

## The fifth door

Wismar in the year 1391

### Chapter 1

A scream. An ear-splitting scream. 'Oh, my goodness,' hissed Peter, 'please, be quiet..., be quiet! They'll hear us and catch us, please!' he begged. Hugo screamed a little quieter, he whimpered and felt something under his foot, what was that? Something disgusting was stuck under his leathery shoe. "What is it, Peter...? Hugo gasped, "I...", he was still struggling for air, '...I tripped over something,' he gasped. Peter held the lantern up to Hugo's leg and saw blood running down from a burst scab and a rat lying half-buried in the dirt. He hoped it was already dead and that Hugo hadn't killed it by stepping on it. But of course he was sure to have killed it: Hugo was heavy, but not that heavy. The rat was completely crushed, but not by just one kick. Peter felt sick. He had been so excited since they entered the system of passageways under the Hanseatic city that he hadn't noticed the stench in the tunnel. But looking at the rat, he became aware of the stench. The tunnel was a well-thought-out system under the Hanseatic city of Wismar. It actually consisted of several small, secret passageways through countless cellars. Almost every house on the market square, every craftsman, every business had a cellar. The monks in the Franciscan monastery, the so-called Grey Monastery, together with the Dominican monks of the Black Monastery, had spent many months building a secret connection under the Wismar market square between the monastery buildings during dark nights. Secretly, every house cellar had been imperceptibly reduced in size and narrow passages had been bricked up. Some of the passageways had ended in no man's land, however, because the ground was too muddy or the cellar was too full from its inhabitants. Nobody was supposed to know about the underground passageways and everyone who knew about it had to swear to keep their knowledge secret. Peter thought about that. It smelled terribly of decay, mould and sewage. The corridors were full of vermin, which sat in the cracks of the damp masonry. The rats disappeared as soon as they noticed the boys, but the crawling insects were crushed under the kicks of the two. Hugo sobbed and looked at his aching leg, but looking at the wound didn't make it any better. He felt dizzy and sick: 'Maybe I did have a bit too much beer this afternoon,' he thought, and then his stomach turned over. What had been inside was now lying next to him, he had just managed to roll to the side. 'Crikey!' Peter groaned, holding his mouth and nose shut with both hands. He was still fighting his own nausea. Hugo wiped his mouth, took two deep breaths in and out, and looked down at his right leg, where the thick scab had already burst open again. It was simply bewitched, the wound would not heal. Pus was already forming at the edges of the wound. Hugo was the son of a master brewer in Wismar. There was always a lot to do in the brewery, and Hugo and his siblings had to help out a lot. About two weeks ago, he had wanted to scrub the vats in the cellar, but he had tripped on the stairs and cut his knee. Since he and his siblings were constantly tasting the beer, he had been dizzy and unsteady. The stairs had taken advantage of this and brought him down painfully. It wasn't a rarity, he tripped over everything that hadn't been cleared out of the way in the house, harbour or city. He often didn't pay attention. 'Hugo,' Peter now scolded, 'why do you have to drink so much beer?' Peter had to stifle a laugh when he saw Hugo standing there: he didn't look 15 years old, more like five. 'You're always so tipsy, you drink too much beer. You should stop.' 'I can't help it,' Hugo replied. Now he had to grin too. 'There's nothing else in our brewery, and beer tastes better than water.' He looked imploringly at Peter and asked, pointing downwards: 'She was already dead, wasn't she?' Both boys looked down and saw the lifeless rat, or rather what was left of it. They thought about it and, as if from the same mouth, they said at the same time: 'Yes,' and nodded their heads. They burst out laughing. 'You'd better watch where you step though.' They were in almost complete darkness and felt their way slowly in the weak light of the lantern. Their lantern was about to go out and the passageways under the city of Wismar were narrow and uneven.

The two boys were down here because they had a job to do. They each rolled a beer barrel in front of them. Peter was only doing it with one hand. He was the older of the two and almost 16 years old and had accepted this task. They had received the beer barrels from the Franciscan monks in the Grey Monastery. Their task was now to smuggle the barrels through the corridors to the Black Friars. The Dominicans in the Black Monastery were not allowed to brew beer. By transporting the beer under the city, the Franciscans wanted to avoid customs duties and penalties. Both monasteries exchanged beer and other goods in this way, without the authorities knowing about it. The boys were to receive three shillings per barrel as a reward. They had thought it would be an easy task, because they actually knew their way around very well, but only in the city. However, the boys had not known about a system of underground passages, so there was not only one under the market square of the Hanseatic city of Wismar, as they had mistakenly assumed. Unfortunately, they now realised that they had lost their way. The ground was muddy, partly interspersed with shells and in some places with deep puddles. Hugo's leg hurt a lot. He had badly bumped his injured knee on the edge of the barrel when he stepped on the rat and slipped. Now it was bleeding again from the broken scab and dripping onto his shoe. He gritted his teeth and so they rolled the barrels on, although they didn't know where they would end up. The tunnel had to lead somewhere. Peter stopped abruptly. 'Look!' He pointed his index finger forward before he fell to the ground. 'Hugo!' he exclaimed, 'pay attention again!' 'Sorry,' stammered Hugo, helping Peter to his feet. When the cart came to an abrupt halt, he had of course stopped to see where Peter was pointing, but his barrel had rolled on – straight into Peter's legs. They saw a light. That must be the end of the tunnel! They rolled a little further and then put the barrels down vertically. Uncertain, they walked on slowly, hoping that they had now reached the other monastery. 'Quiet,' whispered Peter, "not a sound!" and he put his index finger admonishingly to his lips. Thereupon, Hugo crouched down and immediately pulled his shoulders together at the neck, as if his posture would make him very quiet. "They must not catch us, otherwise it will end badly for both of us," whispered Peter tensely. They crept forward as quietly as they could. The light was getting brighter and brighter, but the stench had also become unbearable. Soon they heard voices and murmuring and very soft, muffled whimpering. Was this the monastery? There were obviously people there. Some were crying quietly. In a small niche, a few stones were missing, and the boys could see through them. In the room, which was surrounded by bricks, were beds and in the beds lay people with their limbs bound. Peter and Hugo realised that they had arrived at an infirmary. Some of the sick people were sleeping, some were staring at the ceiling. It smelled of disease and death. They were cared for by a nurse who ran back and forth and had a lot to do. She had a cloth over her mouth, was wearing a gown and had a cap on her head. The smell was unbearable. It smelled of mould and damp earth and sweetish, somehow like the dying. The boys crept on, shocked. They had known that there were infirmaries in Wismar, but they didn't know that you could get there through the tunnel. They looked around very quietly. There was a wooden door that was half open. Maybe there were monks here too who could take the beer away from them. Peter hoped so much, he just wanted to get out of there. But they didn't see anyone except for the nurse. The stench was so terrible. Peter looked around searchingly and was suddenly terrified when he looked into wide-open eyes. It was a man staring at him with wide eyes, taking Peter's breath away. The man wanted to scream, but only a squeaking sound came out of him. Hugo was frightened, he saw the same thing and covered his mouth. He reached for Peter's shirt and tried to pull him away. But it was too late. The man tried to sit up, but couldn't, and squealed again, this time much louder, and now naturally attracted the attention of the nurse. She understood immediately and followed the horrified look on the man's smallpox-covered face. She was horrified to see the children here, approached them and asked in a whisper and sternly, 'What are you doing here? Are you crazy? How did you get here? Did the Franciscans send you? Does anyone else know about the way?' Hugo and Peter wanted to answer, they took a breath to say something every time, but they couldn't get a word in edgewise. 'The Way is secret,'

she continued frantically, "you must not tell anyone about it." She asked emphatically, "What are you doing here?" Hugo whimpered, he felt dizzy again from all the talking and held on to Peter. He didn't know what to do, he looked at her but didn't say a word. He swallowed and said quietly, 'My friend is bleeding, he needs help.' He couldn't think of anything else. 'Luckily,' he thought, 'Hugo cut his knee.' Now they had an excuse that wasn't even a lie. The nurse came closer and bent over to get a better look, and Hugo held out his leg to her. She looked at it and frowned, shaking her head ever so slightly. They couldn't see any more, because she had the cloth over her mouth. 'Wait here,' she said, 'I'll be right back.'

A few minutes later she returned with several cloths and a small bottle. She asked Hugo to sit down and pointed to a small chair next to a bed. In the bed lay a young woman. She was sleeping and had bumps and lumps all over her body, some of which were covered with wet cloths. 'It's probably leprosy,' Hugo thought, he had never seen this disease before, but that's how people had described it. He didn't want to sit on that chair, so he just held out his leg through the wooden door and clung to Peter. The nurse looked annoyed and stared into Hugo's eyes, then she let out an audible groan and knelt down. She opened the small brown bottle, soaked a compress made of folded cloth in a yellow liquid and wrapped the damp compress around his leg with another cloth. Then she cleaned the skin around the bandage to see if he had any other injuries. Then she held out the bottle to them, and when neither Hugo nor Peter reached for it, she took Hugo's hand and pushed the bottle into it. She held his hand very tightly, pulled him towards her, and looked him firmly in the eye. Hugo froze and didn't resist. She said, 'What you have seen here, you will forget immediately. This is not for children.' 'What children,' thought Peter, 'I don't see any children here,' and looked at Hugo, who stood before her reverently and submissively at the same time. Hugo was obviously afraid. 'And please,' she continued, 'you must not tell anyone about this secret passage. Promise me! Only the monks know the way under the city, they often come here and help, bringing clean cloths, herbs and healing pastes. Sometimes they bring us warm food and hot drinks and...' Suddenly she paused and listened, as if she was expecting the monks. But the noise was coming from the sickroom, or so she thought. Peter and Hugo were getting restless. She went into the room and looked around. She listened again. The noises were different from what she was used to. Whimpering and crying were familiar sounds to the nurse. The patients were all surprisingly quiet today. She heard

soft voices and footsteps. 'Quick,' she said frantically. 'Pay attention and hide,' she said, running to the back, grabbing a sheet, and ordering the boys in a harsh tone to move the barrels aside and cover them with the sheet. Peter saw the bloody stains and realised how dirty the sheet was. The two should hide behind the barrels. Not a second later, a light flickered in the corridor from which the boys had come. Two people came around the corner. You could see them now. They had cloths over their mouths and their hoods pulled down over their faces. Two monks. They carried jugs, one in each hand, and a sack that they carried together. It smelled wonderfully of herbs. On their backs they carried rolled lengths of fabric, each tied with ropes around their shoulders. The monks went to the sister and gave her the things. She thanked them, and they set off back, but not without first reaching into the pile of dirty laundry in the dark corner. One monk spread a sheet and the other placed a pile of dirty laundry in the middle. Both then took one corner each on the right and left and quickly and skilfully twisted the sheet several times. It all happened in a flash, routinely and without words. It took a while before the cone of light from the two figures with a bag of dirty laundry on their backs was no longer visible. Then the nurse signalled to the boys that they could come out. She was relieved that the monks had been in a hurry and hadn't seen the cloth over the barrels. She took Peter and Hugo by the hand and asked them again, 'Please promise me, you mustn't tell anyone about the corridor.' Peter felt sick if he heard the sentence again. The boys promised, of course they wouldn't tell anyone, they could both do without this trouble. They thanked her and were about to leave when Peter turned around in the middle of the movement. 'Maria?' The nurse was startled and turned to him. He looked the nurse in the eye. He didn't know

how, but he recognised her and now he knew he was right. He gathered all his courage and asked her: 'Maria? That's your name, isn't it? You're the girlfriend of Georg, Alva's brother, aren't you?' She relaxed and had to smile. You could see it in the small wrinkles at the corners of her eyes. 'Yes,' and after a short pause, 'you're quite observant, you recognised me. Do you know him? Georg, I mean?' Peter laughed and was pleased; he was even a little bit proud. "Well, a little bit. Alva is our friend," he said. Then he thanked her again. She reached for the door. "Guys, this....," and she pointed to the cellar with the sick people inside, '...these are not lepers. I can't say I blame you for thinking that. I can see it in the disgust and fear on your faces. They are not contagious; they are mostly accident victims.' She gestured around: 'People who have been run over by a horse-drawn cart, seriously injured while working in the fields, or who have been victims of assault. We hide them here because many of the people upstairs,' and she pointed disparagingly at the ceiling, 'believe that they have contagious diseases or even leprosy or the plague. We take care of them and nurse them back to health. Most of them even manage to make a full recovery. The girl over here was badly abused by her husband shortly after her wedding; she has bruises and open cuts.' She pointed to the sleeping young woman on whose chair Hugo was supposed to sit at first. With all those open wounds, you could easily think that she had leprosy. Maria continued: 'They would lock her up or isolate her until she died because they might think she had a contagious disease. She just turned 17.' 'A little older than me,' Peter thought. He felt ashamed and squinted over at Hugo. He stood there as if he was getting a lecture from his mother. 'We here are not contagious.' 'And the stench of death?' Hugo asked, not really trusting her. She took an oil lamp that was standing next to a bed and pointed with a calm gesture into a dark corner near the door. She shined the light inside. A huge pile of dirty laundry revealed itself to them. Dirty bed sheets, clothes with dried blood and other excrement, dead rats and, yes, a half-decomposed leg. Now the boys realised a lot, at the sight of it the stench became even more unbearable for them. 'We can't keep up with the laundry,' Maria apologised. Then she turned around exhausted and was ready to go, she reached for the door. Peter reached for her, but couldn't get hold of her. He called, 'Maria,' she went through the small brick archway and was about to close the door. 'Wait,' Peter called again. Now she seemed annoyed, 'What is it, I have to go in there and continue working.' 'How do we know we're in the right corridor? We have to deliver the beer here to the Black Monastery...' he pointed to the two barrels. Maria looked at the wooden barrels and thought. Behind her, a woman screamed in terrible pain over and over again. Maria flinched and wanted to leave, but Peter held her back. "What about?" he pleaded. Maria thought about it for a moment and said, 'I think I heard...' She thought about it thoughtfully, '...that in some corridors wax sticks to the walls. Signs made of candle wax. If you find this corridor, just follow the signs made of wax that has the same colour, always on the right side of the masonry. Seen from both cloisters, the wax should always stick to the right side, but be a different colour.' Right, always right, Hugo memorised. Thoughtfully, he stuck his little brown bottle into his coat. 'I don't know for sure if it's true, but that's what I heard.' The woman screamed again, Maria was standing in the archway of the wooden door, lost in thought, and then she pulled herself away abruptly. 'Good luck!' she called over her shoulder, then she closed the small wooden door behind her, but only to open it again a crack, just as she had found the boys when she arrived. She probably did this so that the Franciscan monks could find the right passage by the light of the oil lamp. Hugo and Peter grabbed their barrels, tipped them on their sides and rolled them awkwardly over the damp, muddy ground. They disappeared into the darkness again – somewhere under the houses or the town square. Peter wondered if there was a passage under his house, where he lived with his family. Suddenly Hugo stopped, limped back to the hospital and brought a sheet from the pile of dirty laundry, rolled it up carefully and stuffed it in front of his stomach in his shirt. Peter wondered what this was about, but said nothing. Both boys slowly made their way back and wondered what to do next. Hugo limped, with Peter walking behind him and seeing his friend's pain. 'Stop,' he finally said. 'I think it's a better idea to hide the barrels somewhere in the hallway, because we won't be able to finish the

task this evening.' Hugo let out a loud breath. He groaned with relief. 'Good idea!' Hugo was glad; he was exhausted, cold and thirsty. What they had just experienced had completely dried him out. They rolled a little further, to a fork in the road, and looked at the walls more closely. There were indeed traces of wax on the walls. Maria was right. Every few metres, wax marks from candles had been pressed onto the walls, small round spots. On the left side, large black spots and on the right side, smaller white ones. You could see it clearly if you knew what you were looking for, of course. Peter grinned. 'We'll hide the barrels in that alcove.' He pointed to a dark spot in the wall. Hugo agreed. He wet his dry lips with his tongue and was glad that he didn't have to roll another barrel. Peter felt for him. 'But you'll have to endure a little bit more,' he said, and then they put the beer barrels in a corner, hoping that no one would discover them. Hugo took out the sheet and covered the barrels with it. Then they went back to the entrance to the grey monastery. Hugo mused: 'We have to think of something. If the monks find out that we haven't made it, we'll never get work from them again.' 'We'll manage,' said Peter, 'I already have an idea. But for that we need Alva. She has to help us. Let's go to the harbour and see if we can find her.' It was a beautiful late summer evening, and Alva was nowhere to be seen. Hugo and Peter decided to sit on the crates to wait for her.

