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# Fidelity and Rhetorical Strategies: an Introduction to and Translation of Arunika Senarath's *Diese Eine Nacht* (2017) with an Interview with the Author

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Fidelity and Rhetorical Strategies: An Introduction To And Translation Of Arunika Senarath's  
*Diese Eine Nacht* (2017) with an Interview with the Author

by  
Malcolm Goldman

An undergraduate thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Bachelor of Arts  
in  
University Honors  
and  
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Thesis Advisor  
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Portland State University  
2020

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### **Part One: Introduction to Arunika Senarath's *Diese eine Nacht* (2017)**

*Diese eine Nacht* is the 2017 debut novel by German author Arunika Senarath. Published by Mikrotex Verlag, a publisher which focuses on “texts with a [political or social] stance and new narratives” (Mikrotex), the novel contributes to a small yet growing body of political literature specifically geared toward a younger audience. Its online publication, in both digital and print formats, is readily accessible to these readers, and the book has garnered a significant degree of success: Senarath has reported a positive and inquisitive response from the public during her book tours across the nation (Senarath “Kaiser Interview”). The thematic content of the book itself introduces young people to a diverse range of issues and perspectives, while the author’s identity and intentions extend beyond the novel itself and into the contemporary political landscape.

Writers like Arunika Senarath, an author with a so-called “Migrationshintergrund,” or an immigrant background, are often marginalized in German societal discourse, especially when writing about overtly political themes. Born in Sri Lanka and currently living in Berlin, Senarath grew up in the city of Rottweil in Baden-Württemberg and attended the Technical University of Dresden, where she studied Communications and Political Science. Although she is often categorized by others as “exotic” because of the color of her skin (Senarath, “Goldman interview”), she is unquestionably a member of mainstream German society. It is important to note, however, that as a female racial minority in Germany her individual perspective on youth culture and its intersection with politics is relevant to Germany as a whole, and especially pertinent given the current political context. Racial othering and discrimination have been on the rise in Germany, and Dresden in particular, especially after the rise in migration following the

2016 European refugee crisis. According to Senarath, *Diese eine Nacht* was inspired by the formation of the right-wing extremist group PEGIDA (*Patriotische Europäer gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes*/Patriotic Europeans against the Islamification of the Occident) in 2015 (Senarath, “Kaiser interview”). Setting the novel in this context but exploring other aspects of identity and belonging as well, Senarath’s voice is important in its conveyance of the experiences of a person of color in the wake of a racialized extremist movement.

Senarath’s personal background and experience in Dresden during the formation of PEGIDA is reflected in the plot of the novel. The book follows the story of Amina, a twenty-something year old daughter of an Algerian immigrant, and her relationship with Sten, who is a member of a far-right organization. At the start of the book, Amina has just moved to Dresden for university, and is coming to terms with the new environment and new social pressures that come with it. She meets Sten at a party, and is struck by his sharp blue eyes. He asks her on a date, and they proceed to have a tumultuous relationship marked by periods of intimacy and distance as it becomes increasingly clear that Sten holds racist and anti-immigrant beliefs. He manipulates her throughout, refusing to explain himself and playing on her insecurities. Meanwhile, it is revealed that Amina is the mother of a young boy, who was born after she was raped at a party in her home town, and that Sten was present at the same party. Amina must come to terms with her identity, find self- and peer-acceptance for who she is, and investigate Sten’s actions to confirm whether he is who she thinks he is. As such, while the story is set in the political landscape of contemporary Dresden, the plot also addresses more universal issues of gender and sexual assault.

By bringing up these topics of race, gender, and violence in her work, Senarath presents us with an insightful view on the fear instilled by right-wing extremism in Europe today. The novel integrates complex and heavy themes with the day-to-day drama of a young woman, a blend which makes the novel engaging and dynamic. Multiple reviewers of her work have praised her presentation of these themes in a format easily accessible to younger readers, indicating that her work “induces students to discuss contemporary issues” (Fraser, Folaji). Keeping the audience in mind, Senarath has addressed the specific intent of blending entertainment, gender issues, and politics. In an interview with Gunnar Kaiser, she states:

Yes, [I am a political author.] But not only political, because it’s also about growing up, and how one feels as a young person with these problems, [...] relationship issues. Yet all of that is also still political, [and I hope that] the reader also thinks about [politics], even the people, especially young women, who perhaps otherwise don’t have much to do with these issues. Hopefully they can come a little closer to the themes in the book. (00:10:34 - 00:10:57, translation mine)

In its equal focus on the daily personal life of the characters and on overarching politics of race and gender, the book emphasizes that the personal is in fact also political. In a similar vein, the political landscape in Germany also reflects on the political themes on a global scale. Right-wing extremism in Germany (and globally) has escalated in recent years, especially in the years 2014-2015. At this time, the far-right political party AfD (Alternative für Deutschland / Alternatives for Germany), and the extremist group PEGIDA were formed. The latter organization had established themselves as a collective which purported to represent the common person, in contrast to the established center-right party in Germany at the time (Dostal, 524).

PEGIDA distrusted the establishment, labelling mainstream media *die Lügenpresse*, analogous to accusations of “fake news” in the United States (525). Instead of communicating with the press, PEGIDA spread its anti-immigration (and economically center-right) views through weekly demonstrations attracting thousands of people. Thus, a deeper understanding of PEGIDA provides insight into the book that might not be apparent to a younger English-speaking audience.

The history of the region must be considered to gain a fuller understanding of the movement’s formation. Dresden, where PEGIDA was both politically and geographically situated and where the novel takes place, occupies a particular space in the German social landscape. The city is known for being especially conservative: as Samuel Salzborn notes, “it may not be so surprising that the east German city of Dresden was the crystallization nucleus for the racist Pegida [sic] movement, considering that the city is a stronghold of rightwing extremism.” (54) The fact that the movement occurred in former East Germany is significant. Former GDR states have a tendency toward conservatism, in part because of the economic and social struggles the population went through during the second half of the 20th century and the contemporary disparity between East and West German states after reunification. These ties are not only inferential: the weekly PEGIDA protests, held on Mondays, were remnants of “the tradition of the mass mobilisations that brought down the East German state, the GDR, in 1989.” (Dostal, 524). The movement’s sociocultural background thus ties it to the city, shaping and shaped by the personal and political lives of those who reside there.

These new far-right manners of political expression are, however, not unique to the city: they prompt discourse in all sectors, raising questions about if and how people should engage in



response. In considering the racist mass protests, and the rise of what Salzborn terms the “New Right,” the issues of dialogue with fringe extremist groups and representation of marginalized populations must be addressed. Although PEGIDA spent much of their history refusing to communicate with media organizations, their protests brought their group and political motives to the forefront of German media discussions at the time, and they gained some further legitimacy through their association with an official party, the AfD. (Salzborn, 52) Meanwhile, as far right rhetoric increased in the media, there came a call for a response from the Islamic community who was being attacked. Yet this may have adverse effects: Karolin Machtans notes that by seeking an official Muslim response to organizations like Pegida, one risks depicting the Muslim communities in Germany (and, by extension due to the racist discourse, communities of color in Germany) as a homogenous entity rather than a diverse body of organizations and individuals with a range of origins, practices, behaviors, and beliefs. This places further strain on an issue which is already sensitive, as the roots of islamophobia lie in the misconception of “Islam as monolithic and static” and a conflation between religion and race (91). *Diese eine Nacht* was born out of these political conditions, paying particularly close attention to others’ perceptions of the self and conveying the feelings of being the subject to these discriminatory ideologies. It is valuable as a voice which is read as individual and personal, making a statement without making generalizations.

By situating the novel within this fraught political context, the translation itself becomes a political act. This piece represents an often-underlooked facet of German literary culture. Written by a female first-generation German immigrant and explicitly addressing the aforementioned issues of cultural identity, right-wing extremism in contemporary Germany, and

sexual assault, (while also centering on the day-to-day life of a young college student), the work brings a perspective rarely seen in the central literary spheres of Germany. As the author states in our own interview “At the time I wrote the book, I felt like there was little to no German political literature, especially literature about current topics that is targeted toward a younger audience, yet still written in a light and entertaining way.” Selecting this work as a representative of German literature in the English-speaking sphere addresses this dearth of varied perspectives.

Making this selection is a part of the complex set of decisions inherent to the role of a translator. One must determine not only the coherence, tone, and even ideological message of the resulting text, but also the representation or suppression of voices on the international stage. In essence, translation is a series of choices, beginning with the decision to translate at all, followed by the selection of a work, and then finally the production of a finished text in which both formal aspects and semantic/pragmatic aspects of the work must be carried over. As such, there was a necessary evaluation of my motivation for translating, and especially selecting this work in particular.

The first concern of whether to translate at all addresses the role which translation plays in a society: how significant is translated literature in a particular language culture (in our case, English-speaking readers), and how possible is it to accurately transfer ideas from one culture to another? I believe that translating international works is crucial to the expansion of global understanding, opening up the resources to the English-speaking world by revealing the perspectives of others. My thoughts are in line with prominent Czech translation scholar Itamar Even-Zohar, who also emphasizes the role of translation in the receiving culture: as translations function as their own subsection of the “literary polysystem” within the larger literary sphere of a

society, they can be used to introduce new concepts to a target culture (whether through innovative linguistic forms or, more broadly, the transfer of culturally marginalized ideas) (193). This novel's simultaneous area-specific and universal themes particularly lend it to being transferred from one culture to another.

Once one has decided to translate, the second choice of selecting a specific author and work to bridge between cultures is a great responsibility. Choosing which author(s) and work(s) to translate has a direct impact on the picture of a nation abroad. German literature in particular consists of a rich and diverse body of experiences, yet many of them remain inaccessible to an English-speaking audience because they have not been translated. Despite the success of significant minority and female authors such as Yoko Tawada in the 21st- and Christa Wolf in the 20th century, their work typically remains overwhelmingly overshadowed by white male writers from Friedrich Schiller to Heinrich Böll. While Schiller and Böll have made remarkable contributions to German thought, this imbalance of representation runs the risk of painting an inaccurate picture of modern Germany culture as largely homogenous. The imbalance further reveals some of the biases present in literary and cultural dissemination on a broader level.

The third set of choices, those involved in conveying semantic and pragmatic meaning, will be discussed in detail in Part Four of this thesis. The remaining sections address the various aspects of translating a literary work, and this one in particular. This project begins with a selected translation of the text, including the prologue and the first, second, third, and sixteenth chapters (Part Two). These chapters were selected due to their inclusion of particularly salient aspects of the book's message as a whole, addressing a wide range of emotions, registers, and events. Amina's identity is established and co-constructed by her and the other characters as she

is placed in situations from college parties to conspiracies, all situated in the framework of a city with a rising trend in right-wing populism. The translation is followed by an interview I conducted with the author, in which we discussed the text's themes and how the author orients to the historical and political contexts in which she is writing (Part Three). The project concludes with an assessment of the research which informed my decision making during the translation process, accompanied by a discussion of the rhetorical challenges I faced and how they were addressed (Part Four).

**Part Two: Select Translations of Arunika Senarath's *That One Night* (2017)**

## Prologue

Amina Salem had a delicate figure, petite and graceful. Like a fragile doll: created to be looked at, not to actually function in real life. She had caramel colored skin, and long, thick, dark hair that fell in locks nearly down to her waist. “Eyes like melted chocolate,” an old woman had told her once, back when she was still a child. She knew that she was pretty – she understood it on a rational level – but somehow she just couldn’t feel it. All of the compliments and kind words she had received throughout her life had created an image of her that she longed to accept. An image of a confident, beautiful, young woman.

If only she didn’t feel this ache when she looked in the mirror. This feeling that something was missing; that something should be different.

## Chapter 1

The alarm went off. Loud. Amina rubbed her eyes in frustration and tried, unsuccessfully, to hit the snooze button. Even if she was used to it, getting up early still gave her headaches. The year before, she would have been happy to have been able to sleep in until this hour without being woken up at some point in the night. It was already light inside her room; she didn't have any curtains. Too much darkness made her feel claustrophobic.

The first lecture of the day was Communication Studies: how do people communicate, what models have scientists developed to explain this, and how does journalism work? Amina wanted to learn the answers to all of these questions and more. She had decided to pursue a Bachelor's degree in Communications, and had been accepted to the Technical University of Dresden.

Dresden was the perfect city for college students. Not too large and not too small, it had an enchanting Old Town that still retained some of the flair from its history of grand princes and kings; and the Neustadt - a modern borough bustling with alternative culture, hip bars and clubs, and swarms of students in the evenings. Between these two sections of the city flowed the Elbe River, a meeting point for cyclists, joggers, and daydreamers alike, as they sat on the banks at the first hint of sunlight and enjoyed Dresden's baroque silhouette. It was simply a beautiful city. And, it was far away from home.

