

**Count-down
in
Ludwigsburg**

A modern fairy tale

by
Gerry Barton

Warning:
Not to be taken
too seriously!

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Chapter 1

‘Have you seen this?’ Mr Nolde asked his wife. He was reading the Saturday morning newspaper over breakfast. He held it high. That way he did not have to watch his children’s bad manners while he drank his coffee.

‘Hardly,’ replied his wife, carrying in toast from the kitchen. ‘You’ve been keeping it all to yourself.’

‘It’s about that young lad Saussele, Boris Saussele.’

‘Oh dear, what’s he done now?’ she groaned. She sat down at the other end of the table. ‘Burned down the bus shelter? Did you know he tried to wreck the Heilbronn train last week? I heard it from his poor mother that he put an iron bar on the track by the bridge.’

‘He’s the boy who let Hans’ rabbits free,’ said Raphael, their five year old son.

‘And turned on all the water taps in the school one Friday afternoon,’ added Lillian, his nine year old sister. ‘The building was flooded.’

‘Hmmm, well it might be worse than that this time,’ said Mr Nolde, ‘he seems to have disappeared. That’s what the paper says.’

‘Really?’ asked his wife. ‘When?’

‘He hasn’t been home for two nights,’ he replied. ‘It says here that he was last seen near the playground in the park, on Thursday.’

‘A bad boy. But to go missing, how terrible for his parents.’

‘His sister will be pleased,’ said Raphael through a mouthful of toast. ‘She hates him, she told me so.’

‘And any clues as to what might have happened?’ asked Mrs Nolde.

‘None. It only says that the police are concerned.’

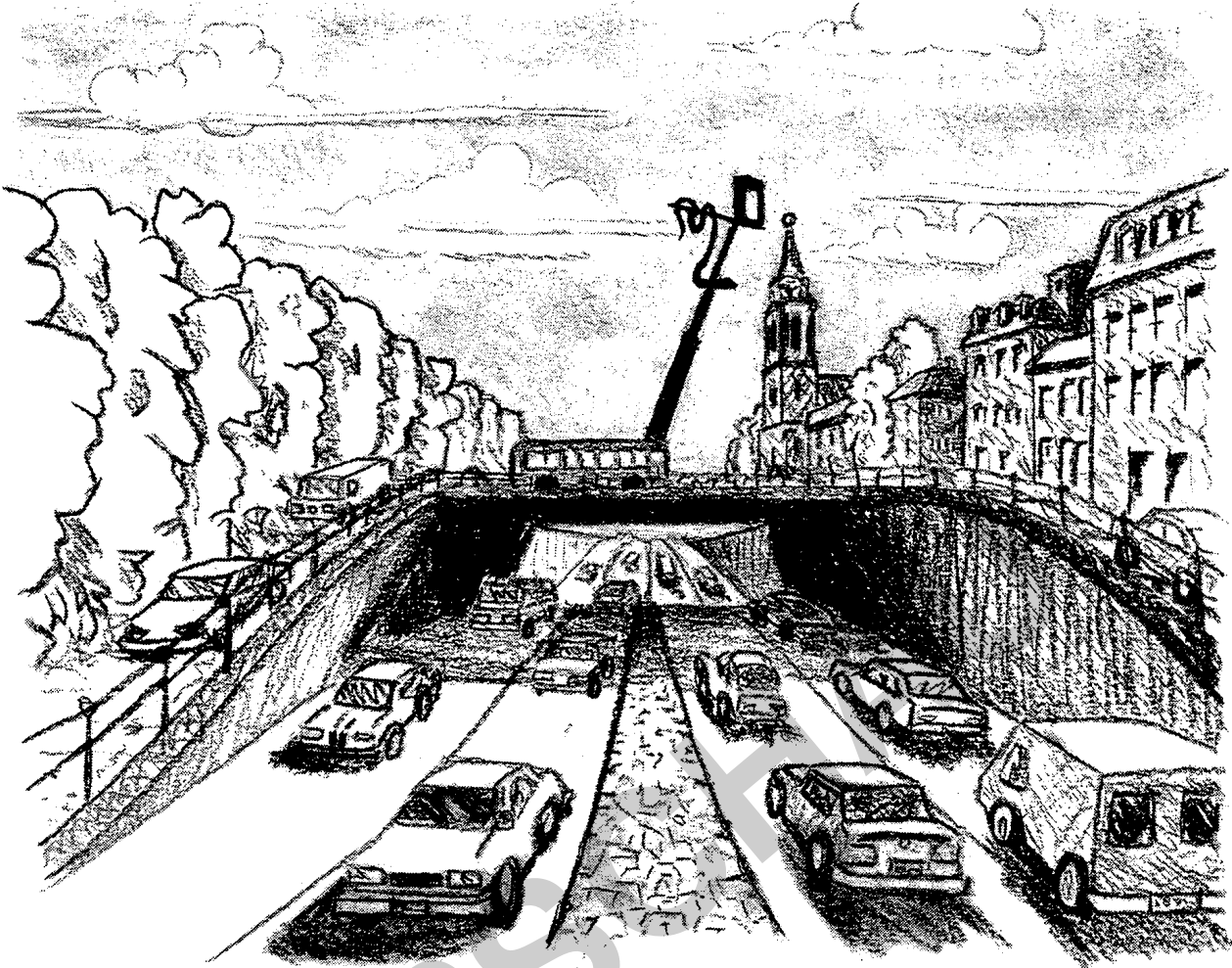
‘I bet the snake ate him,’ said Lillian.