She would definitely turn up that evening. They stank terribly, and Peter hoped the smell would have gone by the time they went home. The harbour was very busy. Many cogs were moored at the quay, waiting to be loaded or unloaded. There were small sailing boats and even a hulk among them. Many people were still at work, rolling barrels, carrying sacks and stacking crates. Since Wismar joined the Hanseatic League, the city had developed well. The alliance made the merchants rich, happy and content. Rich people were generous and so even the poorest could draw some hope. There was work for everyone who wanted to and could work. The setting sun shone brightly in their faces, the seagulls screeched, it smelled of tar and fresh wood. And of smoked fish. Suddenly Hugo stood up and asked Peter: 'Are you as thirsty as I am?' Peter just grinned. Then Hugo ran off. From the harbour, he took the small, well-trodden road through the water gate, directly to his father's brewery. He entered the cellar through a back door, grabbed two small jugs and filled them from a large barrel. Then he slowly went back up the stairs, made sure that no one was watching him, and ran back. At the Watergate, he walked more slowly and passed the two gate guards quite innocently, back to Peter. Both drank with relish and waited for Alva. Alva had a very exhausting day. She had spent the whole day with her friend Helmke at the market. However, she was not exhausted from the physical work, the shouting and the hustle and bustle of all the people, like Helmke. Alva just sat around all day and brooded. Something terrible had happened. Alva still couldn't believe it. Three days ago, her dear mother fell to her death. She had been working in the brickworks, standing in for an apprentice who had sprained his ankle that same day. As she climbed ladders and scaffolding to bring bricks and a water jug to the spire of St. Nicholas, she broke through a board and fell to her death. Now she was dead and Alva was alone with her brother Georg. Loneliness gnawed at her like rats at a cheese. In the safe haven of the Hanseatic city, her mother had raised her two remaining children alone; all of Alva's other siblings had already died of disease or weakness. There was no father. Alva suspected that her mother still loved him very much, though, and she would make up excuses every time Alva persistently asked her about her mother. Alva was quite sure that he was around her. Her mother, however, believed that it was too dangerous for Alva to know too soon. One day they agreed that the secret of the father should be revealed on Alva's 15th birthday. Although it was a very small family, they were doing well. They had little to eat, but none of them went hungry. Alva didn't know where the money came from that kept them going. Everyone had one or more jobs, but they didn't really earn much money. Alva helped Helmke at the market. Helmke was very, very old. She had had this little place on Wismar market square for a

long time, selling or exchanging goods. Everyone in Wismar knew Helmke. She had always been there and had accompanied many Wismar lives. She belonged to the market square like the customs stamp on the town hall. She was probably the oldest person in and around Wismar at the time and enjoyed privileges that no one else had. Some residents rumoured that she had made a pact with city robbers. For example, she was not checked by the city fathers like all the other merchants, and she did not have to pay taxes. Most of the time, she offered her customers goods that had been left over from other merchants. For example, skins that did not contribute to the good reputation of the tanners, or candles that were a little crooked because an apprentice had practised on them. These were things that a merchant no longer wanted or could sell. She earned little money and usually exchanged essential items such as bread, milk and ceramics for the vegetables and fruit she grew in her small garden. Now in late summer, she had her own apples, pumpkins and potatoes. On some days, other vegetables and fruits were added. Helmke had a small garden where her little house stood and where she made her popular fruit preserves. It was located outside the city walls. She had to make sure to get out of the Hanseatic city in time in the evening before the city gates were closed, so that she would not have to sleep on the streets of Wismar. The wooden house where she lived had a thatched roof and actually consisted of only a single room. Inside was a bed, a shelf, boxes for her clothes and blankets. There was also a table by the large and only window. A small cooking area had been set up in the floor against the mud wall. This was really great, because most of the Hanseatic city residents' cooking areas were located outside of the building due to the risk of fire. Cooking pots and utensils hung above it. She used a wooden chest to sit on. Alva loved Helmke's house. It was the cosiest house she had ever entered. Outside, a large wooden chest had been attached to the house. Five chickens lived in it. They had a small run and in autumn, when Helmke fenced in his cabbage, the chickens were allowed to run around the whole garden. In this way, they fertilised the garden and kept the pests at bay. Every morning, Helmke filled the small cart with goods, with baskets and boxes, and pulled it heavily and laboriously to the market square. She really was very old, but she had willpower and strong, well-trained muscles. She was always punctual, standing in front of the Schwerin city gate every morning, waiting to enter. Alva helped her with the work as often as she could. They sowed seeds together in spring, pulled weeds, cut herbs for drying and cooked jams and cabbage soups, which Helmke then sold on the market square next to the town hall. In winter, when the small cooking stove could no longer warm the house, Helmke slaughtered her chickens one by one and temporarily moved to the poorhouse on Lübschestraße, in the middle of the Hanseatic city. Today Helmke was not feeling so well. She coughed and was weaker than usual. All the physical work took its toll. Alva was worried that Helmke would eventually be too old for the market stall and would not be able to come one day. Despite her age, Helmke was her best friend. She was like a grandmother that Alva never had. Almost all of Alva's relatives and Helmke's family died 41 years ago, in 1350, of the great plague epidemic in the Hanseatic city of Wismar and the surrounding area. Now Alva was very worried. If Helmke was no longer there, she would have no one but her brother Georg, who was two years older than her.

He worked as a night watchman or a guard at the city gate, depending on where he was needed. And he was always at home when Alva was at the market or trying to find work elsewhere. He slept during the day. And in the evening, when Alva came home tired and exhausted, he was usually already gone. They shared a small room in the old town, on the outskirts of the city. They lived in a large, pretty town house with three floors in a small room under the roof. Georg had had a girlfriend for a long time, Maria. She also worked several jobs. She and George hardly had any time for each other. The fact that George was never around when Alva was home only increased her loneliness since her mother had died. Today at the market, when she was selling apples with Helmke, two ladies came up to the stand. Alva caught a few words from one lady and her compassionate look at her: '... it's a shame she won't live.'

The girl was shocked and didn't know what it meant. The other lady said nothing, paid for her

apples and both looked down at Alva with pity. As they were leaving, the other woman added, 'Yes, it's a shame!' Alva didn't understand. What did the words and looks mean? She was unsettled. Helmke recognised the situation, but decided not to interfere for the time being. Alva couldn't think of anything else all day. She felt melancholy and paralysed; she would rather be dead too than be crushed by this feeling. Meanwhile Helmke continued to sell and trade. 'Ouch!' Alva cried out. She was startled when Helmke poked her in the back with his walking stick for the second time. 'Come on, let's go home,' Helmke said wearily. 'I want to lie down for a bit.' Alva rose from her box and looked around the marketplace in confusion. Had she missed the whole market day? She was so lost in thought that it only now occurred to her to notice how the musicians were practising in front of the town hall, and the many town servants were hanging pennant chains and colourful flags. Many people were singing songs and dancing to them. It smelled delicious like potato soup with bacon. Her stomach rumbled. The Hanseatic city residents were cheerful and jolly, as if they were looking forward to a big party. Alva didn't know where all the people came from. The market square was decorated and cleaned as if the Hanseatic city were expecting important visitors. Alva scratched the back of her head and looked down in amazement at Helmke, who was much smaller than she was. Helmke stacked ceramic bowls inside one another and poured the remaining wooden pegs into her box, which she usually filled with her property. She sighed contentedly, gave Alva a small sack of potatoes and smiled at her. 'Alva, my dear girl. I know you're sad and I know how you feel.' Helmke had experienced many terrible things in her life. 'Don't let the feeling overwhelm you. The longer you give in to it, the harder it is to get out of it. There are people who, in the end, took their own lives because they forgot that they were still alive. It's really terrible what happened and that she won't live. But you can't let it take your breath away. Believe me, when one door closes, five new ones open at the same time. I should know, I'm so old!' She grinned toothlessly at Alva. With arms outstretched, she stood before Alva. "Take a deep breath, breathe in the life and happiness of all the people here..." She drew a semicircle across the market square with outstretched arms. '...and then breathe out all the terrible, bitter feelings.' Helmke embraced her with all she had and hugged Alva as tightly as she could. Alva smiled and stroked Helmke's back. "Thank you for being there!" "And the five doors only open when something terrible happens?" the girl mused. Helmke relaxed and thought. And after what seemed like an endless moment, she whispered, 'Yes. Unfortunately.' Imperceptibly, Helmke shook her head and continued cleaning up. 'Only then.' She brooded and sorted eggs into a basket filled with straw. 'I'm curious to see which door you'll take.' She coughed with the physical exertion. Alva took her by the shoulders and sat her on the box where she had been sitting herself a moment ago. She took over the work. 'First of all, I have to find out who my father is and where I can find him.' Helmke was frightened and had a severe coughing fit. After she had recovered, she asked, 'Your mother still hasn't told you anything?' 'No, do you know anything about him?' Helmke looked at the ground and shook her head violently. When the sun disappeared behind the tall buildings at the market, Helmke and Alva set off for home. Alva was impatient and lost in thought, she walked hastily and with quick steps. Helmke could hardly keep up. When they arrived at the small wooden hut, Alva began filling the crates with new apples and preparing the cart for the next day at the market. Then she said goodbye to Helmke, who coughed and was completely out of breath as she sat down on her small bed. Alva brought her some fresh, cool water and then set off for the harbour. She was angry because she couldn't get the ladies out of her head. She was really not feeling well today. She grumpily passed the people, always along the city wall. When she passed the many small fishing huts opposite the Wismar city harbour, she didn't notice all the people, many of whom jumped aside. Alva had no desire for consideration. Her footsteps swirled up sand and dust and then she started to run. She ran and ran, leaping over large field stones, across meadows and onto dry hay. Finally she was where she wanted to be. She stood on the salt marshes, barefoot in the cool grass, looking across the bay to the city harbour on the opposite side. She breathed salty air and tasted seaweed. She relaxed

immediately. There was a lot going on at the harbour. Carters from the surrounding area, from Hornstorf or Schwerin, were bringing or picking up goods. Some cogs looked battered; some were being repaired on this side, opposite the seaport, but most were being loaded or unloaded. Many merchants were negotiating and their servants were sorting and stacking the goods. There were many pirates on the Baltic Sea, and from time to time ships did not return or were towed back to port completely damaged. Shipyard workers set to work on them, because they had to be made seaworthy again immediately so that they could set sail again soon. She walked along the shipyard, past merchants, sailors, horse-drawn carts, and vast quantities of goods, boards and barrels, to a small country lane. To the right and left, the last wild flowers of the year were fragrant, the tall reeds bent over the seawater and swayed in the light breeze. The seagulls circled above the Baltic Sea and played tricks on the fishermen. The sun warmed and still shone so brightly, even though it was already late summer. From the northeast, the first wild geese came over the Bay of Wismar, slowly heralding the coming autumn. Alva saw them from afar and her blood began to pulsate in her veins. A feeling of bliss spread through her. When she arrived at her boat, Alva skilfully turned it around in one go and pushed it towards the water. She set up the small mast, which she always kept under the upturned boat, and attached the rudder with the tiller to the stern. When she had finished rigging the boat and hoisting the sail up onto the mast, she pushed the little boat with all her might from the meadow into the water, jumped in with an elegant dive, hauled in the sheet and waited, tense and full of anticipation, for the gust that would push her out to sea. The waves rocked and Alva managed well. She watched the sail and tried to turn the boat into the wind by moving the tiller. There was little wind today. Being on the water calmed her. She breathed in and out deeply, thought of Helmke's words, closed her eyes and enjoyed the warm sun on her back. Then she felt the boat lift and the breath of wind, which immediately developed into a strong gust. She pulled the sheet a little tighter, it slid through the block of the mast and then she really felt the wind take hold of the sail. With her eyes closed, she felt the wind take hold of the boat and lift it with a small jolt, which immediately picked up speed. She was sailing. She sailed along the small coast, past the meadows with the children playing, the fishermen stretching their nets, and the women cleaning or mending the nets. Other fishermen sat beside them, telling stories, smoking pipes. Some looked at her. She saw many families every time she went out sailing. Albert waved at her with both arms, and she raised hers in return. Albert was a good friend of Helmke's and almost the same age and frail as she was. Large cogs sailed past her on the starboard tack. 'Where do you think they come from?' the girl wondered. Alva loved this boat, she loved sailing, somehow the passion for it was in her blood. Helmke had said one day that she had Baltic Sea water in her veins, given how much time she spent on the water. One day Albert had given them and Georg the small sailing boat, and he also taught them how to sail. It was a present from your father, he had said to the children at the time. When she was sailing in the bay, she missed her father particularly. Where might he be? She could only hope that he was still alive. And a sad shiver came over her when she had to think of her dead mother. What must it feel like not to be able to live anymore, to no longer perceive anything or anyone around you? A cog was just sailing past her, coming from Wismar. The sailors sang songs and wound up ropes. She laughed heartily and would have loved to come with them. On a cog! She would see foreign cities and countries, new clothes, different churches and buildings, hear foreign languages! Were there other Hanseatic cities with houses as beautiful and churches as tall as the ones in Wismar? She would have loved to have sailed off immediately, far away. Why didn't she do it? Her boat bobbed up and down as the crests of the waves hit her. She put her little sailing boat in the wind in a quiet place, far away from the big boats. The sail fluttered and she made no more headway. The boat bobbed, almost standing still on the water. She loved this little boat so much. She loved being on the water, letting herself drift, feeling nothing and not having to think about anything. Helmke often said, 'Life is like a storm at sea. Unpredictable. There are mountains and valleys. There are beautiful days when you are happy and there are terrible, stormy days with lashing rain and darkness, days when you are afraid



you won't make it, when you want to give up. But if you have enough courage and hold the tiller tightly in your hand, you will make it through the storm. Then life goes on and on until one day it is over!' When is the end, Alva thought. Is it the end when you can't find any of the five doors, do you choose it yourself, do you know when life is over? She thought of her mother and that she couldn't hold her tiller tight enough. Alva's eyes filled with tears. She didn't want to cry, but she couldn't stop it, tears rolled down her face. Alva didn't know if she would be able to hold on to her tiller or go through any door. She was scared and felt alone, abandoned by her parents. She cried and was ashamed at the same time. She didn't want anyone to see her like this, to see that she was weak and missed her mother and father so much. She was 14 years old, after all. She was almost an adult. She cried bitterly until all her tears were used up. To calm herself and cool down, Alva leaned over the railing. She plunged both hands deep into the cool darkness below her boat. Her arms were almost up to her shoulders in the water. Slowly, without her noticing, salt water crept on board. The water was cold and black and deep, very deep, and the deeper she bent her arms into it, the more she was overcome by a feeling. A longing. How deep could she reach down, what would she find down there? Did thoughts exist in the black, cold water? She bent over deeper and deeper, so that her hair was already floating in the water. Her boat turned, sometimes to the right, sometimes to the left, rocking up and down on the waves. Sometimes the blue sky was reflected, in which the seagulls played their games, and sometimes there was only this deep, dark, eerie blackness to be seen, which exerted an incredible pull on Alva. It seemed as if the darkness was gripping her by both arms and trying to pull her down into the depths. Alva hung over the railing, motionless and seemingly sliding into the abyss, weak and powerless. Then suddenly her boat turned again and revealed her reflection. She saw a girl with long, red, wavy hair. Suddenly she heard a voice inside her: 'Hold the tiller! Hold your tiller tight!' And her consciousness returned instantly. Thereupon the incoming waves distorted her image. After that, the sea was smooth again. What she saw was a strong girl and she recognised the strength within her, and the longer she looked at her dishevelled reflection, the more courageous she became. Quietly she said to herself: 'That's me. I am me. I am strong!' She wanted to live. 'Inhale, exhale,' she whispered. Once again, a gust seized the boat and rocked and turned it around again, the reflection disappeared. Seagulls screeched overhead and from the shore she heard the people sailing along the coast in their boats, the fishermen going about their work, the laughing children; all the sounds were slowly coming back. Alva closed her eyes and absorbed life. She sat up and looked at her city. Wismar looked beautiful with the silhouettes of the Nikolaikirche, the Georgen- and the Ratskirche and the many merchant ships in front of it. She dreamed. She knew for sure that one day women would also go to sea, and maybe she would be one of the first, a merchant woman who would travel to the Hanseatic cities and sell and exchange goods and explore new lands. The Hanseatic League was flourishing around her and she wanted to be part of it too. Heavily laden cogs with their white and red striped sails come and go. She was happy, she was happy and grateful that she had taken the boat out. She did that so often, she could, because she knew it did her good. The waves would suck out every bad thought she had. She grabbed her tiller on the sailing boat and rocked back and forth until her boat was facing sideways to the wind. She tightened the sheet, and the sail filled with wind, which pulled the boat along with it. The wind had picked up over time and so she was back at the harbour faster than she would have liked. Carefully, she weaved her way through all the large and small ships to her place in the salt marshes. Alva gently pulled the boat to a safe place on land and thoughtfully took it apart, rolled the sailcloth together with the boom around the mast, and stuffed everything back under the upturned boat. She wanted to come back here tomorrow after work. Maybe she could take Peter with her. She liked Peter and was looking forward to seeing him soon in the evening. She walked along a sandy path past the meadows, past drying nets and clothes lines with rows of dried fish in the direction of the harbour gate. Alva always walked this way, she liked it. Here the horses were tied up that came with their owners to the Hanseatic city and did business. She observed the many

people who kept the Hanseatic city alive with their horse-drawn carts packed full, huge bundles, barrels and crates filled with salt, hops, candles and beer.

