

Close to here lives a girl

January

Close to here lives a girl who is not as beautiful as you or I. She doesn't have blond curls. She has no pretty dresses. She has no pink pony. No one says that she is a princess. In the school playground, no one invites her to play.

Except you and I. Sometimes.

When we play at princesses, she can be our maid. She helps us put on our beautiful dresses. She makes tea and cake. She tidies the castle. Even if she asks, we don't let her be a princess. Because she's not a princess and that's that. Not even when she grows up. She cannot be. And that's all there is to it.

Princesses are beautiful and gentle, like you and I.

February

Close to here lives a girl who is not as rich as you or I. She doesn't live in a new house or a new apartment. She lives in the next street, in an old house with strange people.

She has no doll's house. She doesn't have a cupboard full of clothes. She doesn't even have a desk. She doesn't have a big garden or a paddling pool or a trampoline like you and I. She sleeps in a bunk bed. With her mother.

For her, we have emptied our cupboards. Everything we are tired of we take to school for her. Because we are good princesses.

Close to here lives a girl who is not as rich as you or I.

March

Close to here lives a girl who doesn't have her own room, like you and I do. And so she doesn't invite anyone round. Not for her birthday, not during the holidays. We've never slept at her place. We don't want to. It's cramped and dirty.

When we have to write about our room in class, she chews her pencil and frowns. She can't just make it up, can she? It's not a story we're writing. Maybe her brother told her to make something up. But she doesn't. She hands in a blank sheet of paper and gets a bad grade.

Close to here lives a girl who doesn't have her own room.

April

Close to here lives a girl who doesn't have any friends. Because she's not as friendly as you and I. She never comes to school by car. She always walks. With her brother. During the break she sits on a

chair and waits for him to come and see her. When he does, she looks up and smiles at him. Then she puts her head down again. She looks small. She holds a pencil and scribbles something in a notebook. Silly scribbles.

Close to here lives a girl who doesn't have any friends.

May

Close to here lives a girl without a name. Well, do you remember her name? You see. You don't. Is it Naida or Esma? It doesn't matter. It's not a proper name. It's a name, but not a pretty one. Not like mine and yours. Kylie or Donna. So sometimes I simply can't remember. Or I don't want to. That's right, I don't want to remember. I don't want to call her by her name. It sounds strange.

As if you were calling someone who doesn't exist.

Close to here lives a girl without a name.

June

Close to here lives a silent girl. Well, she's not as noisy as you and I. You know what I mean.

She never shouts. She never cries. And so no one cares about how she feels. If she says anything, we all laugh. If she draws something, we all look away. If she suggests anything, we all ignore it. She never puts her hand up. She never wants to be first. She never competes. She doesn't go to the teacher for praise. She never jumps the queue or pushes anyone aside.

Close to here lives a silent girl.

July

Close to here lives an invisible girl. Well, not as noticeable as you and I. As if she was wearing an invisibility hat. Or an invisible cloak.

During the holidays we look at school photographs. She's not on any of them. I don't see her. On every photo she is behind someone. Or perhaps she was absent. Yes. Of course she was absent. Maybe she was ill. We never asked her.

Close to here lives an invisible girl.

August

Close to here lives a girl without a body. Did you notice that? That's why we never hugged. We never asked her where she was during the holidays. Because she didn't go to the seaside like you and I.

In the playground we sometimes let her play drop the handkerchief with us. But only for a while. No one dropped a handkerchief behind her back. Because she's not there.

Close to here lives a girl without a body.

September

Close to here there lived a girl. Now she's no longer around.

She didn't come back to school in September. We didn't ask why. We weren't interested. The people who lived in the old house disappeared. They were suddenly not there. Including her mother and brother. We don't know why. Maybe it wasn't their house. Maybe they didn't have money for rent. Maybe they had to leave.

Now the old house will be knocked down and something new built. There will be a shop in the new building. Nice and big. For me and you.

October

We opened her school locker and found a folder full of drawings. Not the kind we did during lessons. Different ones. Much more beautiful. We were amazed. On the first she had drawn herself as a princess. What if she really was a princess? And we didn't know. Maybe she only pretended to be an ordinary girl.

Another drawing showed a room with a bunk bed, a black rabbit and a boy throwing a paper aeroplane. Her brother. And her mother watering flowers. Right across the room stretched a rainbow.

Now all the grown-ups are praising her drawings. That they are beautiful. We kids also think so. We like rabbits and paper planes and rainbows.

The last drawing shows a school desk. On it is a pencil and a sheet of paper. An empty sheet. Without any scribbles. White.

November

Close to here there lived a girl who is no longer around. She is only in our thoughts. We didn't ask her if she was really a princess. We don't know where she was from. We could have talked to her sometime about the black rabbit. Or about her brother. We could have invited her to a birthday party. She was very close by. In the next street. At the next desk. At the same time. With you and I. In the old house which is no longer there she hid a great treasure. Her rainbow.

But we didn't notice.

And you know what!

I no longer want to be a princess. Do you?

December

Here there lived a girl. Just like you and I.