Amina came from a small town in Baden-Württemberg. There was not much there that she particularly missed or was holding on to. A handful of high school friends. And him. But she was thankful that her mother had pushed her to go to college instead of wasting away at home. She had taken a break after graduating high school, and hadn't given much thought at first to continuing her education. Although, it couldn't really be called a break: each day was another challenge. Her current distance from home felt good; it distracted her and let her concentrate on her studies. The faster she could get her degree, the better.

By now, Amina had prepared herself for the day ahead, and was just closing her bag and heading out the door when her phone buzzed. A message from Franzi: "Hey, feeling too lazy for Comm today, but I'm looking forward to tonight!"

"Great." thought Amina. Sitting through the lecture without Franzi would take away half the fun. They had met at one of the first university events at the beginning of the year, and had gotten along instantly. Unlike Amina, Franzi was easygoing and agreeable to everyone. She hadn't even heard of shyness or distrust; she was immensely popular. Amina had been drawn to Franzi's positive energy, and they had become friends right away, despite their apparent differences. Sometimes Amina wished that her own life had allowed her to be like Franzi, who had moved from Cologne to Saxony's capital in order to explore a new city and meet new people. Franzi was beginning a new chapter of her life, free and unbound by her past. She lived without burden, without fear, without shadows that followed her every step. Amina was never so carefree. She couldn't be.

The day's two lectures seemed to drag on. Amina spent most of the time on her phone, Googling pointless things and reading the day's news. The professor didn't care much for microphones, making it next to impossible to understand anything from the back rows of the auditorium.

As she navigated through the rows of seats to the exit, she saw a figure in the front row, cheerfully waving her over. He had a mop of curly, dark brown hair and a boyish face. Alex called out to her, "Hey, want to grab a coffee?"

"Sure, why not," answered Amina. Alex was, next to Franzi, the only other person Amina had become friends with in the first few weeks of the semester. He was, admittedly, a bit of a dork, which is why Franzi tended to avoid him and wondered why Amina would want to spend her time with him. But Amina really did like Alex. Maybe it was because neither of them was one of the 'cool kids.'

"What did you think of the lecture?" Alex asked, as they leaned up against the low wall in front of the cafeteria. He turned to Amina, looking directly at her as she absentmindedly stirred the contents of her paper coffee cup.

"It was alright. A little boring."

Alex tried to get Amina's attention two more times, attempting to start a proper conversation, but she didn't feel like talking. She still had a headache.

"Are you okay, Mina?" Alex laid his hand awkwardly on her shoulder.

"My head has been pounding all day. I should probably take a nap before the party," she responded.

"Are you going out with Franzi tonight?"

"Yeah, she wants to make it to every single party this semester, and of *course* I have to join her," Amina said with exaggerated indignation. Parties really weren't her thing, not anymore. But, for Franzi's sake, she tried to join in as much as possible.

Once she and Alex had parted ways, Amina thought that maybe she should have asked him if he wanted to tag along tonight. But Franzi would not have been thrilled to be seen out with the "nerd," as she called him. Oh well, he wouldn't hold it against her.

Franzi had been invited by one of her roommate's friends to a party hosted by some older students, and she gave Amina the address in the Neustadt. They were to meet there at 10 p.m.

Amina sat at her dressing table. A small, white table with round, adjustable mirrors attached to it. It was covered with a variety of makeup products, nail polishes, and brushes. The glossy white of the wooden surface had, over time, turned to more of a grubby gray-brown. Amina wasn't particularly attentive to maintaining things like that. After putting on her makeup, she tried to tie up her hair. She tugged hopelessly at the loose strands, and tried to flatten down any stray hairs. She wasn't really satisfied with the result.

Despite all of the different kinds of makeup she had, her look always ended up the same: presentable without attracting too much attention to herself. A little eyeshadow and some blush. She sat before the mirror and just looked at herself for a while.

The vanity was the only piece of furniture of her own in the 160 square feet of her dorm. Student housing all came furnished with a bed, desk, chair, and dresser. Even the little bathroom and kitchen were already fully equipped upon moving in. Amina's apartment had a sterile feel to it; she hadn't done much to make it her own. The desk had a few books on it, and there was a framed picture of him on the windowsill, right where she could see it. Sometimes, she liked to pick up the picture, take a seat, and spend some time contemplating it.

To get to the party, Amina took the streetcar, Line 13, toward Kaditz, a route that crossed the Elbe at the Albert Bridge. The view of the river from there, the reflections of the city's beautifully lit architectural treasures from the Frauenkirche to the Semperoper dancing in the water, was one of a kind; more impressive in person than on any postcard. Slowly, the lights dissolved into the river's flow. The scene that was formed had a graceful, silent air, giving the feeling that nothing could disturb its serenity. Tourists and locals alike turned their heads toward the Elbe.

Even from a distance, she could hear the bass rattling the open kitchen window of the student apartment as she approached. She hurried from the streetcar stop down to the building. It was 10:05 p.m. She was just about to text Franzi to let her know she had made it there when she got a message herself. It was Franzi. "Go on in, I'll be a little late." Amina let out an irritated sigh. As much as she liked Franzi, her chronic lateness was irritating sometimes. Ideally, Amina would have just turned around and taken the next train back to her dorm, but by now it was too late. As she stood outside the entrance to the apartment, a giggling couple emerged and held the door open for her. She reluctantly slipped inside.

The air inside was stuffy with cigarette smoke. Small groups of people stood around chatting, but it was impossible to hear any details of their conversations over the music. Amina uncertainly made her way to the kitchen. The air there was a little more breathable thanks to the open window. "Why hasn't Franzi shown up yet?" thought Amina, getting anxious. She removed her jacket and found a place for it on a chair that already had some coats hanging off its back. She looked around. The kitchen was not particularly spacious, but there was enough standing room for a good ten people. Next to her was a square wooden table holding drinks and a few bowls filled with different kinds of chips. The three colorful chairs surrounding the table were all mismatched, and seemed tossed together. Four girls, all a couple years older than Amina, jostled past each other to the other side of the table to get to the drinks: screwdrivers. They laughed loud and shrill, a little too high-strung for Amina's taste. Next to the fridge, situated diagonally across the room from Amina, a couple was talking animatedly. The girl was gesturing wildly with one hand and kept taking drags off the cigarette in her other, while the guy stood right up against her, clearly into her, his arm resting casually on the fridge.

Amina felt increasingly uncomfortable. She didn't know anybody there, and didn't see anyone else standing alone. She helped herself to some strawberries, nibbling at them periodically, mostly as an excuse to stick to the relative safety of the snack table.



“I just got here, where are you?” came a text from Franzi. Instead of answering and having to wait for a reply, Amina set out to find Franzi herself.

Even while she was reading the message, she could feel it: the sensation of being watched, the kind that could only be confirmed after indeed catching someone as they stare. In response to the feeling, she lifted her eyes and saw at the kitchen door a pair of ice blue eyes looking in her direction. The eyes told a story. A story with a past, one that began this very moment.

“There you are!” Franzi approached, beaming, and gave her a hug. “Sorry I’m late, I missed the train.” After searching through every room in the apartment, Amina had finally found her friend in the last one, sitting on a bed with a couple of guys.

“This is Nicolai, my roommate. You two still haven’t met. And this is Michi, he lives here.”

“Hi. Amina,” said Amina as the boys took turns shaking her hand. Nicolai was tall, with black hair and a striking chin. He must have been at least 27, and had a surfer look to him: a bunch of friendship bracelets, a fake shark tooth necklace, and a loose baja hoodie. Just Franzi’s type, she figured. If Franzi wanted him, Amina was certain he could be hers.

Amina left the group to find the bathroom. Franzi and Nicolai were sitting suspiciously close to each other at that point, and Franzi had already downed her third glass of punch.

Amina looked in the bathroom mirror. She looked tired; her eyes were getting red and her makeup somewhat smudged. “I should go home,” she thought. She hadn’t talked to anyone else at the party. Instead, she just sat staring into space next to Franzi as she flirted with her roommate.

If only Amina were home, with him. She missed his natural warmth, his soft gaze, his laugh. She longed for him. But it was better this way. She would return to him three years from now, and then it would all work out alright. Everything would work out alright.

On her way out, she heard voices breaking out of another room in the apartment.

“You can’t just decide all that by yourself, there’s five of us, and if we don’t unanimously agree, then that’s that.”

“What you idiots need to figure out is that there’s no point in just meeting and talking. We need to finally *do* something! *Ante Noctem* has to become active!”

Amina crept up to the half-open door and peeked inside. Hopefully she wouldn’t be seen; her curiosity had gotten her into some sticky situations before. *Ante Noctem*? What was that supposed to be? Despite the tension that this secret eavesdropping aroused in her, she held out for one last moment and tried to see if she could recognize any of these people who seemed to be arguing. A chubby guy, in his mid-twenties and with a mean look on his face, stood in the middle of the room and waved a sheet of paper around. Somewhat further away, his counterpart stood leaning against a glass table. Amina winced when she saw his face. His ice blue eyes. It was the

guy from the kitchen with the piercing stare. She had never seen eyes quite like his. His other features weren't bad either: wide shoulders, visibly toned biceps, tall frame. He had a dimple in his chin, and his smooth facial features looked more childlike in contrast to the rest of his body.

The two guys kept on arguing, until the fat one crumpled up the paper and threw it on the floor, finally storming out of the room, straight in Amina's direction. She managed to turn and step to the side just in time before he passed, but he didn't even notice her. He made a beeline for the door and left the party.

Amina had seen enough and was just trying to scurry out of the way when a voice suddenly called out from inside the room, seemingly directed at her.

"Hey, are you here alone?" the ice blue eyes asked.

A little firecracker went off inside her. Had he seen her eavesdropping on their conversation?

"Um, no, my friend just got here late, I was on my way over to meet her, that's all," countered Amina.

He approached her in a few long strides and took her hand. "I'm Sten," he said, and looked at her as though he was expecting some specific reaction to his words. His gaze seemed to want to hold her fast, as though he had been long awaiting this moment.

"Amina," she responded, which she quickly followed with "Do you live here?" in order to avoid an awkward silence.

"No, but a friend of mine does. I'm doing my Masters in Business Administration. What's your major?"

They continued chatting along those lines for a while, posing typical small talk questions and laughing about this and that.

Sten had a sort of aura that Amina couldn't quite figure out. He acted friendly and nice enough, but she thought she could sense a type of dishonesty in his eyes, something that wanted to keep her at a distance. Perhaps part of it was his appearance. He looked too good to just be the nice guy next door. Even so, despite the awkward pauses, they seemed to be on the same wavelength.

"Alright then, I've gotta go," Sten finally said. He bid her farewell and gave her a quick hug, which seemed to shoot through every inch of her body like an electric current. She was annoyed that she could let herself be impressed by some hot guy like him.

But there was something more. She knew that there was something else behind this encounter.

After he left the room, she stood there for a while and let her mind wander. The crumpled paper that the fat guy had thrown down in his rage was still lying there on the floor. Her curiosity got the better of her again. She bent down, picked it up, and unfolded it.

*We are rising to put an end to the senseless mechanisms of our government, of the parties of congress, and of the lobbyists.*

*We will no longer stand by and watch as German politics are decided in Washington, as Islamists raze entire villages before coming to find their asylum in Germany.*

*We will no longer listen to the lies of the single-minded press, to the fairytales which are drummed into us day in and day out.*

*All that must end now.*

*If you agree, then join us - and if you're against us, and therefore against the truth and against a free Germany, you will pay dearly.*

*For our country!*

*Ante Noctem*

The crumpled paper must have been meant as a draft for some kind of pamphlet. Amina was confused. What did these strange propositions, these threats, mean? And what did Sten have to do with it?

Amina said goodbye to Franzi, who was wildly making out with Nicolai, grabbed her jacket, and left the party. The crisp, fresh air felt good. There was no one to be seen out in the street, even though it wasn't particularly late.

When she got to the streetcar stop, she was annoyed to find that her train was cancelled. The stop's display announced this information with an aggressively lit sentence tucked away at the bottom of the screen. "You've got to be kidding!" Amina cursed under her breath. But her words wouldn't change anything, she would have to walk. If she was fast, she could be home in just over half an hour.