## Chapter 2

There was always a lot going on at the harbour and there was plenty to see. The barges, snigs and cogs were all crammed together at the moorings. If there was no more space for large cogs and the opposite coast was too shallow, they had to be loaded and unloaded via pontoons on the open water. There was a lot of activity in front of the water gate. There was always plenty of work for the carriers who had to lift the goods out of the ships' holds and onto the wagons. The merchants depended on the reliability of the carriers and helpers; without them, trade would come to a complete standstill. Goods were dragged, rolled, carried, pulled or pushed. Ships from outside the area had to unload all of their goods, as stipulated by the city's staple rights. It required that the goods had to be offered for sale for three days, only after that the seafarers were allowed to continue with their remaining goods. For the Wismar merchants, it also brought a good profit. In the last week, a merchant ship from Sweden had three polar bear skins with it. Many Hanseatic city residents came to the harbour to marvel. Some of the sailors cooked their meagre meal over a small fire, because cooking was forbidden on board due to the risk of fire. Alva dreamt and counted the planks under her feet, which served as a road for the city. Since she kept her head down, she didn't see what was in front of her and suddenly she was standing in front of four legs. One of them had a fresh bandage on its knee with yellow and red spots. Startled, she looked up and frowned at the faces of her friends, who had made themselves comfortable on some boxes lying around. Both giggled and beamed from ear to ear. Alva didn't understand why they were so happy, and that made her curious. Of course, they each had a beer mug in their hands! Of course they were a bit drunk now. Alva was glad to see them. Hugo and Peter were her best friends, even though they were much wealthier than she was. She was glad, glad that she had them and that they liked her just the way she was. She didn't have much property. And yet they were together as if they were siblings.

'Why are you sitting here and not at our usual place?' Alva asked them. "We thought we would escape Hugo's father that way," Peter replied. They both giggled and clapped their hands together. Hugo's father came to the harbour every evening before the city gate was closed by the guards and fetched Hugo to clean the taproom. Each time, he threw a damp, cold and particularly dirty cloth in the direction of the children. Whether it was intentional or not, it almost always hit Alva. And each time, the children were surprised, as if it were the first time.

Alva hated it. She wrinkled her nose and nodded appreciatively. Hugo asked, 'What were you doing all this time, we've been waiting for ages?' He grinned at Peter and held up his jug. She felt a little ashamed and thought of what she had felt when she looked into the darkness of the Baltic Sea and didn't want to talk about it. 'Are you all right?' asked Peter, sensing her unease. "Yes, I'm fine," she lied. "I'm fine." "Do you know what happened to us today?" Peter continued. "No, what?" She sat down between the boys, looked blissfully towards the harbour and reached for Peter's jug at the same time. She took a big gulp and said, 'Tell me, what did you do this afternoon?' Both of them started talking at once! Alva listened eagerly and shivered. 'And how can I help you with that? You don't want me to...' She felt quite dizzy. 'No!' she shook her head after realising what was coming.

'No, no, no, because I don't want to catch or have to look at leprosy or the plague or anything like that, and I certainly don't want to meet Maria!' Maria had been to their house far too often. Maria liked the brother very much, a little too much for Alva's taste. And George liked Maria, and they would probably get married one day. But Alva didn't like Maria very much, and she wanted George to stay with her and not go to Maria's. She became completely absorbed in her thoughts. The room

they lived in was just big enough for two people. She never felt cramped with her mother there. Actually, the room was much too small. But since Georg and she lived in it at different times, it was sufficient. There was a table, two chairs and a wooden chest that served as a bench, but only one bed, which was separated from the rest of the small room by a thick curtain. Often Alva would fall asleep in bed at night and wake up on the padded bench in the morning, because Georg would move her there when he came home in the wee hours of the morning so that he could go to bed. His little sister would have to get up soon anyway. Sometimes Maria was there too, but she only ever talked to Georg and paid little attention to Alva. Alva thought Maria worked at the baths. At least she always smelled so good of soap and lemon oil. Maria was often tense and seemed cold and heartless to Alva. Sometimes Alva felt as if she were the visitor herself. 'Alva! Alva!' Peter called. "No," she shook her head. "No, we are definitely not going to turn right again into the hospital corridor." Peter took her by both shoulders, shook her awake and looked her friendly in the eye. 'We never want to go to the hospital again. Believe me, it was so terribly creepy. But we have to fulfil our mission, otherwise we will lose our good reputation with the monks!' She stroked her hair with the flat of her hand and said, "All right...", Alva was back to reality again, "...and how can I help you with that?" Peter told her about the following idea. 'Tomorrow afternoon, when we have finished our work, we will sneak to the Grey Monastery again. The Franciscan monks must not see us, because then they would know that we did not make it today. We'll sneak in secretly, but really just you and Hugo.' Hugo, who was playing with a baby cat, looked up in horror. "What?" He asked. "And what are you doing?" The little cat jumped up on his arm and dug its sharp claws into Hugo's arm. 'Ouch,' he cried out briefly and tried to grab the kitten by the neck. "I'll go across the market..." Peter continued undeterred. "...with a flute," he said thoughtfully. "Are you serious?" Hugo was annoyed. 'You just want to play the flute while we toil in the damp dirt under the Hanseatic city?' He tugged pitifully at the cat, who in turn tugged at his sleeve, but got her claws caught in the fabric. Alva had to laugh. She bent down to Hugo and began very carefully to get the claws out of his sleeve, paw by paw. 'I'll whistle very loudly...' Peter continued meaningfully, watching the goings-on beside him. '...I'll walk along the top of the rows of houses on the walls and finally across the market and whistle the way loudly for you. You will hear me and finally run after me and thus find the right way.' He thought for a moment before continuing. 'Roll the beer barrels to the Black Monastery, where you will hand them over to the Dominicans and get...' Now he raised his index finger, '...three shillings per barrel!' Alva rolled her eyes, while Hugo nodded reverently, as if Peter had said three million per barrel. 'At the Black Monastery, you have to see if you can somehow get out of the tunnel, but whatever you do, don't get caught. Otherwise, you'll have to go back through the tunnel system!' Again, Alva rolled her eyes and looked at the sky. 'After that, we'll meet at the Weavers, at Kuno's, agreed?' Alva understood and nodded. 'All right,' she said, repeating, 'When I'm done with work and have brought Helmke home, we'll meet at the Franciscan monastery and when we're done with the beer barrels and have the shillings, we'll meet at the big stone in front of the house at the weaver Kuno, near the Franciscan monastery.' Both looked expectantly at Hugo. The little cat had fallen asleep on Hugo's lap, purring and curled up, and Hugo stroked her very gently. 'Agreed,' he said softly, without taking his eyes off his little fur ball. He beamed from ear to ear at the sight of the little kitten. Peter was satisfied and breathed a sigh of relief. They drank beer, ate bread from the market, which Helmke Alva had given to the potatoes as a reward, and cheese that Peter still had in his pocket from yesterday. All three friends enjoyed the orange-coloured late summer evening. Wild geese sang their song in the coloured sky and formed a V-formation in proper order. Sailors were loading their ships and overloaded horse-drawn carts were leaving the harbour area with their carters. It smelled of horse manure, smoked fish and greasy soup. How hungry I am, thought Alva.

Suddenly, an unpleasant smell, she wrinkled her nose. She was still wondering where the smell was coming from. The realisation came too late, she felt something from behind, a cold draft brushed her neck, shortly followed by a soaking wet, heavy splash on her head. Alva was so

terribly frightened and flew forward onto her knees. At the same moment, Peter jumped up and was ready for battle in seconds. The kitten jumped in a huge arc from Hugo's lap and brought itself to safety. It took Hugo a while to react, and as if in slow motion, he stood up and looked behind his back, his jaw dropped and he seemed to stop breathing. Alva didn't move. She sat on her haunches as if petrified, completely tense and holding her breath. It stank terribly. A soaking wet floor cloth was on her head, smelly and cold with crumbs, chunks and old hair. The stinking water dripped onto her neck and back. Endless seconds passed. Alva was boiling with rage, she was so furious and clenched both hands into fists. Inhale, exhale, she thought. Peter whispered to her: 'Stay calm, Alva!' He almost prayed. He saw the same thing as Hugo. Inhale and exhale, very slowly Alva stood up, turned around and pulled the stinking thing off her head. She shook out her hair, but didn't dare to feel for the lumps. She already suspected what had caused it, and found confirmation immediately: Hugo's father. A big, strong, fat man in shorts under his dirty coat and an apron that was much too small under his chest. He stood in front of the three friends with his huge neck, his small head and his, unfortunately, very friendly face. Just like Hugo, he radiated complete bliss. Hugo always looked like he was smiling all day long. 'Excuse me, pirate doll, I'm really sorry about that!' he scratched himself where you might expect to find ribs. 'I didn't mean to hit you. I wanted to hit Hugo. He is late again. He should finally go inside and start his work,' he said, pointing with his thumb over his right shoulder towards the town, towards his tavern. He tried to frown to look angry. "You good-for-nothing lout!" he tried, scolding in Hugo's direction, "Come on, the gates will close soon!" he ordered. He tried hard to sound harsh and heartless, but his voice was soft and far too loving. Alva's anger disappeared instantly. Hugo could be so proud to have such a lovely dad. But someday, she promised herself, she would channel all her rage and slam her fist into his fat belly with all her might.

One day, she thought, she would take revenge for all the stinking rags on her head. She glared at him angrily. But Hugo's father just looked at her challengingly, with the corners of his mouth turned up. Hugo sighed, slowly got moving and was so glad that he hadn't got that stinking rag. Peter grinned. He stood behind Alva and held his fist to his mouth so that it looked as if he had to cough. This rag flew almost every evening. He didn't know if it was intentional that Alva was always hit or if Hans, Hugo's father, couldn't aim. But somehow Alva couldn't bear that big bear any grudges, except for 'Pirate's Doll,' which provoked her to the depths of her soul. He had probably seen her go out in the sailing boat. She stood there, groaning to herself, shaking her head almost imperceptibly. Hans ran after his son in the direction of the harbour gate. Many people were streaming in the same direction. Soon all the city gates would be closed. During the night, the city dwellers only came into or out of the city for a good reason. Other people streamed out of the city, farmers and fishermen who lived outside the city walls. The city wall protected the city's inhabitants and their wealth. Hugo would spend the whole evening cleaning the brewhouse, scrubbing and polishing the barrels, and mopping the floor in the taproom so that fresh, clean beer could be brewed again tomorrow. That was his only task. In return, he could sleep late the next morning and do whatever he wanted until the evening. He enjoyed this work. He was able to contribute to his family and was grateful that they were all doing very well. He loved to listen to the loud conversations, the bickering and murmuring of the men and women in the evenings, he loved to watch the brawls, but most of all he loved to listen to the stories of the sailors, traders and carters. He would never leave this beautiful, vibrant Hanseatic city to travel to other countries. This is where he wanted to be. He was happy here in Wismar. He already knew about sea monsters, admired and cursed pirates, especially Klaus Störtebeker and his cronies, who were merciless, cruel and damn just, the stories about the Vitalienbrüder often kept him busy for nights on end. A lot of riffraff gathered in the restaurant. And he knew that one day he would take over the brewery with his siblings. He liked the beer, the scent of hops and barley. Actually, the real master brewer was Hugo's mother; Hans was just the big, fat figurehead of his inn. She was an excellent cook and also brewed beer, something she had been doing since she was a child. Originally, his

mother's family had learned their art in a monastery. Her grandfather was a monk in a monastery in Wismar and passed on his brewing skills and recipes to his family. With the money, his ancestors had once been able to develop a brewery into a large brewing house. There were many extensions and additions. Now it was a residential building with a business for serving beer, wine and small dishes, a meeting place for men and women, and beer was brewed in large vats in the cellar. The whole family helped out and at times they even had employees. Hugo's job was to clean the vats and keep the taproom clean. Hugo often thought up new recipes for new types of beer. In the cellar, when everyone thought he was working, he experimented with herbs and flowers. Of course, he constantly had to taste what explained his idleness at the harbour earlier and occasionally made him so drunk that he could hardly walk in a straight line. A mix with honey was quite acceptable. All he needed now was a suitable name. Bumblebee or Mummelbee, when he was sure of it, he would ask Peter to write it down for him. Hugo was not particularly good at writing and he had no desire to practice. There's always time for that later, he always said. At the same time, Peter and Alva went to the baths, as they did after every wet raid, and knocked on the back door. A young woman opened it for them. Hot, humid air met them and it smelled fresh of fragrant soap. Laughter, loud splashing and some bathers singing songs could be heard from the house. The woman was wearing a thin dress, a wide apron over it and a bonnet on her head. Her sleeves were rolled up and she held a large brush in her hand. She recognised Alva and her companion immediately. She shook her head and grumbled, 'Not again, Alva!' Peter grinned. Alva's hair was sticky and soaking wet. 'Is Maria here?' she asked meekly. 'No...' the thin woman replied, 'she's...', suddenly she paused and bit her lip. Peter and Alva already knew about the hospital and noticed her uneasiness. '...she's...', the young woman thought and searched for an excuse. '...she's busy, we have guests from the town hall tonight. Come in, you know where everything is.' Peter and Alva knew their way around. They went, without shoes, along the small hallway, past the curtains drawn with beautiful fabrics, and entered a room with a large wooden wash tub. A girl of about seven years old was in the process of scooping it empty with a bucket and then scrubbing it clean. They only scrubbed it really clean when the water was no longer usable. A full bath was used by several people in succession. First the nobles and then in the order of precedence and so on. The water was dirty, but anything was better than that disgusting, sour smell on her head, and besides, the dirty water had a lot of fragrant soap in it. The girl looked at Alva from top to bottom, laughed and made room. She also knew what to do and helped Alva wash her hair. 'I have to go then,' Peter said to the two of them, raising his hand in greeting. 'I still want to help my mother and study before my father comes home!' He looked lovingly at Alva. He liked her so much. She looked even more beautiful with her wet, fragrant hair, which she was just combing back with relish. The little girl scooped up the dirty water from the tub and went outside to pour it into the yard. Peter could hardly turn away from her beautiful face, and Alva allowed it; she simply liked Peter too much to send him away. He came closer and was about to pull Alva close to him when the girl came back with the empty buckets and the mood was gone. 'See you tomorrow,' he whispered only in Alva's ear. Alva got a pleasant goose bump at the breath in her ear and had to giggle. "See you tomorrow," she whispered back and sank into his grey-blue eyes, which shone like the Baltic Sea on one of its most beautiful days.

At the same time, in a completely different place. In a small village near Wismar, a farmer and his two oldest sons were getting ready to get up very early the next morning and drive to Wismar in their horse-drawn cart. They wanted to sell fruit and vegetables at the market that the farmer and his wife had grown in their large garden. The boys helped him load the cart and prepare the wicker baskets in which some chickens were to be transported in the early morning. They had fresh herbs, lots of dried herbs, salted meat, eggs, several sacks of flour from a friend's mill and a small barrel of lard to load. In addition, there were some loaves of bread wrapped in cloth, fresh vegetables, including lots of onions. Everything was packed into barrels and bundles and tied to the cart. Once all the goods had been stowed and secured, the boys went into the

house, had something to eat for supper and then fed the animals. They were really looking forward to market day, to the big colourful city, but most of all they were looking forward to the stalls and booths in Krämerstraße, where some traders from Nuremberg sold fine knives in all designs. In the morning, the boys were quite astonished. Because when they had finished with the chickens and were about to stack the baskets on the cart, their dear mother was already sitting close to their father on the coach box. At that moment, there was a 'hü' and old Trudi pulled away. The boys ran alongside for a moment and then swung themselves onto the cart. They were happy that their mother was coming with them and immediately worried about their younger siblings. 'Who's taking care of everything else?' asked the youngest, climbing onto his mother's lap. 'We have something important to do in Wismar, your father and I,' she said, looking lovingly at her husband, who was watching the area intently and with great concentration. Leaning over to her youngest, she spoke very softly: 'Don't worry, we've thought of everything!' She kissed him tenderly on the head. Some time ago, the farmer only travelled to the market in Wismar with his journeymen. At that time, it was too dangerous to take his family with him. There were frequent raids and robberies. Many people lost everything they had on the way to the protected city and often paid with their lives. The Hanseatic League changed many things in terms of security, not only were the merchant ships protected and supported by soldiers on board. It was now also more difficult for robbers on the land routes of the Hanseatic cities, as many farmers and carters met at junctions, then moved on together and were also partially guarded and protected by soldiers. Along the roadsides, abandoned and burnt-out farmsteads or coaches overgrown with creeping plants bore witness to the horror of the raids and sent shivers down everyone's spine.

