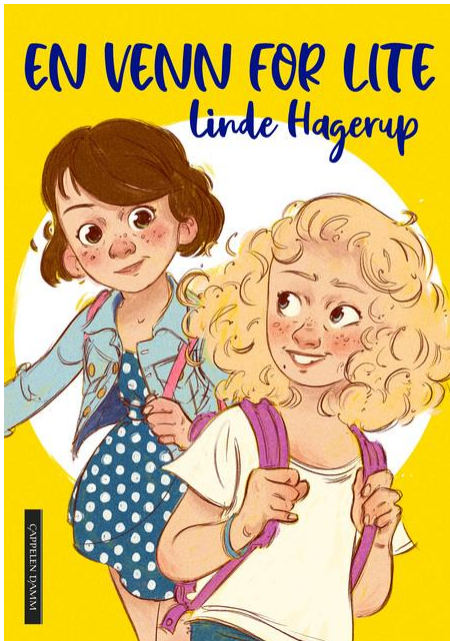


Cappelen Damm Agency *Fall 2021*



One Friend Too Few

Sara and Helene are best friends. Forever. But after the summer holidays, everything is suddenly different. Helene has been to the US and Disneyland, while Sara has spent her summer fishing and playing cards at the family cabin. They are miles apart even though they live next door to each other.

When Sara's parents also reveal that they have a secret and that the family will be moving house, Sara realises she's in the process of losing absolutely everything that is good. Sara needs to make a plan to get her life back. But is her plan cunning enough to turn the situation around?

Linde Hagerup is back with a stand-alone follow-up to 'One Brother Too Many'. This is also a children's novel that is easy to read and enjoy.

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One Friend Too Few
Linde Hagerup

Linde Hagerup
b. 1968

Linde Hagerup (b. 1968) made her children's author debut in 2008.

Her previous novel, A BROTHER TOO MANY, was shortlisted for the prestigious Deutscher Jugendliteraturpreis 2020.



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Synopsis

The summer holidays are drawing to a close and Sara's best friend Helene is due back from her vacation in the US. Sara is desperate to cut short her own family holiday and hurry home to meet her – but her parents won't let her.

When Sara and Helene finally meet up again, things don't turn out the way Sara expected. Helene is distant and uninterested and only wants to talk about the US. She doesn't want to walk to school with Sara anymore and turns up at school late for no reason. And then Dad announces some dreadful news: he's landed a job in Bergen and the whole family is going to have to move. Sara, her big sister Emilie and Little Brother Steinar all protest and conspire to sabotage the moving plans. After several unsuccessful attempts, Steinar's pet rats come to the rescue: they escape from their cage, find their way into the kitchen wall and refuse to come out again. As long as there are rats living in the walls, Sara's parents aren't going to be able to sell the house, so Sara and Steinar decide to feed them in secret.

Sara and Helene have a massive argument and Sara tells her they're moving to Bergen. The next day, Helene's big brother Fredrik tells Sara that Helene has been sitting in her room, crying. Sara gets in touch with her and they become friends again, although she still doesn't find out why Helene has been so distant. Sara's move is a catastrophe for Helene. The next day, she shows up at Sara's house with a plan: if she can make Sara's parents love her like their own child, they can't possibly move to Bergen. But Dad won't budge. That's when Sara comes up with one last idea: she will stop talking to Dad. Over the days that follow, Sara refuses to respond to anything Dad asks her. In the end, Dad gets terribly sad and gives up trying.

When Sara's gets up to feed the rats one night, she bumps into Dad. 'If you won't be my friend, I'll have a friend too few,' he says. They both burst out crying. Sara gives up and starts talking to him again. 'It's okay if we move,' she tells Dad. And the next morning, she says it again at breakfast. That makes Emilie desperate, and Helen storms out saying she doesn't want to be Sara's friend anymore.

After that, the atmosphere in Sara's house becomes pretty unpleasant. They all argue and shout at each other. In the end, Dad says he can't do this to his family; they won't be moving to Bergen after all. When Sara tells Helene, Helene finally reveals why she has been so distant. She's in love with a boy in the US. Helene and Sara become friends again. The next day, the rats come creeping out of the wall, fat and pudgy from all the extra food.