And so she went, hurriedly, not looking around her. She felt frightened, and recognized this feeling. It was the middle of the night and she was alone. Threatening memories arose in her, which she immediately tried to suppress. "It's okay, there's not a soul in sight, you'll be home soon," she said in the quiet dark. Men's voices in the distance. A door swinging shut. Panic. She picked up her pace. Scenes flashed by in her mind's eye, scenes of that one night that had changed everything. A group of young men stood around her. Laughter. Alcohol. Too much alcohol.

Her heart began to race with the memory; she had to concentrate hard not to be swept away by her thoughts.

Then she heard footsteps behind her. Her instinct was to run away, but she held herself back and merely began to walk faster. The steps behind her accelerated with her pace. "Please no, it can't happen again!" Amina thought, trying hard to catch her breath.

"Mina!" came a call from behind. The panic reached its climax, but then dissipated. It was Alex.

"Hey, what are *you* doing here?" she asked.

"I was in the area and I saw you leaving the streetcar stop. You shouldn't be walking out here alone at night, it could be dangerous." Alex had a slight slur to his voice, which Amina just now noticed. He approached her, giving her a strange look.

“You’re... really drunk,” Amina offered tentatively. The unpleasant feeling was returning. It was just her friend Alex, but she didn’t know him that well, had never experienced him drunk. This version of him seemed cockier and more relaxed.

“Come on, I’ll walk you home,” Alex said, getting uncomfortably close.

“It’s fine, Alex. I can make it alone. Your train wasn’t cancelled, it’s got to be coming in a couple minutes. Just go ahead and go back to your stop, I’ll see you at school on Monday.” She was already turning away as Alex grabbed her arm.

“Amina, stay here, I’ll take you home!” he repeated, this time in a more threatening tone, and pulled her toward him.

“Let go of me!” screamed Amina. She tore herself away from him and ran as fast as she could.

## Chapter 2

She ran and ran. Her breathing turned to coughing, a sharp pain in her side. Her pursuer was right on her heels, she could feel it. “Just keep running, he’ll give up eventually,” she thought.

“Amina, stay here!” A woman’s voice cried out. She stopped abruptly, turned around. Her mother was running toward her, with some kind of bundle in her arms.

“How can you just run away from this? You have a responsibility!”

“But mom...” Amina started, as she ran to her mother. Then she got stuck somewhere, her left foot was caught. She stumbled and fell.

Amina’s eyes snapped open. Her heart was pounding loudly, as though it were rebelling against her. It took her a moment to realize that she had just been dreaming.

“What a stupid dream,” she thought as she prepared her morning cup of green tea. Alex had tried to call her three times throughout the night, followed by a few apologetic texts:

“I’m sorry, Mina, I didn’t mean to scare you.”

“I hope you’re not mad at me, please answer your phone.”

And then, in the morning: “Sorry, Mina, I was really drunk yesterday.”

No, she wasn’t mad. Admittedly, she had been afraid, but she knew Alex well enough to understand that it really was weighing on his conscience, and that something like that wouldn’t happen again.

*Elbe Flea Market. Antiques and Secondhand*, promised the garish banner that hung below the Albert Bridge. Amina descended the stairs to the cobbled plot on the bank of the river. There was a flea market here every Saturday, and it bustled from morning on throughout the day. You could find anything here: from ancient SLR cameras to children’s clothes to assorted junk like porcelain vases and silverware. The stands were lined up against each other.

Franzi was on time for once, and the two friends strolled through the market together. It was a cool but sunny autumn morning. Barely a cloud in the clear blue sky.

“So? How are things with Nicolai?” Amina asked, grinning, as they checked out the silver rings at the jewelry stand.

Franzi’s eyes lit up right away. “Great! He’s really cute.”

“You went home with him last night?” Amina returned, affecting seriousness.

“Very funny. We live together... Come on, I know that having sex with your roommate is taboo, but he’s really into me and is totally my type!” cried Franzi, a bit too loudly. A few people turned their heads toward the girls, but they didn’t care.

“Franzi, it really would be nice if it works out. Don’t worry about it, if you two have a falling out you can just move in with me,” Amina said with a chuckle.

“What’s *your* deal? Meet someone interesting at the party?”

Franzi clearly wanted to change the subject.

“Oh, you know, I talked a bit with this guy, Sten was his name. He was nice enough, but... I don’t know, he was a little strange,” Amina offered critically. She didn’t want to bring up the argument or the pamphlet just yet.

“Hey Franzi!” Two girls rushed toward Franzi. She was clearly annoyed that her conversation with Amina was interrupted, but she greeted them warmly anyway. The three of them did intramural sports together, and they had something important to discuss. Amina didn’t want to stand there for no reason, so she went ahead a little bit.

She came to a “50 cents per item” stand and began to sift through the boxes, not searching for anything in particular. Eventually, behind a white plate with a flower pattern, she found a blue marble. She took a liking to it right away, and let it roll from hand to hand. Her face was reflected in its deep blue hue, faint and distorted.

He would also like the marble; he would also examine it as closely as she did.

Just as she was about to buy the marble, she saw a tall, blond figure a few yards away, pushing a bicycle along the path in her direction. Sten. She considered how she could best avoid interacting with him, but he had already spotted her and was approaching. She didn’t really feel like talking with him; the thought was unpleasant to her. She didn’t know what to make of the pamphlet, and besides, she really wasn’t really ready to deal with men.

“Hey Amina,” Sten called, now barely 10 feet away.

“Hey!” said Amina, curt but smiling.

Sten seemed to notice Amina’s wary composure, his wide smile narrowed, and his gaze somehow grew more unsettling.

“Are you doing alright?”

Sometimes Amina hated how obvious her emotions were. It felt like everybody could read her like a book; everybody seemed to know what she was thinking and how she was feeling. Whether she was in a good or bad mood, cheerful or sad. Everyone around her seemed to notice what was going on right away; she couldn’t keep any of it a secret. One of the reasons she had to move away from home.

“Yeah, the weather was so nice that Franzi and I decided to come out here. What are you up to today?” Amina answered in an extra-relaxed tone of voice.

“I was out exercising, and now I’m just running some errands. What are you doing this evening?”

“Oh, there you are! I...” Franzi came up to Amina from behind, stopping mid-sentence. She eyed Sten like an exotic animal.

“Hi, I’m Sten. I’m currently trying to ask your friend out on a date,” Sten chipped in cheekily, with an impish grin. Judging by the look on her face, he had already won Franzi over.

“Well then. I’ll leave you two to it,” Franzi responded with a wink, and disappeared back into the crowd.

“Sorry, I already have plans.” Amina said, although she immediately felt some regret. Sten nodded and said goodbye.

“‘Nice enough,’ you said... That guy was hot! How could you stand someone like that up, you monster!” Franzi was almost in hysterics as they talked about Sten on the way home.

“Yeah, he looks good, but that’s not going to make me drop everything and go out with him,” countered Amina defiantly.

Franzi rolled her eyes, she couldn’t see what the problem was. Amina didn’t really understand it herself.

“8:00pm at the Semperoper -Sten,” Amina’s phone informed her. She was in the library, trying to wrap her head around complicated statistical formulas. Why she needed to be able to calculate a rank correlation coefficient as a Communications major was beyond her.

“Who does he think he is?” thought Amina. She found Sten’s behavior to be really brash. She had told him she was busy. Even if it was a lie, he didn’t know that. He must be used to having every woman wrapped around his little finger.

But as much as Amina would have liked to play it cool, she found herself feeling something warm.

“How did you get my number?” she wrote back.

“Will you be there?” came the response.

She sighed. Should she give in? His efforts didn’t make a bad impression, and anyway, whatever reason he had for arguing with his friends, that wasn’t her business; she shouldn’t let herself get worked up over it.

Amina hadn’t entirely convinced herself in this mental debate, but she accepted the invitation anyway.

She had also just gotten a message from Alex asking if she wanted to meet up that evening and talk over an old statistics test they had just gotten back. For the second time that day, Amina had to make an excuse to get out of social plans.

It was just coming up on 8 p.m.. Amina sat in the streetcar, Line 9, which went directly from her dorm to the Semperoper. She fidgeted nervously with the fringe of her skirt. She had spent almost an entire hour trying to decide what to wear. She didn’t even know what Sten had planned. Would they go out for dinner, get some drinks, go to an opera...? Hopefully not the opera – she was clearly underdressed for such an occasion.

She got off the streetcar at the plaza by the theater and slowly made her way toward the opera house, her eyes darting around the area. It looked like he hadn’t gotten there yet. She

cursed herself under her breath, irritated that she let herself be called like a dog. Now she was standing there in her flower-patterned skirt and her too-thin leggings and would have to wait for Sten. She hated waiting on people.

“You look nice.”

Amina started as a shadow emerged from outside the Schinkelwache, a building on the edge of the plaza that housed the opera’s box office and a little cafe. The shadow took on the shape of Sten. So he was on time after all.

“So, what are we doing?” asked Amina, after they had properly greeted each other. Sten was wearing an unbuttoned wool coat over a silver-gray shirt which highlighted the muscles underneath, and dark jeans. He had style.

“Be patient!” Sten implored, beckoning for her to follow. The plaza was empty. If there was a show at the opera house, it must have already started.

Warm light streamed out of the opera house’s many windows, hinting at the festive mood inside. The Semperoper was a symbol of Dresden’s post-war reconstruction. Even before the war, the building had been completely burned down in 1869, after which it was recreated based on Gottfried Semper’s original plans – making this opera house the third attempt.

Sten and Amina began walking in the opera’s direction, but then started toward the left, approaching a narrow passageway next to the building. The suspense made Amina tense. She had no idea what Sten had planned.

She ran her hand through her hair, attempting to tame it against the wind. The sky was dense; it looked like it was about to storm.

They arrived at a short staircase leading up to a boxy, sandstone-colored building with a flat roof. The building stood right up against the Semperoper, and a glass tunnel ran between them at the highest story.

“What kind of a building is this?” Amina asked Sten.

“There’s a second, smaller stage in here, called the *Semper 2*. Dressing rooms and practice spaces, too,” Sten responded while holding the door open for her. So they would be watching a show after all?

The security guard nodded at Sten and pushed the button to unlock the door to the stairwell.

They went up to the third floor, and then down a long hallway. The farther they went, the more Amina became aware of the orchestral music drifting through the halls. It was gradually getting louder: they could hear the symphony playing from inside the opera house. Amina was amazed.

They stopped in front of one of the doors near the end of the hallway. Sten pulled out a key and unlocked it, releasing a draft of musty air.

The room before them was about 130 square feet. It was dim yet inviting, lit by an array of stout candles. A black cloth covered a number of undefined objects in one corner.



In the center of the room stood two worn orange-green sofas. Between them was a small table and a bottle of red wine. From here, the sound of the instruments from the opera house was as clear as if they were inside.

“Do you like it? I thought I’d organize a little private showing for us. Sadly without the visuals, but the wine should make up for that,” said Sten, somewhat saucily.

Something about the display touched Amina. This was something entirely different than if they had met for lunch in the dining hall or met up at some bar in the Neustadt. Here they were alone, and they could talk to the accompaniment of the Dresden Staatskapelle.

Amina looked around with interest as she took her seat across from Sten on one of the sofas.

“This room is actually a storage space; one of my buddies keeps his drum set and some of his other crap here,” Sten explained with a gesture toward the covered pile in the corner. “His dad works for the opera. We meet up here once in a while; five of us guys have keys. We usually don’t allow ladies, but I’m making an exception for you.” A wry, arresting smile.

Amina ignored his attempt at flirting and quickly changed the subject. “Do you know what they’re playing here tonight?” She wasn’t so good at leading conversations with people she barely knew. She found it hard to relax around unfamiliar people. To counteract this fact, she had developed the strategy of asking as many questions as possible and letting the other person speak until she had regained her footing.

“Ballet. The piece is called *Giselle*. Giselle is a country girl who falls in love with Prince Albert. Albert is actually engaged already, but he decides to disguise himself as a farmer and try to woo Giselle. Giselle ends up falling in love with him too, but eventually uncovers Albert’s true identity and dies from a broken heart. Pure drama.”

Amina had to laugh. “You sure seem to know a lot about it.”

“But of course,” countered Sten, also laughing, but then he instantly turned serious and looked at her with that piercing gaze of his, the gaze which had caught her attention at the party. “But enough about me. Tell me something about you.”

Amina gripped her glass, which Sten had already filled with red wine.

“Umm, sure, what do you want to know?” she asked nervously.

“Everything.” His ice blue eyes were fixed on her. What was it about his presence that made her suddenly feel so uncomfortable?

“My name is Amina, I’m 21 years old, I’m from a town in the South, and I thought it would be a good idea to move to Dresden for college.” Somehow it didn’t quite carry the joking tone she had hoped for. She took a long sip of wine.

