

Inhaltsverzeichnis

[Wanted Posters](#)

[The Call](#)

[The Million](#)

[The Friends](#)

[The Briefing](#)

[The Trail](#)

[The Beer Drinker](#)

[The Photo](#)

[The Boss](#)

[The Plan](#)

[The Closet](#)

[The Voice](#)

[The Riddle](#)

[The Suitcase](#)

[The Suspicion](#)

[The Threat](#)

[The Underground Parking Garage](#)

[The Train Ride](#)

[The Key in the Lock](#)

[The Message](#)

[The Emergency Call](#)

[The Shot](#)

[The End](#)

[Another Ending](#)

Bo and the Blackmailers

Ulrich Renz



BO & FRIENDS

BO & FRIENDS



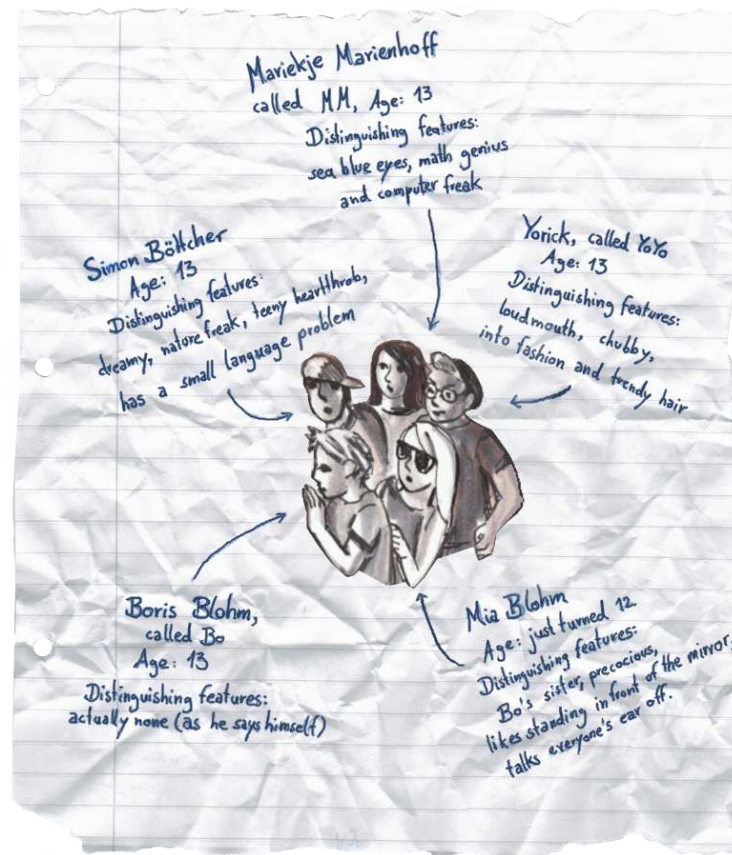
Ulrich Renz

Bo and the Blackmailers

**Translation from German by Vanessa
Agnew**

Wanted Posters

Bo & Friends



- *Name:* Boris Blohm, called **Bo**
- *Age:* 13
- *Distinguishing features:* actually none (as he says himself).

- *Name:* **Simon** Böttcher
- *Age:* 13

- *Distinguishing features:* dreamy, nature freak, teeny heartthrob, has a small language problem.
- *Name:* Mariekje Marienhoff, called **MM**
- *Age:* 13
- *Distinguishing features:* sea blue eyes, math genius and computer freak.

- *Name:* Yorick, called **YoYo**
- *Age:* 13
- *Distinguishing features:* loudmouth, chubby, into fashion and trendy hair.

- *Name:* **Mia** Blohm
- *Age:* just turned 12
- *Distinguishing features:* Bo's sister, precocious, likes standing in front of the mirror, talks everyone's ear off.