Autumn comes and Helene falls in love with a boy at school. Emilie's in love too. Stein is waiting for Christmas and Mum is waiting to fix up the house. Dad is waiting to get a new job. Sara is waiting for Helene. Here she comes. Off they go. The two-headed monster.

Sample translation by Lucy Moffatt

En venn for lite (One Friend Too Few)
by Linde Hagerup

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1

Waiting is one of the hardest things I can think of.
Sometimes I may be waiting for the sun to come out.
Other times I may be waiting for the snow to fall.
This summer, among others, I waited to turn ten.
Then I turned ten, so I stopped waiting for that.
When it's nearly suppertime, I wait for food.
When it's December, I wait for Christmas Eve

.

Right now, all I'm doing is waiting for Helene.

Helene and I are always together.
We walk to school and back together.
We do our homework together.
We have more sleepovers at each other's houses than anyone else.
Everyone calls us the two-headed monster.
Helene and Sara.

Helene and her family have gone to the US for their summer holidays.
They left on the last day of term.
Soon they'll have been gone for the whole holiday.
It's been so long I've stopped counting the days.
We hardly had time to say goodbye before they all jumped into the car and drove off.
Helene's hand waved from one of the car windows.
Then they turned the corner and were gone.

I began to miss her straight away.

Missing Helene is like being hungry all the time.

I think about her and wait for her.

There's always something I want to tell her, but she isn't there, so I just have to tell myself.

That's the way it is with best friends here on Earth.

You think and wait and miss and wait and wait and talk to yourself.

'Good things come to those who wait,' Mum said one day when I was sitting there missing Helene.

I don't really know what she meant by that.

What I do know is that people who wait for good things always have to wait far too long.

But tomorrow, Helene will be back.

Tomorrow night, their car will turn onto the little street where we live.

Stop in front of their yellow house.

The whole family will pile out of the car.

Suitcases, bags and tired faces.

Her dad will shout loud enough to wake up the whole neighbourhood: 'Hi folks – we're hoooooome!'

And Helene will definitely look up at my room.

She'll look for my face in the window up there.

But my window will be dark.

The whole house will be dark.

Because there'll be nobody home.

We're still on holiday at our cabin.

2.

I love being at the cabin.

Every summer we spend three weeks here.

At the cabin all of us are all together.

We fish and swim in the ice-cold sea.

We hike up super-steep mountains.

We cook food we've never cooked before.

We sit in front of the open fire playing board games and guessing games and reading.

The cabin is a cave where we hide away.

It's the best place in the whole wide world.

Apart from right now.

Right now, all I want to do is to go home to Helene.

But we'll be here for two more days.

And after that we'll go to Bergen, the way we always do.

We won't go home for an eternity of five days.

But that's no good.

It simply won't do.

Not right now.

3.

I went downstairs and joined the others in the living room.
The fire was lit.
Mum was sitting at one end of the sofa with Steinar on her lap.
She was reading him a book called 'How do you start school?'
We'd been reading that book to Steinar all summer.
In just over a week, he would be starting in Year 1.
Emilie and Dad were sitting at the table playing chess.
He'll win, no question.
He almost always does, and when he does, he gets all cocky and conceited.
There's a cage by the door with Steinar's two white rats in.
Their names are Steffen and Geir.
Steinar often takes them out of the cage to pet and play with them.
Sometimes he forgets to shut the cage afterwards and they escape.
Whenever Steffen and Geir escape, they run around hiding and destroying stuff.

I coughed.
Mum stopped reading and everyone looked at me.
'We need to have a serious talk,' I said.
 'Do we now?' said Dad.
When Mum and Dad want to talk about something important, they always say we need to have a serious talk. Serious talks can be very long and they are often bad news.
 'The thing is, we have to go home,' I said.
 'Home?' Mum said.
I nodded.
 'I'm afraid so,' I said. 'Helene is coming back from the US. That's just the way it is,' I said, with an apologetic gesture. 'I think it'd be best if we left tomorrow,' I said.
There.
The serious talk was over.
Done and dusted.