Sten grinned. “Why Dresden?”

“I like the city, and it’s far from home.” Amina could feel the wine going to her head. She shouldn’t reveal too much.

“Why did you want to move away from home? Did you not like it there?” Sten pushed.

“I mean, yeah, sure I did... Anyway, why are *you* studying here? Are you from the area?”

Sten cleared his throat. “No, I graduated from high school in Berlin. I moved around a lot before that.” He told her about his parents’ jobs, which involved lots of transfers to different cities.

Time passed, and the bottle of wine grew empty. Amina and Sten were able to keep each other entertained, but neither of them wanted to draw the focus to themselves, and the conversation remained rather superficial as a result. Sten had a lively way of talking, he acted natural and seemed to just say whatever thoughts came into his head. At the same time, he knew how to use his charm, repeatedly making Amina laugh.

There were just a few moments, when things seemed to come to a brief standstill, in which Amina could see something concerning, a serious expression on Sten’s face. She could tell that something was bothering him. In these short seconds, she got the feeling that not everything about him was as casual and normal as he was trying to lead her to believe. Yet she couldn’t quite put a finger on it, couldn’t quite pin this feeling on any specific aspect of his behavior, and so these seconds passed, without sticking in Amina’s memory.

The music had long since stopped, so Sten and Amina decided that it was time to wrap up their date in the candlelit storage room and make their ways home. Meanwhile it had grown colder outside, and Amina drew her arms tightly around her chest.

“Are you cold?” asked Sten, right away.

“Yeah, but I’ll be fine,” Amina answered, so that he wouldn’t offer her his jacket.

While they waited at the stop for their streetcars, which would take them in different directions, they exchanged brief glances to each other. They both wanted the date to keep going. It wasn’t that late; they still could have gone to a bar or done something else together in the city. But Sten didn’t suggest anything, and neither did Amina, and so they bid each other an awkward farewell when Amina’s streetcar finally came first. On the ride home, Amina was wrapped up in her thoughts, wondering if the date had gone well from Sten’s point of view, and if he would ask her out again. “Don’t fall for guys like that!” admonished her inner voice at once.

She had barely gotten home when her phone buzzed. She grabbed it out of her bag immediately, secretly hoping that it might be Sten.

“Tomorrow, same time, same place?”

She grinned and answered five minutes later:

“Of course!”

All day Sunday, all Amina could think about was their date that evening, and she found it difficult to concentrate on her homework. Around lunch time, she met up with Franzi downtown for coffee. The girls barely finished greeting each other with a hug before Franzi started chattering away. Amina had, of course, already told her what had happened and Franzi was relieved that she hadn’t thrown away the opportunity.

“So? How was your date with Sten?”

“We had some good conversation. He’s a nice, funny guy,” answered Amina casually. But Franzi saw through her feigned indifference.

“You like him, don’t you?” came her immediate response.

“Come on, I barely know him yet. We’ll be meeting again later...”

Franzi interrupted her, instantly excited: “Your second date? Today? Already? Then he really seems to like you too! It’s only our first semester, and you already snagged a hottie. Lucky girl!” Franzi laughed.

“Come on, that doesn’t necessarily mean anything. I’ve got to wait and see,” Amina answered, but on the inside she was happy about Franzi’s reaction.

Amina met with Sten in front of the Semperoper. “Nice seeing you again today,” said Sten with a smile. Amina didn’t know how she should respond, and cursed herself once again for her shyness.

They navigated, as they had the day before, toward the boxy building behind the opera house and made their way up to the storage room. Once again, a bottle of red wine stood on the table, and music wafted up to them from the opera’s stage.

Amina was more relaxed today, and talked a little about her classes. Sten seemed to pay close attention to everything she said, as if he wanted to record it all on an internal cassette, to be played back at any time.

As he leaned forward to pour himself another glass of wine, Amina caught a glimpse of something on his wrist. His sleeve had been pushed up slightly from his movement, exposing a small tattoo: a half moon.

Amina cocked her head to get a better look.

“You have a tattoo?” she asked.

Sten’s countenance changed immediately, his expression growing harsh and serious. He grunted and drew his arm back from the bottle, as though he had been burned. “Uh, yes, right, um, I was young...”

His reaction confused Amina; she didn’t say anything more. Sten looked at the floor, then stood up, mumbled something about the bathroom, and vanished.

Amina stayed back, disconcerted. Had she asked something inappropriate; had she gotten too close? She had just asked him a simple, harmless question. She felt uncomfortable. Why was Sten acting so strange? How could he shift so rapidly from cheerful and open to serious and closed off?

She reached for her bag and left the room as well. He was too volatile. He should drink his wine alone, if he was going to leave her like that just because she asked an ordinary question.

As the door was closing behind her, Sten approached with hurried steps from down the hall. “Where are you going?” he asked, now with a tender tone and friendly, ice blue eyes.

“I have an early class tomorrow, I’ve got to get home or I’ll oversleep again,” Amina tried to answer with the same kind tone, and hoped that she hadn’t mentioned before that she never overslept.

When she got home, she threw herself in front of her computer to distract herself from the strange evening. This time, when her phone buzzed, it was from her mother: “How have you been? We’re doing well, we miss you!”

For a moment, her heart seemed to beat heavily. She was overcome by a miserable despair, a feeling that she was doing everything wrong. Quickly, she wrote back:

“I’m also doing well, please come visit me soon!”

## Chapter 3

Autumn gradually took hold over Dresden. In the Neustadt, fewer and fewer students could be found in the streets, beers in hand. After a hot summer full of color and glimmering nights reflected on the Elbe, the city now took on a less inviting hue. As if all the tourists had packed up its baroque radiance and taken it away with them.

Amina was now spending most of her time studying and preparing for the upcoming exams. She had breakfast in the university cafe, lunch in the dining hall, a coffee break with Franzi at some point midday, and finally returned to her dorm after the sun set. And so the days went by. The fact that Sten still hadn't contacted her since their last meeting sent a pang through her heart each time she thought about it.

But there was one thing on her mind which was truly distracting her: her mother's upcoming visit. She longed for it in the same way that a child longs for Christmas Eve.

Again she sat amidst hundreds of other students in the library, trying to concentrate among the cacophony of a thousand clacking keyboards, rustling papers, and frustrated sighs.

Suddenly, her phone lit up. "Are you free this evening?" She felt butterflies in her stomach. Why did he have to write to her now, of all times? In any case, she would brush him off at first, even if she felt a spark of joy that he *hadn't* actually forgotten about her.

"Sorry, gotta study," she promptly answered. That would be clear.

A few minutes later came a reply: "Bummer." She thought so too.

"Mina, shall we take a break?" Alex ambled over to her table, water bottle in hand. He was also in the library every day.

"Yeah sure, I can barely concentrate right now anyway," Amina responded.

They took the stairs up to the cafe, discussing whether it was worth it to go to the statistics lecture in an hour.

"I won't get it either way! And it's so boring. And I need to finish up my report for Content Analysis."

Alex wasn't taking her excuses. Of course he was planning to attend the lecture; Amina didn't think he had ever missed a class.

After Amina had gotten herself a green tea and one of the remaining sweet, sticky pastries, they made their way to the far corner of the cafe and continued their chat. Amina was truly happy to have Alex as a friend. She could be herself in front of him. She could tell him, for example, that on Sundays she liked to spend the whole day in her old pajamas doing nothing, instead of waking up at seven in the morning to go jogging before trying out a new healthy recipe for lunch. Or how dumb she felt during class seminars, when her classmates would discuss the subject at the highest level, while she barely understood what any of it was about. He didn't judge her, and he always seemed interested in what she had to say.

Once their talk about school had run its course, Alex asked, awkwardly, "So what kind of party are you going to *this* weekend?"

“Hmm,” Amina murmured to herself and considered what Franzi had suggested the other day. “I think there’s a party for med students over in the Alter Schlachthof dance hall.” The medical students always threw the best parties, or so she had heard.

“You sure sound impressed,” Alex laughed.

“I just don’t really like going to so many parties all the time.” Amina picked at her pastry.

“Why do you do it then?” Alex’s tone was more serious.

Yes, why *did* she do it then? Perhaps to avoid losing Franzi as a friend, or at least not to become distanced from her. But maybe she wanted to recover what she had lost. The ease, the lightheartedness. The feeling that she was young and invincible, and could do whatever she pleased.

While Amina continued with her inner dialogue, Alex simply looked at her and waited, as though he could tell he had brought up a sensitive topic.

Amina herself didn’t know what was happening, as she suddenly heard herself saying, “There was this one party. I was there with my best friends at the time. We’d had a lot to drink, just like every weekend, really. We were having a ton of fun, singing along with every song, dancing wildly.” She smirked.

“At some point, the people in our group drifted away from each other and were all just chatting up other people, continuing the party with them. I joined a group of boys. They were boisterous, funny, and since I was the only girl, I got all the attention. They kept giving me drink after drink, dancing with me, complimenting me. I don’t remember any of their faces. We weren’t at our usual place but at a party in a nearby town. It was held in this giant tent, but it was super cramped because there were so many people, and we barely knew anyone there. Well, the whole thing got out of control. The last thing I can remember is that I was starting to feel sick, and I grabbed onto one of the boys to stop myself from falling over. I think he left the tent with me, but I’m not sure. I’m not sure about anything else that happened that night.” Amina’s voice grew quiet, reserved. “The next morning, I woke up in my bed, with a terrible hangover and not a single memory of the previous evening. I felt detached from myself and I knew that something was wrong. I didn’t have any visible marks, but my body felt somehow... off. I felt that...” She broke off for a moment, and started over.

“Of course I drank too much, but the fact that I had no idea how I got home worried me. I’d never been so drunk in my life. Before I even got out of bed, I called one of my friends who was with me at the party to see if she could remember anything from that evening. Unlike me, she hadn’t blacked out. She told me that she didn’t see us when she came back from the bathroom, so she found a guy to dance with for a while. Then my friends met back up, but it was hours later when they found me outside the tent. I could barely speak, and the two of them figured I was just completely wasted. Then we all took a taxi home, and my friends took me to my apartment. When I heard the whole story I thought that maybe roofies were involved – that someone had drugged me to make me act that way. But the whole situation just made me uncomfortable. I didn’t want to know exactly what had actually happened. I also didn’t say

anything about it to my mom. I didn't want her to think that I had made it all up to try and blame some stranger for my blackout. I also couldn't be sure if I actually *had* simply drunk too much alcohol and threw myself at the boys. I just felt ashamed and felt like it would be easier to just act like nothing happened. I was so stupid."

Amina stopped her stream of speech to catch her breath. She had really just told someone. The whole story. Almost the whole story. Of course she left out that one detail.

Alex stared ahead, shocked. He had clearly understood what had happened, even if she didn't say it explicitly. He had not been prepared for such a story.

"Mina... I don't know what to say, that's just so awful! If I had known... I mean, that one time, when I was drunk... I..." He abruptly stopped his stuttering.

"No, it's okay. You didn't know. I can't just lock myself up at home to avoid something like that happening again. I've done that for too long. I need to be able to go out and enjoy myself again."

Now came the tears. Alex scooted closer to her, putting his arm around her shoulder. They sat that way for a while.

Shortly after, they were at the statistics lecture. Alex had insisted they go.

And so Amina was sitting in the lecture hall, but her thoughts were elsewhere. She felt somehow naked, now that Alex knew her secret. She was certain that he wouldn't spread it, but the feeling kept creeping over her that it was wrong to open herself up like that to someone she hadn't known for very long. Lost in thought, she doodled aimlessly in her notebook, when she felt a firm tap on her arm. Alex was trying to catch her attention, and Amina saw why right away. The professor, Herr Heinrich, was coming in her direction and seemed to be looking directly at her. He was in his late 50s, had a beer belly, and spoke with a heavy Saxony dialect. He usually came across like a kindly grandfather who wanted to show his grandkids a few math tricks, and often laughed at his own jokes.

"Now, young lady..." It appeared he was indeed addressing Amina; he was now standing directly in front of her desk. She blinked at him, startled. "Sorry, what?" He sighed.

"Can you tell me whether this value is significant or not?" Amina's blood rushed to her face. She had no idea what the lecture was about right now; her mind had shut off after the first ten minutes.

"Um..." She turned to Alex with a desperate expression and he gave the answer for her. Not fully satisfied with Amina's non-response, Herr Heinrich confirmed Alex's answer and walked back to the overhead projector.

"Thanks," mumbled Amina.

