



**Synopsis: Angelika Glitz, *Der Himmel kommt später / Heaven Can Wait***

**Illustrations by Leonard Erlbruch.**

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**Content:**

Lulse Stresemann, called “Lulu”, has been wishing for a pair of in-line skates for quite some time now. Her father, an orthopedist, refuses to buy them for her because he thinks them too dangerous. Therefore, Lulu is happy when an opportunity to earn a bit of extra pocket money opens up to her. Her great-great-aunt Hilde, who is the sister of Lulu’s great-grandmother, is now 97 years old. Lulu’s father has rented a little apartment for her in the neighborhood. Every Tuesday, Hilde needs somebody to look after her, as Agathe, the nurse who usually takes care of her, meets with her Polish book club.

Lulu’s and Hilde’s first meeting is a bit bumpy. Lulu hopes that Hilde can help her with her school homework, but Hilde just talks about the past and then falls asleep, snoring like a boar. So Lulu watches TV instead. When Agathe returns to the flat, the TV is on, Hilde has not eaten anything and Lulu has used the wrong blanket for Hilde – Agathe is upset and complains about Lulu to her mother.

On her way home, Lulu goes to the sports shop to have a look at the in-line skates of her dreams. Ever since she saw the musical “Starlight Express”, Lulu dreams of owning in-line skates. As Lulu does not have the 79 euros (86 US\$/116 CAN\$) for the model of her dreams ready, she hides them inside a rucksack in the trekking department, hoping that nobody will find them until she will have enough money. When Lulu comes home, her parents have gone out to meet with friends. Her little brother Ben is in the living room with babysitter Arthur, no dinner is ready, so Lulu just grabs a package of flatbread and goes to her room.

The next day, Lulu wants to talk about her financial situation with her mother (who works as a lawyer), but she puts her off because she has too much work to do. So Lulu asks her father if she may take care of Hilde twice a week. Her father has nothing against the idea, but says he will withdraw his permission if Lulu's marks at school get worse.

Then the doorbell rings. It is Lulu's schoolmate Belinda, all dressed in black, carrying her guinea pig Melli which has died the last night. While Belinda is drenched in tears, she and Lulu bury the guinea pig right in the middle of the lawn, wrapped in orange tissue paper ("Orange was her favorite color, because of the carrots."). Their friend Marlies joins them. She baked a cake with little carrots made of sugar as a decoration. Right in the middle of the burial, Belinda starts having doubts: Will Melli really go to heaven? The girls have a short amateurish theological discussion. Marlies, the most well-versed in the Bible of the three, manages to calm Belinda down by explaining that Jesus died for all the sins of all humans and animals. They hug and feel the comfort of being best friends.

The next Thursday, it is raining cats and dogs. Mum has an appointment, so Lulu has to ride to Hilde on her bike. When she presents Marlies' cake to Hilde, the old lady is resigned because her denture is at the dental laboratory, but then it turns out that the cake is completely mashed up due to the wild bike ride. Lulu and Hilde enjoy spooning the mush and Hilde speaks about the small house in the mountains she used to live in.

All of a sudden, Lulu discovers a beautiful pair of ice skates under Hilde's bed. Hilde tells her that she never managed to go ice skating in her entire life and goes on telling her about her father who went to prison once during the hyperinflation in the Weimar Republic (1920s), because the prices had doubled while the family had had their meal at a restaurant and in the end, Hilde's father did not have enough money with him. After having told this story, Hilde falls asleep. When Agathe comes to the apartment, she is very satisfied with Lulu.

On her way home, Lulu drops by at the sports shop to check whether her in-line skates are still inside the rucksack where she hid them. Suddenly, the store detective grabs her and accuses her of having stolen the in-line skates the last time she was at the store. Lulu tells him that she hid the skates in a rucksack, but unfortunately, they are not there anymore. So the store manager thinks he has caught a thief and tries to call Lulu's parents. He takes Lulu's mobile phone and dials the number he finds at the phone book entry "Stresemann". It is Hilde's number.

After a long time, somebody knocks at the door of the office. It is Hilde in person, slowly pushing her walking frame. She pretends to be Lulu's grandmother. While the store manager and the detective go outside to call the police, Lulu tells Hilde what happened. Then they escape through the back door of the office into the stockroom. Hilde slowly leans on her walking frame, but then she spots a red forklift. While Lulu snaps the walking frame, Hilde, who used to ride tractors when she was young, takes the forklift and drives through the room at a breakneck speed, Lulu running after her with the walking frame in her hand. They see an open gate, pass it; Lulu closes the gate by pushing a heavy metal door. It's pitch-black inside. Hilde and Lulu wait in the darkness, both sitting on the forklift.