I turned around and walked towards the door.
Now I would go upstairs and pack.
Tomorrow we would leave.
Just before my hand reached the handle, Mum's voice stopped me.
 'We have to have another little serious talk,' she said. 'I think you need to come right back here and sit down.'

4

'But Sara,' Mum said. 'Right now, this is about us: our little family on holiday. Exactly the same holiday we take every summer. First we go to the cabin together. Then we go to Bergen to visit Auntie Mona and all the relatives.'

'I can go on my own,' I said. 'I can take the train. It'll be perfectly fine.'
'This is our holiday,' Mum continued. 'This is when we are together, all together. And you're going to stay with us the whole way. You're not going anywhere without us.'
Something crashed inside me.
Like a door being slammed shut.

'But why can't I just go?' I said.

'There are lots of reasons,' Mum said.

Steinar jumped down off the sofa and took one of his rats out of the cage.
He lifted it up to his face and kissed it gently on the head.

'Give me one reason!' I said.

'First of all, you're still a child. We are responsible for you. We can't let you go off all by yourself.'

Another door slammed.

'I could stay at Helene's,' I said. 'It'll be perfectly fine.'

Mum sent me a look that meant I absolutely could not.

It was probably just because our parents don't like each other.

They're as different as they could possibly be.

They don't even seem to be able to have a normal conversation.

'I can go home with Sara,' Emilie said, winking at me.

'Emilie,' Mum said. 'Don't you start.'

'I can stay at Helene's as well,' Emilie said. 'There's probably space for me in Fredrik's room.'

Fredrik is Helene's big brother.

He's in the class above Emilie at school.

Mum didn't answer. She looked at me instead.

'Now, then. I think you should send a quick message to Helene telling her we'll be home at the weekend and we'll have no more talk about this.'

'Poor Steffen!' Steinar shouted suddenly.

Steinar had dropped Steffen on the floor.

The rat was heading at top speed towards the darkness under the sofa.

Mum caught him just in the nick of time.

She hauled Steffen up by the tail and put him back in the cage.

'But you'll have a really nice time whether I'm here or not,' I said.

'I'm not so sure about that,' Dad said. 'I'd miss you terribly. You're one of my favourite people. I really want to spend this holiday with you. Can't you stay here with us right now – and can't you try and feel as if it's a little bit nice to be here? Just for a few more days? Try and feel as if you want to be with us for a little while, right now? Pretty please?'

'But Dad,' I said. 'Helene ...'

But there was no point saying anything else.

All the doors slammed shut at the same time.

5

So we stayed at the cabin.
Time stopped going forward.
It mostly stood still.

Now and then it went backwards.

I sent a message to Helene saying we wouldn't be home until Saturday.
I got a short answer saying that was a shame.
I hadn't heard from her in a long time.
A few photos to start off with, and after that, I'd heard almost nothing else.
She was probably really busy with all the stuff people do in the US.
Maybe they were at Miami Beach and Disneyland and places like that.
It was hardly surprising she'd forgotten about Norway a bit.

We kept on doing all the things we always do.
We swam and fished in the ice-cold sea.
We hiked up super-steep mountains.

6

That night Dad came in to say goodnight.
We had to whisper because Steinar was asleep in the other bed.
There are three bedrooms in our cabin and Emilie is the only one who sleeps alone.
 'We realise you're missing Helene,' he whispered. 'But you'll be seeing each other again soon, won't you? Just a few more days.'
 'But she's coming home tonight,' I said.
 'And next week, you'll be going into Year five,' he continued. 'You're getting so big. Soon you'll hit puberty and you'll probably be cross with us all the time, because that's what people are like in puberty. After that, you'll suddenly be a grownup and you'll move out. We want to spend as much time as we can with you right now.'
 'It's not fair,' I said.
 'It's not fair that we want to spend time with you?' Dad asked. 'I didn't know that.'
 'You don't know anything,' I said.
 'No,' Dad said. 'I don't know anything. You're quite right. I'm just a twit.'
 'I didn't say that,' I said.