Sitting on the bus home, she suddenly felt invigorated and exhilarated. It was out. Not everything, but some of it. She had told someone about it, and Alex was affected by it, but he hadn't found her repulsive, hadn't tried to tell her that what happened that one night was her fault.

What had happened in her past wasn't important, it didn't define her. She had tried to convince herself of this far too often before, but this was the first time that she could really feel it. Cheerfully, she pulled her phone out of her jacket pocket and typed rapidly, before she could change her mind. Sent.

Hopefully he wouldn't push her away. As she unlocked the door to her room, her phone buzzed. She quickly wrested it from her pocket, hoping it was Sten's answer. "My pleasure. 8pm at Canapé?"

Amina wasn't very familiar with all of the pubs, bars, and clubs in the Neustadt, but she knew Canapé. It was a bar on Alaunstraße, one of the most vibrant streets in the quarter.

A smile broke across her face as she wrote back, "Of course!"

A brisk wind swept through Alaunstraße as Amina walked toward Canapé. From barbecue-steakhouses to barcades to Asian restaurants, this street offered anything you could think of. It had a special flair, and students especially were proud of this alternative, "cool" district. Amina sometimes thought to herself that she would probably live here too, if she weren't staying in the dorms. Or maybe not, the quaint old buildings had their price, and it was relatively far from campus. She was, all told, fairly happy with her current living situation; she could get anywhere quickly on the bus or streetcar, and was only a five minute walk to the Old Town.

Amina quickened her pace as the wind picked up, holding her arms to her chest. Yet despite the cold, the area still exuded an inviting air of comfort.

Finally, she opened the door to Canapé and stepped inside. She stopped in the foyer and took a look around. To her left was a long bar lit with LEDs, decked out with countless bottles and occupied by a busy-looking bartender, who was in the process of preparing a cocktail. The room was kept dark; the lounge across from the bar was filled with low black sofas and dark wooden tables. A set of stairs led below to where, according to the signs, the hookahs and smoking section were located.

After a second glance around the room, Amina noticed that Sten was already seated at one of the tables in the back, engrossed in the drinks menu in his hand. Amina was suddenly nervous. She was just now becoming conscious of how bizarre this all was, after their last meeting and the ensuing period of silence. She felt some regret for agreeing to the meeting at first, but tried to pull herself together as she approached Sten's table. He smiled at her, though he too seemed to feel a similar discomfort. They greeted each other with an awkward hug and sat down across from each other.

"So, what have you been up to lately?" Sten asked, fixing her again in his inscrutable gaze. Amina began to list off the various exams and presentations she had coming up, trying to give the impression that she had been so busy that she hadn't even noticed how he hadn't texted her in weeks. The conversation rambled on as they reached for their cocktails during the frequent



pauses. Amina had the feeling that they wouldn't be able to warm up to each other again. As if the magic they had felt between them in the opera house had vanished into thin air.

As Amina was really starting to wish that she was back in the comfort of her own home, reading a good book, Sten abruptly stood up and left for a bit. When he got back, he picked up his jacket and said, "I just went and paid. Come on, let's go somewhere else." Amina, somewhat flustered by his sudden actions, just nodded and likewise put on her coat and followed him outside.

She was unsettled. Did he want to end their meeting?

She trailed after him as he crossed the street with long strides. He appeared to have a destination in mind.

"Where are we going?"

It had gotten quite cold outside, and Amina had no interest in aimlessly walking around the neighborhood.

Sten pointed at a gray house. They made their way toward it and he pushed open the door, which was already slightly ajar. Looking through the front window, Amina could see wooden chairs and tables.

They now stood in a dim corridor. Sten leaned into the restaurant area and called out to someone, asking if they were still open. The question was affirmed. Sten smiled, satisfied, and started up the long staircase in front of them. Amina couldn't make sense of any of this, and the uncertainty made her nervous. They ascended all the way to the roof; the staircase never seemed to end. Finally they arrived at a hatch which opened up into the night air. They were indeed on the roof of the house, or rather, a rooftop terrace. Compact tables and stools with round metal surfaces were interspersed with patio heaters. Quiet music flowed through the sound system set up at one edge of the terrace. The space in front of the speakers was illuminated with colorful lights, clearly meant to serve as a dance floor. The atmosphere was cozy; a few tables were occupied and lively conversation could be heard. A tentative smile spread across Amina's face. Once again, Sten had an ace up his sleeve.

They sat themselves at a table off to one side, pressed close together to share the blanket that had been spread out for them. It did really help stave off the cold. A few minutes later a waitress arrived from downstairs to take their orders.

The mood between them was instantly improved. They laughed a lot, and the conversation was no longer stilted. Amina considered multiple times whether or not to ask Sten about the meaning of his weeks-long silence and his strange behavior around his tattoo at their last meeting, but she couldn't bring herself to. She understood that it would be a mistake to bluntly introduce such an unpleasant topic to the conversation.

After a while – there were already a number of couples on the dance floor – slower, quieter music began to play.

"May I have the next dance?" Sten asked with exaggerated flair, standing up and offering Amina his hand.

“Oh God.” muttered Amina, half smiling, but nonetheless took his hand and followed him to the dance floor.

As Sten laid his arm around Amina’s waist and she put her hand in the appropriate position behind his neck, the butterflies in her stomach, which always began fluttering whenever Sten looked at her with his hypnotic gaze, began to beat their wings even heavier. She wasn’t prepared for this kind of physical contact, especially after the date’s painstakingly slow beginning. Sten was simply impossible to see through, in one moment reserved and pensive and in the next transforming back to the charming gentleman who could wrap her around his little finger.

Slowly the beat of the music swung back and forth. For a while it was quiet between them, when suddenly Sten asked, “Amina is a pretty name, where does it come from?”

“It’s an Arabic name, my father is from Algeria.” Her answer was abrupt and made it clear that any further inquiry was undesired.

Sten ignored any unfriendly undertones and responded tenderly, “That explains your dark eyes.”

Amina looked at Sten. She could never keep up with his ice-blue eyes and penetrating gaze. He looked at her as though he could read her thoughts.

An elevator dropped through Amina’s body in free fall as Sten bent down and kissed her. It felt good and strange at the same time.

After swaying back and forth to the music for a while, they paid and made their way to the streetcar stop. Amina was nervous, Sten had thrown her off balance once again.

“When do you have class tomorrow?” Sten wanted to know.

“Not until after noon, and even then just two lectures.”

They arrived at the stop. Amina disappeared inside her scarf, her hands already buried in her jacket pockets.

Sten glanced at the display board. The next streetcar came in three minutes. Sten cleared his throat and said, “Would you maybe want to come to my place? It’s only two stops away.”

For a moment Amina didn’t know how she should answer. What was he expecting from her?

“Umm, sure, okay,” she responded, all the while desperately trying to figure out how she could politely decline any potential attempts to get more intimate. Hopefully it wouldn’t come to that point. She kicked herself for not declining the invitation right away; how come she could never just refuse things when she didn’t want them?

The streetcar came slowly trundling up; Amina could hardly wait to get out of the cold. They rode the two stops to Sten’s apartment in silence. He lived directly across from the streetcar. Quietly they tiptoed through the dark entryway; Sten figured that his two roommates must be asleep. Once they got to his room, the pair were able to turn on the lights and speak a little louder. The room was a nice size. A double bed with dark sheets was positioned under the

window; a dresser, some book shelves, a cluttered desk, and an ottoman were also distributed throughout the space. There were a few posters on the walls, and not a personal photo in sight.

“Welcome to my humble realm,” Sten joked as he made his way to the kitchen to get them some water. Amina took in the room around her, and sat uncomfortably on the sofa. Things still didn’t feel quite right to her. She didn’t think Sten was a serial killer or anything, but she didn’t trust him yet. She felt she absolutely had to ask him what his long silence had meant. Or was that also too invasive, like the question about his tattoo? Would it come across as if she had just been waiting for him to text her the whole time? She rolled her eyes at her inner monologue. She was overthinking things again, worrying about how she came across to others.

Sten returned to the room and placed two large glasses of water on the table before sitting down next to her on the sofa. Now or never. She conspicuously cleared her throat, and Sten looked at her with raised eyebrows.

“Tell me,” she set forth without looking him in the eye, “What happened there, the last time we met? I’ve barely heard from you since...” She let the sentence sink into the room. Sten began to shift his weight on the couch. The topic clearly made him uncomfortable.

“Yeah, sure. But you didn’t text me either!” he threw in, trying to sound relaxed. But then he spoke with a serious tone.

“Well... you know. The evening took a strange turn, didn’t it? I thought you probably didn’t want to see me again.”

‘He’s making excuses,’ Amina thought to herself, but she nodded anyway.

“So what are we doing now?” she asked instead.

“Want to watch a movie or something?” Sten offered.

And so they sat next to each other on Sten’s bed while he browsed for a passable movie on his laptop.

The room was lit only by a small lamp on the bedside table, and the glare from Sten’s laptop was hard on the eyes. The sliver of street visible through the window had a very peaceful quality to it. Amina could tell it was drizzling from the water reflected in the streetlights. Otherwise, the night was still.

“Sometimes I feel like you can’t stand me.”

She was startled as Sten’s voice broke the silence. She turned away from the window and looked at him. He had put his laptop off to the side and was focusing on her.

“What?” Amina answered, dumbfounded.

“You’re always so cold and distant. And you’re always eying me suspiciously, as if you don’t trust me. Just like you’re doing now.”

Amina let out a laugh. “Sorry, that’s just how I am. I mean, I barely know you, and you’re so... hard to read. I always wonder what’s going on inside your head.”

Now Sten was grinning. “Hey, nothing special, really. I’m just trying to figure out how I can draw you out of your shell, and if you like being around me at all.”

Amina rolled her eyes theatrically. “Of course I like being around you.”

“Well then maybe show me once in a while.” Sten looked at her intensely, and he leaned over and kissed her. It was the second time this evening, but somehow it felt just as thrilling as if it were the first. They weren’t watching the movie anymore. They simply laid down next to each other, bodies pressed close. Sten held Amina tightly in his arms, as though afraid she could suddenly jump up and run away. In that position, they fell asleep.

Amina woke up as she felt Sten getting out of bed. His phone was buzzing on the floor, and he was trying to answer it in time. He picked it up urgently and left the room. Amina yawned deeply and turned over in bed. She didn’t feel like getting up yet, it couldn’t be that late in the day.

Just as she was about to drift back off, she noticed Sten sitting next to her on the bed. She turned herself toward him and opened her eyes just enough to look at him.

“I’m so sorry, but I have to head out already, Amina. You can stay here as long as you want.” Sten gave her a kiss on her forehead and was gone. Amina felt like calling after him, telling him to come back and join her in bed, but of course she didn’t.

An hour and a half later, Amina was also ready to start the day. Since she had fallen asleep in her clothes, she just went into the bathroom for a few moments to freshen up. She figured she would wait at the window for the streetcar, and then run down and catch it so as to spend the least amount of time possible in the cold.

There was a box of granola bars on Sten’s desk, and because her stomach was rumbling, she helped herself to one. As she stood in front of the desk and ran her eyes over the debris on the surface, a piece of paper caught her eye. The pamphlet.

*We are rising to put an end to the senseless mechanisms of our government, of the parties of congress, and of the lobbyists.*

*We will no longer stand by and watch as German politics are decided in Washington, as Islamists raze entire villages before coming to find their asylum in Germany.*

*We will no longer listen to the lies of the single-minded press, to the fairytales which are drummed into us day in and day out.*

*All that must end now.*

*If you agree, then join us - and if you’re against us, and therefore against the truth and against a free Germany, you will pay dearly.*

*For our country!*

*Ante Noctem*

Shit, she had nearly forgotten about that, and now, here it was again. What could it possibly mean?

As she took the flyer in her hand, she noticed that something was written on the back. *Thursday, 6pm. And underneath, Stay away from A.*

## Chapter 16

Amina stared at him, shocked. All of her senses seemed to leave her body; she felt numb.

“What?” she asked quietly. Her anger had dissolved into nothingness.

Sten’s expression grew sorrowful. His ice-blue eyes were fixed on the ground.

“Sorry,” he mumbled. “Sometimes you can really get to me. I didn’t want to go and push such a big thing on you.” He stepped closer to her, and put his arms around her. Amina was motionless. She felt overwhelmed by a sudden uncertain fear.

“Come on, let’s go to your place. We can talk there,” Sten said assertively.

Amina had no response. She felt she should have exploded at him by now, bombarded him with questions, but she just couldn’t. She didn’t want any more answers.

They didn’t say a word until they were back in Amina’s room. Amina sat down on her bed, while Sten prepared a pot of tea and set a steaming mug on Amina’s nightstand. He took a seat at her desk.