Author



- *Name:* Ulrich Renz, called **U**
- *Age:* middle aged
- *Distinguishing features:* loves Spaetzle (a sort of Southern German noodles), likes making music, used to be a doctor, now writes books for children and grown-ups. More at www.bo-and-friends.com.

Translator



- *Name:* Vanessa Agnew, called **Vanessa**
- *Age:* a bit younger than the author
- *Distinguishing features:* has lived in all English speaking continents, is a university professor, studies biology, lives in Berlin with a dog, two frogs, a pixie and a bookworm.

CHAPTER ONE

The Call

What crappy weather. Bo swore softly to himself as he stomped up the steps to the front door like a drowned rat. With dripping wet fingers he put the key into the lock. It was supposed to be summer, but for weeks they'd had nothing but rain.

In the hallway he kicked off his sneakers, hung his soaking wet jacket on the coat hook, and went to his room. He chucked off his wet clothes and rummaged around in the dresser for some dry ones. He chose some white socks, light brown trousers and a dark blue shirt. Actually, identical to the things he'd just had on, he thought to himself. His sister Mia would probably start nagging him again: "With clothes like that it's no wonder girls aren't interested in you." Mia was very interested in boys and usually spent her afternoons at the mall taking clothes on and off.

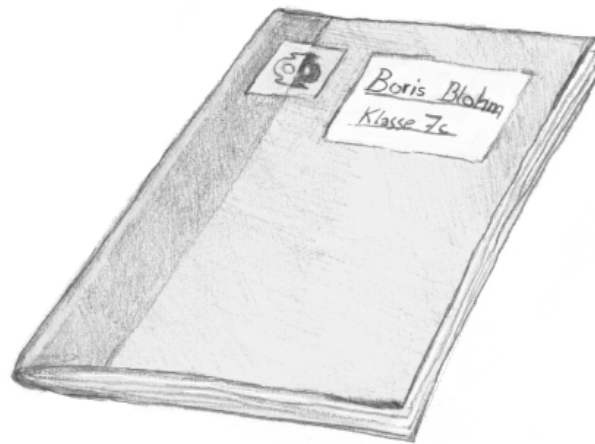
Bo knew he wasn't God's gift to girls. He wasn't especially tall, and he didn't look like any of the movie stars

on the posters in Mia's room. But he didn't care, he thought he was okay just the way he was - except perhaps for his hair. For as long as he could remember, it had been so shaggy and messy that he didn't need to bother with a comb or a brush. A few times he'd tried hair gel, but that made him look like Dracula. Now he only put a bit of gel in the front so that his hair jutted out from his forehead. "Hairstyle with built-in umbrella," his father kept teasing him, "use superglue instead, it lasts longer!" Well. Dad should take a look at his own hairdo.

Bo made himself comfortable on the soft rug under his loft bed. Luckily, his two-hour German class had been cancelled! His teacher, Siegwart, was probably still sleeping off one of his nightly drinking binges. Now he could focus on his math homework, and then maybe read his book, a super exciting thriller about a gang of blackmailers. At 1:30 pm his mom would come home from work, and then the nagging would start. "Could you please set the table? Empty the dishwasher? Take out the garbage?" When she started with her "could you please ...," he knew he could write off the next few hours.

He took his new exercise book, which he had bought on the way home, out of his school bag. When he wrote "Boris

Blohm, grade 7c” on it, he couldn’t help smiling. “Boris,” how strange that sounded to him ... For as long as he could remember, everybody’d called him “Bo.”



He’d just started with the first math problem, when the door creaked. Bo let out a muffled growl. Couldn’t he have a minute of peace in this house? One of Mia’s classes must have been cancelled as well. Of course she would immediately grab the phone, as always, and then he’d have to listen to her gossiping with her girlfriends, at full volume of course. Clearly, her vocal cords didn’t work any other way. It was usually about those stupid guys from her teeny magazines or some other boys from the parallel class ¹. And

about clothes of course, there was nothing else to talk about. Since she turned twelve, she behaved as if she were miles ahead of her brother in terms of life experience.