Mr Nolde lowered his paper. ‘Snake? What snake?’

‘The one above the intersection,’ replied his wife. ‘You know, the piece of modern art in town. Lillian thinks it is alive.’

‘It is too,’ said Lillian. ‘It is in a different position every day.’

‘It’s metal, Lillian. It’s a very expensive work of art, not something from the 19th century. How it is no more alive than the



*The snake's pole was on top of a column.
This stuck out of the traffic island like a telescope.*

Chapter 2

The mayor was right, people did get used to the snake above the roads. Soon only tourists and children noticed it.

But everything changed one May night in the middle of a thunderstorm.

It started just like any other summer storm in Ludwigsburg. During the afternoon a wall of clouds had stacked up to the west of the town beyond the Franck factory. Then, later, as people were watching the evening shows on television, it arrived. The wind rattled the shutters of their houses. The rain clattered down.

‘What is the matter?’ asked Lillian with interest.

‘Idiots running wild in the palace grounds. They spoil the place for everybody. They smashed into the big bird cage and killed a dozen of those ibis.’

‘Those lovely bright orange birds with the long beaks?’

‘That’s right: South American ibis.’

‘South America?’ echoed the children.

‘That’s what I said. From Brazil in fact.’

Lillian and Raphael looked at each other across the breakfast table.

‘The night before last?’ asked Lillian hesitantly.

‘Yes.’ Her father lowered the newspaper and gave her a look of curiosity.

‘Why? Do you know something about it?’

‘It’s the snake,’ blurted out Raphael.

‘Shut up! You are not to say anything about him,’ shouted Lillian.

‘Oh, the snake again,’ said her father, breaking into a smile. ‘First Boris Saussele, now the birds in the gardens. My goodness, he has a healthy appetite - for a statue.’

Lillian relaxed. Their father still didn’t take them seriously. Good. She gave her brother a cross look, and then returned to her breakfast.

‘You ate those ibis, didn’t you?’ she said to the Count as soon as he had got his huge body into the room.

‘Naturally.’ His tongue flicked around his lips several times. ‘They were delicious.’

‘There has been a colossal fuss about their disappearance. You’ll be lucky if you don’t get arrested.’

The snake turned pale. ‘But ... but what else was I supposed to do? I learn the other night that I am South American, eat large birds and little animals. I also happen to know that the label in front of the cage says that ibis are from Brazil. What could be more reasonable, I ask you? South American anaconda eats South American bird. It is like one and one make two. Or -’ He gave a grin. ‘- in this case, one plus one makes a delicious snack. I could have eaten twice as many but I didn’t have the time to round them up.’



A lovely bright orange bird with a long beak.

‘Try and stick to pigeons in future,’ said Lillian. ‘Nobody will notice the loss of them. But those orange ibis were special.’

‘I didn’t come here to be lectured, you know,’ grumbled the Count.