He was clearly searching for the right thing to say, but words failed him. Finally, he began to explain.

“It’s true that me and my family moved around a lot. But usually we were only away for a little while, and then we’d move back to Baden-Württemberg. Right before I graduated high school, we moved to Berlin, as you know. In any case...” He was rubbing his hand on his leg, as if he could somehow get out of the conversation that way.

“I was at that party, Amina. The party you went to with your friends, I was there too. I don’t remember much about that night, I was pretty drunk myself. But at some point you were standing there with a group of my friends, you were drinking with them and seemed to be having a good time. I was wandering from group to group. I knew a few people there. I didn’t really pay attention to you after that. At some point I left, I don’t know exactly when anymore. I didn’t say goodbye to anyone. I don’t know where you were at that point. News of your situation, your pregnancy, eventually spread around. People guessed about what had happened, and it wasn’t hard to figure it out. My friends and I didn’t really talk about it. No one wanted to know if one of us had... well, you know. Of course we should have gone to the police, we should have tried to find out who did it, but we were too worried about ourselves, we were afraid of getting in trouble. I... I’m sorry.”

Sten stared at the ground. Amina remained silent. She was overwhelmed by what she had just heard, she couldn’t process it. She had really thought that the incident had been her own well-kept secret, that people had believed the story she had made up about Rian and his father.

“Then I saw you at that party here in Dresden, at the apartment. I recognized you immediately. You were even more beautiful, but I knew it was you.” Sten let out a rueful laugh.

“Something – I don’t know what – moved me to talk to you. I wanted to get to know you a little better, hear how things turned out for you. At first I didn’t plan on letting it go so far, I didn’t think we would get so... close to each other. And then suddenly I was in the thick of it,

there was no turning back, and I didn't *want* to turn back. But I still didn't know how to handle it. Of course I should have told you all of this right away, but at some point, the moment had already passed, and then I just couldn't bring myself to do it. I know that was a mistake. Really. I am so sorry."

An agonizing silence passed between them. Amina stared straight ahead, still silent. She should say something, anything, but she suddenly felt so powerless, so infinitely weak. As if every last bit of strength had left her body. She wanted to sleep. She didn't want to think anymore.

Sten started talking again, he talked and talked, tried to fix things with his words, tried to take things back for which it was already far too late.

After some time, Amina finally managed to get the words out: she was tired and wanted to be alone. She knew that her silence was tormenting him, and she wasn't even doing it on purpose. She just didn't have any response, not today, not now. Her whole body hurt; memories and realizations were coming to her in waves and she couldn't bear their weight.

Once Sten had left, Amina laid in her bed, dressed as she was, and eventually burrowed into the sheets and tried to sleep.

She slept in fits, waking up almost every hour and then trying to push away the unpleasant thoughts so she could go back to sleep. She felt raw and vulnerable.

Alex tried to reach her throughout the next day, but she had no desire to talk to him about Sten or *Ante Noctem*. Their story had changed, reached a new level. Now it was personal again, something that heavily impacted her. She felt she had to get through it on her own. She couldn't have Alex by her side anymore, didn't want him there. Not since last night. She didn't want to push any of her own responsibility onto him by sharing what she had learned. She would make her way through this alone once more.

She had considered the possibility of ending her investigation into *Ante Noctem* and just going back home to Rian, forgetting about Sten. But she decided that wasn't an option. She had to get to the bottom of *Ante Noctem's* sickening agenda first.

Sten grew even more persistent since Amina had sent him home the night before. He had called her several times and left her messages on her voicemail. He said he was truly sorry, and that he would help find Rian's father if she wanted, he would talk to his friends, he would be there for her, blah blah blah. To Amina, it seemed like he was mocking her, or even taunting her. Working together with Sten was the last thing she wanted to do right now.

But she called him back that afternoon anyway. He was clearly relieved to hear from her.

"Hey Amina, I'm so glad you called. Are you doing any better? Do you want to talk?"

Amina ignored his questions.

"Do you have any plans today?" she asked.

“Well, I’ve got to go to the student union to get some things done, but after that I’m free. Does six o’clock work? Should I come over there?”

“No, no. I’ll call you back this evening,” she answered curtly, and hung up. It looked like Sten wouldn’t be home for the next few hours. Good.

Then she gave Alex a call, so that he would stop bothering her.

“Hey Mina, have you learned anything new? I think we should probably sneak into their meeting again...”

Amina tried her very best to sound normal.

“Hey, you know, I don’t think we need to do that anymore. I talked with Sten, and he was really open with me. They had been planning this big march downtown, with a flash mob, hundreds of people, a massive event. That’s the ‘big thing’ they had been talking about. I don’t think we need to look into it any further.”

Alex went silent for a few seconds, and then ventured with uncertainty, “Okay. Are you sure? What about Sami?<sup>1</sup> We have to find out once and for all if *Ante Noctem* was behind the attack made on him.”

“I brought that up with Sten too. He promised to explain that as well. We’re meeting tomorrow. It’s fine, Alex, we won’t need to do much more about this. I’ll call you tomorrow evening. Talk to you then.”

She cut him off just as she had Sten, ending the call. If she had to tell one more lie, she felt she would throw up.

A half hour later, Amina got dressed and made her way to Sten’s apartment building.

When she arrived, she rang the doorbell and held her breath for one of his roommates to be home. There was almost always somebody there, but there was still a chance it would be empty and she’d be out of luck. After a while, someone came to the door and let her in.

Upon reaching Sten’s door upstairs, she saw it was already open. One of his roommates popped his head out of the kitchen and gave her a friendly wave as she slipped inside and closed the door behind her. Because he recognized her, there was no need to explain her presence when Sten wasn’t home. He probably thought she was waiting for Sten or had just forgotten something in his room and was coming to pick it up. Typical behavior for a girl whose boyfriend lived in the building.

Amina quickly went into Sten’s bedroom. Even if Sten were to come home early, he would most likely be happy to see her, and wouldn’t suspect a thing. And anyway, he wasn’t exactly in a position to voice any suspicions or demand anything of her at the moment. Nevertheless she wanted to be quick.

The room was cluttered. It seemed to get even messier every time she came here. Either Sten was too busy now to keep things tidy, or he just didn’t feel like it.

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<sup>1</sup> Translator’s note: Sami is a young Syrian man who was brutally assaulted earlier in the novel, almost certainly by Sten and his group.

She scanned the area, trying to decide where she should start. She looked through his dresser, but all she saw was clothes, so she moved on to his desk. It was overflowing with documents, papers, and writing utensils, with Sten's laptop in the middle. A shiver ran through her.

Most of the scattered pages were filled with scribbled equations. Under one folder filled with bank statements, she found the pamphlet again on which *Stay away from A.* was written. She thought over it again. It had to have been written by Samuel<sup>2</sup>, and of course "A." was referring to her, but none of that mattered anymore.

Just as she was about to open Sten's laptop, she heard a noise out in the hall, followed by a door opening and closing. She hastily rearranged the desk as she had found it, and took a seat stiffly on the couch.

She strained her ears. The floorboards in the foyer creaked, someone was approaching Sten's door. Amina held her breath. She prayed that it wasn't him. She needed to examine his laptop, and now would have been the perfect time.

Another door opened and shut: it sounded like the door across the hall. That meant Sten's second roommate had come home. She was relieved. She held still on the couch for another two or three minutes, listening carefully. It remained silent outside, so she stood up again and returned to the desk.

She opened up the laptop, and it unlocked automatically. It had been in "sleep" mode. Amina muttered a quiet "Thank you." Otherwise she would have needed a password, which she never could have guessed.

The desktop was just as cluttered as the room itself, filled with countless files and folders. Amina began to click her way through them. Most of the PDFs were lecture notes and homework. She browsed the "photos" and "documents" folders, but nothing interesting turned up. Just old classwork, photos with friends on some vacation from long ago.

She tried to log in to his email, but it was password protected. That was frustrating. She probably would have found something useful there.

She looked through all of the folders again, but she found nothing new.

But then, a folder caught her eye that was nested under the "downloads" category. It was labelled "AN."

She clicked on it, and found another mass of files inside, including the pamphlet in its various drafts and versions. It looked like she had discovered something after all.

A list of far-right organizations and individuals was also in the folder. Their *Heimatliebe* group meeting was also noted.

Another file was full of links to various websites. Amina looked at all of these, too. They were mostly alt-right news sites, several of which spread particularly outlandish conspiracy theories.

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<sup>2</sup> Translator's note: Samuel is the fat young man from the first chapter. His identity is revealed early on in the novel, in a chapter which is not included in this translation.



All of these things seemed relevant, but she also needed to find proof of the “big thing” Samuel had boasted about at the group meeting, or else none of this would be of much use.

Beginning to feel impatient, she eventually started just skimming through the documents. There were so many files; it would take hours to examine each one carefully.

She sighed. The next file was a picture of the floor plan of the Semperoper. Amina was taken aback. She knew they held their meetings next door, but why would Sten need a diagram of its floor plan?

The next files showed the opera house from all directions.

After that, she found another floor plan of the opera house, but this one was marked in some places with red X's. Amina had no idea what that could mean.

More files. She opened them. They were descriptions of chemical reactions, or something like that. Amina skipped over these; she knew next to nothing about chemistry.

Frustrated, she had to admit to herself that none of the evidence she had found was substantial enough. Sten must keep the important things somewhere else. Or maybe only Samuel had access; he was the leader of the group, after all. Digging through the remaining photos, notes, and graphics felt futile. It would only lead to her getting caught by Sten when he got home. She couldn't risk that.

She closed the files and shut the laptop. Immediately, she had an unsettling feeling, something she couldn't quite put her finger on. Something had taken hold of some little corner of her brain. She contemplated it. What could it be? She felt she had passed over something obvious.

She kept mulling things over while she put on her coat and scarf. Just as she was about to leave the room, the feeling became unbearable, stopping her in her tracks.

Frantically, she tore off her scarf and coat and took up her place at the computer once more.

She pulled up the “AN” folder and clicked through the photos and floorplans of the Semperoper. What did they mean? What were they doing in this folder?

She also made herself look at the chemical documents again, full of descriptions of properties of various substances and their reactions with others. This time, she read through it attentively. The last of these files was five pages long. Amina examined this one too, but she couldn't make a bit of sense out of anything that was written. She was about to close it when she suddenly noticed something on the last page.

There was an annotation with the next day's date, along with the sentence:

*Samuel will bring the supplies. Meet at 7:30 p.m., show at 8. Each person sets up one, 7:45 at the latest. Meet back at Samuel's at 8.*

Amina tried to understand. *Each person sets up one?* She bit her lower lip, couldn't keep her leg from bouncing nervously. What could this mean?

One more time, she went through the floor plans, photos, and descriptions. *Descriptions.* These weren't descriptions, they were instructions.

Amina felt nauseous. She skimmed the instructions and read the annotation again and again, until she was absolutely sure.

*Ante Noctem* was planning an attack.

### Part Three: Interview with Arunika Senarath

*MG: The title *Diese eine Nacht* (That One Night) is semantically related to the name of Sten's group *Ante Noctem*, which means "Before Nightfall" in Latin. One of them refers to the night Amina was drugged, raped, and got pregnant and the other is the name of the right-wing extremist group that is planning a terrorist attack on the *Semperoper*. Is the connection intentional and, in your opinion, how does the title *Diese eine Nacht* relate to *Ante Noctem*, the name of Sten's group?*

AS: The title *Diese eine Nacht* was a suggestion my publisher made. I had something similar in mind and immediately confirmed it. We mainly had the night Amina was raped and got pregnant in mind. But the title also links the book to being a love story, so that particular night could also refer to a "night of love."

