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## ***HOW TO DEAL WITH STORMY SPIRITS***

by Tyra Teodora Tronstad

Translated from the Norwegian by Megan Turney

The English translation is supported by NORLA

### ***A visit to the shoe-maker***

The small woman with big, dark eyes spoke:

‘Take your shoes off.’

The man in the chair opposite pulled off his boots and lifted up his bare feet. He tried to spread his toes, but couldn’t, as it was almost like they had fused together. The heel on one of his feet was huge, a little smaller on the other, but both looked like fruit with hard rinds.

‘Can you make me a pair of shoes?’ he asked. ‘Tailor-made, shoes that fit me perfectly?’

The woman’s soft hands stroked his feet. She studied them and turned them over, coughing weakly, before saying with great seriousness:

‘I am terribly sorry. There isn’t enough time.’

‘But you are the only person who can make them exactly how I need!’

‘I just can’t do it.’

The man stood up, looked down at her, an expression of sadness on his face, and hobbled back to his tractor.

Translation © Megan E. Turney

The woman packed her tools back into their box and went home. In the hills just outside the city, the wind was growing stronger. One night soon, it would pass by her window. And a bird would fly into this wind from the west.

### *Henry and Joachim*

Henry Mafaye lived with his father, Joachim Mafaye. It had always just been the two of them – for as long as Henry could remember. The two of them at breakfast, the two of them at dinner, and the two of them in the evenings. Every morning, they would walk down the five floors of their apartment building together, staircase after staircase, all the way down to the gate at the bottom.

‘Have a good day, Henry,’ Joachim would say.

‘Have a good day, Dad,’ Henry would say.

And they didn’t say any more than that.

As long as they were silent all the way down the steps, everything would be fine.

That’s how it was for years.

Henry only knew a few facts about his mother:

That her name was Ita Shu.

That she fell ill and died when Henry was quite small.

And that he must never say her name. Preferably shouldn’t mention her at all.

She had lived with them up on the sixth floor, years and years ago. Back then, Joachim and Ita – the most loved up couple in the whole world – would stand with Henry between them, who had only been a baby at the time. They had smiled, looked out of the window, and kissed Henry’s wonderful little chubby cheeks.

Now all of the photos of Ita were gone. As were her things, and every pair of shoes she had made. Henry and Joachim never spoke of her, because if they did, the hard winds would pick up again and destroy everything. The winds would burst into the apartment with such sudden and violent ferocity that the chairs and tables would be blown over, the books would be ripped out from the shelves, plates would topple out of the cupboards and all of their shoes would be dropped in the bath.

It could take several days to clear up the mess, and several years before they could afford to replace whatever had been destroyed.

No, Ita Shu must not be spoken of. It didn't matter that she had been his mother.

The last time Henry had forgotten about this, it had been a few days before the school holidays. It was actually his teacher's fault: *Write the story of your parents*, was the homework assignment. And he had been careless.

'My mother's name was Ita Shu,' he had said as he read his paper out loud to himself, home alone in the apartment. And then, mere seconds later, the tea set had flown out of the cupboard. One of the cups had landed on Henry's phone, smashing the screen.

'I don't understand how you could forget like that,' his father had said as he sat gluing the teapot back together. 'You know what happens when you talk about... um, you know who I mean.'

'I just don't understand why,' Henry replied. 'Loads of people have died before, but their families can talk about them without things smashing all the time.'

His father sighed, but didn't respond.

'I just wonder why it happens. Why we're not allowed to say anything about... her.'

This time, Henry didn't say the name, instead tried to carefully sneak around it. It was okay when he spoke about her in a roundabout way like this, or at least, it had been thus far.

'I've been wondering the same thing,' Joachim answered as he placed the teapot back in its place in the cupboard. It had been smashed and glued back together so many times that the cracks criss-crossed all over it. 'We'll have to wait and see. I'm almost certain it'll pass.'

'By itself?'

'An awful lot of things in this life pass all by themselves,' Joachim answered.