‘You are going to have to be more careful if you want to stay free,’ said Lillian. ‘It is important to eat only what people won’t notice.’

‘Sounds *so* appetising,’ said the Count rudely.

‘Like Boris the Beastly,’ added Raphael.

The snake cheered up. ‘Oh, so that naughty boy was all right?’

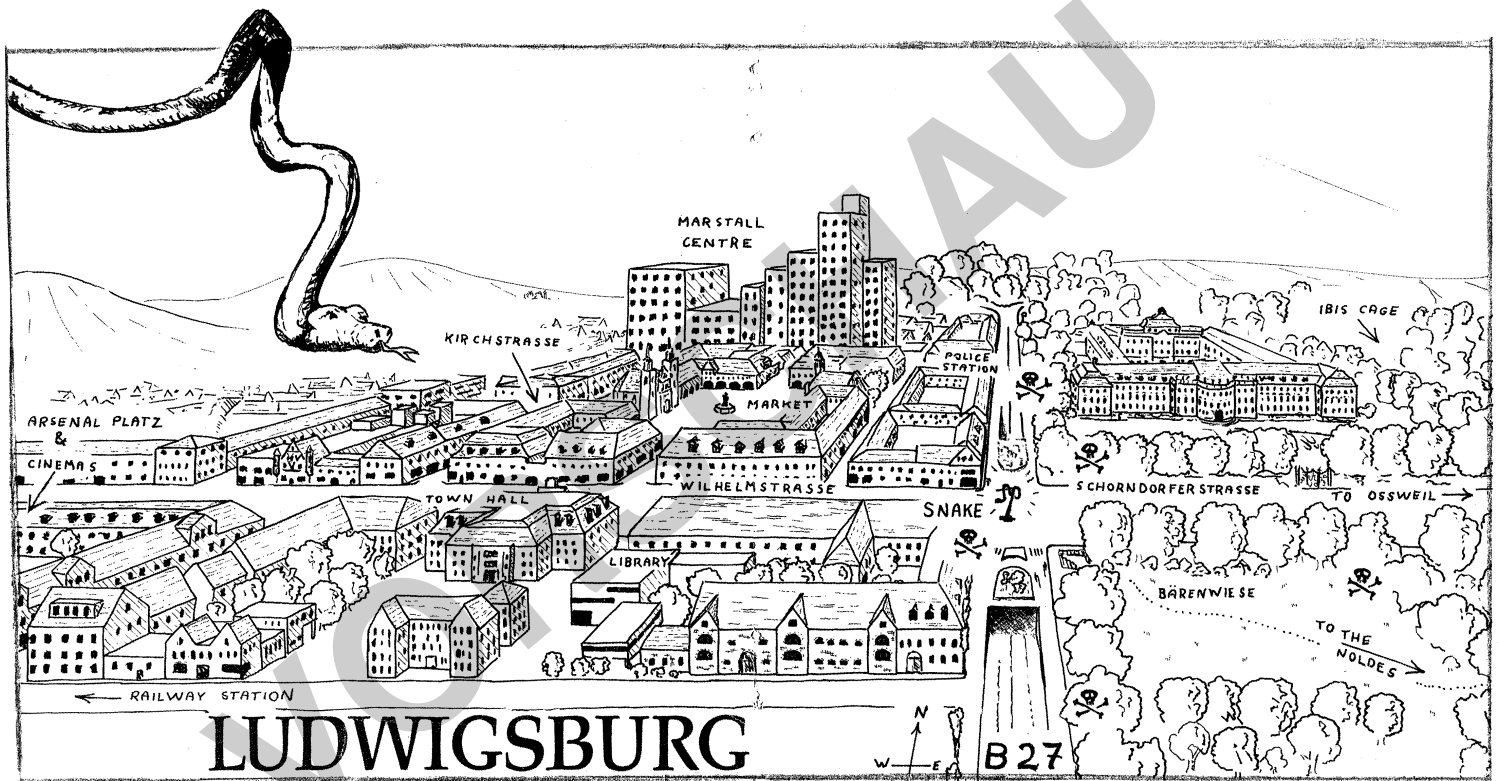
‘Oh yes, he’s not been missed - I mean missed in a nice way - at all,’ said Lillian.