Bo was just about to get up to slam the door, when he saw his father's white mop of hair flash past the door. - What? Dad was home from work already? Usually he never came home before four in the afternoon. Bo remembered that morning's breakfast, when Dad had been in a stinking mood, even worse than he had been lately anyway. He'd made a scene because he thought Bo put too much jam on his bread. No, Bo didn't want to listen to all that again and decided to stay undercover.

He was just getting to the second math problem when the phone rang. Dad had already answered it after the first ring. It was as if he'd been waiting for the call, thought Bo. Usually, he'd let the phone ring forever - if he answered it at all.

"Hi there ..." The tremor in Dad's voice made Bo listen harder. A strange feeling came over him. He heard Dad wandering back and forth restlessly in the corridor. Apart from that, there was nothing to be heard for a long time.

"You must be crazy, Peter!" he yelled. It sounded like an explosion. "You are scum! If you knew how much I hate you!"

This was again followed by a long silence.

Then Bo heard him say softly: “Yes, I got the email. But I’m handling everything as fast as I can. Do you think I can just fork out that much money without my family noticing?”

Another long pause.

Then he heard as if from far away: “Okay ... you’ll get the million ... in four weeks.”

CHAPTER TWO

The Million

Bo sat thunderstruck on his rug. Over and over and again, that one sentence kept going through his head: “Okay, you’ll get the million.” - One *million*? What sort of a million was he talking about? Who was this Peter guy? What did Dad have to do with him? And why should he give him money? How in the world could he get hold of that much money? As the head of the public library he certainly didn’t have a bad salary, and Mom’s part-time job at the health food store brought in a bit of extra cash, but a million? That would be like winning the lottery! They’d just built this eco-house two years ago, and Bo knew they still had the bank loan to pay off every month. At any rate, that was Dad’s favorite argument whenever the cash issue came up and Mia started lobbying for new clothes and, more recently, make-up stuff. “We all need to tighten our belts for a while,” he would say with a cheerful smile. He probably wanted to show how much fun saving could be.

And now he wanted to raise a *million* and give it to this Peter? There was something weird going on. No, mega weird.

Now it was clear why Dad had been so grouchy lately. He was always in a bad mood and complained about everything. Watching TV and playing games together was a thing of the past. Now after dinner all they ever heard was, “Go to bed!” in a tone that stopped any further discussion. Bo had also noticed how much Mom suffered from his bad moods.

It was as if Dad had become a different person. Actually, he’d always been pretty good natured and easygoing. He could be really funny, even if he sometimes didn’t mean to be. But above all, you could always count on him.

Of course, he also had his quirks (he called them the “golden rules of upbringing”). And, unfortunately, his taste was sometimes pretty weird. Take TV, for example: Soccer was pretty much the only thing you could agree with him on. Otherwise, he mostly watched boring culture documentaries on ARTE. He even thought that James Bond movies were violent and should be banned.

When it came to music, it was pretty much the same story. Anything after the Beatles was “riot music” for him.

Dad only listened to music that was guaranteed to put you to sleep: classical music, church music, and, at best, his old hippie songs.

He'd just stopped in the 70s, same with his appearance. He wore his hair almost down to his shoulders - at least the few strands that he still had. For as long as Bo could remember, they had been snow white. "A real old hippie," Bo's friend YoYo would always say, hitting the nail on the head. All he needed was a pair of purple overalls and some Jesus sandals, and you could stick him in a museum.

Bo stood up. He paced the room anxiously, and then stood in front of the window. The rain was drizzling quietly and depressingly outside. He shivered. What should he do? Tell his mom everything? - No! The answer immediately ran through his head. His parents had always been straight with one another. Dad had to have a reason for keeping the matter secret from Mom.

Maybe he should talk to Mia? He dismissed the thought as quickly as it came to him. She just couldn't keep her mouth shut. In no time at all, all of her twenty girlfriends would be offering their opinions about it.