### Chapter 3

Alva woke early that morning. She had a backache. As always, she lay on an old box that was much too hard and too short for her. Maria had not come home that night; she must have been working. She really had a lot of work. In Wismar, there were several infirmaries. One was in the Heilig Geist, where the poorest people were fed and treated. These were people who had no money. Many contagious diseases were treated there. And now Alva also knew about the cellar in the tunnel system under the Hanseatic city. Sometimes Maria brought home leftover food from the soup kitchen and Georg was also often bribed with goods at the city gate, and so it happened that Alva often had breakfast in the morning. Not this time, though. Maria wasn't there. Georg was asleep. He was snuggled up in blankets and breathing deeply. Alva drew the curtain closed, which Georg had left open during the night. She had a nice feeling when he was lying there and she was not alone, almost as if she had her father back. Almost as if her mother were still there. Alva went quietly to the wooden kitchen cupboard and took out a mug. On a small cooking ring, she poured warm water into her mug using a ladle from a pot. From the windowsill, she took a few peppermint leaves that she had planted in a flower pot. She kneaded the leaves in her hand for a while until they were completely squashed and stuffed the herb into her cup. In a bowl, she found some leftover bread from the day before and half an apple, a perfect breakfast. Chewing, she stood at the window, looking forward to this new day. It was still quite fresh from the night, but it should be another beautiful, sunny day: a bright blue sky, not a cloud in sight. The seagulls screeched and in the distance you could hear wild geese flying to their gathering places. She listened and enjoyed the smells that wafted over from the harbour. Fresh fish and supplies for the sea. The fishermen were probably selling fresh cod and herring on the quay; last weekend they had butchered two harbour porpoises. George's snoring shook her thoughts aside, she got ready and closed the door very quietly behind her. Alva hopped down the stairs into the garden, opened the small hatch to the shed where the domestic pig was kept. The residents all shared a pig and ten chickens, seven of which were still alive. Alva

carefully fastened the flap with a ribbon so that the pig could not break the door and checked all the hinges so that the animal could not escape and wreak havoc in the garden. There was a small run in front of the shed. It was just big enough for a pig to turn around in. It wasn't much space, but it meant the pig could get fresh air and a little daylight. She took some kitchen scraps from a tub next to it and poured them onto the floor next to the pig. Then she went to the neighbouring shed, followed by three impatient cats. She opened the door, whereupon mice immediately scattered in all directions. She scooped grain out of a sack with both hands and poured the feed onto the floor for the chickens and also for the pig, although she was forbidden to do so. The grain was intended for the chickens and the residents. The pig grunted and smacked its lips in satisfaction and quickly ate everything.

She left a tiny opening as a door with a descent into the courtyard open and carefully closed the shed door. The chickens were always allowed to run in the courtyard of the house. In the old town, many houses had courtyards or bowers at the back. Families or journeymen often slept in the sheds. In the bowers, more affluent people. Here with them, six families lived on three floors. The owners, the candle maker and his wife, were only two and liked to have people around them, so it had come to this community. Each family had a small room. Nobody had a cooking place, they cooked all together in a small shared kitchen in an annex to the house. Alva and her brother, however, secretly built a small cooking area in their room. Everyone helped everyone else. Alva's job was to let the pig out early in the morning and to feed the chickens. She was not allowed to take the eggs, because they were sold at the market and belonged to the master and his wife, and sometimes they were exchanged within the household. Anyone who had any extra food, which was rare, was supposed to collect it in a bucket in front of the pigsty so that the animal got enough to eat and got nice and fat. At the end of the year, the pig was sold or slaughtered. All the residents of the house got something. Most of the time it was ham, which then had to last for the whole winter. The next spring, a new pig was bought. When she had finished, Alva went through the house to the candle maker's small workshop, which took up the entire lower floor. The master stood over a cauldron and dipped long threads, which were attached to a round disc, into the hot candle wax again and again. He bought the wax in barrels at the harbour, which came from Russia to Wismar via the Baltic Sea in cogs. The hot wax stuck to the threads and dried quickly on them. As soon as it had set, he dipped the small thin candles into the hot wax again. He repeated this process until the candle was thick enough to sell. A fellow apprentice watched him and did the same. You didn't have to be particularly careful or artistic, because candles were used up quickly and the candle maker had to constantly replenish supplies. Alva often helped them when she had time. Alva liked Gustav, the candle maker. He radiated calm and serenity; he didn't have to worry about his future, because candles were always needed, like bread. He and his wife no longer had any children. None had survived the first five years. Gustav noticed Alva and nodded to her, saying 'Good morning.' Then he cleared his throat and called, 'Gustje, Alva is here now!' A small, stout lady emerged from behind the racks on which the candles were hung to harden. She was pleased to see Alva and came towards her. As she passed Gustav and his hot dipping pot, she kissed him tenderly on the cheek. It smelled of beef tallow and it was unbearably hot in the workshop. Gustav and Gustje were sweating in their overalls. She approached Alva joyfully, but then something happened. The journeyman tried to scare away a chicken that had entered the workshop with his shoe and did not notice how crooked and misshapen his candles dried. Finally, the wheel with the wicks hanging from the half-finished candles fell out of his hand and landed in the dirt. Gustje moaned, 'Oh no, oh no!' and ran to him, groaning, trying to limit the damage. But it was too late; dirt, wood chips and chicken poop were stuck to the misshapen candles. She picked up the holding wheel and hung it over a hook on the shelf. 'Now go!' she murmured in the direction of the apprentice, who stood there guiltily and with his shoulders hanging. He grabbed the chicken and took it outside. The master continued to dip his wares into the hot tub unperturbed. Gustje took a bag from the hook and gave it to Alva. She slung it over her shoulder, shrugged both shoulders

laughingly and winked at Gustje. Then she left the trade. She ran to the city gate in the direction of Lübeck, near which she expected to find Helmke. Hopefully Helmke was feeling better. Alva passed many carts and wagons going to the market and looked excitedly for her friend. Many carriages were stuck in front of the gate, waiting to be checked. Meanwhile, the gatekeepers were looking for contraband. Helmke's small garden house was located outside the city centre, on the border of the fishermen's huts.

It used to be a very large house belonging to a farming family that had been a farmer. Helmke had worked there as a young girl as a maid and nanny, learning how to sew and cook and garden. But over the years, misfortune had repeatedly befallen the farming family: poor harvests, raids, sick children and death. Their farmhouse had burnt down several times and been rebuilt again and again. Over the years, the family and the house shrank, and so the last survivor occupied a small wooden hut with a beautiful garden, five apple trees and many berry bushes. Helmke's pride and joy was a large, light-blue, old chest painted with many flowers. This chest had been with her all her life: first in the farmhouse and now in the small garden shed, it had survived all the fires and raids unscathed. Helmke kept her food in it. The chest had four feet and all four feet were placed in a ceramic bowl, all filled with water. This was to keep vermin, such as ants and woodlice, from destroying their food. Insects often swam in the bowls, much to the delight of the chickens, who were allowed to roam everywhere, including in the hut. Helmke had no spiders, only chicken dirt, which could easily be swept away. Helmke loved her chickens. They were like her children, whom she had never been able to have because of a violent assault at a young age.

She had to take great care of her chickens so that they didn't run away and then lay their eggs somewhere in the bushes. Every day there were at least five eggs. These provided the little old woman with breakfast and supper. Helmke herself did not know how old she was. She could neither read nor write nor do arithmetic. Often Alva could not understand where she got the strength to recover from one misfortune to the next. That summer, Alva noticed that Helmke was growing weaker and weaker and also often had severe pain. Alva was very worried. She didn't want to lose Helmke, ever. She would help and support her and do the work for her wherever she could. When Alva still didn't see Helmke, she ran all the way to her hut. A cool breeze came from the sea, the last swallows circled in the blue, almost cloudless sky. She couldn't see Helmke anywhere among the merchants and the raving children. A shiver ran down her spine and she started running. She felt a sense of fear, what if Helmke... She didn't follow the thought through to the end. From a distance, she recognised the house, the small wooden fence and the chickens running around. There was no sign of anyone. She ran through the garden into the house and immediately realised that Helmke was not there and the cart was missing too. She began to worry, because she couldn't imagine that poor old Helmke could have pulled the cart alone, with the apples and the boxes full of pumpkins and jam. She quickly ran back towards the market in the Hanseatic city, past the wandering people, past the Franciscan monks in their rough, grey robes and past the noble lords and ladies taking a leisurely morning stroll. From behind, she saw a cart that looked as if it were driving across the boarded road all by itself. Alva ran faster and faster and finally recognised Helmke's soft white hair. She must have been walking for hours, as slowly as she was pulling the cart. Helmke was glad and very relieved to see Alva, she stopped immediately and rested. In an instant, all her strength left her; now she no longer needed to be strong. She smiled wearily and coughed. They must have overlooked each other in all the human tumult. They just stood there for a while, and Alva smiled at Helmke. Helmke looked stronger than yesterday, she took an egg out of her apron and held it out to the girl. 'It's cooked,' said Helmke, handing it to Alva, who ate it immediately. It tasted great. Helmke sat down on a large field stone at the side of the road. A strong wind blew and blew dust into her eyes. Blinking, she said, 'Go ahead, I'll follow. You can set up the market stand. Maybe you can sell something already. I'll hurry as fast as I can.' Alva said, 'No, don't hurry, take it slow. I'll manage, believe me. By the time you get here, I'll have sold half the cart!' Alva bent down to take the cart, and rejoined the procession into town. Finally,



she pulled Helmke's cart through the Lübsch Gate, greeting Georg's comrades as she did so. Panting, she pulled the cart over the smooth yet uneven wooden planks to the market. Lübschestraße is long, it drags on, past many trades and workshops. Past the inn, where it smelled of beer, hops and thin beer, past a bakery where fresh bread was stacked in baskets. Two journeymen were already waiting with a handcart to take it to market. Onwards, past chickens and pigs running around, trying to keep the city clean by eating what fell at their feet. She passed the woodcarver, who used his sharp iron to carve delicate works of art, but also clothes pegs and toys. His young son came running up to Alva and, like every morning, wanted to give her a small basket of self-carved clothes pegs. But Alva wasn't stopping, she didn't want to stop and called out to him, 'Helmke will come after me, give her your basket. See you this afternoon!' The little boy waved happily after her. At the shoemaker's, several journeymen sat repairing shoes that wore out far too quickly. And at the cooper's, barrels of all kinds were made. She hurried because she didn't want to be late. Market day was almost underway. Many had already set up their stalls, hung out their pennants, or were in the process of beautifully presenting their goods. The first customers were already coming and negotiating good prices. Alva went to Helmke's usual place after the customs officer waved her through, and immediately got to work. The side panels on the cart could easily be lifted up, creating a small sales table. She unpacked the boxes and placed jam, pumpkins, beetroot and bouquets of dried flowers on it. She left the two tubs of apples on one side in front of the table. She looked up at the sky and decided not to set up the large cloth that served as a sunshade. She preferred to feel the warm rays of sunshine on her back. In another small box were a blanket, a thick fur, a jug of fresh clear water and an embroidery kit. Since Helmke spent the whole day here, she often passed the time with embroidery. She was very skilled, despite her advanced age. Alva placed the fur and blanket on the empty, upturned box, took her small bag off her back and emptied the contents into an empty wicker basket, the unsuccessful candles that Gustje had given her this morning. She was allowed to keep the money she earned from this, Alva knew that and was pleased about it. The dirty candles were cheap and were almost always bought by poorer people. Sometimes Helmke and she didn't get any money at all, sometimes it was simply better if they exchanged their goods for other things. That way they got bread, milk, cheese, and even beer or other things like embroidery needles and coloured yarn. Alva would put a few candles in the box that Helmke took home. She was finished setting up and sat down on the box, feeling satisfied. Then she observed the hustle and bustle around her. And soon the first customers came and bought fresh, crunchy apples from her. People were setting up their stalls to her right and left. On her right was a nice lady. She had pelts that her husband brought from Norway, and she sewed hats and gloves out of them during the day. On her left was a gentleman. He had a stand with jugs, plates and bowls made of clay. His wife and children, all girls who were more skilful than he, spent the whole day in the pottery somewhere on the outskirts of town making pottery, which they then sold at the market. A sudden commotion made Alva sit up and take notice. There was a fight somewhere. The authorities closely monitored whether everything was in order. All wagons with merchants' goods had to be checked and thus stop at the council mark. There the goods were weighed, measured and prices as well as levies to the city were determined. At a mark on the town hall, one could see the engraved and calibrated measure. The people of Wismar knew the values and stuck to them; they were only checked randomly. There was a lot of activity everywhere. The whole market was full of small and large stalls and booths. There was plenty on offer. There were plaited baskets, a wide variety of skins and leathers, salt from France, as well as colourful buttons and wooden plates, carved toys, bread, vegetables, spices from faraway countries, hats and at the knife sharpener you could buy knives or have the city guards sharpen their swords. Helmke had arrived in the meantime. She had a basket full of wooden pegs with her and placed it next to the candles. Her friendly, soft face shone in the sun. Alva made room. Between the housewives and merchants running around, a farmer's family set up their stand. They had a large wagon with four wheels so large that they could store perishable goods under it in the shade. The family often

came and usually stayed for two to three days. Helmke and Alva had known them for a long time. They also sold vegetables, grain and fruit, but they were not competitors. They were like neighbours. Helmke coughed into her handkerchief again and was shocked to discover blood in it. She quickly hid it in her bag, glancing anxiously at Alva. Alva didn't notice any of this, she only had eyes for the Viking over there. The farmer's wife was a tall, strong woman, packed with firm muscles, young and handsome. He looked like a real Viking, thought Alva, strict but friendly in the face. Sometimes his wife and their two children came with him, like today. But sometimes he also came with an apprentice. Alva believed that a farming family had it good; how else could one afford a cast-iron Grapen. Grapen were also available in clay, which most people could afford. These were small round pots with handles on the sides, and small feet on the bottom so that they could be placed over the fire. Alva was very happy that the farmer's wife was there. She liked her very much. The farmer's wife had such a friendly face, blue eyes and black, straight hair. When she was around, Alva felt so safe and protected, as if they had always known each other. Her face reminded her of her mother's. The two boys, who had been coming with them more and more often lately, took care of setting up the stand. Since the father took the old horse outside of town to a meadow, he was gone for a while. In the meadow, there was a pen in which several animals were kept, and of course she was taken care of. Alva noticed Helmke shaking next to her and muttering something. Alva leaned down to her, but didn't understand anything. She took the thick blanket and wrapped it around Helmke. Helmke was grateful, sighed deeply, and fell asleep on the spot. The old woman snored a little and coughed from time to time. Business was good today. Alva sold and exchanged apples; the first basket was already empty while she watched the woman across the street set up her cooking area but not light the fire. Then she placed a ceramic pot on it and opened it. Inside the pot was a white, greasy paste. From a sack next to her, she took a loaf of bread, cut off a large slice, and spread the white paste on the bread. Then she opened a small ceramic box, which was closed with a wide cork, and sprinkled white-green powder over the smeared bread. Alva watched her and guessed that it was salt with dried herbs. The woman stood up and came towards Alva. She smiled and handed the bread to her. She said, 'This is lard. It tastes very good. Enjoy it and tell me if it's good or if it needs more herbs.' Alva thanked her and smiled back appreciatively. 'I'm Martha, by the way. That's my husband Alreich over there,' she said, pointing to the tall Viking with the dishevelled blonde hair and red beard who was just coming down the alley with another man. 'And these are our oldest children, Bruno and Anselm.' She stroked the boys' heads on either side of her. The boys waved to Alva and then asked their mother: 'Can we go now?'

