

Princess

KATINKA

"Do you believe in life after death, Dad?"

"What do you think, princess?"

"I believe there is. I don't know why. But I think I can feel it in my belly."

"Remember that feeling. Little princesses know a lot more about that sort of thing than people realize."

Katinka has a good imagination. She is curious and wants to know more about Dad. There is something about Dad that people don't talk about.

Katinka is the diplomat between Solveig and Cirkeline, when tempers run high.

The Birthday

Tomorrow it is your 10th birthday! If Dad had been here, he would have said, "10 years, that's damned big!" He believed all birthdays were large events and should be celebrated in style. That meant tons of flags, wild decorations and the biggest gifts he could find. He was of the belief that big gifts were better than little ones. You know that Mom doesn't have a lot of money, so you purposefully didn't wish for big or expensive gifts this year. Small, sensible gifts at affordable prices. It's important to you that everyone can participate.

You hope that a lot of guests come and have a good time and don't eat all the cake. Nothing's better than birthday cake the day after. You learned that from Dad. He always made two cakes for his birthday. One for the day itself, and one that could wait until the day after. Because it was always better.

It is also your first birthday after Dad's death. You're afraid that you can't have a good birthday without Dad.

Dad

In two weeks, it will be one year since Dad died. Mom says it's because Dad was really sick. But you don't really know if that's right. He never had fevers. Mom says he was in pain and took pills, and then he ended up taking too many, but you don't believe that either. A person doesn't just end up taking too many pills. You hate pills. Just one and you're ready to choke on it. Nobody can eat a whole jar of pills, just because they taste good. It just doesn't happen. But Dad needed to take some pills, you know that. Sometimes he wasn't himself. Normally, he was happy and good at playing. Building paper castles instead of cleaning. Painting monsters on the wall in your room. Mom got angry about that. Mom was always angry when dad was at his most fun.

At other times, Dad was quieter. Almost sad. Thoughtful. Silent. It was as though Dad had millions of thoughts inside his head and could only get a hold of them by asking questions. And taking pills. Sometimes he woke you in the night. Then you spent hours whispering about the universe's secrets and life's riddles and the coincidences of whims and fate. You loved that. To sit in the treehouse all night, wrapped in duvets.

But Mom didn't love it. She could always tell in the morning when you had been up all night. She never scolded you. But you could often hear her and Dad quarreling in their bedroom. "She has to go to school! It's bad enough you're up all night. Are you going to drag the whole family down with you?" You wish Mom had tried staying up all night with Dad.

Mom

Mom is great, but she hasn't been herself the last couple of years. She has shouted a lot. Mostly at Dad. And when Dad wasn't there anymore, at Grandma. Now she is mostly quiet. She looks sad when she doesn't think you are looking.

Maybe she misses Dad just as much as you do. The lovely fat man. Maybe she's just sick of being only able to afford living in this stupid apartment where everything's about to fall apart. Maybe she's sad that she and Grandma can't manage to talk.

Mom and Grandma aren't friends. Grandma is mad at Mom about something, but won't say what. And Mom is mad at Grandma, because Grandma says that Dad is a Sky Pirate. You don't entirely understand why that is a problem.

Mr. Herman

You have a cat. It is yours. Mr. Herman is his name. The same day you buried Dad he was there when you came back to the apartment. Black. Fluffy. And a little fat just like Dad. You just knew that he was there only for you. So you took him inside with you. Mom wasn't happy about that. She's a dog person.

But you love Mr. Herman. And he loves you. But he hates Torben. Torben is Mom's new boyfriend. Solveig says that he's ok. Grandma says he's a sop. You mostly think that he's a little boring. He doesn't have a beard and always goes around with his shirt tucked into his pants. Dad could never do that.



Sometimes you think you can feel Dad. See him out of the outermost corner of your eye. Round and mild. Hear his voice. You think Mr. Herman can, too. At least he sometimes behaves as though Dad is in the room. Purrs. Meows in that *Dad is around* way. When you think he's there, you talk to him like you did when you sat in the treehouse in the middle of the night. You ask the big questions, and sometimes you also get the feeling that you get an answer.