*MG: Sten's character is a terrifying portrayal of the "banality of evil," a term coined by Hannah Arendt to describe how seemingly average or banal people can be capable of cruelty: he is a good looking graduate student, while also an accomplice to rape and a far-right extremist – even to the extent of attacking foreigners. For example, he was present the night Amina was raped and was friends with the perpetrators, but did not go to the police. Later, he recognized her at a party, sought her out, started a relationship with her, and lied about where he was from. He was a member of the small but violent group *Ante Noctem*, didn't stand up for Amina when Samuel made racist comments, attacked Sami based on his dark skin and hair, and planned an attack on the audience at the *Semperoper*. Despite these facts, Amina – a person of color herself – still mouths "Ich liebe dich" [I love you] after turning him in to the police when she finds out about the attack. And, in your interview with Gunnar Kaiser, you say that "[Sten] ist eigentlich an sich ein guter Mensch." [Sten is really, in and of himself, a good person]. Are Sten's actions meant to be justified because he moved around a lot and sought friends? Was Sten mentally ill or also dealing with trauma in a way that might compare him to the profile of an American mass shooter? Was he trying to redeem himself in Amina's eyes for playing such a role in her rape? In any case, can you elaborate on how Sten can be understood as "ein guter Mensch" [a good person]?*

AS: Well, I would not call him "a good person" (although I did before). I would say that he is more of a typical "Mitläufer" [follower] who doesn't take responsibility for his actions at all. Furthermore, he is good at repressing almost anything that could interrupt him being with his

group of friends, on whom he is somewhat emotionally dependent. I would say that he is a very insecure person. He does not really believe in hatred and right-wing ideologies, but keeps repeating what he has been told. As he is an emotionally unstable character, he is an easy target for people like Samuel. I didn't go into detail about why Sten is this insecure person, because it might seem like saying that a person is not responsible for being bad if anything bad has happened to them in the past. But I guess, everyone who is drawn to extremist groups has probably experienced or felt some kind of rejection from the *Mehrheitsgesellschaft* [status quo]. Still, he is fully responsible for what he is saying and doing and there is no kind of excuse for it.

*MG: The city of Dresden plays such a significant role that it can almost be understood as a character itself. It has a complicated history that ranges from the residence of the Kings of Saxony, to its decimation in the Second World War and subsequent rebuilding, to the DDR, to the birthplace of the far-right group PEGIDA. How did the city's history inform your writing and how does your writing comment on the history of Dresden and Germany in general?*

AS: Dresden indeed plays a significant role in the story. When I started writing the novel, I still studied in Dresden. It was the beginning of Pegida and I could sometimes watch the crowd pass by the building I lived in. This was my inspiration for the story. It was mainly Pegida's formation and my being directly confronted with it that made Dresden the only place I could imagine setting the story.

*MG: The Semperoper plays a special role in the novel: first mentioned as an integral part of the Dresden skyline and later the site of Amina and Sten's first date, sinister political meetings, and ultimately an attempted terrorist attack. And the pieces performed at the opera house have symbolic value as well. For example, Giselle is about a man who disguises his identity and tricks a girl to fall in love with him. When she finds out who he is, she dies of a broken heart. And Coppélia is based on ETA Hoffman's Der Sandmann, which forms the base of Freud's essay on the uncanny (Das Unheimliche), and is related to Sten's familiar yet jarring ice-blue eyes as well as Amina's experience with trauma. Did you consider any piece in particular to be performed the night of the attack? How does the opera house itself and the performances chosen inside inform your writing? Also, how might the choice of the opera house as a target fit in with Ante Noctem's*

*far right goals - were they trying to frame others, was it a ploy to get more attention, was it their 'Reichstag fire'?*

AS: As far as I can remember, I did not have any particular play in mind for the night of the attack. The Semperoper is a really important symbol for the people of Dresden: the building has burnt down several times, but it was rebuilt every time in its original style. *Ante Noctem* chose this target just to become the focus of attention. It shows that they do not even shy away from harming people who aren't members of their targeted groups, and would do just about anything to spread their message.

*MG: The prologue sets up Amina's experience as someone who is deeply aware of others' perception of her yet as someone who desires to have her voice heard. Throughout the novel, she is often conflicted and caught between a desire to please others or to be true to herself. In the end, she turns Sten in even though she has feelings for him and knows that her decision may hurt him. She also loves the child who came from a source of great trauma for her. It seems that Amina becomes more comfortable with the many manifestations of her complicated and conflicted existence throughout the course of the novel. Is this part of your larger message?*

AS: Yes, Amina is and was dealing with a lot, but is not passive in any way. She tries to do the right thing and to discover the truth. Her being a strong character and finding out what values matter most to her and who she wants to be in the end is an important part of the story.

*MG: There were many moments in the text where Amina did not feel in control of herself, and they play a central role in the development of the story: from her irritation at being at Sten's beck and call for the first several dates to her denial of the truth of the extent of his extremism. For example, "Zwischen sie trat eine quälende Stille. Amina stierte geradeaus, sie schwieg. Sie sollte etwas darüber sagen, irgendetwas. Aber sie fühlte sich auf einmal so schwach, so unendlich schwach. Als wäre jede Kraft aus ihrem Körper gewichen." These themes of mental autonomy are closely tied to her control over her own body (which, of course, makes sense as so much of one's sense of physical and mental autonomy is severely affected by rape and sexual assault). In what contexts do you see these themes manifesting? How do you position Amina as an*

*intersectional character; how much of this loss of sense of autonomy is due to her specific situation (having been raped and bearing the child), and how much is an ever-present sense of identity constructed by those around her?*

AS: Because of her personal history, Amina experiences a lot of ambiguity in every aspect of her life, and of course a lot of the general feelings of insecurity come out of her very special situation. But in general, I think that a lot of people growing up and becoming adults face a lot of insecurity and confusion and could get into a situation where they have to determine their values, or sacrifice their ideals for someone else's. For a woman in particular, there is still a common conception of needing someone in your life and feeling incomplete without a partner. So I think that many people can relate to enduring some kind of mistreatment from someone else, while at the same time knowing that it's not right.

*MG: When Alex and Amina are talking about attending the Stammtisch, Alex does not understand how Amina, as a person of color and therefore a potential target for an attack, might be afraid to show up to a far-right meeting. Her fear reflects the struggles that people of color encounter every day with the micro (and macro) aggressions against them in the United States and in Germany as well. How do you think Amina's understanding of being perceived as a person of color shapes her identity in the work? Do you think there is a difference in Amina's perception of herself as a person of color and others' perceptions of her? And, is there any resolution at the end?*

AS: Amina is highly aware of herself being seen as the "other," a non-white person, and also knows that she's sometimes marked as a source of desire and as an exotic, interesting woman. At the same time, she has faced aggression, which of course is an extremely confusing combination. So, I guess as a person of color, and probably like most people of color, she's never *not* aware of being different.

*MG: Reviews I have read of the book have mentioned the educational value of the book in the classroom as an introduction to modern political issues. Is there a particular message that you hope would come through if *Diese eine Nacht* were used in a classroom?*

AS: First, I think it's really important that younger people get in touch with politics at all, and not just neglect the topic as being boring or too difficult to understand. Then, of course, I would hope that people think about racism and racist views in their life and get a sense that hatred and racism are never right.

*MG: Who is your target audience for this book? It seems to be geared towards younger, but still advanced readers. Would you say the book is primarily written for those who do have experience with racial or gender discrimination, or for those who have less experience and should learn?*

AS: The book is mainly targeted toward younger people, who are still in school or maybe just started studying. But I also had readers in their forties or fifties who liked it. I think for people who have faced racism, it's always helpful to get the sense of not being alone, but I think the book is interesting for anyone who is open to the topic.

*MG: In interviews, you have pointed out that many people in the audience have been ex-GDR citizens and you yourself are from the former West. How did elements of Dresden's GDR past influence your thinking about this novel, the plot, the characters and how have reactions responded to this tension? To what extent does the novel comment on the rise of the far-right in former East Germany?*

AS: The story was inspired by the rise and enormous success of Pegida, so the specific situation of the former GDR and the pervasiveness of right-wing ideology there play a big role in the book. Right-wing extremism is not unique to the former GDR, but in many ways it is a

phenomenon in the eastern region of Germany because many people feel left behind and like “losers” of the re-unification.

*MG: How do you feel about the text reaching an international audience; which themes do you expect will transfer easily and which do you feel are more specific to the socio-historical context of Germany and Dresden in particular?*

AS: The whole Pegida topic in particular, considering the background behind why such a group is most successful in the former GDR, is a very German subject. An international audience might not be familiar with it. However, racism in general is something very international. The subject of becoming an adult and the love story can also be understood interculturally.

*MG: You have mentioned several other political novels as sources of inspiration to write this book, along with the rise of PEGIDA in Dresden. Did you feel that your novel filled a (student-g geared) space where there was little political literature available from this perspective? I would like to hear more about the way you see yourself (and political literature in general) within the political landscape, from the perspective of someone who overtly identifies as a political author. Also, how (if at all) has your experience as a person of color growing up in Germany informed *Diese eine Nacht*?*

AS: At the time I wrote the book, I felt like there was little to no German political literature, especially literature about current topics that is targeted toward a younger audience, yet still written in a light and entertaining way. Of course, like Amina, I have experienced incidents as a person of color in Germany, though never in such an extreme way as she does. I thought, and still think, that any non-white view in literature is rare and needs to increase.



*MG: What is the significance of Sten's tattoo? I suspected that it had a right-wing connotation that I'm unfamiliar with. It also seemed to question his claim that he was just pulled into the movement through his more extremist friends and that he had been involved in the movement for some time already. Did you have a specific kind of symbolism in mind when you wrote that detail?*

AS: Regarding the symbolism of his tattoo, I mainly thought about how right-wing movements pursue a lot of cultural appropriation and just take over whatever symbols they like for their own agenda.

#### **Part Four: A Discussion of Translation (with Examples from the Text)**

This section addresses the significant role translation theory played in how I approached this translation. I begin by outlining the ideas of the theorists who most influenced my practice, followed by a discussion of the challenges which arose during the process and how they were resolved. The discussion is accompanied by representative examples from the translated text which demonstrate how I applied certain aspects of translation theory. Finally, I conclude with a few brief words as to the significance of the project.

The role of theory in translation is often ambiguous, as theoretical ideas in the discipline tend to be more philosophical in nature. One of the central aspects of translation theory is the question of whether one should translate word-for-word, or sense-for-sense. These concepts have been described using many different terms, from Cicero's question of "*ad verbum* translation" (Weissbort & Eysteinnsson 21) to Walter Benjamin's discussion of "Fidelity" and "freedom" (160) to Jiří Levý's juxtaposition of being "faithful" or "free" (14). Yet although the majority of theorists have agreed that "sense-for-sense" translation is typically the most coherent strategy and is more representative of the source text, the pervasive view institutionally is closer to the "word-for-word" tradition (c.f. Chakravorty Spivak, 1992, 398). Van Wyke notes that the ethics of translation have begun to change from the traditional notions of fidelity to the source text and a minimization of the translator's voice. Translation studies since the late 20th century have begun to place more emphasis on transferring the pragmatic meaning of a text for a purpose, allowing some degree of interpretation on the part of the translator. Van Wyke describes complete fidelity as an "impossible requirement that translators neutrally reproduce the same text in another language," saying that they will "inevitably produce a difference." (112) A translator's

interpretation of the text has been discouraged. However, by only translating the direct meaning of each sentence, there is a potential for pragmatic aspects of the translation to be lost, as each language and language culture uses different devices to convey pragmatic understanding, and organizes information in different ways (Hassan 5).

In writing my translation, despite a strong comprehension, I found that there is little practical advice on *how* to work within a freer “sense for sense” framework while maintaining fidelity (accuracy) to the source text. However, several scholars guided my thinking as I practiced. I began with the basic steps outlined by Levý: “apprehension of source,” “interpretation of source,” and “re-stylization of source.” (31) The apprehension of the source is, in short, to read and thoroughly comprehend the source language text and its messages. In the next phase, “interpretation of source,” it is necessary for the translator to discern the pragmatic meaning of the text. This is the key aspect of the process: Levý maintains that the meaning of the text must be maintained, while the language itself is replaced (23). The final step in Levý’s process is the “restylization of source,” or the translation proper. The first two have been discussed above, and the third is the topic of this critical assessment.

The apprehension of the source is, in short, to read and thoroughly comprehend the SLT and its messages.. This gave me a basic process to guide my project. While writing, perhaps the most influential to the process as a whole was the work of Christiane Nord, who describes sense-for-sense translation as making “the jump” (6) into the target culture’s rhetorical framework, or “linguaculture.” (1) She compares the traditional method of translation, which oftentimes involves writing a word-for-word translation first and revising it gradually to fit it in more within the target language’s conventions, to a new method in which a text is more freely

translated. In this new method, the translator directly employs pragmatic and rhetorical devices in the target language, editing for flow and clarity, and then revisiting the source text to ensure that all of the information and meaning remains accurately conveyed. As such, the final product has already “bridged the linguaculture gap” (2), rather than potentially never reaching a point in which it reads naturally in the target language. I used a mixture of both methods in my work. For the most part, I used the latter, aiming to create a work which reads as a natural sounding English text. However, in cases of complex syntax and semantics in the source text, I would translate word-for-word first in order to ensure that all of the ideas are transferred, and then I revised to follow English syntax and style. After writing each section, I received feedback from at least two other reviewers, one who spoke German and one or more who did not. Their feedback was essential in finding the balance between literal accuracy and English style/readability.