Then Raphael had an idea.

‘We could give you a list of awful people in Ludwigsburg who we hate. And you could have them for supper whenever you were hungry.’

The snake smiled at the idea.

‘Actually, there’s something in what you say which appeals to the anaconda code of honour.’ He looked thoughtful. ‘Do you know Batman?’



The box on the top became a home for some pigeons.

Lillian and Raphael kept their secret. They often wondered how their friend was keeping. But they never worried about him. He would be okay. Just once, they heard so.

‘Your Count has written,’ said Mrs Nolde the next summer. ‘Here’s a letter for you two from Venezuela.’

Lillian opened it quickly. Inside was a photograph.

‘Look!’

It was of the Count. Nobody could mistake that big grin of his. It seemed wider than ever. And the reason was obvious. About him were a number of tiny snakes.

‘He has a family!’

‘What has been written on the picture?’ asked Raphael.

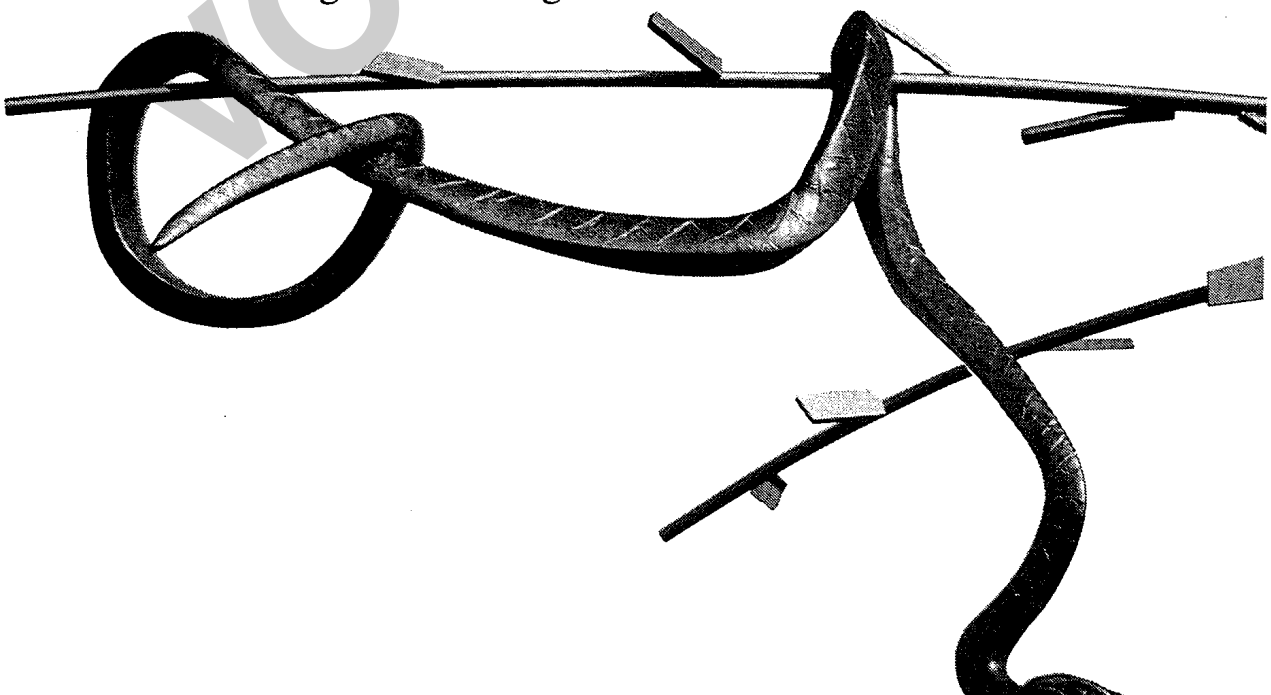
They looked. A couple of arrows had been drawn there with names written above them. One was ‘Raphael’ and it pointed to a small snake at the edge of the photo. ‘Lillian’ was to another next to him.

‘Wow!’

‘One day we are going to have to visit them,’ said Lillian.

They noticed another arrow. This pointed to another baby snake. At its top was written ‘Ludwig’.

The Count had forgotten nothing.