As he stared at the rain, he suddenly realized what had to be done. After all, what were friends for?

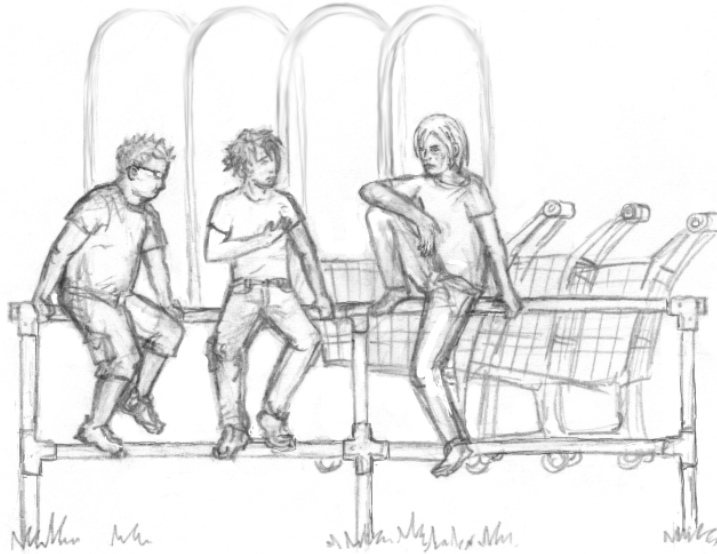
CHAPTER THREE

The Friends

“**K**eeep cool. We’ll figure something out!” As if he wanted to prove his point, YoYo quickly took off his glasses and attacked them with the end of his shirt. Once he was satisfied with how clean they were, he put them back on.

Simon just gave a slight nod. He was - in contrast to YoYo - a man of few words. He said what needed to be said, but not a word more.

The rain had finally taken a break. Bo and his friends were sitting on the railings of the supermarket parking lot, where their way home from school together came to an end. They would usually sit there next to the shopping carts for a while before each of them took their last short stretch home alone.



It was not exactly the most comfortable place to meet. Shopping carts rattled, small children whined, cars pulled in and out, and the crashing of empty crates came from the drinks department. But nobody took any notice of them.

Bo told his friends about everything - the call, his father's stinking mood, the bad atmosphere at home. He was so relieved to get everything off his chest, that he almost gave them a hug.

YoYo and Simon were his best, or more precisely, only friends. Sometimes he wondered to himself how he could be friends with two such different characters. Even at first glance you could hardly imagine a greater contrast: YoYo was much smaller than Simon, but on the other hand a

whole lot fatter. His real name was Yorick. Mean kids said his nickname had something to do with his body shape: small and round - like a yoyo. The cause of his corpulence (as he liked to call his tummy) was no mystery. All he ate was fast food. He regarded all other food with suspicion. "There might be something in there," he would say. When he came to visit Bo, whose mother inevitably served her health food, he always made a face as if he was going to be poisoned. His favorite drink was his famous "slush." It was a sweet, iced slurpy drink that was drunk out of a cup with a straw. It came in bright red, purple, acid green, and bright yellow. The whole thing came from a machine in YoYo's room that his mother had bought him. He'd gotten hooked on the stuff on vacation in Majorca, and after that claimed that he couldn't do any homework without slush.

When it came to food and drink, YoYo was completely self-sufficient. His mother worked in the afternoon and came home late, and even in the morning YoYo rarely got to see her because she was still sleeping. His father was never around. YoYo told everyone he was at sea, but Bo knew from his parents that YoYo's father had moved to Hamburg with another woman. That was five years ago, and since then he hadn't reappeared.

A clear case of blackmail!" YoYo shouted so loudly that a passing old lady with a shopping cart looked at him in complete terror and then scurried off in a hurry.

