

Sample translation

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THE ROCKETS

It's not even eight and the fireworks have started going off outside the window, we can't see them, but we hear them banging, inside the living room, and over the music. We are a small friend group, dinner is finished, and the plates are still left around the table, while we've moved closer together, talking about the year to come, about everything we wish for, things we want more of, and the things we want less of.

Renate says she wants to grow tomatoes.

Lisa wants to eat more vegetables.

Nichlas wants to go to the cinema more, and squeezes my hand when he says it.

I say that I want to call my mum more often.

"That's nice," Renate says, leaning her head against my shoulder. Nadia and Stian come into the living room from the kitchen laughing, each with a party blower in their mouth, but because they're laughing no sound comes out when they try to blow.

"We're talking about the things we want to do more of in the new year," Lisa tells them as she gets up, gathers a few glasses, and walks past them into the kitchen.

"I wanna hang out with you more," Nadia says, finally getting a sound out of the blower. She blows it three times and we clap. Then she drops down onto the sofa beside Renate and hugs her. Stian tosses his blower to Nichlas, who honks it, and then Stian clears his throat and tells everyone he's going to read the seventy-one books he's marked as started on his Goodreads.

"You've started seventy-one books at the same time? How is that even possible?"

"That's easy," Stian replies, taking a top-up from Lisa, who's also topping up the other glasses. "You start one book, you read a bit, then you start another, read a bit, then another, you get the gist." He takes a sip and shrugs his shoulders.

"I don't think I've read seventy-one books in my entire life," Renate says.

"You can borrow it when I finish the first one." Stian and Renate clink glasses. I help Lisa clear up the table, Nichlas turns the music up, and Nadia checks in with the babysitter, asking if everything's okay.

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I can hear my friends singing loudly along to the music in the living room while I rinse the plates and stack them in the dishwasher. Renate always tells me that I don't need to help tidy up, but I

like it. I hum to the song they're howling along to, and after a few minutes the countertop is tidy again. I go over it with a cloth and think that I should write Mum a message now, before the mobile network crashes, so I sit down by the kitchen table to do it before returning to the others. I've received two messages. I crack open a can of beer and open the first one.

"Happy New Year from the mountain! Sol has already fallen asleep here, but we promised to wake her up before midnight. Hope you're enjoying yourself at the party. Lots of hugs."

There's a photo attached to the message of Sol asleep on the sofa, messy hair and in a glitter dress. She's already six. I heart all the messages from Therese and go back to my inbox. The other message is from Mum and I smile as I reply to her.

Renate comes into the kitchen and sits down beside me. She leans her forehead against my shoulder, asks if I'm tired.

"Not really," I reply.

"I'm so tired, I've been tired all year."

"You're allowed to go to bed," I say as I lean my head against hers.

"Never! It's New Year's Eve, you have to last at least until midnight. So..." She gets up and goes to the coffee maker. "I need some coffee." She takes out the tin and a spoon and looks at me.

"How much should I make? Do you think anyone else wants some?"

I shrug.

"Do you want some?"

I lift my can and say I'm fine.

"I'll make half a pot." She nods to herself while measuring the coffee, then she leans forward on her elbows and watches the machine at work. It gurgles, and the sound reminds me of breakfast, not a party. I get up and walk over to her, putting my can down.

"Are you nervous about starting your new job?" Renate gets out the mugs on the counter, I scootch over to give her some space.

"I'm actually really looking forward to it," I say. "I think it's going to be really great."

She looks at me, and continues to get more mugs, more than I think she needs.

"What?"

"You're not even a bit nervous?"

"No, should I be?" I ask.

She shrugs, folds her arms and looks at me.

"What are you thinking right now?" I ask and point at her playfully, even though I already know what she's going to say.

"I just think it's strange that you want to go back there."

"It's different now," I respond quickly. "It's just a job. It's not like I'm going to college all over again. I'm not sixteen anymore."

I'm not scared anymore, I could also say, but I don't, because I'm not sure that's quite true.

Renate nods slowly in response, smiling to herself before looking back at me.

"Do you think the students are as shitty as we were?"

"Probably," I say, and we both burst out laughing.

Renate drinks half a cup of coffee and says she's still tired.

"The party's almost over," I say reassuringly. It's a quarter to midnight, I take a sip from my beer and quickly glance at my phone, just as Renate is bringing her mug of coffee into the living room and asks if anyone else wants some. A message pops up on Messenger just as I'm about to put my phone away again. It's from Mattias.

