

Joanna Thompson

Stand by your Sam

Thienemann

Happy New Year?

It's 12.17 am on January 1st, 2009. I'm Emily Hausmann. I'm from Berlin and I go to Chalk Farm School for Girls in London but, listen, **never mind** that now! **None** of that is important. The important thing right now is that I'm *alive!* I have *actually survived* Christmas with my crazy German-English family! I feel a bit like one of those people who walks away from a plane crash with only a broken fingernail. Hallelujah!

I had been so sure that our first Christmas at my grandmother's house in *years* would be a bizarre kind of **bilingual** disaster movie: *Massaker at Christmas* or something. But it's been totally peaceful. One big, long *Stille Nacht*. It's a **miracle**. It's enough to make you really believe in the magic of Christmas.

Not really. It wasn't Santa Claus or any of his **elves** who made it possible for us all to be together under one roof. It was my mother. She had **plainly** told my dad that she would **divorce** him if he complained about *anything* at Grandma's. Dad hasn't opened his mouth all holiday.

+++ never mind – *hier*: kümmer dich nicht drum +++ none – nichts, kein +++ actually – sogar, tatsächlich +++ bilingual – zweisprachig +++ miracle – Wunder +++ elf – Elfe +++ plain – deutlich +++ to divorce s.o. – sich von jmdm. scheiden lassen +++

We've just done everything *nach der feinen englischen Art*. We played by the Queen Mother's – my grandma's – rules. We opened our presents on the 25th (Not on the 24th). We ate turkey, not goose. And my father *said nothing*.

Right now, it's New Year's Eve and we're all just sitting around; Dad, Mum, Grandma, my Auntie Nora and me. My little brother Max has just gone to bed. We've all finished saying: *Happy New Year!* and remembering not to try and kiss my grandmother, who hates kissing.

The adults are now all **sipping** sherry and talking politely about the world economic crisis: *will be a difficult year, bankruptcy, blah blah*. Whatever. I'm not thinking about the **stock markets** crashing. I'm thinking about Sam. Sam Reid, my boyfriend, world's nicest guy! I can almost *see* him.

No, I'm not mad. Grandma's TV is on in the background. It's probably the world's smallest television and about the size of a packet of **fish fingers**. But if I stare hard enough I can see lots of drunk, cold people celebrating on its tiny screen. *Edinburgh!* a little voice says. *Hogmanay, the Scottish New Year, is famous and Edinburgh has one of the biggest street parties anywhere.*

Sam's *there, right now*, at that street party! His mobile hasn't been working, but he still managed to send me a message from a friend's phone about half an hour ago: *Edinburgh cold cold cold, but you are hot hot hot all the best for 2009.xxxxxx*. Hmm. No one's ever called me *hot hot* before. I could get used to it.

*** turkey – Truthahn *** goose – Gans *** New Year's Eve – Silvester *** to sip – nippen *** bankruptcy – Bankrott, Konkurs *** stock market – Börse *** fish finger – Fischstäbchen ***



It looks like a beautiful place, Edinburgh. There's the castle, set high above the city, spectacular fireworks exploding above it. "Sehr schön," says my father suddenly. He's talking to me, of course, the only other German in the room. "Edinburgh ist wie Rom, wusstest du das? Sieben Hügel. Wir müssen da unbedingt irgendwann hin."

Then he looks in **disgust** at the sickly sweet glass of sherry in his hand and **mutters** to my grandmother, "Mrs Millington, do you have any whisky in the house?"

My grandmother **nods**. She has a dangerously dreamy look on her face. I know that look! It's a *nostalgic* one. Oh no! I hear the Queen Mother say, "I remember the **bombers**, how scared we were ...". My grandmother is about to start telling one of her legendary World War II anecdotes. She has never really forgiven

+++ in disgust – angeekelt +++ to mutter – murmeln +++ to nod – nicken +++ bomber – Kampfflugzeug +++

the Germans for bombing her and her friends and family. Strange.