When the holidays came to an end, the summer weather decided to hang around a little while longer. The sun was soft, and winter was still far away. *Maybe nothing will go wrong today*, Henry thought. *Maybe everything will be as it should, all day long?* His best friend – Viktoria – was waiting for him at school, so Henry knew there was a chance that it could be a good day.

He headed off to school, rucksack on his back. Which happened to have a big tear on the front pocket. His father stood by the gate, waving him off. Every morning, the same: Joachim would wave goodbye, and Henry would turn and wave, slowly and seriously, back.

### ***The stone floor at Andromeda School***

Viktoria Flix, Henry's best friend in the whole world, was waiting for him outside the classroom, furious in a way that only she could be: like a fire raging through a forest. This time, it was the headmaster's new rules that had got her all fired up. Especially the new punishment for arriving late more than three times in one month.

'Should people really have to clean the toilets just because they happen to sleep in longer than everyone else?' she shouted as they hurried down the corridor.

Henry struggled to keep up.

‘What about people who don’t have many people at home to wake them up? Like you, Henry!’

Henry had to think about that for a moment. Even though he was never woken up by anyone, he never came to school late either. That was Viktoria, who would always get there late, even though she had two mothers to wake her up. But it did sound unfair when she put it like that.

‘You should talk to your father,’ Viktoria said. ‘Everyone knows who he is. He could set up an influencer campaign. It could be a huge deal for him.’

‘I don’t think he has time for that,’ Henry stammered.

‘Your father needs something good to focus on. It could perk him up a bit.’

‘He doesn’t need perking up.’

‘Everyone is aware that your father can’t sing any more. It said so in the newspaper, that he’s gotten all rusty.’

‘It’ll pass,’ Henry said. ‘An awful lot of things in this life pass all by themselves.’

‘But it’s a great idea, Henry. He could talk about how your mother is dead, and that you don’t have anyone else at home to wake you up, right? It’s totally unfair that you’d have to clean more toilets than everyone else just because your mother’s dead. That’s what your father should say, to get support from his fans. It helps to talk when times are tough.’

If Henry hadn’t been annoyed before, he certainly was now.

‘My father isn’t having a *tough* time,’ he said, but then thought to himself that what he should really be doing is changing the conversation.

Viktoria, of course, had no idea what happened whenever Henry spoke about his mother. School was another place where he had to keep his mouth shut.

‘Have you done the homework?’ he asked.

‘Come to think of it, what was your mother even called?’ was Viktor’s answer.

*No, no, no*, Henry thought, and gave Viktoria his sternest look.

If there was anyone who understood such a look, it was Viktoria. But it didn't look like she understood anything at all today.

'Tell me, Henry! What was her name?'

Viktoria always went on like this, she was the kind of person who rarely let things go, but she could usually at least see when something was wrong. But not now. She couldn't see a single thing.

'Henry, say it!' she pestered him. 'I don't think you've ever told me. Which is kind of weird, actually.'

She still wasn't getting it. How spoiled could you possibly be? Would she push him to say his mother's name all because she doesn't want to clean a toilet? Just because she can't force herself to get up in the morning?

'Come on, Henry!' she commanded.

Henry almost never gets angry. But the rage washed over him in that moment, hard and fast. Fine – if that was what Viktoria wanted, then that's what she'd get.

And so Henry said it, loud and clear:

'My mother's name was Ita Shu.'

To really let it hang there, in the event that Viktoria hadn't understood him, he repeated himself:

'Ita Shu. And she was the world's best shoemaker.'

Henry regretted it, of course, but it was too late. The winds blew in from every side. Winds so strong that the two of them struggled to stay on their feet. School books and rucksacks swirled around in the air, and even the bust of the former headmaster zoomed past their heads.

*One more second*, Henry thought, *and it would be over.*

But then two seconds passed. Three. Four.

He saw Viktoria wobble, and grabbed hold of her arm. But it didn't help – winds such as these knock over whatever they so please. And thus, Viktoria Flix was lifted up into the

air, blown down the staircase, and landed with a big THUMP on the stone floor at the bottom.

Where she lay.