Mattias.

I haven't heard from him in years, I don't even know where he lives or who he is anymore. A few years ago we ran into each other on the street, he hugged me and asked if we should get coffee or something, wasn't that what he said? I remember replying yeah sure. Or maybe I even said it would be nice, before hurrying on, trying my best to look like I wasn't walking as fast as I could without running.

Now he's sent a message asking if I'm doing okay.

My finger hovers over the screen and the keyboard, reluctant to open the message. Then the chat window lights up again, another message ticks in, yet again from Mattias.

"I was wondering," it says.

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"Can you remember if I was ever violent towards you?"

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I quickly get up, I hear the sound of the chair scraping against the floor over the loud music from the living room, which just keeps getting louder and louder, and I flinch at Renate's laugh in there, it's all of a sudden so loud and shouty, almost scream-like. I go into the bathroom, lock the door and sit down on the toilet lid, trying to take deep breaths into my stomach. I keep hearing bangs from the fireworks outside, and clamour from the living room, I hear my happy friends and their voices, Renate's laughter that is softer now, which usually makes me feel safe, I can hear the feet of the people at the neighbour's party upstairs, someone jumping to the beat of music different to ours. I hear my heart pound and the pipes hissing in Renate's bathroom, I hear the sirens outside and someone shouting someone else's name. I hear the sound of New Year's Eve as it's nearly midnight.

I hear the sound of so many parties where I hid in the bathroom, afraid of what he might say or do when he found me again. Even more banging from the fireworks, and my head hisses. I can feel the pulse in my temple, and I have to swallow again and again, but my mouth is so dry. I start counting, first to ten, then to twenty. All of a sudden I'm a teenager again, and I've done something wrong, but I don't know what, but I know he's furious, and I know that he's going to find me any second and pull me out by the arm and ask if I think I'm better than him, and if I

think he's stupid. I open the tap and hold my hands under the cold jet while I lean my forehead against the edge of the sink, still sitting on the toilet. My heart's pounding, and I hear the pounding as some sort of knock against the door, again and again and again, it's pounding and throbbing, and I clench my fists and screw my eyes shut, and above me they're jumping with the beat, and the fireworks are banging in the sky, and I'm grown up now, I'm grown up now, I'm grown up now.

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Can you remember if I was ever violent towards you?

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Can I?

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I was sixteen when we were waiting for the year 2000. I was afraid of everything that would happen. I was afraid the computers would be activated at midnight by the Y2K virus that I had read about on the internet and in the papers, that they would short-circuit the world as we know it, blow all the atom bombs all at once and take away everything we had, everything we cared about, everything we knew and had known. There was already so much to be afraid of, ordinary things, like failing a test or not finding an outfit to wear for school, that none of my friends actually liked me and that they talked behind my back as soon as I left the room, that I would never get a boyfriend. A million things to worry about, and now there were atom bombs too.

I was invited to a party. I had just started college that autumn, and been to a few parties, but I mostly kept to myself. I had found some new friends and kept some old ones. I was full of dreams for the future as well as being filled with unease for what was to come on New Year's Eve.

I was originally celebrating at my nan's house, both that Christmas and New Year's Eve. We ate Christmas dinner and watched TV, ate candy, and went to the shops together. We sat at the cafe in the shopping centre afterwards and watched the snow fall outdoors. It was an unusually snowy winter, I had to shovel the stairs every morning.

On New Year's Eve my friends called all day and evening. They asked if I wanted to come to theirs before the party, if I had something to drink or could get something to drink, if I knew what I was gonna wear, but I sat by the computer upstairs in dread of what was coming. Maybe I should've just stayed at home? Maybe I should've just stayed with Dad and Nan the last evening of 1999, the last evening in life before the year 2000.

Dad asked me if I wanted to go for a walk after dinner and I said yes and went out with him wearing a puffer jacket, wrapped in a large scarf that Nan had knitted for me a couple of years ago. We walked down the road in silence, towards the woods and the car park, towards

the factories and the bus stop. It was cold, my nose burned as I breathed in, and snow squeaked under our boots. We went into the little woods and then he stopped when we had made it up the hill and could see the city view, all the lights, some fireworks that banged above us already, even though it was only seven. It was dark and I went to stand closer to him than I usually do, and then he put his arm over my shoulder.