Dad, who's just fetched himself a glass of whisky the size of Edinburgh Castle, **winks** at me. It's the signal: *Evakuieren!!* He's right: when Grandma starts talking about the war, it's a bad time to be German. It's a bad time to be *half* German, like me. *Los!*

Back in the safety of my room, I sit down on my bed and **sigh**. I'm looking at the Christmas present Sam gave me, a beautiful book of black and white photographs of Scotland. I **keep** reading what he's written inside the front cover: *I hope 2009 is the year I can show you round my home country!* Wow.

I keep thinking, too, about how Sam gave me this book. We'd had a fight – after a disaster at the Bloomsbury Christmas party when my **archenemy** Cyclops Dobson tried to get her **claws** into him. I'd left the party with my heart breaking. I really did think that Sam might actually have enjoyed Cyclops flirting with him. I really did think that Sam and me might not make it into 2009 as a couple.

We did, **though**. Just as I was about to leave Chalk Farm for the holidays, Sam appeared to give me not only my beautiful present but two of the best pieces of news I've ever had: firstly, that he wasn't interested in Cyclops, and secondly, that he was, in fact, totally interested in

*** to wink at – zuzwinkern *** to sigh – seufzen *** to keep doing sth. – etw. immer weiter tun *** archenemy – Erzfeind/in *** claw – Klaue, Krallen *** though – trotzdem ***

me. I was so happy. I was ecstatic. Everything's cool, isn't it? So why do I still feel so *uneasy*?

I think I **trust** Sam. I *think* I do. I mean, you never know. I *think* I believe that nothing happened with Cyclops at the party. I haven't known Sam very long and you can be wrong about someone but I'm about 87.6% sure that he's not interested in Cyclops. No, it's not that that's making me uneasy. Not really.

There are other reasons, two of them. And both of them have to do with the – what's the expression in English again? *Haar in der Suppe* – fly in the **ointment**, that's it! The fly in the ointment *of my life* – Miss Bardwell.

Ms Bardwell is my Latin teacher and **housemistress** at Chalk Farm School, in case you didn't know. She hates me, in case you didn't know. And as my family certainly now do know, thanks to my **report card** from last term.

My report card. I had nearly forgotten about it, I'll be honest. Miss Bardwell had handed them out at the Kensington Christmas party and I had remembered to stick mine in my suitcase to bring here. Honest. But so much had happened over Christmas that *actually getting it out to show my parents* just went totally out of my head.

Luckily, it didn't go out of my grandmother's. On the 28th of December, as we were all laying around the living room lazily, the Queen Mother suddenly woke up from a **nap** in front of the fire and looked at me closely:

+++ uneasy – unbehaglich +++ to trust – vertrauen +++ ointment – Salbe +++ housemistress – Hausvorsteherin +++ report card – Zeugnis +++ nap – Nickerchen +++

“Shouldn’t you have had your first report card by now, Emily?”

Grandma had probably been having a bad dream. Maybe her bad dream went something like this – she’d paid a **fortune** for her granddaughter to go to an expensive boarding school in London and her granddaughter had **messed up** her chance. “Oh, I’ll get it later, Grandma,” I said, trying to seem relaxed.

But my mother was listening, too, by now. She’s a teacher and so has a radar for this **stuff**. She just said, calmly, “Emily, I’d actually really like to see it *now*, if you don’t mind. **No point in waiting.**”

No way out. So I **headed** upstairs, found my case and took out the two envelopes hiding at the bottom of it: *Report Card, Emily Hausmann, Third form, Chalk Farm School for Girls.*

I opened my copy first. I didn’t want to be unpleasantly surprised. I took a breath so deep I could feel it in my **toenails** and read.

I knew my grades already. They were OK, mainly “B”s, one “A” for Art – hurrah! – and, OK, OK, a couple of “C”s. I was only really worried about two things: what Mr Benn and Miss Bardwell would have to say about me. I read Mr Benn’s comment first. Mr Benn’s my English Literature teacher and I had a bad start with him when I handed in a “copy” of Olga Petrova’s essay to him. But he’s a nice man, Mr Benn, thankfully: *After*

*** fortune – Vermögen *** to mess up – vermasseln *** stuff –
Sachen *** no point in – kein Grund zu *** to head – *hier*: gehen
*** toenail – Zehennagel ***

some *initial hiccups*, Emily has made excellent progress. Phew.