Please, we'll be right back!' 'We won't be long!' Anselm said, acting all grown-up, even though he was only eight years old. Their mother said, 'Yes, but be careful. Stay together. See you later, have fun!' Both boys took each other's hands and ran off. When Alreich came to Martha at the stand, Alva recognised who he was talking to. It was Georg, her brother. 'Georg!' Alva called over, but Georg didn't hear her over the noise in the market. He greeted Martha as if they knew each other and Martha smiled back friendly. Alva didn't want to disturb Georg in their conversation; he would come over and say hello anyway, she thought, and adjusted Helmke's blanket on her back. Martha smiled and looked at Alva. 'The children want to explore the Wismar market,' she said. 'First they help set up and then they can do their own thing. Later, they can help us with the sales.' Alva nodded and watched the boys disappear into the crowd. Where did all these people come from, Alva wondered. A goose cackled excitedly and ran along the narrow lane between the market stalls in fear of her life. Closely followed by her future owner. Alva chewed her bread with relish and nodded thoughtfully as she watched the goose. The bread tasted delicious! 'There are no missing herbs. It tastes excellent,' she said, happy and content. Martha was so nice to her. Alva had been watching the farming family for many months. Everyone had their regular place in their marketplace. So it happened that you got to know the people on the right and left, in front and behind very well. 'That's nice, I'm glad!' Said Martha, she went back to the stand and spread out a

beautifully polished board, put several slices of bread on it, spread all of them with the herb lard and then with some dried marigold flowers for decoration. Then she called out loudly: 'Lard bread, fresh lard bread!' and people came from all directions, looking and buying. Alva and Helmke never called out their goods, people just came to their little stand. Alva had to laugh heartily, looking to the right and left, and everywhere there was a turbulent market scene. Many people shouted something: 'Furs!', 'Beer, fresh beer!' or 'Fruit, buy fruit!' and all mixed up, it was quite loud and that made her happy and joyful, she loved these days. Of course, she also saw the swindlers and thieves who had success here and there. Suddenly there was a coughing next to her. Alva knelt down to Helmke, who was still asleep. Helmke's hair was very thin and she looked as if she had cotton wool on her head. Alva looked lovingly at her old friend. Suddenly tired but friendly eyes looked at her. But a deafening scream of fear broke the harmonious silence between them. A man with a swollen face and a thick cheek was running across the marketplace, fleeing from the barber-surgeon. The barber-surgeon, with his pliers for pulling teeth, ran after him. Many people burst out laughing and egged the barber-surgeon on to run faster. 'Georg, did you see that...?' Alva called over to the farmer's stall. But Georg had disappeared and Alreich was busy making lard bread. Alva shrugged her shoulders and smiled, then sat down beside Helmke, who was now wide awake and full of energy. She hadn't finished the half-eaten bread roll and gave it to Helmke. She was sure she was hungry. Many people passed by and told stories and chatted with each other. The market day was like a talking newspaper, you got all the news. People talked about the pirates and also about the Vitalienbrüder, about the latest raids on farms and castles, about knights and distant lands. Suddenly, Peter came by. He had rolls of fabric under his arm and beamed at Alva. 'What are you doing here?' Alva asked. She was very happy and jumped up. 'Well, my work!' Peter said, looking down at the rolls of cloth in his arms. 'I still have to deliver these, then I have three other deliveries and then I'm done for the day.' He thought. 'Well, that's not quite right, I still have to study Latin, tomorrow I'll go to the Franciscan monks to get new parchments and then they always want to know what I've learned.' He grimaced a little, he didn't like Latin. He loved mathematics, nautical science and geography. His parents were wealthy people and Peter was supposed to take over his father's trading post later on. His father owned two cogs. 'Are you thinking about tonight?' he asked Alvar, whispering so that Helmke couldn't hear him. Helmke wasn't listening anyway; she had fallen asleep again on the box from exhaustion. 'Of course!' Alva said. 'As discussed, we'll meet when the church clock strikes five times, down on the street in front of the monastery,' she explained. 'Hopefully Hugo will be on time.' 'Hopefully!' grinned Peter. "If he doesn't drink so much beer again that he misses the time." "I don't understand why he drinks so much beer?" Alva pondered. "A good brewer has to try a lot, find new recipes and finally also try them out from time to time," explained Peter. "After all, Wismar Red Beer is one of the best." 'I have to go on. See you later, maybe I'll have a delivery that takes me past you guys, then we can talk again!' "All right!" Alva replied, full of anticipation, her stomach twitched and she winked at him. Peter disappeared into the crowd. Martha and Alreich were very busy. The lard breads found many takers. In the meantime, the boys had returned and were helping with the sale. Their father, Alreich, had made himself comfortable. He lay on top of the cart, wrapped in furs, letting the sun shine on his face and sleeping. They would probably take turns selling. Musicians played on a flute and some people clapped along to the beat. Alva overheard a conversation about a pirate. It was about Klaus Störtebeker, the leader of the Vitalienbrüder. The pirates Gödeke Michels and Magister Wigbold were among his men. They were so-called Likedeeler, or equal dividers. They divided everything they captured equally. However, they didn't just share with each other, but also with the population, mostly in the fishing villages or towns where they were hiding. The goods were eventually sold by carters and traders and also came to the Wismar city market and were unknowingly distributed throughout the country via protected Hanseatic routes. Alva liked the Vitalian brothers; they were terrible to the grumpy rich, but fair to the friendly population. Many ordinary people supported them and even hid and

helped the pirates. Other people hated them and wanted to see all pirates hanged, but these were mainly rich merchants or nobles. Unfortunately, Alva didn't understand much, even though she had approached the two men. She only heard enough to realise that pirates were coming to Wismar to make a deal with the city fathers. Alva felt a tingle of excitement and began to brood. Pirates are coming to our city, maybe Klaus Störtebeker! Of course, it is also his hometown. But what does he want here? Does he have family here? Surely he has family in every fishing village, she thought. Maybe, and her heart began to leap in her chest, maybe the brothers also take female pirates on board.

## Chapter 4

There was a lot going on at Hugo's father's brewery. Today they were all trying out a new variety and a whole load of hops had arrived. The journeymen and apprentices had been at the harbour all day securing the goods. Business was more than great! Hugo's father always liked to emphasise that without the Hanseatic League the city would never have done as well as it had today. People were buying like crazy. Everyone who could work had a job and everyone could afford special things. That was usually his toast to the Hanseatic League. Hugo had a lot to do, his leg didn't hurt so much anymore, he had changed the bandage several times and now and then added a few drops of the yellow stuff. He had washed the boilers early in the morning and was now helping to unload the huge bales of hops. They got their hops from everywhere. The local variety was cheaper, but the ones from Bavaria or Belgium had a different flavour. If you mixed barley from different growing areas, experimenting to make new, delicious types of beer was great fun! Slowly it turned into the afternoon and the sun went down. The tall gabled houses cast their long, cold shadows. The bell sounded, signalling the end of the market day. The first stalls were already being closed and the market stands dismantled. Helmke had overslept the whole day, she was still sitting on the box, twitching occasionally. 'She's probably in pain or having a bad dream,' Alva thought. 'Come on, Helmke, let's pack up. We sold everything!' Alva helped the old woman to get up. "What should we do with these bad apples? May I take them for the pig at our house?" "Of course," Helmke whispered, she was quite weak. "Will you take me home? I don't know if I can make it on my own." "Of course, I'd be happy to!" Opposite, the farmer's stand had been partially dismantled. The children helped to tidy up and pack the goods properly. Alreich stowed several boxes under his wagon, the sacks on top of them. At the same time, Martha stretched a large canvas over the entire horse-drawn cart as a tent. They would probably sleep in it tonight so as not to have to move to the meadow with all their belongings, she thought. It's much safer in the city. A small pot was simmering on the stove. Alva's stomach growled. It probably contained a delicious soup, because it smelled wonderfully of vegetables, fish and lard. She would have loved to try some of the soup. It must be great to live on a farm, to have something to eat every day and to be able to take care of the animals and plants every morning. If she had a farm, she would plant beautiful flowers and then tie them into wreaths and pretty bouquets, she would have animals and take care of them, or maybe even Peter would be there and then they would also have children together, who she could take care of. Alva laughed at the thought. She was looking forward to her life. She was only 14, but she could still imagine a family life! She was happy at the thought. When she had finished her work and stacked all the boxes inside each other, she helped Helmke to sit on the cart. Alreich came over and carefully helped to place the little old woman so that she would not slip down. He also helped Alva by pushing the cart so that it started rolling. 'Thank you and see you tomorrow!' she called to Alreich, Martha and the children. They were so nice to her and she was happy to see them all again tomorrow. She saw that Martha looked very worried and reached for Alreich's hand. So Alva set off along Lübsche Straße. The little boy was already waiting at the carver. Alva stopped the cart and looked for his basket next to Helmke in the loading area. 'Today

we didn't sell all the clothespins!' she held out the basket. He looked inside and his almost sad face began to shine. 'Thank you, Helmke!' He bowed and shouted while running, 'Have a nice evening!' Alva was pleased with so much politeness. 'What did you put in it this time?' Helmke smiled: 'A large bowl of honey.' She knew that was much too much. Helmke poured most of the staples into her box of bartered goods that she took home. Alva pulled, and Helmke had to be careful not to slide down. The wagon wasn't that heavy. Helmke didn't weigh much. As they passed through the city gate, the old woman said, 'I want to walk alone, let me try.' 'Are you sure?' Helmke nodded and assured her she would make it. She was doing well and had gathered strength, slept all day, and had good food. Now she would make it. Alva was unsure, but didn't want to patronise Helmke, so she helped her dismount. Helmke slid off the cart and stood with firm legs on the ground. Alva looked at her somewhat suspiciously, not believing that the old lady could make the journey alone. 'Do me a favour, Alva. Take the cart to my house. If you still have the strength and time, it would be nice if you could pick a few apples and put them in here...', she tapped the stacked boxes with her thin fingers, '...and put the chickens back in the coop. That would be nice of you, I'll take care of everything else later.' The girl nodded thoughtfully. 'I'll do it!' said Alva. 'But what are you planning to do? Are you sure you want to go it alone?' 'Yes, I still want to stop by Albert's, maybe we'll eat some bread together and talk about the old days.' Helmke grinned. Of course, Alva knew that Helmke was in love with Albert. He was a fisherman and in his younger years he had been out at sea all day. Now he repaired nets and gave the young fishermen tips and well-meaning advice. Alva looked at Helmke from top to bottom to make sure she was really strong enough. Then she smiled and said, 'All right, I wish you both a lot of fun and give my regards to dear Albert!' After that, she grabbed the cart and ran along the sandy path to the small house. When she arrived at the small house, she did what she had promised Helmke. She prepared everything for tomorrow's market day. On her way back to town, she tried to spot Helmke on her way to the fishermen's huts, but of course she was long gone, so she was really fine and had plenty of strength. Alva was relieved and made her way to the meeting point, because if she was a little earlier in Wismar, she could still stop by the soup kitchen. She didn't go home, because she didn't want to disturb her brother. Georg was probably still asleep in their shared bed. Halfway there, however, she changed her mind and decided to stop by Hugo's in the taproom. From a distance, she saw Hugo's father in front of the restaurant at the water gate. Quickly and without attracting much attention, she went to another door, because she really didn't want to meet Hans. Hugo's siblings were scattered everywhere, but she couldn't find Hugo anywhere. 'Wait a minute!' she called, grabbed someone by the neck and snatched a little boy. 'Do you know where Hugo is?' Startled, the little boy looked her in the eye and recognised her after a few seconds. 'Oh, it's you, you can't scare me like that, Alva!' She shrugged. 'So, where is he now?' 'Yes, I'm thinking!' He twirled his white-blond curls with two fingers. 'I think he's in the basement...' 'Thanks, Arthur!' She found him there, indeed. He was talking to himself. Hugo was funny, he was funny, brave and a bit slow in thinking and always cheerful. You could have fun with him anytime, but somehow he was also strange. What kind of kid talks to himself? Well, he wasn't a kid anymore either. Hugo was a year older than her, 15, of course you're no longer a kid and you naturally do things that adults do, like drink beer and talk to yourself. Hugo was tipsy again, at least a little, Alva thought. 'Hello Alva!' He was happy to see her. 'What are you doing here?' 'I wanted to pick you up, can I still help you with anything?' He waved it off casually. 'No, no, I'll be done in a minute. I just have to finish scrubbing this kettle. It has to be sparkling clean!' He scrubbed like crazy with a rag in one hand and a brush in the other, all around the cauldron. Alva saw that the water in the bucket was very clean. Not like in the taproom, gross and smelly. The whole cellar was sparkling and shiny, it was really incredibly clean. Immediately she felt ashamed of her dirty clothes. There was no sign of any spiders or other vermin. The cauldrons were sparkling. 'What have you brewed today? Is there a new variety?' 'Yes, we've tried something new. Do you want to try it?' Alva wasn't sure whether she should, because she also had to go down that terrible tunnel under the market today. She was afraid of it because Hugo had said

that he had stepped on a squashed rat that had exposed its entrails on all sides, that blood had spurted out in masses and all the intestines had spilled out. Alva was so creeped out. She thought about it and then said, 'Yes, oh yes, I would like to try it!' She hoped that this would calm her fear. 'Maybe I'll take another sip of beer! Maybe then it won't be so creepy in the cellar,' said Hugo, glancing at her and laughing his head off. Ha ha, thought Alva. "What kind of brew did you make?" "Try it, here!" He held out a jug to her and ran to a counter. He brought back a pot of fruit and looked triumphant. 'What?' she marveled, "don't tell me you put currants in the beer?" "Yes, currants!" He thought it was quite normal. "Well, currant jam." He invited her and nodded towards the jug. "Why don't you try it? It tastes really good!" "You mixed jam into the beer, is that supposed to taste good?" 'Yup! Now try it. When I mixed it, the beer turned all red and it tastes sweet now and not quite so bitter. Trust me.' Hugo talked and talked, like a real salesman. Alva raised the jug to her mouth after shaking her head in disbelief and looking at him with amusement. "All right." She tasted it and smacked her lips. Hugo was wide awake and strangely excited. He nervously shifted from one leg to the other. 'It tastes strange, a bit like beer, much milder...' She pondered, '...but also fruity, somehow pleasant.' She took another sip and liked it more and more with each subsequent sip. 'What are you going to call the variety?' This time she drank properly and Hugo relaxed. 'I don't know yet.' He was very happy that his invention had been a success this time. "Do you want to sell it at the bar upstairs?" "Actually, yes." Hugo was proud. "I think it's really great!" grinned Alva with rolled-up eyes; the beer was already having an effect. "Should we take some for Peter to try, when are you actually going to finish here?" She looked around. 'In a minute!' He quickly pushed the bowl of fruit into Alva's stomach and dropped to the floor. She noticed a deep cut on his right forearm. 'You're bleeding!' Alva realised in horror. 'What happened?' He paused briefly, looked at his arm and said, 'There was a fight in the bar last night,' and continued cleaning. 'It was about Störtebeker, who wants to make a deal with Wismar. There were also cogs owners from Hamburg in the room, they have to lie here in Wismar for three days and make their goods available for sale in our city, well and they would rather see Störtebeker hanged than him allying with Wismar. Wismar wants to offer the Vitalienbrüdern protection in the city and in return the pirates are to sell their goods here on the market and in the harbour. He polished and polished. 'Personally, I think that's really good!' He looked Alva in the eyes, who listened eagerly. 'That will bring many traders to the city, many buyers, and Wismar's city coffers will overflow with tax revenue. Besides, hardly anyone will dare attack our Hanseatic city, because the most notorious pirates in the entire Baltic Sea could be in the city. Who would be so reckless?' he asked Alva, laughing. Then he became pensive, 'Yes, but the people of Hamburg and the Danes want to prevent that and hunt down the Likedeelers and, like all criminals, bring them to justice. They also said that they are looking for family members in all Hanseatic cities and want to kidnap them as hostages.' "Why is that?" Alva asked blankly. 'If they have hostages, Störtebeker might come to rescue them and fall into a trap.' 'That's terrible!' she said, she liked Klaus Störtebeker and his pirates. "I don't want our city to be invaded by the Hamburgers!" "No!" shouted Hugo. "He can hide too well in the Hanseatic city, just think of the monks' tunnel under the city, too many narrow streets and allies!" His eyes lit up with excitement. Alva let out an audible breath, she was relieved. 'If they catch him at all, it'll be at sea!' and Alva's forehead furrowed again in alarm. 'Anyway, last night, mugs and beer mugs were flying through the air and at me, and to protect my face, I sacrificed my arm.' Hugo was used to injuries. Eventually, he had finished cleaning. Alva had meanwhile polished off all the fruit and jam leftovers and was no longer quite as dizzy. He washed his hands, took off his wet coat and put on a clean one. 'We can go!' Alva took a step and stumbled, she was still dizzy, of course. Unsteadily, she stood up and stumbled backwards a little. Hugo laughed. 'Come on, I'll hold you, I'm curious to see what Peter will say when he sees you like this!' He doubled over with laughter. Together they fetched a small ceramic bottle and filled it with fruit beer. 'He can try it himself,' and then they went up the small staircase. As they came out of the brewery, they noticed that many people were heading towards the harbour, but there was