ORAL EXERCISES

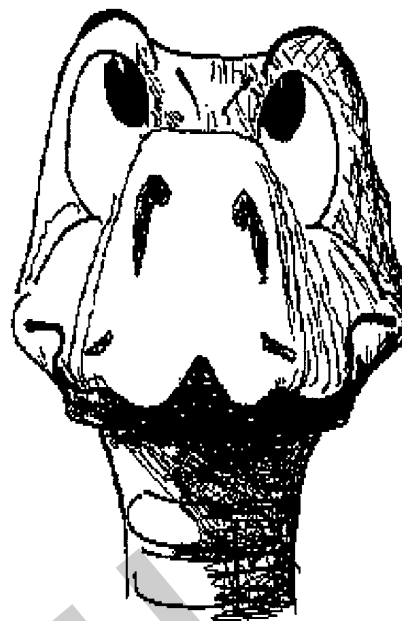
Chapter 1

A. Fact Finder

1. The Noldes
 - a) how many in the family?
 - b) what are they doing?
 - c) who are they talking about?

2. Boris Saussele
 - a) who was he?
 - b) what had happened to him?
 - c) what does Lillian think happened to him?

3. The snake
 - a) what was he?
 - b) what was he made out of?
 - c) how big was he?
 - d) where was he?



B. Summary

Look at the following notes and try to summarize chapter 1.

The snake:

new art work in Ludwigsburg, is on a traffic island above busy roads, not liked by people, looks too real, Mayor not interested about him.

The talk at breakfast:

Mr Nolde reads the newspaper, Boris Saussele in the news, hasn't been home for two days, Raphael and Lillian talk about him, police worried about him.

Chapter 6

A. Fact Finder

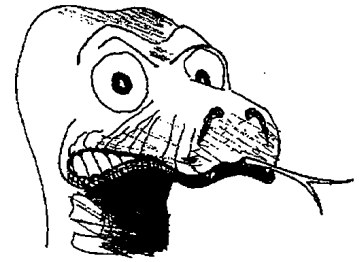
Find details about the following people:

1. Miss Bunte
2. Mrs Fink
3. Mr Icke

What were they like?

What jobs did they have?

What happened to them?



B Summary

Talk about the snake, using the following ideas:

digesting a dozen ibis - did the job properly - fatter than normal - you would have loved it - the Count blushed - shook his great head sadly - take the word of an anaconda - can't stop eating - eat the worst of the drivers - I would if...

Chapter 7

A Fact Finder

1. the intersection
 - a) why were drivers angry?
 - b) why were Lillian and Raphael there?
 - c) what was the snake doing?
 - d) what had the driver of the BMW done?
2. the driver
 - a) how did the Count feel about him?
 - b) what was he doing when he crashed?
 - c) what happened to his car?

B. Summary of chapters 6 and 7

Talk about the problems of cars in Ludwigsburg, with the following ideas in mind:

angry drivers - too many cars - too many big cars - roads too wide -

driving manners - loud stereos - da...

4. Find expressions which mean the opposite of:

- | | |
|----------------|-----------------|
| 1. young | a) beautiful |
| 2. disappeared | b) friendly |
| 3. hates | c) be seen |
| 4. modern | d) to go slowly |
| 5. to conclude | e) loves |
| 6. hideous | f) old |
| 7. fearsome | g) to begin |
| 8. to race | h) traditional |

Chapter 2

1. True or false?

Here are some statements about what happens in chapter 2. Say whether each statement is true or false.

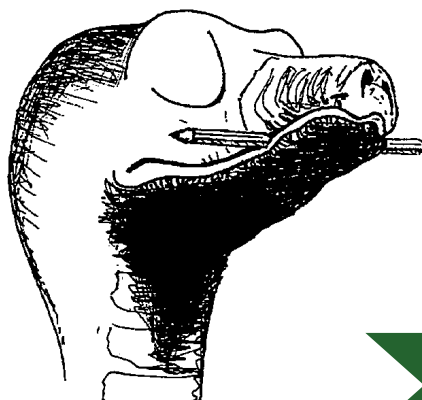
Correct it if necessary.