While they are waiting, Hilde tells Lulu how she and her family managed to get her father out of prison back in the 1920s. One night, her mother organized a car and gunnysacks and rubbed their faces with charcoal. Then mother, Hilde's sister Martha and Hilde drove to a field to steal potatoes. This was strictly forbidden, so they had to be very careful. They dug into the earth to find the potatoes and then, all at once, Hilde found a leather bag with a beautiful pair of ice skates, although

it was summer. Her mother allowed her to keep them. When the woman and her daughters had two big sacks full of potatoes, they returned to their home and fell asleep right away. After having told her story, Hilde falls asleep in the seat of the forklift.

Three hours later, Lulu comes home to her parents' house. Hilde still is not at her apartment which worries Lulu's mum who decides to look for her. Lulu tries to convince her mother that Hilde should live with them. Mum pretends they do not have enough space. When mum has left the house, Lulu turns on the radio just to hear an announcement saying that Hilde is sitting in a taxi, has forgotten her address and the police are looking for somebody who knows her. So Lulu calls 110 (911), disguises her voice with a fake French accent and tells them Hilde's address.

Lulu's mobile phone rings; it's her dad. He reports that Hilde has finally found her apartment. She said she just wanted to do Christmas shopping. Lulu's parents go out for dinner, leaving her with Ben. She hands him bananas and chocolate and parks him in front of the computer with a DVD of cartoons on. Then she calls Hilde. They speak about fears, about being afraid of death. Hilde says she is not afraid of dying, as her life story has almost come to an end.

Still on the phone, Hilde tells Lulu what happened back in the 1920s. When Martha and she woke up the next morning, their father was sitting in the kitchen. Mother had indeed managed to free father by handing in the potatoes to the restaurant owner who had then dropped his charges. Then father started to read the newspaper. The headline read "Burglary at the Olympic Indoor Hall". Somebody had stolen the expensive ice skates of Olympic figure skater Sonja Henji the night before. When Hilde wanted to fetch the skates from the cellar, it turned out that they were inside the sack her mother had given to the restaurant owner. Unfortunately, he had exchanged the potatoes against some meat at the butcher's – who had found them and brought them to a shoemaker to make nice boots out of them for his daughter. When Hilde came to the shoemaker, the skates had already been turned into boots. Father promised to give her ice skates as soon as they would have enough money, but they never had enough. From that day on, Hilde was a fan of Sonja Henji, though. On her nineteenth birthday, Hilde met a boy named Horst, when she went to see a movie starring Sonja Henji with her father. Horst was sitting in the audience right beside her father. ... Lulu hears a thud and Hilde tells her the receiver fell to the floor and she cannot get out of bed now. They say good-bye. When mum returns to the house, Ben has chocolate and bananas all over his face and is still sitting in front of the computer. He has eaten too much and has to vomit. Mum is upset and tells Lulu that she is irresponsible.

The next day, Lulu brings her friends Belinda and Marlies to Hilde's apartment. Without warning Hilde or Agathe, they start to paint the sadly empty white walls of the apartment with a colorful Alpine scenery including many different animals. Hilde wakes up and is enthusiastic. She tells Belinda who exceeds herself which details to add to the painting (a supermarket, a hospital ...). The girls have a lot of fun with Hilde who joins in painting the wall. When Agathe arrives, she sees the painting and faints (as it turns out later on, she has harmless cardiac arrhythmia which she knew about already).

Lulu calls an ambulance. Agathe is taken to the hospital. Then the three girls curl up on Hilde's bed. She tells them another story. ... One day while the family was having lunch, the door rang. It was Horst, the young man from the cinema. He had found Hilde's handbag in the cinema and wanted to take her out for a cup of coffee. Against her father's will, Hilde had the coffee with Horst and fell in love immediately. Horst was so different from other men; he wanted to become a pilot. From this

afternoon on, the most important man in Hilde's life was not her father anymore. Mother also liked Horst and helped the young couple. After just six weeks, Horst proposed to Hilde while "Swan Lake" by Tchaikovsky was playing. ... Somebody knocks on the door of the apartment; it's Lulu's dad and he is angry. He takes her home, where she has to take care of her little brother Ben. The next morning, dad tells Lulu that he has found a place for Hilde in a nursing home. Lulu is aghast.

