition to his pharmacy uncle Paul loved gliding. And when he flew over the farmyard for the first time he saw that the stalls were arranged exactly like a jagged star. So he called his inherited home Star Court.

"If you ask me, something strange is going on at Brims' farm," gasped Maja. "I need to investigate this urgently."

Maja liked going to the bottom of things and desperately wanted to become an investigator. Her mother found Maja's thirst for knowledge rather exhausting. She had strictly prohibited Maja from investigating how many packets of washing detergent were needed to make a washing machine bubble over. And she was not allowed to discover whether popcorn popped louder in the oven or just as loud as in a popcorn machine.

At that moment Maja had been trying to figure out whether hens lay more eggs when they are sent to sleep listening to gentle lullabies. But because she did not want to spend every evening hanging out in the henhouse she had set up her old CD player in there. This now sang the chickens to sleep.

"Okay, but we are just getting Snuff out of there," Karolina said. "There is nothing else to be investigated!" She snorted threateningly like a horse. When it came to her Haflinger pony, Karolina meant business.

Maja raised her hands. "I am only here to help you. Brims has certainly attracted Snuff onto his farm. If I can prove he has done it on purpose then I will be on to him. "

Once Maja had set her mind on something it was very hard to stop her.

Lille grinned broadly. "Attracted! Snuff is being attracted by a pig. Snuff must have been a piglet in her past life and now she wants to see her relatives again. "

Karolina said nothing but the thick crease of her brow deepened telling the others she was in no mood to chatter.

"First of all we must find Snuff", Maja went on cheerfully. "And therefore we have to cross Brims' yard." Lille nodded in agreement. "Let's go, girls! Into the lion's den!"

Chapter 2

Five carrots and a horse

"Stop! Take a look first! ", Lille eventually ordered out of breath.

The friends placed themselves behind a row of apple trees in position.

The farm of farmer Brims was still almost a hundred yards away. Ajax the watchdog was asleep in front of his hut and was not even bothered by the clucking chickens cockily stealing the food out of his bowl. As far as the eye could see there was no sign of Snuff.

"Those stupid Brims should return my Snuff immediately," Karolina hissed angrily. "Otherwise, I am going to go ballistic!"

"We don't know if Snuff is here at all," Maja answered objectively.

But Karolina was so enraged that she just kept on complaining. "And the worst thing is that mum and dad do nothing. Since Lawrence came into our world everything revolves around this little bundle of joy. "

Lawrence was Karolina's little brother and only about a half a year old. When he wasn't screaming fit to burst Karolina found him really quite sweet. Well, not when she had to remove his dirty nappies he wasn't. However, he made her parents a lot of work. His needs always came first and her needs were always left until last, or forgotten.

"Look there are Tim and Tom!" Lille whispered suddenly. "They're dragging a bucket of carrots into the old cowshed. Come on, we need to get closer!"

The twins Tim and Tom were the sons of farmer Brims - and were in the same class as Lille, Karolina and Maja. They were identical twins, and even their father had trouble telling them apart when they were playing him up. Only Maja with her incredible ability to investigate could tell the two of them apart.

"Do you think they have caught Snuff?" asked Karolina.

Lille shrugged and stealthily approached the barn. "There is a window round the back," she whispered to Maja. "If I climb up, maybe I can have a look inside." She looked at Karolina strictly. "And you don't make a sound. Okay? "

At one time farmer Brims had kept over a hundred milk cows. But since he started breeding pigs the barn was left empty save for an old tractor and a mower. Recently, Maja had discovered that Tim and Tom had set up a secret hiding place in there.

With Maja's help Lille scrambled up to the window ledge. With some effort she stared through the dirty glass into the barn.

"No," she gasped after half an eternity. "I do not believe it!"

Karolina trotted on the spot just as her Haflinger pony might. "What?" She cried impatiently.

"Shhh!", Lille and Maja hissed simultaneously.

"Let me see!", called Maja and let Lille down to the ground. She was a little smaller than her friend, but she was the better climber. She deftly pulled herself up to the window.

"There is Snuff," Maja reported down. "Tim is feeding her with the carrots and Tom is sitting on her back, brushing her lovely mane." Then she giggled. "Heehee. Now he is snuggling with her. How embarrassing. Boys don't do that! "

Karolina let out an indignant cry. "What! Impudence!" At that she lost all self-control. She stormed into the barn and wrapped her arms around the neck of her Haflinger. Hastily, Lille and Maja followed in after her.

"Hi, Karo," Tom said, and slipped, embarrassed, off Snuff's back. "We are grooming your horse." He let the brush surreptitiously disappear behind his back. "I just brushed the burrs out of her mane."

Karolina looked at Tom angrily. "What burrs? We don't have burrs at our place! And don't call me Karo. You know I can't stand that name." She looked so wild, as if she wanted to fire the two boys, Tim and Tom, to the moo.

"I think we'd better go now," Lille suggested hurriedly. "I'm really hungry." At that, her stomach growled terribly.

Maja nodded. "My chickens are waiting for me." She gave Karolina a nudge. Karolina climbed onto Snuff's saddle-less back and glowering at the boys she rode the Haflinger mare out of the cowshed.

"Bye, Karo!" Tom called to her happily and then took a bite of a carrot. "Send Snuff over again sometime."

"You might hope!" Karolina said. "If you kidnap my horse one more time you'll get in so much trouble with my dad."

Karolina's father was a traffic-policeman. Right now he was on leave to look after Lawrence while Karolina's mother started working a few hours in the nursery again.

"What will he do, parp his horn at us or something?" Tim snorted. "That's really going to scare me – Not!"

Tom burst into laughter and spat a mouthful of chewed carrot onto the stable floor.

"Yuk", Lille shouted in disgust. She remembered suddenly that today would have be a great opportunity to take an inconspicuous look at the farm. She could not imagine that a thousand pigs could be happy in such a small barn with no windows. And there were other things here on the farm that were clearly wrong. Maja had been right.

But Karolina was now so red in the face, that it was better to disappear as quickly as possible, before she went into a serious temper tantrum. Hurriedly Lille gave the Haflinger a loving pat and said, "You ride on ahead Karo. We'll meet back at my house."