He continued more quietly: "This Peter guy shouldn't be too happy too soon. Now he's going to have to deal with real professionals!" He stroked the bleached tips of his spiky hair. With his hairstyle YoYo had always been "a trendsetter," as he liked to say. The same was true of course for his clothes. There the trend was apparently heading in the direction of wide jogging trousers, sky blue gym shoes, and t-shirts or sweatshirts with freaky slogans on them. At the moment it was "I could explain it to you, but don't want to overburden you." YoYo was a born loudmouth. But that didn't change the fact that he was a really good friend.

"Yes, YoYo's right," Simon piped up with his gentle voice. He bit into an apple and started to chew calmly, looking off somewhere into the distance.

His tanned face showed he was outside a lot. It was framed by long, straw-colored hair that fell forward into his dark eyes. All the girls in class had a crush on Simon, partly because of his appearance, but mainly because of his shy, Robert-Pattinson-like smile. Especially the beautiful

Tatyana with her generous and revealing bust adored him truly, but he didn't seem to notice. He didn't care about girls, as he had once told Bo.

Simon threw the apple core skillfully into the trash can. "YoYo's right, the thing looks dangerously like chainmail!"

"Blackmail," Bo corrected him.

Simon's language skills were a bit rusty. He and his family had lived in Texas for six years, where his father had worked as a pediatrician. In the three months since their return, he'd made some progress, but he was still headed for an F in languages - which fortunately wouldn't get him held back ¹. That rule only applied to the current school year, which was why Simon had asked his friends to correct all his mistakes.

Simon smiled. "Yes, blackmail ... but how do we find these lobsters?"

"Mobsters." Bo had to suppress his laughter.

"The first thing we need to check is this email they were talking about," YoYo said. He sounded like the police chief in a TV show. "My experience tells me that this will help us out."

"And does your experience also tell you how we can get at it?" Bo said. "I don't have a clue what the password is."

YoYo waved the objection away with a gesture. “Chill, bro.” He waited a few moments for a dramatic pause. “I know someone who might help us.”

“And who would that be?” Bo asked suspiciously.

YoYo cleared his throat loudly, and focused his view on his shoes.

“Spit it out!”

YoYo scratched behind his ear. “MM.”

Bo looked at YoYo searchingly. You never knew with him, but he seemed to be totally serious.

MM’s real name was Mariekje Marienhoff, but since it tied your tongue in a knot, everybody in class only called her “MM.” Some also claimed that MM stood for “Math Mousie,” from the time when she proved to Mr. Freudenthal that he’d made a mistake in the fifth position behind the decimal point when converting a fraction. MM was an absolute overachiever, and not only in math. Bo couldn’t recall that she’d ever gotten any grade other than an A. Apart from that, no one really knew anything about her. She’d joined the class after summer vacation because she’d skipped a grade. To this day, nobody had exchanged a single word with her. Not that she couldn’t speak – when she was asked a question, she would answer as quickly as if shot from a pistol. But if it was up to her, she would never

say a word. She would just sit straight up in her seat in the front row, hanging on to the teacher's golden words. During the break, she stood around alone. Naturally, she played the violin in the school orchestra.

Bo still couldn't believe it. "Are you kidding me?"

"No, man," said YoYo. "She could really help us out."

"How'd you come up with that idea?" asked Bo.

YoYo was again preoccupied with the tips of his shoes. "I once spoke to her -"

"Spoke to her?" Simon really looked confused. "Get out of here."

YoYo looked uncomfortable. He shifted from one foot to the other, as if he had to go to the bathroom.

"I once had a problem with my tablet, and since her father is a computer geek, I thought -"

Now it was clear what had happened. The idea of spending a few days without games or the internet had driven him crazy, so he eventually called Math Mousie. Her father was a professor at the university. There'd once been an article about him in the newspaper. He was supposedly building the fastest computer in the world.

"Even the people at the computer store were clueless. So I thought I'd give MM a try, thinking maybe she could ask her father." YoYo's ears had turned very red. "She just told