something strange about them: they had no carts, sacks or other commercial goods in their hands. They were all heading towards the water gate, towards the harbour and the Bay of Wismar, from which direction all the merchant ships came. In the almost windless waters, three cogs came sailing silently and mystically, one behind the other. They skilfully entered the port of Wismar. On all three ships, a flag familiar to all people flew from the masts in the middle. The dreaded pirate flag. Many people cheered, others looked around anxiously. Alva saw strange people among them, ragged and dirty, with half-torn off ears and scarred faces. Hugo nudged her and whispered, 'Vitalian brothers, everywhere!' and nodded towards the harbour. Otherwise, it was eerily quiet, with seagulls flying silently across the cloudless blue sky. Suddenly, a shrill whistle sounded and, in the blink of an eye, the sails of the cogs were reefed, attached to the mast, the anchors were thrown and all three ships were tied to the quay with thick ropes. They stood on board like a human chain, pirates close together. They looked creepy, some wearing armour, some almost naked, many carrying weapons and their skin was scarred. First, a stately figure stepped ashore. Hugo nudged Alva again: 'That's Klaus Störtebeker!' He was wearing a beige-coloured robe with a wine-red velvet waistcoat, and at his side he carried his broad sword, a small leather bag and a beret over his back. His long, blonde and dishevelled hair blew in the sudden wind under his old leather hat. The leaders of the other ships were the first to disembark: Gödeke Michels and Magister Wiegbold. When Störtebeker began to wave to the people of Wismar and greet them, the mood lightened and there was a warm welcome. Suddenly, musicians could be heard playing from somewhere. Alva and Hugo relaxed too. Alva could hardly take her eyes off the pirate captain; her heart began to beat excitedly. Hugo tried to drag Alva towards the city, but she wanted to see Klaus Störtebeker up close. She was really giving Hugo a hard time. 'Just come with me, we have to go to Peter, he's probably waiting!' When they arrived at the Franciscan monastery, they were careful not to run into the monks. Many monks were in the garden watering or weeding their medicinal and culinary herbs. Other monks murmured softly to themselves or sat on benches in front of the monastery reading parchments. Peter came up to them beaming with joy when he saw them behind the small wall and suddenly didn't look quite so happy when he looked at the monks. 'What they're doing, I've already been doing half the day.' When they looked at him questioningly, he replied, 'Learning Latin, I'm being tested tomorrow. My father is coming back tonight. Hopefully. I wanted to be done with all my learning tasks by then. I'm really looking forward to seeing him!' Alva sensed that he was worried. His father was supposed to have returned to Wismar last week, but it usually got delayed. "Where was he last?" she asked to take his mind off things a little. Peter thought, 'I'm not sure, I think it was in Bruges last.' Peter's father was a merchant and often travelled with one or two cogs to offer his goods. He had been to many Hanseatic cities. Alva took Peter's hands and squeezed them gently. 'Maybe he's already at the harbour.'

The soft singing of the Franciscans stopped as the churches of the Hanseatic city announced five o'clock in the afternoon. As Alva was about to take a few steps, she staggered. And Peter asked with amusement, 'What's the matter with you? Have you been in Hugo's cellar?' Hugo laughed and held the bottle under his nose. 'Yes, Peter, Hugo has tried a new beer, would you like to try it?' she giggled. Peter was a little annoyed. 'We wanted to go into the tunnel, but if you two are so confused, if you stumble over something again...' He paused and searched for the right words. 'I have to be able to rely on you. You have to find the barrels and then deliver them to the right place.' Disbelieving, he scratched his head and began to pace nervously. 'If we don't manage it this evening, we won't get the money. I need the money and I'm sure you do too!' Alva looked over at Hugo, who was just changing his bandage. The small bottle looked mysterious, Alva thought. "I promised the Franciscan monks that no matter what, we have to go to the underground passages..." With both hands he tousled his curly hair. '...we're already way too late!' Alva gently took him by the shoulders and squeezed them firmly, so that he calmed down a little. 'I'm sorry,' she said, pulling Hugo up to her. He, in turn, managed to put on his friendliest smile, shrugged his shoulders and tilted his head. 'At least try it!' Hugo said to Peter. 'It's a brand new variety. Maybe

your father can sell it in Bruges or India or somewhere like that.' Peter groaned, but still couldn't help grinning. He took the bottle, but hesitated for a moment, wondering if he was doing the right thing and whether he really should do it. Determined, he took a big gulp and grimaced in realisation that it tasted much better than he had suspected. Then he looked as if he liked it very much. He took another sip and then another. Finally, he handed the empty bottle back. 'Tastes good, not bad at all. Maybe you can refine it a bit and then we'll do business.' Peter grinned at Hugo and patted him appreciatively on the shoulder, as if they were already business partners. Alva was a bit jealous: she would have liked to have offered Peter a homemade product too, but she had nothing to trade with. 'All right, are you ready?' Peter asked the group. 'I've got the flute with me, watch this,' and he just started playing. During the pauses in the flute playing, he gasped, 'We mustn't get caught.' His melody repeated itself. 'I'll say it again...' He played the flute again, 'we'll be punished badly.' His flute sounded and Alva began to feel sick. 'Yes!' She put both hands over her ears. 'We'll be careful, it won't be that bad!' 'No, seriously!' Peter gasped. He finally let go of the flute. 'I heard about a farm boy, 14 years...' With wide-open eyes, he practically screamed: '...he was executed! His head was cut off! The whole town watched!' 'Excuse me?' Hugo interrupted, he was magically drawn to terrible stories. 'What did he do?' he wanted to know. Children and women were not allowed to attend executions. Peter rolled his eyes and looked up at the sky. 'I don't know exactly. He probably stole a lot or killed someone. I have no idea. Anyway, they cut off his head.' Alva felt increasingly uncomfortable; in her mind's eye, she saw the bloodied severed head of a boy rolling at her feet. Hugo rubbed his neck and Alva tensed up too. She didn't want to be punished, and certainly not hanged or beheaded. That was something for adults, something like that should better be left to the adults. 'Come on, are you ready?' Peter asked. Alva was still struggling with her stomach, she didn't know if she was ready for an adventure. She was afraid and reached for the bottle that Hugo always carried in his bag around his belly. She took a few big gulps. 'I'll be ready in a minute,' Alva said, drinking. Hugo did the same. 'All right!' They both said, determined, as if from the same mouth. Peter looked at them. He was so proud of their friendship. He knew that, no matter what happened, he could always rely on them. 'All right,' he nodded to them. He took his flute and began to play a melody. 'You have to play much louder,' Alva laughed. 'I don't know if I can hear that in the earth.' He played the flute even louder than before. The same melody. It was a beautiful melody.

When it ended, Peter blushed as he realised how Alva looked at him. The few monks who were still working in the herb garden looked up from their work and over to the children. 'Come on, we have to go,' said Hugo, and they walked along the wall, ducking. Peter crept to the adjacent street leading to the market. Hugo and Alva climbed nimbly over the low wall and disappeared almost invisibly into the Franciscan monastery. In a niche around a small corner, there was a very small wooden door. Behind it was a narrow passageway, smelly, damp, muddy and full of mould. It was crawling with creatures of all colours and textures. Alva shuddered as Hugo lit the lantern hidden behind the wooden door. Both of them disappeared stooped over into the endless passage, while Peter had almost arrived at the market. He waited a few minutes and tried to estimate how long it would take the two of them to reach his feet. Hugo strode ahead and Alva followed. She felt disgusted because mud and dirt were everywhere. It stank terribly. Hugo remembered what Maria had said. They should watch out for wax residue on the right wall. He thought about this and began to sweat. Which way was right? 'Hey, Alva?' 'Yes?' Alva was afraid, and she walked very close behind Hugo, almost as if she were his rucksack. Suddenly they both heard a melody, very soft, coming from a flute above their heads. Alva was relieved to recognise it as Peter's. She closed her eyes and forgot everything around her for a moment, lost in the beautiful melody. It was very faint and they both had to be very quiet to hear which direction it was coming from. Slowly they continued along the muddy path. The sound grew weaker and weaker. Of course, Peter had no idea where they were underground, so it was difficult for him to guide them. He tried his best. Peter was in the market. He took a few steps in the direction of the Black Friars Monastery, stopped



again and played his flute again. He hoped that the two would hear him. Peter was very focused. He was so intent on walking slowly and playing the flute loudly that he didn't even notice that the market was almost deserted. If he had paid attention, he would have noticed that no one was paying any attention to him, because all the residents, all the merchants and tradesmen of the Hanseatic city were standing in front of the town hall or looking in its direction. There was a great deal of excitement among the people. Many people had gathered and were talking to each other. In all the crowd, you could make out three figures, around which it revolved. They were guarded and accompanied by the city fathers and soldiers of the city. There were three men, well-known men, all pirates and despised and hated by some residents of the city. Some shouted, 'You should be arrested!' And others opposed this and cheered and greeted them warmly. But Klaus Störtebeker and his Vitalienbrüder walked happily and contentedly through a guard of honour of Hanseatic citizens directly to the town hall. It was said that there was to be an important meeting there – important for the city of Wismar and important for the pirates. As soon as the town hall door closed behind them, market day and its life continued as if nothing had happened before. Everyone went about their business again. Nobody noticed the swindlers on their right and left. 'Alva...' Hugo asked again. 'Do you know which way is right?' 'What, why?' Alva was busy rolling up her dress and aprons so that they wouldn't get soaked. Her feet were partly up to her ankles in mud. Every now and then, rats scurried past them at lightning speed. 'I don't know which way is right. I'm just trying to figure out which way is right,' he stammered desperately. 'How old are you, fifteen or five?' 'Just tell me which way is right, Alva!' he demanded. She thought for a moment. 'Starboard is on the right side.' Alva fought against her nausea. 'I don't know which way is starboard!' Hugo sounded a bit angry. 'Which way is right?' Alva held her clothes up to her neck and thought. 'There!' she said happily, pointing at Hugo's injured leg. 'Where your bandage is!' 'Ah!' He looked happily down at his leg. He saw the bandage and immediately felt a sharp pain. 'It's a good thing I got hurt, otherwise we'd be miserably lost!' Alva sighed and shook his head. 'Fine, thanks!' He grinned and shone the lantern along the walls. Very slowly, Alva crept along behind him. 'If you see any wax blobs on the right wall, let me know.' Alva looked at everything carefully, but Hugo had already spotted one, a large white blob on the wall. He was surprised that he hadn't noticed it before. The white wax blobs blended into the brick wall with the mould in the niches of the tunnel system. In a corner, they discovered the barrels, still covered with the once white, now dirty sheet. Peter's melody was barely audible. The flute grew quieter and quieter until it fell silent. An oppressive feeling crept over the two of them. 'There are the barrels!' whispered Hugo. They took off the sheet and folded it. Hugo put it under his shirt. He took the lantern in his mouth and rolled his barrel ahead. Alva took the second barrel and rolled it behind Hugo. She had to be careful not to roll it into Hugo's legs. She just wanted to get out of there as quickly as possible. He stopped at a fork. Hugo went a few steps ahead and then decided on the right-hand path. 'Here, here are the blobs, this is where we have to go.' They pushed their way along the corridors. In the meantime, Peter had already arrived at the Black Monastery and hoped that the two of them would be just as quick. He waited for them here and not, as agreed, at Cuno's. Hugo finally spotted a light. He handed the lantern to Alva so he could see better. Yes, there was actually a light, and both rolled their barrels quickly, quietly and carefully. They had actually made it. Further ahead, in a niche, a lantern was burning in front of a wooden door. 'Wait here,' he said to Alva and went ahead. He pushed open the wooden door and saw a monk dressed in black in a corner. He was sitting on a bench and sleeping. Turning to Alva, Hugo whispered, 'There's someone there!' She rolled down her clothes and looked at her dirty, smelly shoes. What kind of stupid things were they doing? Hugo went up the small steps and slowly approached the monk, waking him up very gently. 'Hello,' he said. 'Hello, we are the messengers from the Franciscan monastery and we are bringing two barrels of beer.' It took a while for the monk to wake up. He wasn't frightened at all. He was just calm and collected and looked at Hugo and then he realised, 'It's about time. I've been waiting here since last night!' 'I'm sorry...' Hugo replied. 'Something came up.' He immediately felt his wound on

his leg and thought of those terrible images in the infirmary that they had to see last night. 'It's all right,' the monk realised how uncomfortable Hugo felt. 'Here is your payment.' A jingling bag flew through the air. 'You can put the barrels down there.' With that, he disappeared into the monastery. Just put the barrels down, Alva was pleased. That wasn't so easy, because from the cellar corridor, behind the wooden door, were three steps. Hugo and Alva were left to their own devices. When Alva saw the steps, she was stunned. 'What?' Alva shouted, 'We have to roll the barrels up these stairs too, excuse me?' 'Well, come on!' Laughing, Hugo waved the bag in front of her eyes. They both grabbed the beer barrel, each on one side, and were about to lift it up the first step. But at the moment their abs tightened, Alva had to laugh terribly when she saw Hugo's concentrated and serious look. Immediately all strength disappeared from her arms. It happened again and again: as soon as she grabbed the barrel and tensed her stomach, she had a fit of laughter. It wasn't long before Hugo was infected. They couldn't stop laughing. Every time Hugo looked up, he was concentrating as he wrapped his arms around the barrel to roll it up the stairs with Alva, causing Alva to laugh. It was so hard. The more they laughed, the harder the barrel weighed. 'Hugo! I don't know if I can do this!' Now she sounded desperate. 'But we have to! Come on!' Both stood behind the barrel, took a deep breath and almost rolled it up the first step. Alva snorted. 'I'm sorry!' she laughed. 'It's okay. Move aside. On three...' he got ready. 'One...' the first step was taken. '...two...' he continued to groan. '...and three!' Hugo shouted and let out a loud fart as he rolled the beer keg over the last step. Alva climbed past Hugo and patted his shoulder, laughing. "You did really well, great!" In the monastery, she fell forward onto the cold floor and cooled her face. She was still laughing and she was in pain, and anyway, what a crazy evening it had been! What would she do without her friends? When Hugo had finished with the second barrel, he tried to help her up, but he couldn't. There was no strength left in his arms. They were like jelly. For a while, they both rested on the bench where the monk had just been sleeping. Then they closed the wooden door behind them. The job was done. Hugo reached into his pocket, took out the small bag of money, and poured it all into his hand. 'Three shillings a barrel, two for each of us!' he said proudly, handing Alva her share. 'Thank you!' She would give the money to Georg later. 'Come on, we have to find Peter.' She took Hugo by the hand and pulled him along behind her. Hugo stumbled and ran after her, which looked quite funny because he was trying to hide the money in his pocket. It wasn't that easy, because his belly was even bigger because of the sheet under his shirt. He could hardly find his pocket. Alva was so excited and happy that she just had to run. But they crept quietly out of the monastery.

Peter was already waiting on the corner. Wismar's market square was almost empty. There were still a few stalls selling food and hot drinks. Alva's brother was standing by the large cart of the farming family. He was talking to Alreich and his wife again. Again, it looked like they knew each other. George had a loaf of bread in his hand and a drink. It was a beautiful evening. Some people were still out and about in the warm twilight. Peter started running. 'Come on, we'll go to the harbour and see if my father's back, and then we'll put Hugo to bed!' He laughed. The other two ran after him.

When they arrived at the harbour, they sat down on the quay wall and dangled their legs. It smelled so good of fresh bread and smoked fish. 'I'm hungry!' said Alva. She had money now and could buy something. She looked at her friends, who didn't think her idea was a bad one either. Then they went to a stand and bought smoked fish and fresh bread. Hugo ran over to his father's brewery and got a large bottle of the new fruit beer. That was a supper! Alva had to think of Helmke. Did she arrive well? Maybe Helmke also experiences such a beautiful evening with

sunset, smoked fish and with her good friend Albert. She was sure he would, and she was pleased. Peter was sitting very close to her, and she was pleased about that. She felt his warmth and the smell of freshly washed clothes. He wasn't dirty and grimy like Hugo and her, who had crawled in the tunnel and stepped over rats. Peter smelled of soap and tobacco, and she thought about how much luck and courage it would take to marry Peter someday. Suddenly, Hugo stood up and said goodbye. He said cheerfully to Alva: 'This time I'm faster than my father, today you won't get wet.' Alva was happy and she and Peter also made their way home. After Peter had brought Alva home and when he entered his parents' large trading office, it smelled of his favourite food. Potatoes with meat and raisin sauce. His father was finally back, safe and sound. On the return journey, they had run aground off the Dutch islands and his ship had sprung a leak. Since the repairs would have taken too long, he had sold his broken ship to the Frisians and found reliable carters to sell his goods and buy new ones. In the meantime, he and his people had even hired two soldiers to avoid being attacked. That evening, his parents announced that Peter would accompany his father on his next trip, that he was ready for the next step in his life, that he should experience the glory of the Hanseatic League while it still existed, and that they were very proud of him. Peter was standing in the cellar of his family's large house, surrounded by vast quantities of goods and merchandise, wool, fine fabrics, exotic spices and barrels full of secrets. Now he was an adult. He would see the big, wide world, meet strangers and experience adventures, both on land and at sea. He thought of Alva and how brave she had been in the maze today, and how proud and dirty she was afterwards, and how much he would miss her. Peter stepped right up to the brick wall of the cellar and listened. Maybe he could hear monks rolling barrels.