"Absolutely nothing is going to happen," he said and stroked my arm with his mittened hand.

"Tomorrow will be another ordinary day, just like this one. And then there will be many, many, many more after that."

I nodded and then we looked up at the sky, at the stars and the darkness, and then a firework over the shopping centre.

"I can pick you up from the party if you want," he said as we walked back. "You can just call when you want to go home."

"Thanks," I replied, and when we got back inside Nan asked if I wasn't going to the party I had gone on about for so long. I had talked about it for weeks, it was planned, the whole class was going, and many I didn't know from other schools as well. Jonas was home alone and had a huge house. I hadn't managed to get anything to drink, but right before leaving my nan came into my bedroom and gave me a bottle of wine.

"Don't say anything to Mum or Dad, and behave," she whispered and gave me a quick hug before she scurried down the hallway and shouted at Dad to turn on the TV.

I ran to the metro and took a seat at the back, peeked out of the window at the sky I had stood under with Dad just an hour ago.

Tomorrow would just be a normal day, just like this one. Nothing would happen.

I met Mattias at that party.

And everything changed.

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I remember so many things.

I remember that we were very young, that we were together all the time, and that he waited for me outside the school gates, and that he waited for me at home, outside my building, and that he waited for me at metro stations and bus stops, and that he picked me up all over the city, anywhere.

I remember that he befriended all my friends, and that he joined all the parties, and that he brought me on summer holidays and that he never wanted me to go back to my own place.

I remember his laughter and his smile and his eyes.

I remember that I forgot who I was without him.

I remember that we fought all the time and that neither of us really won.

I remember that he walked out the door of my studio flat for the last time and that I'd never been so relieved in my entire life.

I remember so many things that I'd forgotten as I see his name again.

Fireworks are banging outside the window, again and again, and when I close my eyes the sounds become the doors slamming too hard, his fists hitting the wall, the sound his steps made when he was walking behind me or away from me.

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"Are you there?" Mattias asks in another message and I hold my breath and try to picture him, but I can't. I just picture who he was when I knew him over twenty years ago. I see his teenage body sitting with an old Nokia that he's holding with both of his hands whilst staring at the screen and waiting for a reply, from me, needing an answer, from me, whatever it is, maybe, yes, no, don't know, just as long as it's from me.

"It's so long ago," I write. "I don't remember."

Then I close the chat bubble and put the phone away resting it on the sink.

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There's a knock on the door, and I bounce up from the toilet seat, I have to take a small sidestep to keep my balance, and then I open the door.

"Everything alright in there?" Renate's voice is at first outside the door, then her face peeks in towards me when I open it ajar.

"Yeah yeah," I reply. "I just had to use the bathroom." I walk towards her and feel my body shaking, but I cross my arms and smile at her.

"Okay, I was worried something was wrong."

"Oh, it's nothing," I say and take a breath.

The sky is banging again and we look towards the windows and then at the clock. It's five to. We're suddenly in a rush, and everyone's hurrying out of the chairs and sofas, some grab the coats, some get the champagne, Lisa shouts whilst trying to get into her boots:

"We have to remember plastic glasses!"

Stian raises them above his head and says they've been remembered, and then we hurry into the hallway, into the lift, some of us take the stairs, Nicholas finds me and holds my hand, and we run downwards and downwards, leaning against each other. It's cold outside, smokiness from the frost and a light fog, but from the park we'll be able to catch the fireworks and it will be a happy new year, we just have to run up a hill right next to Renate's apartment building first, and a bunch of people have already gathered on the top, younger and older than us, we're in the middle, and we gather in a cluster in between all the other clusters, and whilst the rockets surge above us and around us, Lisa pops open the champagne, and Stian passes around the plastic glasses, and then we hear people shouting.

"Ten ... nine ... eight ..." I feel a bit cold and start bouncing from one leg to another, trying to keep the warmth. The new year is coming, the new year is coming, the new year is coming. New opportunities, a new job and a new, more relaxed version of myself. Nicholas toasts his

plastic glass against mine, and then he leans down and kisses me as the crowd shouts: "One!" and the rockets squeak over us.

"Happy New Year," I say and look at him. We've been together for five years, and Nicholas is the loveliest thing I know of, and I look forward to a sixth year with him, and I hope the year will look just like the five years we've spent together so far.