When Lulu is at Hilde's again, Hilde expresses her gratitude. She is thankful that Lulu organized the painting of the wall for her. She now feels at home much more. Hilde gives Lulu 100 euros (108 US\$/148 Can\$) so that she can buy the in-line skates. Lulu has a bad conscience because of this big amount of money; she does not know what to do with it. Then Hilde starts to tell the story of her life again ...

Hilde and Horst got engaged, but he died during the war. So Hilde helped to rebuild her city, stayed single and then inherited a goose farm by her sister Martha who died. When Hilde was already more than 60 years old, a man unknown to her walks up the hill to her house and hands her a parcel. With ice skates, bought for her by Horst, back in the days when he was in Russia as a soldier. ...

The winter comes. One morning, Lulu calls Hilde who is very depressed because she was told she has to go and live in the nursing home now. Hilde says she won't go anywhere anymore. Lulu takes the 100 euros. She buys warm socks, a CD, a CD player and chocolate candy. At home, she pretends to be really tired and goes to her room where she forms a dummy of herself of pillows. Then Lulu steals away and rides to Hilde on her bike.

Lulu dresses Hilde in all sorts of warm clothing. Then she pushes Hilde in a wheelchair through the streets on this silent winter night. They find themselves on the shore of a lake which is frozen. Lulu pushes the wheelchair onto the ice. Then she turns the music on ("Swan Lake" by Tchaikovsky) and gives Hilde a praline. All of a sudden, Hilde gets up and slides a few inches on the ice. She starts to laugh and cannot stop laughing.

While Hilde is sleeping in the wheelchair, Lulu brings her back to her apartment and beds her. Hilde wakes up for a short moment and says: "Did you see that, Lulu? I made my babies slide." – speaking about her ice skates. At her home, Lulu goes to bed and falls asleep right away. The next morning, mum tells Lulu that Agathe called to tell her that Hilde slept in her skirt.

When Lulu meets Hilde the same day, the latter is very tired. She does not even want to listen to Lulu's flute playing. She makes Lulu promise to never forget the last night at the lake and to always follow her heart. Then she makes Lulu look out of the window and describe the heavens for her. They both agree that in heaven, nobody needs to wear support stockings or practice the flute every day.

Once more, Lulu's place is empty when she comes home: Neither her parents nor anything to eat is to be found. Lulu is so tired that she falls asleep with her head on her Latin textbook. When she wakes up, her parents are both home, in the middle of the day. Her father holds a letter which says that Lulu was falsely accused of having stolen a pair of in-line skates; the skates were found in the store. But the letter is mostly ignored, as her parents have something important to tell her. Lulu fears they will say they want to get a divorce. But then dad says that Hilde passed away that morning. She is dead. As dead as Melli, the guinea pig. Lulu realizes she can never talk to her again; colorful memories of hours passed together pop up in Lulu's head. She screams "No!" and runs out of the door.

In the street, Lulu runs and runs and breaks into tears. An unknown woman with a baby stops and consoles her. The baby is as toothless as Hilde was. Lulu runs to the middle of the lake which is still frozen and lies on her back to watch the heavens. She does not know what to believe but finds comfort in the idea that most religions say there is something like a heaven. It starts to snow.

The funeral is on a Friday. Lulu refuses to play the flute as Hilde did not like flute playing. Observing the flowers and the coffin, Lulu feels she has lost something important to her. She feels very sad, but also thankful for the moments spent with Hilde. When the reverend speaks about how calm the last weeks of Hilde's life were, Lulu raises her hand and interrupts him. She walks up onto the pulpit and holds a speech, telling the mourners what Hilde and she did these last weeks. Dad and the reverend think Lulu is confused in her grief, but then Lulu shows them the photo on her mobile phone with her and Hilde on the lake. Then she walks out of the church.

Outside, Agathe hands her a gift. It's a parcel with Hilde's ice skates, accompanied by a note written by Hilde: "Once you have lived your dream, the curtain of your life may drop. Thank you, Lulu-darling. Your granny Hilde." All at once, the clouds give way to a few sunrays.

### **What makes this book special?**

- A wonderful story about a friendship transcending the age difference between the generations.
- A calm and warm description of friendship, life and death.
- The aspect of taking responsibility for other family members is presented in multifarious ways. Critical perspective on parents working too much so they do not have enough time for their children – without realizing it.
- The story of a girl growing from a girl to a teenager, with the help of a shrewd 97-year-old lady.
- A read both amusing and touching which makes the readers laugh but also brings tears to their eyes

### **Technical features:**

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