## Chapter 5

Alva was sleeping in her bed, wrapped in warm blankets. She dreamt of pirates and polar bears, of ships in storms, she dreamt crazy things and was suddenly awakened. At first she thought that in her dream she heard voices from the cog, with the white and red striped sails, on which she sailed the seas as captain. But the noises were coming from the kitchen. She heard her brother Georg, who sounded very worried. He was speaking to Maria and Alva just about heard, '...That too. Now I just have...' He fell silent abruptly and did not voice his thoughts. Maria said something like, '...she'll understand. Don't worry. It was important. We need the money!' And then there was another voice speaking to Maria. A soft, gentle female voice. Alva didn't recognise it. The female voice spoke hectically and excitedly to Maria. She didn't understand a single word, only that Maria and Georg had to leave, very quickly, and Alva thought that it had something to do with the infirmary. She turned around, snuggled up in her blankets and pulled them up so high that she couldn't hear anything and immediately fell asleep again. The next morning she didn't wake up on the box. She was lying in bed and next to her was Georg, he looked terrible. He had swollen eyes, his hair was dishevelled and he stank. He was completely sweaty, and he was lying in bed with his clothes on, without a blanket, because Alva had it. She sat up and tried to climb out of bed over Georg, pressing him on the stomach and legs. Georg woke up and Alva said he should just go back to sleep. She would go to the market. She carefully tucked him in, but Georg sat up, wide awake. 'It's all right,' she said, smiling. 'You can go back to sleep.' 'Where is Maria?' Georg asked in a hoarse voice. Georg was wide awake. He looked very worried. Alva immediately got goosebumps. 'What's going on?' she asked as she got dressed. 'Has something happened?' Georg looked at her with wide eyes and swallowed. At the door, someone was fumbling with it. Maria came in. She saw the two of them at the bed, one completely helpless and the other completely unaware. Maria also had dark circles under her eyes and looked very tired. 'Hello Alva, you're already awake.' Maria spoke very gently; otherwise she was always so strict and reserved with Alva. Maria and Georg looked at each other. Georg slowly got up. Alva didn't understand anything anymore. Her mouth went dry, something was happening here. Maria sat down and said softly to Alva, 'Come here to me, sit with

me.' Alva sat down and immediately Maria took her by both hands. Georg came in, sat down too, and put his big hands over the women's. 'We have to tell you something...' Georg said. He looked down at the table and swallowed. 'That night...' He searched for the right words and then rubbed his hands on his thighs. 'Last night, something happened.' Maria's hands were very warm. Alva tried to concentrate on the warmth. It felt so good. 'What? What happened?' Alva sought eye contact and suddenly her eyes filled with tears, even though she didn't know what was going on. 'Helmke...' Georg said. 'She's dead.' Georg faltered, his voice failed him. He, too, had known Helmke all his life. He couldn't continue, and Maria took over for him. 'Helmke passed away last night. She went to sleep peacefully, looking at Alva. It happened very quickly. A friend came for me because she thought we could still help her, but when I arrived she was sleeping peacefully. She had an enchanting smile on her lips and she was lying in her bed, covered and snuggled up.' Suddenly Georg broke down, weeping bitterly. His body shook. His brother's incredible sadness shook Alva. She felt completely overwhelmed. Helmke was dead? It couldn't be. She was losing another loved one. She didn't know how to bear the pain or where to find the strength to comfort her brother. She felt herself becoming tense inside. Maria sat motionless at the table. She stared at the table and said nothing more. Alva must never know the true story. The memories of that night were too gruesome. Maria shuddered when she had to think about it. Helmke had gone home late at night from Albert's; they had spent a nice evening, eating and drinking. She had recovered somewhat from her tiredness and was strong enough to go home. But then she had collapsed and fallen on the stone with his head. She was not dead, but the laceration had bled. Helmke must have been dazed, because she did not get up again. A friend had found her, but had not been able to help her to her feet. So she had run to Maria for help. When the three of them arrived at Helmke's, they were confronted with a terrible sight: Helmke was dead. But that wasn't all: wild dogs were about to pounce on the lifeless body and took it with them when the three approached. Only Helmke's tattered and bloody clothes remained. Maria was breathing heavily. She would never be allowed to tell Alva this. Georg stood up, wiped his face with both hands and walked around the table to Alva. He hugged her very tightly. 'I have some more bad news for you.' Alva's tears rolled down her cheeks as she looked at him. 'I'm so sorry...' he began. Alva bit her upper lip. He whispered, 'Yesterday I sold our sailboat.' 'You did what?' That was too much for Alva; a half-grown person couldn't take any more. She stood up, clawed at the tabletop, and screamed. 'What kind of day is this? Why did you sell it?' 'We need the money. We have to pay the rent. We need new clothes. I don't earn enough and Maria usually doesn't get any money either. She only ever gets food. I kept a little bit for you. You'll get it when you come later... I...' He stammered, "...I'll explain it to you later." Alva sat down again. She couldn't say anything more. She was crying and angry. Her sailing boat! How would she ever be happy again if she couldn't even go sailing? Maria tried to comfort her: 'We brought you Helmke's cart. It might be good for you to spend a normal day at the market.' 'A normal day?' thought Alva. 'This will be the worst day of my life!' Everything was gone! She wanted to scream. 'I don't need any new clothes. I like these, I have these, ... Mama made them for me!' 'I know...', said Georg, 'it was also meant for the winter, when we all need new clothes.' He sighed. 'We brought you the cart, it's loaded with goods for market day. Helmke would have wanted it that way for you.' At the mention of Helmke, tears filled his eyes again. 'We took your chickens too. They are down in the yard and can stay here for the time being. Gustje has allowed it. So you can take five eggs every morning if you want.' Maria continued: 'The cart is in the yard. Please go to the market, please open the stall as you always do. It is important for you.' Maria looked her deep in the eyes. But Alva didn't understand why it was so important. It didn't matter anymore. She didn't need the market day. 'Just do it. Please!' Maria repeated. 'It will do you good. You have to move, don't just sit here. Otherwise you may never be able to get up again and your life will remain as it is right now.' Alva cried, thinking of Helmke's words about the five new doors when a door closes. She said through her tears, 'I don't know if I can do this.' Georg took her by both shoulders. 'We can do it. We can do it together, everyone picks up where they left off

yesterday.' Maria said, 'Tonight the world looks different again. I'll take the evening off tonight. Maybe we can spend an evening together.' Alva took a deep breath and thought of Helmke, glad that she had simply fallen asleep as she had always wished to. Now she was in heaven and maybe she was looking down on her and would be happy if Alva went to the market and sold her apples. 'And what do I do with the money?' sobbed Alva. She looked at Maria through her tears. 'You keep that, that's for you.' Maria and Georg looked at each other.

George went over to Maria and hugged her too. Both looked at Alva. Maria nodded at her and Alva understood. Alva got up and went without turning around and without another word to the door, down the stairs, let the chickens into the yard, scattered grain on the ground and opened the small door to the pigsty thoughtfully. She had thick tears in her eyes and so she didn't notice that the door didn't latch properly, but swung loosely on its hinges. In the yard stood the cart, packed full of Helmke's wares. When she saw the cart, she still saw Helmke sitting on it, small and happy. Now Helmke is dead, she no longer needed to struggle and endure pain. She grabbed the cart and went to the market without saying hello to Gustav and Gustje. The cart was unbelievably heavy, much heavier than usual. Somehow Alva managed. Since her house was not near Lübschen Straße, she took a different route to the market. So it happened that the little boy with his little basket full of wooden pegs spent his day unsuspectingly and waiting at the side of the road.

When she arrived at the market, she set up her stall. She had no eye for anyone. She didn't see the citizens, not Martha or Alreich. She only looked down at the wooden street. The children came over to her, Anselm and Bruno helped, they took the apple baskets and set them up, just as Helmke and Alva had always done together. They put the goods on the table and Bruno asked, 'Is Helmke coming soon?' Alva was stiff as a poker, she couldn't move, and immediately the tears came. She couldn't talk about it. Alreich came over and took the children in his arms. Of course he knew what was going on; when Alva came alone, crying, there was only one explanation. After his children, he took Alva in his arms. He held her for a long time and very tightly, then built the rest around her. He placed the box upside down in the middle, put the blankets on top and gently pushed Alva down so that she was sitting. Alva let everything happen; she had stopped crying by now and just stared ahead. She felt as if she were under a bell, the whole world had stopped. Her sailboat was gone and Helmke was dead, and now she sat here and didn't know how to go on. She was paralysed, everything stood still for her. Everything happened as if in slow motion. She didn't notice how life bustled around her, loud and colourful and exuberant. Merchants shouted to her right and left. Children laughed, music played in front of the town hall. And in the town hall, negotiations continued. Störtebeker was still in town. But she didn't notice any of the hustle and bustle. Plates were clattering to the ground at the stand next to her, it was loud, but Alva sat there and hardly noticed anything. A woman wanted to buy apples from her, but when Alva didn't react, she threw the shilling into her lap.

Another woman walked on without buying anything. Some customers just took what they needed and put eggs and cheese in the basket instead. Martha watched all this. She got up from her stand and said to Bruno: 'Would you please get some wood for me and the little lantern, the oil lamp?' Then she went over to Alva. She sat down beside her on her knees. She had brought the small fireplace with her. She used Bruno's wood to start a fire and set up her cast-iron pot. She filled the kettle with water, then began to cut the old apples. Martha peeled away all the bad parts and cut the rest into large pieces and put them into the boiling water. Bruno came back again, this time with his little brother Anselm, who clung to Bruno and looked very sadly at Alva.

'Mummy, do you need anything else? Dad asks,' he whispered. The mother asked for some sweet syrup. "And bring another jug of water, please!" Bruno and Anselm brought everything she needed, while Alreich was busy selling the goods at her actual market stall.

Meanwhile, the market day had become a big folk festival. There were many more people than usual. Loud music and happy crowds now characterised the market. Alva watched it with the boys, but without letting the Grapen out of her sight. In the meantime, the apple-water mixture had turned

into a puree and the first buyers stopped. 'What are you cooking?' one of them asked. 'But it smells delicious!' said another. "It's apple sauce. Would you like to try some?" "Oh yes, I'd love to." Several people gathered at the stand. "I'd love to try some too!" said the potter, handing her a small plate. Martha filled it with apple sauce and gave it back to him. The potter tasted it and grimaced, then broke into a warm smile. But Alva sat idly by, not even noticing the hustle and bustle around the stand. Martha was now selling the apple sauce. Bruno brought more wood, helped cut the apples, and soon both baskets were empty. Alva didn't even recognise Peter, who wanted to share his news with her and had therefore made a small detour via the market. This time he had pelts under his arm that he was supposed to deliver. Alva had noticed Peter's worried look at the sad Alva sitting there and called him over. He told him what he suspected. Peter understood, nodded goodbye and went on. Actually, Peter had wanted to tell her about the evening with his father and about the adventure that was now in store for him. But now he hadn't had the heart to approach her. Alva stirred, she couldn't sit any longer. Her bottom hurt from the hard box despite all the blankets. She was hungry and exhausted. Martha handed her apple sauce and sat down on the box next to the girl. She gave her a big hug and said, 'We're always here for you if you need us.' The words and the hug felt good and Alva no longer felt so alone.

Martha was kind and smelled good. Martha was soft. Martha looked like her mother and she felt as if her mother had come back to her in Martha to comfort her. Alva pulled Martha close and hugged her as hard as she could. Martha let her. And Alva thought she would never let her go. She would never let go of the farming family again. Martha stroked Alva's head and said, 'It'll be okay. Eventually you'll understand that everything that happens has a purpose. Everything has a reason, you just need patience. You only understand a lot when you're an adult, and some things only when you're old, as old as Helmke. She had a good life. She had you, Alva.' Alva nodded and said, 'Maria said she went to sleep peaceful, with a smile on her face.' 'Well, you see,' said Martha. 'Then it's all right.'

Then it was meant to be. She'd be so proud of you, if she could see you now, bravely running her stand.' 'Yes.' Alva was proud, all right. Now she felt good, somehow grown up. Now she was an adult and she was proud of herself. 'Georg said that I should take the car to Mr Müller in Böttcherstraße. That means I won't be here tomorrow.' Martha nodded thoughtfully but with a smile. 'But you can help me here...' she pointed over to her stand, '...and Alva and the children will be happy to have you around. They don't have a sister yet!'

Martha stroked her belly and only then did Alva notice that her belly was big and she was expecting a baby. Alva smiled. "I'm happy for you," she said, hugging Martha once more. 'Look, I'm going to go to my cart and relieve Alva so he can get a break. You stir the apple sauce and when it's all gone, just let the fire go out. But please take the kettle down first. Now you just have to stir it well so it doesn't burn!' With that, she got up and walked over to her cart down the narrow aisle. People came and bought apple sauce, jam, pumpkins, and bouquets of dried flowers. The fire burned down. There was still a little apple sauce left in it and Alva enjoyed it. It tasted so wonderfully sweet and fruity, she had never tasted anything like it before. She was glad that this day could still have a happy ending. Unfortunately, Peter didn't come by anymore. He was frightened and didn't know how to deal with Alva's sadness. Many people had gathered again in front of the town hall. They could only hope that a pact with the Likedeelers would be more beneficial than disadvantageous for them. Probably the many pirates would leave Wismar now. Nobody wanted to miss that.

Alva packed her things together. She also saw that the farmer's family was leaving. They packed more than usual on the previous evenings. They would probably go back to their farm. 'It's lucky,' thought Alva, 'that they are leaving the market at the same time as me. Otherwise I wouldn't survive tomorrow.' She was glad that she could hand in the cart. Everything would remind her of Helmke. She would have to find a new job. Maybe she could help Peter deliver the goods. Then he could learn more Latin and his father would be happy. She would discuss this with Peter tonight.

She had finished loading her cart, looked around to see if she had forgotten anything, and went over to the farmers. 'I wanted to say goodbye and thank you for helping me!' The boys hugged her. 'See you soon!' they said and continued playing.

Martha and Alreich held hands and beamed at Alva. Alreich stroked his wife's belly. 'It's strange,' Alva wondered, 'that I hadn't noticed the pregnancy at all until just now.' They looked happy. They were a great family. 'Goodbye. See you soon!' 'See you soon,' they both said, smiling. Alva thought it was a bit strange. She thought the farewell would have been much more moving. As she walked away, she turned around again, and they were still standing there, smiling from ear to ear and waving at her. When she passed Wismar town hall with her empty cart, there was still a lot of commotion. She only saw soldiers and guards. Unfortunately, no Klaus Störtebeker.

Maybe the pirates were still in the building. Fortunately, everything seemed to be going peacefully, because she didn't hear any fighting or shouting from inside. They would probably get along this time, the rich councilors and the infamous pirates. Alva took the cart to Franz in Böttcherstrasse. After that, she wanted to stop by Hugo's and possibly wake him up. Peter would join them later. She walked slowly towards the harbour, past narrow, tall, richly decorated gabled houses.

Luckily, Hugo was already awake. He was sitting with his father Hans on the steps of Hans's brewery. Many of his siblings were playing tag in front of it. Alva was unsure whether she wanted to run into Hans. But then she realised that the day couldn't get any worse, pulled herself together and went over to them. 'Well, pirate doll!' Hans grinned at her. 'Hello Alva, I'm glad you came.' Hugo stood up and disappeared into the brewery.

Hans was still sitting on the stairs. At eye level, they glared at each other. Hans' eyes narrowed into slits, he grinned more and more, until he finally nodded in approval. "Your father is certainly proud of you, pirate doll." Alva couldn't breathe anymore, she cramped up inside, and a tremendous rage rose up in her. She just wanted to slap him. She just had to do it. She was so angry: all the stinking rags, that nasty grin, the name and now the allusion to her father. That was too much! What was it all about, why was he being like that to her? Her fist clenched, she took a deep breath and... there came Hugo with bread and a filled cloth in his arms and three jugs of beer in his hand. 'Coming?' he called as he walked past Alva's back. Alva turned on the spot and ran after him through the city gate to the harbour.

