

Lilly Lindner: *Was fehlt*

What's Missing

Translation: Katy Derbyshire

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Dear April,

You've been gone for nearly a week and it's really boring here without you. Mum's constantly in tears and Dad's been working long hours every day, and when he does come home he looks sad. At dinner, they both sit at the table in silence and don't bother talking about their day any more.

Dad doesn't make jokes about Aunt Magda any more.

And Mum doesn't get angry any more about Dad constantly making jokes about Aunt Magda.

All they do instead is sit there and wait until I've eaten up. And I deliberately eat very, very slowly. Like you used to do. I want the time to last longer, so that we spend as many minutes as possible together at the dining table – as if we were a perfectly normal family. But really we're only half a family without you. And we're not normal either. Because once dinner's over Mum locks herself in the bathroom and cries and Dad locks himself in his study and rearranges the folders and pens on his desk.

I wish I could pack my things and run away.

But if I leave Mum and Dad will be all on their own. And that definitely wouldn't be a good starting point for a good ending.

The atmosphere here is like inside a raincloud. It's grey and cold and it

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can kick off at any minute – the fitful rumble of thunder. The first flash of lightning. And then the huge storm.

Even Fork doesn't feel like barking any more. All he does now is trot around the horse chestnut tree in the garden like he's the second hand on a sundial. Perhaps he's chasing his shadow. But he must realize at some point that he'll never catch up with it.

Today I asked Mum if I could visit you soon.

But Mum shook her head. Three times in a row. Maybe even four or five times – I wasn't counting all that precisely. Once would have been more than enough.

And then Mum said you're very sick and you need a lot of peace and quiet, and I can't visit you until you've got a bit better.

That's a shame because I'd really like to come and see you. As soon as I'm allowed to I will, April.

I'm really looking forward to seeing you again, even now!

Apart from that, you get better much more quickly when you have your family around you and get flowers and chocolates and presents. Or I do, at least.

But I'm usually fine anyway.

Are you missing me too, a little bit? □ And do you think of me as much as I think of you? If you like I can send you a photo of us both together. Then you'll have something there to remind you. But I suppose you've got enough pictures of us in your head anyway, so you don't even need a photo.

I hope you'll write me a letter back. But if you don't that's fine too – I'm still going to keep writing to you, I promise! I understand if you don't feel like answering letters as long as you're so ill.

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One time when I was ill I didn't want to send any letters back to my friend Paula either. All I wanted to do was sleep.

I love you so, so much! See you soon,

Phoebe

Dear April,

I've just got back from school and I've got loads of homework but I don't feel like doing it right now. I'd rather write to you, that's much nicer.

It's been five days now since I sent off the first letter and you haven't answered yet. That's a bit sad but it's not really bad. I already wrote that I understand. It's fine this way as well. And I'm sure you like getting my letters anyway, don't you?

Fork is on my bed with me. If Mum sees him she's bound to tell us off again. But he really wants to be with me when I write to you; I think he can tell this letter's to you, even though he's only a dog. He's staring at the paper, really interested, and wagging his tail. I hope I can bring Fork when I come to visit you.

How are you now? □ Are you feeling a bit better? I really hope you are. Although I don't really understand what's actually the matter with you. Mum says you've got anorexia and that's why you can't eat properly, and she says it's very dangerous. I asked Mum if anorexia is catching and she said it's a very complicated illness that certainly can be infectious, just not like a cold or chicken pox, in a different way.

I didn't understand that. And I didn't understand why you can't eat properly either. Maybe you're feeling so sick that you can't, or you've got a constant tummy ache. Like that time when we went to the seaside

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and ate those funny mussels and everyone went all green in the face.

I really hope anyway that it'll go away soon, your bellyache. Then we can go out to get ice cream together or something. But only if you feel like it – maybe you think going out for ice cream is boring, and then we could do something else instead. Like going swimming or to the cinema.

Mum told me not to annoy you about your illness. She keeps saying I have to be careful not to upset you because it's all really difficult for you.

Her saying that has made me really scared of doing something wrong and making you feel even worse. I don't want that to happen, no way. I feel sad when you're feeling bad. You're the nicest person in my life, you see, and I want you to laugh and laugh all day long.

You really deserve that.

I asked my friend Paula and she said she thinks you're really nice too. And Paula always tells the truth because her mum's an actress and she always notices right away if Paula has an unrealistic look on her face or if her voice sounds different to usual.

Sometimes Paula and I used to practice telling lies in front of the mirror. Then we'd go to Paula's mum and say three true things and three lies – Paula's mum always knew straight off which were the true ones and which were false. So we gave up and decided on the truth. That's usually for the best anyway.

Yikes! My hand's hurting from writing so much, but it was fun. I'll write again soon. I promise!

Big fat hugs,

Phoebe

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