When the winds finally subsided, people began to crowd around her, trying to help her up. From the top of the stairs, Henry saw everything unfold: the wide-eyed pupils as they made a ring around her, teachers as they called for an ambulance. When the paramedics eventually did come running in with a stretcher, Henry felt overwhelming sick with fright. All he could bring himself to do was run. He wanted to get away, find a place where no one could see him. Somewhere he wouldn't have to see all of the shocked pupils, Viktoria's pale face and her foot, sticking out an angle it absolutely shouldn't be.

### *Clove tea*

'Hello,' squeaked Henry.

He had finally reached the top of the stairs and their apartment on the sixth floor, after having run all the way home.

No one answered. All the curtains were drawn. He walked through the hallway and was met by the usual smell of sleep and old socks, and it soon became apparent that no one had been in the kitchen since he had left that morning: Every breadcrumb, both half-empty glasses of milk and the same wet tea towel were there, just as Henry had left them.

From the bedroom, Henry could hear a long, deep snore. When he opened the door, he could see the duvet, rising up and sinking back down. On the night stand beside his father's bed was a script from the Subito Music Theatre, where he worked. It didn't look like he'd read much of it.

'Dad, you've got to wake up,' Henry said, quickly changing his tone so he sounded more casual. 'I'll make you a cup of clove tea. It'll help you sing tonight.'

He still felt sick from the sound now playing on a loop in his head: the thump from when Viktoria hit the floor. All the horribleness he had run from.

He tried to pretend like there was nothing wrong. He was good at that.

Henry went and fetched his three alarm clocks. Placed them in different places around his father's room, and turned them all on. They would ring and ring until Joachim woke up and turned them all off.

'Take her, take her,' Joachim mumbled from beneath the covers.

'I'm sure it'll go well tonight, Dad,' Henry said.

Then he walked into the kitchen, found a big mug, dropped in a few cloves, boiled the water and poured the tea. He left the kitchen door open, so the smell of the cloves would drift through to Joachim and help rouse him. Henry's phone vibrated in his pocket, but instead of reading it, he decided to chuck it into the closet and stuff his coat on top. Which is why it took several hours before he saw the message from his school, which read:

***Headmaster's office. NOW.***

***The theatre director writes a letter***

*I have never heard Joachim Mafaye sing quite as badly as this,* his boss at the Subito Music Theatre thought. *It is truly terrible.*

He was sitting in his office, watching the actors and singers rehearse from a screen that was balanced on top of eight old pizza boxes.

On the desk in front of him: a couple of documents. NOTICE OF TERMINATION FOR SINGER JOACHIM MAFAYE, was written on one of them.



The theatre director sighed.

'There's no other way,' he said to himself. 'Joachim's voice is just too bad. And he's fallen asleep on the job several times in the last week.'

The play – which was soon to premiere – was about a princess who escaped from a castle, and has to find her way out of a large forest. On her journey, she meets all sorts of creepy creatures, which she defeats, one after the other. Joachim Mafaye didn't have a major role in this play, but rather, several minor roles. Among them, one of the angry little trolls that chases the princess over a swamp so she almost gets stuck, while he sings 'take her, take her'.

His name wasn't even on the poster.

Yet, only a few years ago, it had all been so different. Back then, people travelled far and wide to hear Joachim Mafaye's voice. It had echoed throughout the hall. People would buy tickets months and months in advance to listen to him sing, and on the way home, they would talk about the man whose voice made the entire audience cry. There were people who still came to the Subito Music Theatre to experience his voice. But they were the people who had not been aware that that Joachim Mafaye, the man they had heard so much about, was no longer the same man. The Joachim Mafaye who stood on the stage before them now was a hunched over figure, who wheezed as he delivered dry stanzas from between his lips, stanzas that were so painful to listen to that even the most sensitive people in the audience had to pull out their hankies and pretend to blow their noses, to hide their grimaces.

But it was especially bad today. Joachim Mafaye's voice was well and truly rusty now, and he could barely stand on his own two feet.

But the theatre director wasn't used to firing people. In fact, he hated it.