He continued.

 'I'm an idiot. A twerp. Thick as a boiled baboon.'
 'Dad, you're not thick,' I said.
 'Oh yes I am,' he said. 'I am so thick. I'm as thick as an old sock. As a tiny, dried-up prune.'
Then he started tickling me.
When Dad tickles me, I just can't help laughing.
I laughed so much I nearly wet myself.
 'Dad?' we heard from the other bed. Dad turned around.
 'Have you woken up, Steinar?'
 'Steffen and Geir,' mumbled Steinar.
Then he lay back down again and went back to sleep.

Dad sat beside me on the bed.

 'Are you cross with us?' he whispered.
I tucked myself under his arm.

Snuggled up to that safe warmth.
He smelt of Dad.

‘No,’ I whispered. ‘I’m not angry. I’m just very, very disappointed.’

[...]

12

All I had to do was ring the doorbell.
All those seconds of waiting were over.
Now I was standing here.
Helene was in her house.

But suddenly I started to feel shy.
What if we didn’t know each other all that well any more?
You can’t tell what a summer holiday will do to people.
Helene might have become a totally different person.

For example, she could have got very tall.
Or very grownup.
Or sulky.
Or superior.

I didn’t have time to ring the doorbell, though.
The door opened all by itself and there she was.
My Helene.
She looked just like herself, the way she was before the summer holidays.
Her eyes were blue.
The freckles on her chin were just where they always are.
Her blonde curls danced around her head like sunshine.

‘Sara!’ she shouted.
She threw her arms around me.
Trying to cover up my shyness, I threw my arms around her too and shouted ‘Helene!’
I didn’t do a very convincing job of it.
And that made me feel even shy.
What an idiotic time to get shy.
When she let me go, I hardly dared look at her.
‘Let’s go up to my room,’ Helene said.
‘Okay,’ I replied.
I went into hall.
Took off my shoes.
‘Come on!’ said Helene.
Then we ran.

Up the stairs.
Two at a time.

The dog barked at us.
Helene's mother shouted something.
We didn't stop to listen.
Just ran.
Ran, ran.
Top speed.
Upstairs.
Into her room.

We dived onto Helene's bed.
Breathless and red-faced.
Tousled hair everywhere.
Helene and me.
At last.

13

Helene talked and talked.
It sounded as if they'd done everything you could possibly do in the US.
 'Did you go to Disneyland too?' I asked.
Helene rolled her eyes.
 'It was soooo boring,' she said.
 'Boring?'
I didn't get it.
Surely Disneyland couldn't possibly be boring.
 'We spent the whole day in queues,' Helene said. 'It was more fun at the Grand Canyon.'
 'Why did you spend the whole day in queues?' I asked.
If you were going to go to Disneyland, I just didn't understand why you'd stand in queues once you were there.
 'That's just how it is in Disneyland,' Helene said. 'You spend ages queuing up and then you do something and then you queue up again. It's like that the whole day.'
 'But what about when you're not queuing up – surely it's fun then?' I asked.
Helene shrugged.
 'I really can't remember,' she said. 'There were so many other things in the US that were more fun than being there.'

Just then, Helene's mum came in.
She held out her arms.
 'Sara!' she shouted. 'Darling! We've missed you. Are you well?'
She tripped lightly across the room to the bed and cupped my face in her hands, kissing me on the forehead and cheeks.
Said I looked nice and my hair had grown so long since last time she'd seen me.
She smelt of perfume and coffee.
Then she tripped back to the door, where she turned around and looked at us.
 'Breakfast will be ready soon,' she said. 'American pancakes. How do you like the sound of that?'

She smiled, showing lots of white teeth.

Blew us a kiss.

‘Five minutes. Come on down now, girls.’

Then she left.

Pancakes.

For breakfast.

I felt my stomach rumble.

‘In the US, we ate pancakes nearly every day,’ Helene sighed. ‘I’m actually a bit sick of them.’