"Happy New Year," he answers when he has kissed me, and we turn around to hug the rest of the gang. Lisa wants to take a group photo before going back inside, and we object because we're cold, but she lines us up and asks us to look happy, so we huddle together and share some warmth from each other whilst raising our glasses towards her phone screen.

"You have to join the photo too," Renate shouts, and Lisa turns towards another gang and asks one of them if they can take a photo of us. They all walk up towards her, and one of them reaches out their hand, accepts the phone and smiles when Lisa shows him how it works.

"I've got a phone myself, I know how it works," he says, and Lisa looks a bit embarrassed, then she runs towards us and squeezes into the middle of the gang, and then we all look towards the phone and shout in unison, and the boy from the other gang snaps a couple, three times before he lowers the phone and holds it in the direction to Lisa to give it back.

In the picture you can see a friendship group who have celebrated New Year's Eve together for many years. You can see me and Nicholas to the right, with his arms around me and looking happy. On my other side is Renate, blinking in all the photos, but with a big smile. We're wearing winter clothes, warm scarves and red cheeks, we've got sparklers and champagne in our hands, Lisa has a leopard print faux-fur coat and an open mouth, her blond hair is moving, like she's just tossed her head. Nadia is looking at her sparkler, not into the camera. Stian has heavy eyelids, but a big grin. Behind us you can spot other gangs posing, hugging, and jumping into the new year, looking forward to all that is to come, all that we will become, all that will happen.

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The memories of the first party where I met Mattias, and the months that followed, are coloured by the fact that I'm older, that I now know everything that I didn't back then. Do you remember how it felt to be in love at sixteen? Do you remember who you were that time, like for real? Do you remember what you thought and felt and did?

I remember that he was handsome.

I remember that he made me laugh.

I remember that he asked me to join him on the veranda to smoke, and that I joined.

I remember that he moved his arms whilst talking, that he told me stories with big gestures, that he held the cigarette between his index and middle finger, that he wore a thumb ring, that he had a piercing in his eyebrow, that shone if he smiled and stood exactly so that the light from a lamp post reached him on the veranda.

I remember that I could tell that he liked me, and that I hadn't experienced that before.

I had never had a boyfriend, but I had been in love, multiple times. Both with boys I knew and boys I didn't know, made-up characters from TV and books, and with the boy I walked to and from school with through to secondary school, but who never made me feel like Mattias managed to make me feel on the veranda that New Year's Eve.

Mattias was clearly making an effort to impress me, he was standing outside smoking and said he wasn't cold, even though I could see him shaking. He had given me his hoodie, it smelled of smoke and something sweet, almost like candy. Later on I found out that it was his hair wax.

I remember that I liked his eyes, and that they were brown.

I remember that I saw that he was watching me, later on during the party, while I was standing with my friends and he stood with his friends.

I remember I called Dad around half past one and asked if he could come and get me, that I was tired but happy. That I was relieved that the world hadn't ended.

I remember that Dad said he'd be there in fifteen minutes, and that I stood in the hallway, putting on my winter boots, that I had given almost my entire bottle of wine to Renate, that I had almost not drunk any of it myself, but still felt a bit dizzy. Then I remember that Mattias asked if he should walk me home.

"I'm getting picked up," I said.

"By whom?"

"Dad."

He nodded and trembled one of his legs, as if there was something inside him that could escape at any time, like his legs were propped with bouncing balls pounding against the inside of his muscles, back and forth, pounding into each other and him. I remember that he stood still all of a sudden, and that I noticed, like when you think it's quiet in a room, until the fridge stops buzzing. I was squatting to tie up the shoelaces of the winter boots, tightened them a bit extra, as to drag out the time.

"Can I give you a call sometime?" he asked and I replied: "Maybe." Much more confident than I really was, but I recall that I allowed myself to, because I understood that he liked me and that I could pretend that I didn't care if he'd call or not. I understood that I had the power. That was unfamiliar and exciting. And that would be short-lived.

I wrote my landline number on a note and gave it to him before hurrying up to get into Dad's car that was already parked in the snow outside the house. The music was loud, but luckily you couldn't hear it inside the car. Dad asked if I had a nice party, and I nodded, thought of Mattias and his eyes watching me, and of my number that was written on a note he had put into his pocket, on his eyebrow piercing and his laugh.