*I really want to give the man a chance,* he thought. But what can I do? *He couldn't do anything about the fact his wife had died.* He wondered how he, himself, would have coped if it were his wife who had died, like Ita Shu had.

He stared down at the letter on the desk in front of him, miserable. And sat there for a while, thinking, before he picked up the phone and made a call.

'I remember reading about it in the newspaper,' he said. 'A new invention that Mafaye's wife had used before she died, do you recall what that was?'

He listened to what the person on the other end of the line had to say for a long time. As he listened, he watched as Joachim Mafaye walked across the stage, rasping and panting:

'Take her, take her.'

The theatre director sighed.

'This is his very last chance,' he said, and hung up.

He then picked up the pen to write one last sentence. He spent many minutes trying to decide what to write. Until finally, he was done, and added a full stop with such force that it almost punctured the paper.

'If this doesn't work, nothing will,' he said to himself.

### *In the headmaster's office*

'Good day, Mafaye,' the headmaster greeted him. 'You got my message then. There was a rumour going round that you were refusing to pick up your phone. Not particularly impressive, Mafaye.'

The air in the headmaster's office was full of dust. Henry stood in the middle of the room, for whoever was called into the headmaster's office was not allowed to sit. If you had done something wrong, then you would have to remain standing there until the headmaster had finished giving his speech. His speeches were known for starting slowly,

but would always grow faster and more intense until he, too, was on his feet, almost spitting out the words.

Whatever was about to happen, Henry deserved it.

'Twenty-five witnesses, Henry Mafaye. That is fifty eyes and fifty ears, plus an incomprehensible amount of brain cells.'

Henry nodded.

'I assume you're aware that Viktoria Flix is now in hospital?'

Just the word 'hospital' made Henry feel queasy.

'The human ankle is one of the most complex things in the world. Akin to the digestive system of the tadpole, or the reproductive organs of an electric eel. I'm sure you can feel it now. How the ankle sort of sings, deep inside your leg?'

A ray of sunlight shot through the dust.

'Viktoria has three complicated fractures in the one ankle alone.'

'Sorry,' Henry whispered.

'A model student! One of our best!'

That was true at least. Viktoria was the smartest kid in school.

Every school wanted a pupil like Viktoria. Even though she did occasionally arrive at school late, she was never disruptive and came top in every subject. On top of that, her mothers also had loads of money, and they signed up to every volunteer event.

'And now, Henry, these twenty-five witnesses have all said the same thing.'

Henry cowered. He knew what was coming.

'They said that you pushed her, Henry.'

What could he do, other than shake his head? He would never be able to explain what really happened. That, admittedly, it was his fault, but in a completely different way. It would be a terrible idea if he tried to prove it. If he did, the headmaster's office would be blown to smithereens, and then he'd definitely be expelled from Andromeda School.

'I assume you know Viktoria's mothers?'

Henry looked up at the headmaster and hoped that he understood that that meant yes.

‘Then you’ll also know what kind of trouble they could get us in, if they were angry enough?’

Henry nodded.

‘...And that they have only just given Andromeda School a large sum of money that would benefit every single one of us, every single day?’

This, Henry was not aware of, but he mumbled regardless:

‘I do.’

‘I am of course talking about the toilets. Four hundred pupils’ constant stream of excrement, bacteria, viruses and grime, can you imagine how much that is? And now we finally have enough money to hire proper cleaners. Are you aware, Henry, of what might happen if Viktoria’s mothers decide to take her out of Andromeda School?’

Then I would be completely alone, Henry thought, but he knew that that wasn’t what the headmaster was getting at. In any case, he knows he’ll be getting a headmaster’s letter: a letter with a task you had to complete, the severity of which depended on what you had done wrong. Sometimes, you would have to do something boring, like get up early or wash something really dirty, but it could also be something quite taxing, like painting every door in the school, or working out the cost of replacing all of the doors with a special kind of Greek marble. The headmaster would write the task in a letter and put the letter in a green envelope, which would be delivered straight to your front door by one of his assistants. The worse the thing you had done, the greener the envelope. But Henry felt that a headmaster’s letter was a mild punishment in this instance. He deserved to be sentenced to spend the entire year without food in a black hole somewhere, for what he had done to Viktoria.