Solveig and Cirkeline

You are the middle sister. Squeezed in between two fighting roosters, one big and one small.

Solveig is the oldest. She is 12, and she is always very serious. She has forgotten how to be a child. It's only when you watch Disney Afternoon together every Friday night that she appears to relax. When talk turns to Dad, she always takes Mom's side. Never Grandma's.

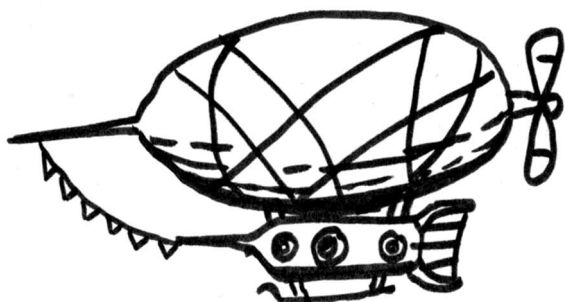
Cirkeline is the youngest of you. She's 8 and the one who shouts the most. She believes fully and unwaveringly in EVERYTHING Grandma says. She was also like that when Dad was alive. If he said that you got chocolate milk from feeding cows with chocolate and then milking them, then so it was. And if you shook the cows, you got chocolate milkshakes. She collects all the stories from the Land in the Clouds. Cirkeline hates Torben and is angry at Mom most of the time, because Mom is mad at Grandma.

It isn't easy to be trapped between Cirkeline and Solveig. You are always trying to be the diplomat.

You learned that from Dad. He always got between Mom and Grandma, when they argue about the best way to make duck for Christmas. But no matter how much Solveig and Cirkeline get at each other's throats, you are still sisters, and you love them more than life itself. When you lie in a pile every Friday and watch Disney Afternoon, it's maybe the best time of the week for you.

Grandma

Grandma is lovely. Old and gray and lovely. Every Friday she has a new story about Dad. She says he's a sky pirate in the Land of the Clouds. She calls it Cloudland, but you like Land in the Clouds better. It sounds more like a fairy-tale. She says the stories come by airmail from Dad, but you don't really know if that makes sense. Maybe. It isn't so important. As long as the stories are fantastic, it will always remind you of everything warm and wonderful about Dad and hold the emptiness at bay for a little while yet. Your Fridays with Grandma are a sanctuary.



Cloudland

Grandma has told you of Dad's adventures in the Land of the Clouds for one year now. It's not actually a land that lies in the clouds. It's a whole other world, where Dad is a sky pirate on the airship Cottonball.

He is the captain of a big crew of lovable thieves and sweet outcasts, who sail around and try to steal all sorts of things from all sorts of people. Like the time they wanted to steal a genuine desert sheikh's world-renowned "Blood Red Ruby," but ended up being taken prisoner. They had to vacuum the desert palace all the time, because sand always flew in from the desert.

Other times, there's a mutiny on the Cotton Ball because of a severe shortage of pancakes. Or Dad's arch-enemies, the Dark Trixies, are making scary plans again. Or that time the Cotton Ball lost air and made an emergency landing in the midst of the Cannibal Jungle.

There's never a dull moment in the Land in the Clouds.

Summary - Katinka

- **Katinka** is the middle of three sisters and has her birthday tomorrow, but is afraid it won't be good now that Dad is gone.
- **Solveig** is the oldest. She is serious and takes Mom's side.
- **Cirkeline** is the youngest. She believes **Dad** is a sky pirate, because **Grandma** says so. Grandma is always right.
- Katinka is the diplomat who mediates between Solveig and Cirkeline.
- Katinka has a cat called **Mr. Herman**. He can tell when Dad is around.
- Katinka loved to sit all night and talk with Silent Dad.
- Katinka doesn't believe that **Dad** accidentally took too many pills.
- **Mom and Grandma** do not like each other.
- Mom has a new boyfriend named **Torben**. Torben is a little boring.