Peter was already waiting at their usual place. He looked nervous. In the background, the pirate cogs could be seen. They were being loaded with weapons, cannons and provisions. The friends sat down. Alva, as always, in the middle and Hugo distributed the food they had brought. They ate and drank in silence. They saw how the light of the setting sun bathed the harbour in a warm orange and it seemed as if the day would lose all its hectic and heaviness, as if there were only light feathers in the crates and bales. The workers slowed down, became quieter and more cheerful. A light breeze ruffled the Baltic Sea and clouds gathered on the horizon for the first time in a long time. 'Helmke is dead,' Alva said into the silence. Both boys paused in their movement. Again, silence. 'So, what are you going to do now?' Hugo wanted to know. Both put an arm around her. Alva savoured the moment.

'I'll choose a new door, one of the fives.' Hugo looked at her blankly. "Huh?" Then he bit into his cheese and continued watching the hustle and bustle at the harbour. A small black cat approached Hugo leisurely. "Alva..." Peter said. '...I have something to tell you too. My father came home last night and told of many adventures. He spoke of trade routes and contacts. He wants me to become a merchant like him one day.' He spoke awkwardly, anxiously and haltingly. "That's why I should also learn Latin, navigation and geography, arithmetic and writing. He wants me to accompany him on the next trip..." Alva held her breath. More news like that! When would the terrible news finally stop? 'You're going on a ship, you're leaving Wismar?' She was so jealous: he would be sailing. She was sad: he would no longer be with her. A seagull cawed overhead. No one said anything. No one dared swallow or even breathe. The little cat crept along all the legs with relish, once there and back. The mood was tense until Alva announced, 'I'm happy for you!' Hugo

let out a loud sigh of relief and bit into his bread. 'What?' Peter asked. 'Aren't you sulky or sad or hitting me?' 'Yes, I actually want to!' She grinned at him, looked into his beautiful eyes and already missed him. 'I wholeheartedly grant you that. Go on your journey, but you have to promise me that you will come back. And you have to promise me that you won't play the hero! I want you to come back to Wismar in one piece. If pirates come, hide!' She took a gulp from the beer mug. "You must come back to Wismar. I will wait for you here!" "Really?" Peter looked hopefully into her eyes. Their noses touched very closely. She almost felt the soft skin, his gentle breath. He didn't want to stop looking at her. She enjoyed it. It was only a brief moment, but now she knew that she and Peter belonged together. Alva was happy, happier than she had ever been in her entire life.

Peter turned to Hugo, who was chewing: 'So, how was your day? Did you invent a new type of beer?' 'Yes, I tried something new today. Smoked fish.' Alva snorted. 'Yuck!' Peter laughed, almost screamed. 'You can't be serious, it can't taste good.' 'No, it doesn't taste good either.' Hugo shook his head. 'It was supposed to taste like the harbour and the sea, I wanted to create a Hanseatic beer. In the end, I threw it all away.' 'The fruit...' said Peter, "was a really good idea. Why not try other fruits?" "Yes, or maybe even spices," suggested Alva. "Sometimes there is cinnamon at the market." "Yes, exactly!" confirmed Peter. He took out a small bag and handed it to Hugo. Peter said, 'There are different spices in here. Take a look!' He took out a small piece of paper and unwrapped it. Inside was a powder. 'Let me smell it!' Alva replied. 'What is it?' Peter answered, 'It's curry.' Alva passed the paper to Hugo, who was very surprised by the pleasant smell. Peter folded up the paper, put it aside and took out another one. This one had a red powder in it, and they both sniffed. 'And what is this?' asked Hugo. 'That's...' Peter sniffed it again. '...that's paprika!' 'Why do you have all this in your bag?' asked Alva. 'My father wants me to learn this. I should be able to recognise it later when we travel.' Hugo nodded appreciatively. Peter unwrapped the next paper and so it went on for a while, until they had gone through all the spices. It was wonderful, everyone felt like they were in a different city, and Hugo tried to remember everything. 'Can you bring me something from your travels, so I can make great beer? I promise! Maybe you can even bring me some new types of hops?' Hugo said to Peter. Peter laughed. "Of course I will. I'll bring you anything you want. If you brew good beer, I'll sell your beer all over the world!" "Great!" Hugo was pleased. 'That's a great plan. I'll do it!' They sat on the crates and watched the hustle and bustle at the harbour, enjoying the late summer, the warm sun on their faces as it slowly set. They listened to the seagulls singing overhead and watched the kittens scattered all over the harbour. It was a beautiful time, Alva thought. The day started terribly, but its end is so wonderful. She thought. Only one thing is missing... and she immediately wrinkled her nose, thinking of the smelly, sticky rag of Hugo's father, who would probably meet someone like him every night. But this time she wouldn't be the victim. This time she wouldn't be able to stand that smelly rag, stuck with chunks and hair, on her head. Everything in her began to tense up, as if she were lying in wait, secretly waiting for what was to come.

She tensed up. Alva was already so tense that it hurt. Then at last she felt a draft, sensed that someone was standing behind her, jumped up, turned around and screamed, 'No! Not today!' and punched with full force into a belly. She didn't see who was standing in front of her, she was quite sure it was Hans, as always. Alva felt that someone was standing in front of her, but the chest wasn't as soft as she had expected, not as soft as that of a fat, overweight man. Time stood still for a moment, all the sounds around her ceased. The hair on the back of her neck stood on end and an unpleasant feeling crept up on her. She shuddered at the realisation that her fist did not disappear into Hans' guts, but instead literally bounced off. She heard a soft, stifled groan. Alva hardly dared to raise her eyes. The man standing in front of her was at least as tall as Hugo's father, only much sturdier.

And there was no wet rag in his hands. He had one hand on the end of the sword he wore at his belt. The other was clenched into a fist. Alva stood frozen, not daring to move. Somehow she hoped it would all be a dream or that she was invisible. She wanted to vanish into thin air right then



and there. Beneath his rolled-up sleeves were very muscular arms, tanned and covered with fine scars. Alva kept her head bowed, frozen, with her fist in a strange man's stomach. She saw his fist relax and move very slowly to her cramped fist in his stomach. Carefully, the large, tanned, strong hand lay on her small, petrified one. Alva was ashamed. She was embarrassed. Squinting, she gathered all her courage. Then she slowly raised her head, just enough to realise that the man in front of her was not Hans! He stood there with a sword and black, worn boots, in a yellow shirt, a beige-coloured robe and a red waistcoat! Oh no, thought Alva, her gaze went higher and higher until she recognised the face. She looked into a very friendly, smiling face. At the moment their eyes met, pupil in pupil, Alva was struck as if by lightning. Everything in her body twitched: from the tip of her toes to the last nerve in her brain. She was shocked and felt as if she were about to faint. Could it be? Yes! She was sure! Now she knew: this was the naked truth. She looked into her father's eyes! She looked into his eyes and instantly recognised an unconditional love. Tears welled up in her eyes. What a crazy day! A pleasant warmth spread inside her, like an invisible embrace, she was unspeakably happy. That was Klaus Störtebeker, standing before her. Klaus Störtebeker was her father! Was that possible? He grinned and she got goosebumps. Very gently and carefully, he released her hand from his stomach. He opened it and placed it on his heart. And in that moment, she realised that he knew exactly that Alva was his daughter. She could feel his heartbeat. Very slowly, she became aware of her surroundings again. Behind her father stood Hans, who didn't have a cloth in his hand today. He sniffed and wiped his dripping nose with the back of his hand. His eyes were moist and he looked terribly happy. Did he know about this all along? To his right, Hugo stood with a cuddly black cat in his arms. His eyes were fixed on the fur ball. On the other side stood Georg and Maria, both holding each other and looking at Alva. Alva immediately understood that Georg hadn't recognised his father. Was eye contact missing? And right next to them: Peter! Alva couldn't interpret what Peter felt. Everyone except Hugo had seen the incident. When she realised how grotesque the situation must look, she took a step back and whispered, 'I'm sorry,' without taking her eyes off his blue eyes. 'It's all right,' he whispered back. He smiled so lovingly that you could see his white teeth. Klaus Störtebeker was her father! Klaus Störtebeker had broken her mother's heart and then left her with her children to become Likedeeler! What did people say? Klaus Störtebeker and his pirates saved many people's lives, but also destroyed those of many others. A million things were whirling around in Alva's head, she heard Helmke's voice: 'You have seawater instead of blood in your veins!' Longing crept into her guts and clung deeper and deeper into her flesh with its sharp claws. In her father's blue eyes, she saw the rough, cool sea, the adventure and the freedom and unlimited possibilities. And she felt that it was right, that he was doing the right thing. It was right to give in to the pull when the sea caressed your bare feet and wooed you to come with her. When Klaus Störtebeker moved to slowly and imperceptibly begin searching for something in his pocket, Alva let go of him and took another step back. She wanted to see him fully. He was tall, muscular and strong, brave and self-confident. They smiled at each other. Imperceptibly, he pulled a small bag out of his belt pouch. From the bag, he took a coin, a large, golden coin. Klaus took Alva by the hand and looked deep into her eyes. He looked happy as he pulled her close and whispered in her ear: 'Don't betray yourself! And take care of yourself, promise me that you will always listen to your heart, no one should be allowed to control you!' And after a short pause, with moist eyes: 'I love you very much!' At that moment, he pressed the coin into her hand, very carefully and without much ado. Alva immediately closed her hand around it, hoping that no one would see her do it. He then turned abruptly and began to walk again, without turning around even once. Behind him, his companions followed, who had meanwhile come through the city gate and were on their way to the pirate ships, accompanied by the city fathers.

The pirates went back to their ships. It took a while before they were all on board and the last goods had been stowed away. Alva stood there, speechless. She was paralysed. She was so happy. How could it be that one is so very sad that one no longer wants to live, and a few hours

later one is so happy that one wants to embrace the whole world? Life was crazy. Many people had gathered at the harbour to see the Vitalienbrüder off. They wished them luck in the fight against the Danes. Suddenly Alva noticed Georg and Maria approaching her. Georg stood in front of her, blocking her view of the cogs. 'Is it true?' Alva asked, looking at her big brother. 'Is it true that Störtebeker will never be arrested in Wismar, that he is welcome here anytime and can sell his stolen goods at the market, that he will probably come ashore in Wismar more often now?' "Yes, that's right," said Georg kindly.

'He will never be arrested in Wismar. He belongs with us now. He was born here. He will always find a home here and he can sell his wares here, at the market or via the Wismar merchant cogs. Or he can find someone to do it for him.' Georg winked at her, laughing. Alva brooded, wondering if Georg knew that Klaus Störtebeker was her father, but she didn't dare ask him here, in front of all these people. There would be time for that later. Besides, she had promised. Under no circumstances did she want to put herself or her brother in danger. If anyone found out that Klaus Störtebeker loved someone, they could become potential hostages. That could be used to pressure Störtebeker and could put her and Georg in mortal danger. Alva looked at her brother. From the side, he really did look like Störtebeker. She was so proud. 'Now I have a great family, too!' she thought to herself and squeezed her coin in her hand. Imperceptibly, she let the coin slide into her bag around her waist. Alva sat back down on the crate. Peter and Hugo did the same. Georg fetched a few more sacks and sat down with Maria next to them. They took Alva and brought her into their midst. George put his arm around his little sister. Maria asked Alva about her day. She wanted to know if she was doing well. Alva looked at the cogs and tried to make out the red vest. Then she remembered that it was Maria who had told her to go to the market that morning, who had urged her to move on and go her way even though she had absolutely no strength to do so. If she hadn't gone to market with the cart this morning, she wouldn't be sitting here now and would have missed her father. It was funny, but it couldn't be that Mary knew this day would happen that way. It was strange that Mary was so anxious for Alva to go to market. She was good. Mary was a good woman, and she wanted Georg and Mary to be together. Maria had a good mind and a good heart. Maria put her arm around Alva, as if she had heard her thoughts. The girl snuggled close to her. Maria returned the embrace and pulled Peter close, too. 'Thank you!' Alva said. 'Thank you for being there!' And they all looked out at the harbour, where the pirates were about to depart. 'There's something we both need to tell you, or rather ask you.' George stood up, went to Alva, and pulled her up. "So...", he thought, "...where do I start?" Maria slapped her hand down on his thigh with a crash.

'Well, go on!' She rolled her eyes. Alva smiled questioningly at him. "What is it?" she asked hesitantly. Georg scratched his blond hair and began thoughtfully. 'You know the friendly farmer family from the market across from Helmke's stand. At the word Helmke, his voice lost its strength and tears welled up in Alva's eyes. She nodded and Georg looked towards the city wall for help. Alva followed his gaze and immediately recognised Alreich and his family. They were all sitting on their large carts, their old horse Trudi harnessed, ready to go home. Bruno waved excitedly. The sight of the boy filled her with warmth. 'I have to tell you...' Georg continued. 'Martha is our aunt, she is our mother's sister. Maria and I wanted to ask you if you would like to live with them in the country for a while.' Alva was speechless. 'You can't go back to our room!' Georg continued. 'Why not?' Alva wanted to know. Georg bit his lip, then lowered his eyes and groaned. This morning, unfortunately, you didn't close the pigsty door properly...' Alva wanted to protest, but then hung both shoulders. Maria reached for her hand and squeezed it. George took her by both shoulders and shook her gently. Now Alva saw that he had to grin. 'In any case, the pig took its chance and completely devastated the courtyard garden, dragged the laundry into the dirt, frightened and scared away the chickens, polished off all the grains and then continued its mischief in the candle kitchen of Gustav and Gustje.' Maria continued, 'Your brother has already fixed most of it, only Gustje and Gustav are still a little annoyed, after all, their workshop is completely devastated.' Alva

was shocked and wide-eyed. Georg saw his sister's shock and tried to calm her down: 'I paid them off with the money from our sailboat. Actually, I wanted to give you the money now, if you go your own way. Now you'll have to look for work again.' Alva looked over her brother's shoulder at the sea. She missed her little boat, but she also felt certain that one day she would have a new one. George waved over to the city wall. Alreich jumped down from the coach box. He came over and stood in front of Alva: strong, with his legs apart, but with a warm look in his eyes. He held out a closed fist towards her. Their eyes met briefly and she felt the warmth in her heart. 'We're giving this to you!' He opened his fist. She looked inside and saw seeds. Lots of marigold seeds! He repeated: 'We are giving you this for a fresh start and much more. I would like you to create a small bed with flowers and medicinal plants for us. We need someone who enjoys the work and knows their way around.' Alva blushed. 'We will then sell these to doctors and hospitals in Wismar at the market!' Alva looked down at Maria, who looked out to sea stiffly at the word 'hospitals'. 'These can be used to make healing ointments and tinctures to heal sick people.' He put his hand on her shoulder. 'That should be your job. These and many others, if you like.' And because Alva didn't move, he added: 'If you come to our farm and live with us in Hornstorf, you will get your own room, your own bed and something to eat every day. In return, we ask that you help us with the work. Of course, you are always welcome to come with us to Wismar as soon as we go to the market and visit your friends and Georg!' Alva felt dizzy with happiness. She was so happy and grateful. Helmke had been so right: it all makes sense somehow. She had found it, her door into a new, into a wider life. She decided that it was the fifth door she would go through. 'Well, what do you say?' Alva turned to her brother. What a picture: behind him the three cogs and the slowly setting sun in the west!

George stood there, with the sun at his back, looking incredibly proud. He was not only proud, but also very happy. 'And when you have enough money, you can buy your own little sailing boat. Maybe one day you'll be the first woman to sail on a cog and trade with other Hanseatic cities.' He looked conspicuously at Peter, who crossed his arms, grinned and tried to look very adult. Georg took Alva's hands and pulled her close. 'Keep your dreams, Alva, we are very proud of you.' A little boy squeaked from the carriage. 'Alvaaaa!' Anselm shouted over. Alva waved back and recognised the colourful chest, a basket with Helmke's chickens in it, the large bed, table and chairs. Alva turned back to her brother. Frowning, she shook her head with amusement. Georg grinned back. 'So, what do you say? Do you want a farm life?' Alva looked out to sea towards the cogs. She knew what she wanted, and she had known ever since Georg had first asked her. 'Yes! Yes, I do!' And she thought, 'Now I've opened my fifth door.' It was a glorious late summer evening, the sun shining and bathing the harbour in an orange light. The smell of smoked fish, wood and tar wafted over from the harbour basin, a light breeze blew from west to northeast. On the horizon, you could see the silhouettes of three heavily laden cogs with which Klaus Störtebeker was sailing in the direction of Stockholm.

*Translated with DeepL.com (Pro version)*