‘Then again, Henry. Was it not the case that Viktoria *wanted* you to tell her your mother’s name? And that for once, you couldn’t just let it go?’

No, it wasn’t possible.

It couldn't be. Henry had never told a single soul about what happened with his mother. He had simply just glued whatever had been destroyed back together, and continued on with his day. How could the headmaster possibly know?

'I had expected more self-control from you. Your father has informed me of the problem, of course. And had assured me that this kind of thing would never happen, yet here we are.'

Had his father really told the headmaster?

The headmaster spun round in his desk chair. He let the chair slowly rotate back into position, pointed his finger at Henry's terrified face and said:

'There must be consequences for this, I'm sure you understand. And you have to call your friend Viktoria, otherwise you're nothing more than a cowardly bully. Do you understand?'

### *Willy complains about boring films*

'I just won't have it,' the old man said, beating his fist on the front desk of the town hall. 'It is an absolute scandal.'

'Who are you here to see?' the woman behind the desk asked. She was used to people getting angry in the town hall, and the elderly were often the angriest.

'I want to talk to the mayor,' the man said. 'It is high time he put on some good films at the local cinema here, and not just films about people who want to leave their marriages or wars that ended donkey's years ago.'

'They're great films. Everyone wants to see them.'

'But they're not for children. And almost none of them are about animals. And anyway, they're all so boring that you would think whoever made them was actually dead.'

‘Don’t bring the dead into this,’ the young woman said, as she diverted her attention to the mobile phone in her lap and yawned.

‘Just put me down in the appointment book. My name’s Willy.’

The woman wrote down the time and date of the appointment and pushed the note over the counter to the old man.

‘But you’ve scheduled my meeting with the mayor on the twentieth of September in five years’ time!’ the old man exclaimed. ‘You realise I’ll probably be dead by then?’

‘That’s the best I can do,’ the woman replied. ‘And it wasn’t me who started talking about death. That was you.’

### *The man who looked familiar*

It was a warm afternoon. Katarina, who had just finished her day at school, was standing behind the counter of her mother’s shop. As she often did.

‘One bottle of water, please,’ said the man as he stepped inside. Following him: a small dog with a short coat and protruding ears.

Katarina pointed at the shelves immediately behind him. It wasn’t a large shop. She then glanced over her shoulder at the door to the back room, to check it was closed. Sitting behind the door with his colouring pencils was her little brother, Kenzo, drawing what he missed most in his life: His Grandfather Willy. The grandfather in his drawings had wrinkles, a dog on a lead and a chequered jacket. Not all that different to the old man now standing on the other side of the shop counter.

‘It’s going to be a hot day,’ the man said, as he began looking over the shelves for what he needed.

Had Katarina's life been a little more like everyone else's, she could have said something like:

'You are so much like my grandfather, you look like you could've been brothers! He had a dog just like yours!'

Instead, Katarina stared blankly at both the man and the dog, and hoped they would soon leave the shop.

'Ah, now I remember!' the man suddenly exclaimed. 'Pretzels, that's what I came in here for!'

He looked down at the small dog standing beside him, panting in the heat.

The old man's voice sharpened her memories, as Grandfather Willy would also come in every afternoon, a warm smile on his face and arms outstretched for both her and Kenzo. And he always wanted pretzels. But he stopped coming in after, that one day in April.

'We need salt in this heat, don't we, little guy?' the old man said, clearing his throat.

And then the door to the back room opened. A small, dark-haired head and two bare feet came gliding toward the counter. Two children's hands appeared, holding up a piece of paper covered in colourful lines, and a smile on his face that lit up the whole room.

'Katarina?' her little brother said.

There was nothing she could do. The seconds passed too quickly. She didn't have time to push Kenzo back behind the door again, nor did she even have the chance to put her hand over his mouth.

'Look, Katarina! It's Grandfather Willy! He's not dead! HE'S NOT DEAD!'