1. Ludwigsburg people never stopped complaining about the snake.
2. The storm came from the west.
3. First it rained, then the wind blew.
4. You hear thunder before you see lightning.

2. Definitions

Read chapter 2 again. Then find the words in the text for

1. things to be piled one on top of another
2. so bright you can't look at it
3. a flash of lightning
4. the noise thunder makes
5. a strange new sensation which is hard to describe



3. Tenses

Put the verbs in brackets into their correct tenses and forms.

It ... (to start) just like any other thunderstorm in Ludwigsburg. During the afternoon a wall of clouds ... (to stack up) to the west of the town. Then, later, as people ... (to watch) the evening shows on television, it ... (to arrive). The wind ... (to rattle) the shutters of their houses while the rain ... (to clatter down).

Chapter 3

1. Find the hidden words

X	P	L	A	C	E	Z	J	B	O	C	I	A	P
L	O	O	K	C	S	E	V	E	N	F	H	K	T
S	L	E	N	D	E	U	Q	T	K	U	F	N	U
R	E	B	P	I	C	T	U	R	E	S	Q	E	N
A	C	A	M	Y	O	V	S	I	B	G	S	W	E
L	O	N	K	A	N	D	A	M	O	F	D	R	X
I	I	C	D	P	D	C	R	C	N	R	M	B	P
V	E	A	J	V	E	R	Y	O	V	I	T	A	L
E	M	M	A	Z	S	E	D	T	H	E	M	X	A
G	T	E	T	R	A	F	F	I	C	N	E	P	I
X	T	R	H	P	J	U	I	R	V	D	R	W	N
P	L	A	S	T	I	C	T	E	H	V	A	K	N
Y	G	N	Q	O	W	H	O	L	I	D	A	Y	S
K	S	N	A	K	E	H	O	W	S	F	N	O	Y

6. to talk when somebody else is already speaking
7. to run away
8. to ask about something
9. to feel good about something
10. when you have 12 of anything

a dozen - library - horrible - to be optimistic - to have a chat - chapters - to inquire - to escape - illustrations - to interrupt

Chapter 6

1. Questions
 1. How long did it take before the Count became Ludwigsburg's Batman?
 2. Who did he eat?
 3. Who did Lillian want him to eat?
 4. What did Raphael and Lillian give the Count?
 5. What didn't the Count like about Mrs Fink?
 6. Why was Mr Icke hated by the students?
 7. Who now has Mrs Fink's shop?
 8. How did the Count feel about car drivers?
2. Complete these sentences, using phrases from the text:
 1. 'Is or is not ...
 2. 'Quickly I ...
 3. He was really...
 4. The shop lady's ...
 5. The teacher treated ...
 6. 'Then what about the man ...
 7. The children could see ...
 8. 'I'd eat him ...
3. Write a short newspaper report about the disappearance of people in Ludwigsburg, beginning:
Ludwigsburg - Popular shop-keeper, Mrs Fink, has not been seen for two days. Police have found... Earlier in the year a schoolboy, Boris Saussele, and a cinema ticket seller, Mrs Bunte, also...

Vocabulary

Chapter 1

bad manners	schlechte Manieren
lad	Bursche
she groaned	sie stöhnte
bus shelter	Bushaltestelle mit Häuschen
iron bar	Eisenstange
track	Gleis, Schienen
water tap	Wasserhahn
clues	Hinweise
to be concerned	sich Sorgen machen
snake	Schlange
intersection	Straßenkreuzung
pigs might fly	Sprichwort: etwas Unglaubliches
mayor	Bürgermeister
hideous	häßlich
distract	ablenken
tax-payer	Steuerzahler
column	Säule
lamp pole	Lampenmast
sloped	schrägstehend
to be designed	konstruiert / geplant sein
replica	Nachbildung
anaconda	Art Riesenschlange
fearsome brute	angsteinflößendes Untier
jaws	Kiefer
gulp	verschlingen
pedestrians	Fußgänger

Chapter 2

thunderstorm	Gewitter
stacked up	aufgetürmt
beyond	jenseits
shutter	Fensterladen
lightning	Blitz
bolt	Blitzschlag
unearthly	unirdisch
grime	Schmutz

Chapter 3

backyard	Garten, Hinterhof
to network	hart
lernen	