Then I said a silent **prayer** and read Miss Bardwell's comment. It's as long as a Russian novel – she gets most space, as my housemistress. And it's as depressing as most Russian novels. It says things like this:

Emily has had a very disappointing first term at Chalk Farm School. She still has to learn traditional English values such as tolerance of others and team spirit. She has also spent far too much time “socialising” with several pupils from St Dougan's boy school. Emily needs to come back after Christmas suitably re-focussed if she is to really get the most out of her year at Chalk Farm School for Girls.

Miss Bardwell says other things, too, about me: *ignoring rules about school uniform – once! – showing no interest at all in sports – is that really so bad? – and other stuff that I don't want to remember, thanks.*

I didn't cry. I didn't. But I was hurt and **embarrassed**. Several members of St Dougan's – that makes me sound like a total **tart**! It was only *two pupils*! Just Sam and Ed Stanton, Sam's bandmate. And he **dumped** me after five minutes so I didn't exactly “socialise” with him for very long.

I went back down the stairs to the living room, where

+++ initial – anfänglich +++ hiccup – hier: Problemchen +++ prayer – Gebet +++ value – Wert +++ spirit – Geist +++ to socialise – Kontakte knüpfen +++ suitable – angemessen +++ to be embarrassed – sich schämen +++ tart – Flittchen +++ to dump s.o. – mit jmdm. Schluss machen +++

everyone was waiting for me. *Dead girl walking*. I was scared stiff about what my parents would say.

The strange thing was, in fact, that Mum and Dad didn't go crazy when they read it. I had thought they would hit me with the Queen Mother's **fire iron** or order me to go to a **convent** school in Switzerland but they didn't. (The Queen Mother did go for another very, very long lie down after she'd seen it, however.)

My mother just looked **puzzled** and said, "Well, that's *odd*. I mean, your grades are OK. The comments from most teachers are good and yet your housemistress says it's all terrible. I'm afraid I don't see why."

Then she looked at me thoughtfully. "Maybe the best thing is for me to get in touch with Miss Bardwell to talk about ..."

I **gasp**ed *no!* and my mum just laughed. "You're not scared of her, are you?"

"No," I **mumble**d. You shouldn't lie to your parents, of course. Obviously, I am more scared of Miss Bardwell than I am of anything else in the universe.

I don't really understand quite *why* Miss Bardwell hates me so much. But I do know that one of the reasons is Auntie Nora. Auntie Nora and Miss Bardwell were at Chalk Farm School together years ago, and they were **sworn** enemies then. Everyone tells me that I'm like Nora, which is generally great because Nora is cool and a brilliant photographer, something I'd love to be. The only time it's not great being like her is when Miss

*** fire iron – Feuerzange *** convent – Kloster *** puzzled – verwundert *** to gasp – nach Luft schnappen *** to mumble – murmeln, nuscheln *** sworn – eingeschworen ***

Bardwell's around. Like at the Kensington Christmas party, **for instance**.

That party is actually the other reason I'm a big **bag of nerves** right now. It was there that I discovered that Auntie Nora was actually the old flame of Miss Bardwell's **fiancé**, aka Sam's Chemistry teacher at St Dougan's Boys' School aka Mr Michaels, our party "Santa". I found this out the hard way: Nora kissed "Santa" and Santa chased Nora. Something tells me Miss Bardwell wasn't too excited about this.

Nora hasn't said a word to me about Mr Michaels all holiday. But every time her mobile has rung, I've jumped. What if she's having an affair with "Ben" Michaels? I have to get Nora by herself tomorrow and find out what's going on.

Finally I fall asleep, still holding Sam's present. **Tight**.

+++ for instance – zum Beispiel +++ bag of nerves – Nervenbündel
+++ fiancé(e) – Verlobte/r +++ aka – alias +++ tight – fest +++