She only just about managed to usher them all out of the shop and onto the street before the winds arrived – from the east, the west, the north and the south. In the space of mere seconds, all of the shop's wares had been hurled onto the floor. Everything from baked beans to tomatoes, bread, soap, toilet paper and lightbulbs were now being blown around in one miserable whirl of chaos.

'Not again,' Katarina whispered, holding tight onto her little brother's hand.

They watched as all the products rose up into the air, zoomed around the room one more time, before they finally clattered back to the floor. And by that point, they were all well and truly destroyed, right down to the last cucumber.

### *Kenzo*

By the time evening came, Katarina was so tired after having cleaned everything up that she staggered through the shop and into the back room, where Kenzo lay asleep under the desk, his face swollen from crying. Neither she nor her mother had found time to take him up to bed. All they did have time for, was clearing up.

Katarina now lifted her little brother up and carried him upstairs and into bed. She lay a blanket over him and kissed his forehead. She then curled up next to him and wrapped her arms round his little body.

In the room next door, her mother was talking on the phone:

‘Do you know what I have to do now, dear sister? I have to go and throw out a huge pile of food. Perfectly good, expensive food that we should have sold to pay our bills. If we have anything left to eat by the end of this month, it’ll be a miracle.’

Katarina’s mother always called her sister when she was in a crisis. Her sister lived in a large house with a garden far outside of the city.

‘It’s just not possible to have him here anymore. He has to go, it’s as simple as that.’

Katarina hugged Kenzo harder as she eavesdropped.

‘The best solution would be for Kenzo to move in with you. That way there won’t be anything he can destroy, or at least not in the same way. Yes, that’s what we’ll say.’

Kenzo was in a deep sleep. There was so much Katarina wanted to say to him. She wanted to say: *Dear Kenzo, my beloved little brother, our aunt is going to come and pick you up*



*soon, but you shouldn't be afraid. Don't be afraid of her massive dog. Don't be afraid of the silence in the house. But do be careful of the swimming pool in the garden, be nice to her boyfriends and hold on tight to your stuffed toy when you miss me, won't you?*

But, instead, she whispered:

'I'm going to bring you home again. I'll find someone who knows what about the winds, really knows what they're talking about. A wind expert. There has to be one, somewhere.'

Katarina lay in that position, staring at her phone, for hours. She scrolled past cats sitting on shop shelves, competitions where people eat spices with a teaspoon and put ice cubes in other people's shoes. No one would understand the picture she posted, of the chaos in the shop. They would just see the biscuits, the chocolates, the milk, bread, beans and shelves, strewn across the floor. They couldn't possibly understand that everything had been blown to pieces because three-year-old Kenzo had mentioned his dead Grandfather Willy's name.

And that it was the fourth time since April.

### ***Pieces of paper***

Henry went for a little walk in the park to clear his head. He did that occasionally – it was like the trees made him feel less afraid. When he got back to the apartment, determined to pluck up the courage and call Viktoria, he found lots of little pieces of paper scattered all over the floor. As if someone had shredded a pile of documents into a thousand pieces and thrown the scraps into the air. An open envelope with the Subito Music Theatre logo lay on the dining people.

'Dad?' Henry called through the bedroom door. 'Clove tea in five minutes.'

Inside the apartment, the mess was ready to take over. No one had washed anything for weeks, and the dirty clothes were draped all over the floor and chairs. The dust on the windowsill looked like a layer of thick, grey snow. Every single thing they owned was either taped or glued back together. If there was one thing Henry was good at, it was repairing things. With tiny little strips of tape, he set to work on the pieces of paper, putting the words and letters together in the right order.

When he was finally done taping the letter back together, it was possible to read what had it said. And it wasn't pleasant.

NOTICE OF TERMINATION, was written across the top.

'Termination, isn't it the same as being fired,' Henry mumbled to himself as he read, feeling the anxiety well up inside him.

Had his father been let go? How do you make money when you don't have a job? How do you buy food when you don't have any money?

'Are you rummaging through my things?'

Joachim was awake and standing in the middle of the room, in just a pair of very tatty underpants.

'I'm cleaning up,' Henry said, uncertain, as he put the final piece of tape in place.