‘Is it possible to get sick of pancakes?’ I asked.

‘Yes,’ said Helene. ‘Of course it is.’

‘So aren’t we going to eat pancakes then?’ I asked.

Helene got a message.

She answered it quickly.

Then she sighed.

‘We can if you really want to,’ she said.

14

They were the best pancakes I’d ever eaten.

Thick and soft.

We covered them with cream and chocolate sauce and pink, blue and yellow sprinkles.

I ate five-and-a-half pancakes.

Helene only ate one.

She seemed bored.

Helene’s mum stood behind the kitchen counter and watched me gobbling up the pancakes.

She laughed.

Helene’s mum has the kind of laughter that seems to jump and dance around.

It’s the kind of laughter that makes you want to jump and dance along with it.

‘Is it a long time since you last ate?’ she said.

She laughed again.

‘A while,’ I said.

‘It’ll do you good to have a spot of proper breakfast for once,’ she said.

Another laugh.

I stopped in mid-chew.

Mouth stuffed with pancake and cream and chocolate sauce.

I swallowed before I’d finished chewing.

A big, doughy lump forced its way down my throat.

‘I always eat a proper breakfast,’ I said.

Helene’s mum turned away from me.

Flipped a pancake.

‘But you don’t get American pancakes,’ she said. ‘Not for breakfast. Maybe not even for dinner, right? Not everything you eat has to be absolutely perfect all the time.’

Then she laughed again.

I looked at her back.

Her long dark hair was piled up in a messy bundle on her head.

She was wearing light-grey joggers and a pink t-shirt.

‘A decent breakfast,’ she said. ‘In this house, we eat proper food.’

I looked down at my plate.

There was half a pancake left on it.

Quite a lot of cream and a bit of chocolate sauce.

Pink and blue and yellow sprinkles.

We didn’t eat food like this for breakfast at home.

We ate slices of bread with sensible toppings.

We ate yoghurt and eggs and nuts and oatmeal.

And apples and bananas and kiwi fruit.

When we were at the cabin, we usually bought a big jar of chocolate spread.

But we never ate thick American pancakes with cream and sprinkles.

Not for breakfast.

Not even on Saturdays.

Not even at Christmas.

Proper food.

Helene’s mum thought we didn’t eat proper food in our house.

I put down the knife and fork.

Pushed the plate away.

‘Thanks for the food,’ I said to her back.

‘You’re welcome,’ she said.

She didn’t laugh.

15

Just then Helene’s big brother came into the kitchen.

Fredrik has short dark hair and wears jeans and a suit jacket.

I always feel a bit weird when he arrives.

I’m not in love with him or anything – he’s just so cool and grownup.

I don’t want him to think I’m childish.

‘Hello, Sara,’ he said, walking over to the stove. ‘Shall I flip a pancake for you?’

‘Flip a pancake?’ I said.

‘If you want one,’ he said.

‘I think Sara’s had enough,’ his mum said.

‘How’s your sister doing?’ Fredrik asked.

‘Emilie?’ I said.

‘That’s her name,’ he said, winking at me.

Helene got up.

‘Shall we go out?’ she said.

I nodded.

'Can you take The Frog with you?' her mum said. 'He may need a poo and he definitely needs a pee.'

The Frog is their dog.

He's big and slow and pretty ancient.

The Frog barks when people arrive and he barks when they leave.

Dad says he always looks as if he's thinking about something he's missing but can't have.

'He looks mournful,' Dad says.

The Frog is so big that he reaches halfway up my body.

They got him from a man who was moving abroad and couldn't keep him.

Back then, he was actually called Frost, because of his silvery-grey coat.

But Helene's dad misheard.

'Frog,' he'd said, when he arrived home with Frost. 'He's called Frog.'

'That's an odd name for such a big dog,' Helene's mum had said.

So we just call him the Frog.

'Do we have to take him with us?' Helene said.

She doesn't much like walking The Frog.

It always takes him a while to find a place to poo.

So Helene thinks walking The Frog is boring.

I don't, though.