While Nord guided my overall process, some specific problems arose which were addressed using strategies recommended by other scholars. Bahaa-eddin Hassan outlines several strategies for conveying pragmatic meaning: to “explicate,” implicate,” or “compensate” (22). Lawrence Venuti’s principles of foreignization versus domestication were used in several places. Finally, Mona Baker’s application of narrative theory to translation influenced several important decisions on phrasing and lexicon. These will be addressed in the following discussion.

### **Challenges and solutions:**

The main issues that came up in the translation process were maintaining the appropriate register, certain words’ connotations within societal narratives, and purely semantic challenges. However, before addressing the content of the text itself, the title merits further discussion. Titles tend to be more freely translated than the contents of a piece of work, as the purpose of a title is to stand out

and appeal to an audience in the target linguaculture. In translating the title of *Diese eine Nacht*, I went back and forth between several ideas, all the while asking, “what information should the title convey?” While several solutions were proposed, such as *What Happens in a Night*, it became clear to me that choosing a title close to the original would best convey the message and themes of the book. Although a fully direct translation sounds grammatically odd in English, I merely changed the title from *This One Night* to *That One Night*, a phrase which encapsulates the significance that individual moments have in shaping our lives while also ambiguous enough to refer to any of the many turning points within the book.

Having addressed the title, I now begin with the register in the body of the work. The text is a young adult novel, and uses many colloquial phrases and fairly simple language. There were times, especially in my first draft, when I initially employed language which sounded too “lofty” for the genre, both in the characters’ dialogues and in the surrounding prose.

The issues of dialogue which most stood out and required the most revision were contractions and appropriate use of aspect. German frequently uses the perfective aspect, which sounds natural in conversation. However, in spoken English the past perfect is uncommon unless intentionally speaking in a more formal register. Similarly, spoken English employs more contractions than German. An example of these changes can be seen in the revision of the passage in which Amina describes her assault (Example 1). Perfect aspect is marked in bold:

**Example 1:**

*German:* So betrunken **war** ich zuvor nie **gewesen**. [...] Sie erzählte mir, dass sie, nachdem sie auf der Toilette **gewesen war**, uns nicht mehr sofort wiedergefunden und deshalb eine Weile mit irgendeinem Typen **getanzt hat**. (43)

*English (Pre-revision):* “I **had** never **been** so drunk in my life. [...] She told me that after coming back from the bathroom, she **hadn’t** seen the rest of us right away and so **had** found a guy to dance with for a while.”

English (Post-revision): “I’d never been so drunk in my life. [...] She told me that she didn’t see us when she came back from the bathroom, so she found a guy to dance with for a while.”

The issue of higher-register prose was pointed out by a student in a German class to which I presented, who brought up that even if it wasn’t explicitly in the dialogue, lofty tone in the prose gave the impression that the character herself was stuck up, as the prose reflected how she thought. Example 2 shows one passage in which these changes were necessary to preserve the appropriate register and keep a more down-to-earth perception of Amina’s character.

**Example 2:**

German: *Amina war nicht sehr achtsam, was solche Dinge betraf. [...] Trotz der recht großen Auswahl an Schminkutensilien, [...] (12)*

English (pre-revision): Amina wasn’t particularly attentive to maintaining **such things**. [...] Despite the **myriad** of makeup **utensils** available, [...]

English (post-revision): Amina wasn’t particularly attentive to maintaining **things like that**. [...] Despite **all of the different kinds of makeup** she had, [...]

In addition to language choices influencing how Amina is perceived, there were also decisions to make regarding the portrayal of Sten. Although he is the antagonist, his character is surrounded with ambivalence, and he is not always portrayed in an overtly negative or positive light. There were some cases in which a single word describing him could be translated in multiple ways from German to English, each of which carries different connotations which influence how he is perceived. Three cases of this are shown in Example 3. The choice in 3a to replace “perpetrator’s stare” with “someone as they stare” was meant to avoid the loaded word of “perpetrator,” particularly as Sten has yet to be introduced and his guilt in Amina’s rape has yet

to be established. It is too early to describe him in that way. In 3b, the German word *schmunzeln* can be translated as “smirked” (with negative connotations) or as “smiled benignly.” To avoid a premature implication of Sten as bad, I chose “grinned” as a balanced alternative. In 3c, Sten tells Amina that he feels that she doesn’t like him: I originally wrote “show it”, but it sounded too threatening in English. It *is* threatening, and the whole scene is manipulative, but the original tone still has a lighthearted quality to it, hence my choice of hedging the phrase with “Well then maybe show me once in a while.”

### Example 3:

- a) *German*: ...nachdem man tatsächlich jemand dabei ertappt hat, wie er einen anstarrt. (15)

English (Pre-revision): ...after indeed catching the perpetrator’s stare.

English (Post-revision): ...after indeed catching someone as they stare.

- b) *German*: Sten schmunzelte. “Wieso gerade Dresden?” (32)

English (Pre-revision): Sten smirked. “Why Dresden?”

English (Post-revision): Sten grinned. “Why Dresden?”

- c) *German*: “Na, dann zeig es mir auch mal.” (54)

English (Pre-revision): “Well then show it for once.”

English (Post-revision): “Well then maybe show me once in a while.”

The passage which was most complicated to tonally convey was the pamphlet written by *Ante Noctem* (Example 4). My initial translation was linguistically very accurate to the tone and syntax of the original, however the texts came across very differently depending on the language. In German, the pamphlet reads as an aggressive, yet amateur far-right text written by a group of

young students. However, preserving the same linguistic tone in English brings up connotations of President Bush's rhetoric on the War on Terror. This is an issue which Susan Bassnett addresses in her paper *Translating Terror*. Referring to the translation of Al Qaeda rhetoric, she comments that "The problem, however, which is fundamental to all translation, is that rhetorical conventions carry different meanings in different contexts." (394). She identifies the ways in which a translation captures the tone in the original Arabic, but this has a different pragmatic function in English. She writes,

[The translation] does not lead to discursive shifts that might transform the rhetoric into something more immediate or more explicitly familiar, and because of this the text reinforces the stereotype of the fundamentalist as in direct conflict not just with a particular political enemy, but with modernity itself. Even car bombs are transformed into quaintly antiquated cars of death. (395)

After several drafts of the pamphlet, I came upon a result which I feel accurately balances these two conflicting notions. The most salient changes are bolded. In particular, the subject of the last sentence is impersonal and official sounding in the original, but directly addresses an audience of peers in the revision. Similarly, "[...] shall bitterly feel the echo of our actions" is archaic sounding and convoluted, rather than the straightforward and single-minded "will pay dearly."

**Example 4:**

*German:* **Wir erheben uns, um den sinnlosen Treiben unserer Regierung, der Parteien des Bundestages und der Lobbyisten ein Ende zu setzen. Wir schauen uns nicht länger an, wie deutsche Politik in Washington gemacht wird, wie Islamisten ganze Dörfer auslöschen und schließlich in Deutschland Asyl finden. Wir hören uns die Lügen der gleichgeschalteten Presse nicht länger an, die Märchen, die uns Tag für Tag eingetrichtert werden. Damit muss jetzt Schluss sein. Wer genauso denkt, ist aufgefordert, sich uns anzuschließen, wer gegen uns, und somit gegen ein freies Deutschland ankämpft, wird das Echo auf bittere Weise zu spüren bekommen. Für unser Land! Ante Noctem.** (19)



English (Pre-revision): “We are **standing up** to put an end to the senseless operations of our government, of the parties of congress, and of the lobbyists. We will no longer stand by and watch as German politics are decided in Washington, as Islamists raze entire villages before coming to find their asylum in Germany. We will no longer listen to the lies of the press which is controlled by a single interest, the fairytales which are drummed into us day in and day out. **It is time for all that to end. Those who agree are encouraged to join us - and those who fight against us**, and therefore against the truth and against a free Germany, **shall bitterly feel the echo of our actions**. For our country! Ante Noctem”

English (Post-revision): “We are rising to put an end to the senseless mechanisms of our government, of the parties of congress, and of the lobbyists. We will no longer stand by and watch as German politics are decided in Washington, as Islamists raze entire villages before coming to find their asylum in Germany. We will no longer listen to the lies of the single-minded press, to the fairytales which are drummed into us day in and day out. **All that must end now. If you agree, then join us - and if you’re against us**, and therefore against the truth and against a free Germany, **then you will pay dearly**. For our country! Ante Noctem”

Beyond the issues of register discussed above, there are other rhetorical devices which stand to be addressed. Especially important is to have an awareness of some terms’ connotations in the context of certain societal narratives such as sexism. As Baker discusses extensively in her book *Translation and Conflict: A Narrative Account*, narratives refer not only to stories told within a single text, but rather across texts and time, such that certain perspectives are “normalized,” or no longer questioned (11). She references Bennet and Edelman, who succinctly posit that “narrative shapes people’s views of rationality, of objectivity, of morality, and of their conceptions of themselves and others” (Bennett and Edelman 1985: 159, qtd. in Baker, 19). Example 5 illustrates a moment in which I took a critical look at my translation and how a specific word choice fit into a broader narrative of sexism. The most “faithful” translation would be to write “just say no,” however in English this carries connotations of both the War on Drugs and the failed “no means no” anti sexual assault campaign encouraging women to simply say no

to unwanted sexual contact (cf Kitzinger, Celia, & Frith, 1999). To avoid situating Amina within a sexist narrative in which sexual assault victims are blamed for taking inadequate action against their perpetrators. Although this is a relatively small phrase within the translation, it had potential to make a negative impact on readers' perceptions of Amina.

**Example 5:**

German: *Wieso konnte sie eigentlich nie 'nein' sagen, wenn sie etwas nicht wollte?* (52)

English (Pre-revision): How come she could never just say 'no' when she didn't want something?

English (Post-revision): how come she could never just refuse things when she didn't want them?

The last rhetorical strategy that I have used throughout the text are the processes of “foreignization” and “domestication” (Venuti, qtd. in Bassnett 396). According to these processes, translators can either foreignize their texts (using loan words or grammatical structures from the source language) or domesticate their text (making the translation sound as close as possible to having originally been written in the target language). Foreignization can be helpful in that it situates the readers within the cultural environment of the source text. I used a blend of both strategies. Example 6 shows some particular words which I chose to either borrow (6a) or domesticate (6b). In the former, I appreciated the German term of “*Neustadt*” in its establishment of the city's flavor. It is also a relevant area of the city throughout the text. In order to keep using the *Neustadt* throughout, I employed Hassan's strategy of elaboration. In the latter, I struggled at first with the translation of the term *WG* (*Wohngemeinschaft*). It is a concept very specific to German culture which doesn't carry over well, somewhat like a communal apartment or shared apartment space for young people. This is where the party takes place in the first chapter. My first instinct was to borrow the term, which would be used in subsequent references.

However, the explication interrupted the flow of the prose as it would need too much context for an American reader, and the distinction between a WG and any other apartment was not relevant to the story. In this case, I chose to domesticate the term, calling it a “student apartment.”

**Example 6:**

- a) German: *eine alternative, mit Szene-Kneipen und Clubs angereicherte Neustadt* (9)

English: The Neustadt, a modern borough bustling with alternative culture...

- b) German: *WG*

English (Pre-revision): WG, a frathouse/shared apartment/multiplex. [alternatives]

English (Post-revision): student apartment

Finally, I used special techniques such as corpus searching to convey purely the semantic meaning (as opposed to other pragmatic meaning). Several terms in English sounded grammatical to me, but other reviewers said they sounded odd for English. For these, I used a corpus search to find which version was more likely to come up in written English. In the following example, I had originally written “a half bad impression,” but I wasn’t sure of its grammaticality.

**Example 7:**

German: *keinen schlechten Eindruck* (28)

English (Pre-revision): didn’t make a half bad impression

English (Post-revision): didn’t make a bad impression

To confirm, I performed a corpus search using COCA (Corpus of Contemporary American English), finding the most common collocates of the word “impression” up to three places to the left of the word to account for “half a bad impression” or “a half bad impression,” to see if “half” occurred in this environment. There were no occurrences of “half” in this context in the over one billion word corpus, leading me to simplify it to “a bad impression.”

The examples detailed above are, of course, not exhaustive, but rather are representative of the types of issues which had to be resolved in order to create a faithful, coherent, and informed translation. In addition to these specific instances, further questions arose, including language-specific wordplay and syntactic complexity. The purpose of this project has been to provide insight into the practice of translation and the thought processes involved, binding theory to practice and exploring the significance of translation as a vehicle for voices and ideas across cultures.

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