He held the sheet of paper in front of him and said:

'Dad, did you lose your job?'

And then Henry proceeded to read the letter out loud. He read each line slowly, in a voice that became more and more rusty, reading aloud all the times Joachim Mafaye had arrived at work late, hadn't rehearsed enough, or had gone home early. Everything that explained the words NOTICE OF TERMINATION that was stated so clearly at the top of the page.

As Henry read, Joachim brought his hands to his head and began massaging his temples. He often did that when there was something he didn't want to hear.

'I don't understand the line written at the bottom,' Henry said.

‘It’s about my being fired, Henry.’

‘I still don’t understand the last sentence though. The one written in pen.’

‘It’s just something they’ve come up with to make my life even harder.’

Henry continued reading, extra loud this time.

*‘If you contact Professor Otto Tiid at the Institute for Important Memories, and ask to see the femtogram recorded by...’*

Henry stopped.

Because the name written there, he could not say out loud. He stomped his foot twice and continued:

‘... you may, if you promise to improve, have your job back.’

Joachim was really awake now. Every word looked like it had hit him like ice in a hail storm.

‘Out of the question!’ he shouted. ‘I’ve had enough of this! I don’t want to hear a single word about...’

He also stomped his foot on the floor. Twice.

‘What’s a femtogram?’ Henry asked, trying to stay calm, because he knew that if he let himself get worked up now, he’d never get an answer. ‘And who is Professor Otto Tiid?’

‘It has nothing to do with us,’ Joachim roared, and stormed back into his bedroom, where he threw himself onto the bed and crawled beneath the dirty linen.

### *The headmaster’s letter*

When the doorbell rang that evening, it was Henry who opened the door. The girl who stood outside was wearing a yellow coat and a pair of wellies, and Henry knew immediately who she was. She was one of the headmaster’s assistants.

**Kommentert [ET1]:** The name “Tiid” refers to the Norwegian word “tid” meaning “time” in English. A translation of the name “Otto Tiid” could be “Otto Tiime”.

‘Henry and Joachim Mafaye,’ she said into her wristwatch. ‘The time is 19:13. The headmaster’s letter has been delivered.’

‘Noted,’ said a voice from the watch. ‘Ask for a receipt from both the father and son.’

‘I’ll try,’ the girl sighed. ‘But I can only see the son right now.’

The last time Henry had received a headmaster’s letter, it was because he had called his maths teacher a stress-blimp, and it wasn’t even a swear word, just something he’d made up. What had happened to receive this one was so much worse than blurting out something not very nice about a teacher. He could tell by just looking at the envelope the girl handed to him. He had never seen a greener envelope.

‘Here,’ the girl said. ‘As your father can’t sign it himself, you can sign for the both of you. It’s an emergency solution, but the headmaster said that we can do that this time, seeing as your parents are improper.’

‘Improper?’ Henry asked.

‘That’s what he said.’

When Henry opened the envelope and saw what was written inside, a shockwave passed through his body.

*Attend an appointment with director Otto Tiid at the Institute for Important Memories.*

*Friday 8th at 08:30am*

*The appointment regards the viewing of Ita Shu’s femtogram.*

*Best wishes,*

*The Headmaster.*

‘I don’t think that’ll work. And the 8th... isn’t that tomorrow?’ Henry asked, while frantically trying to understand how the exact same thing written on his father’s notice of termination could possibly be written in this letter.

‘And anyway,’ he continued, speaking in a low voice as he tried to hand the letter back to the girl. ‘What’s a femtogram?’

‘No clue,’ she replied. ‘Probably something you watch, like a film or recording. Maybe in 3D? I’d be pretty chuffed if the task I got in a headmaster’s letter was to just watch a film.’

‘But I can’t,’ Henry whispered.

‘I’ve got no idea what you’re on about, Mafaye,’ the girl said. ‘But those who don’t follow the recommendations set out in a headmaster’s letter are not allowed to continue studying at Andromeda School. It’s written in the small print at the bottom. Or on the back. So I don’t think you should be giving me that back,’ she said, turning and heading back down the stairs.