

Sample Translation

WANTED. JA. NEIN. VIELLEICHT by Lena Hach

Published by Beltz & Gelberg

Translated by Nani Schumann

Finn - 1

“What’s the first thing you think about when you wake up?”

“Sofie.”

Max frowns, which makes him look like an overbred dog.

“Come on, Finn, you have to wait for me to read out your options. A - about going back to sleep. B - about breakfast, and C - about your ex-boyfriend or -girlfriend respectively.”

“About Sofie.”

“Alright. That’s a C.”

Max checks a box on the list in front of him. He’s even carrying a clipboard. A clipboard! Sometimes he really gets carried away.

“Okay, next one. What do you think about before you go to sleep? A - the next math test, B - Brad Pitt or Angelina Jolie respectively, C - of your ex-boyfriend or - girlfriend respectively?”

He must be kidding. I stare at him hard, I mean like he’s really lost it. He’s my best buddy - he knows I am into girls. Or rather into one particular girl. Oh, did I mention her name yet?

“Where did you get this dopey test anyway?”

“Made it up. For you. It’s personalized.”

“Then what’s up with that ‘respectively’?”

Max adjusts his glasses. They are new, with a dark-rimmed frame, and they look good on him. They make him look smart. But not too smart.

“I decided to make it gender-sensitive.”

Of course I could ask him what that’s supposed to mean, but you know what? I couldn’t care less. Honestly, there’s only one thing I do care about: What’s Sofie doing? Right now, at this moment. It’s Monday, ten to four. An hour until she has to leave for her training. Around now, we’d be at her place, just chilling, listening to music, sitting outside on the balcony. Then I’d walk her to the subway, or perhaps go along with her for the ride, chances are I’d just stick around in the dojo the whole time. I’d sit there watching Sofie doing what she’s doing, kihon and kumite, in her white uniform with the green belt. Yup, a green belt. Not yellow, not orange, but green. I was there when she took the test, keeping my fingers crossed for her all the way through. I was even keeping my toes crossed, that’s how bad it was. As if Sofie had needed me to. As if she needed anything from anybody. As if she needed anybody. Me, for example.

“So? A, B, or C?”

I still haven’t answered. Max sighs his Max sigh. It sounds like a baby whale exhaling. Maybe that’s because he’s put on a few pounds recently. Then he launches into an explanation.

“Finn, this test will help me analyze the degree of your heartbreak. In order to figure out what counter measures have to be taken I have to know how serious it really is.”

I clench my teeth. Super-freakin’-serious is what it really is.

Sofinn. That’s what they called us. I have no clue who started it, but in any case, that’s who we were: Sofinn. Inseparable. Well, that’s what they must have believed anyway, whoever thought it up. Maybe it was Hanna, she’ll come up with stuff like that. But look at it now: We’re not even SofieandFinn anymore. It’s Finn and that’s it. And Sofie somewhere way at the other end of the classroom, between Mehmet and Mike, who still can’t believe their luck. Who wouldn’t want to sit next to Sofie?! I’m positive even Hank, our student teacher, wouldn’t be opposed to it. And Sofie? Says “hi” and “bye” to me like

to anybody else. As if these eleven months, two weeks and four days we were together never happened. As if I'd never seen her cry. Or seen her crouch down behind a bush to pee. Or seen her laugh so hard it made the soda she was drinking spurt out of her nose. And I also saw her breasts, or really I've seen, and touched, every part of her. But we never had sex. Max says I should be glad. Otherwise I'd be suffering even more right now. But I am not glad. I would very much have liked to.

Sometimes Max is just too much for me. Maybe that's because of what his mom does: She's a psychologist. His dad is a massage therapist. A healthy mind in a healthy body, that kind of stuff. I'm sure that's why Max wants to help me so bad. But honestly, I'm really glad he does. Even if it doesn't show most of the time.

Fact is: the summer vacation just started. In other words, six weeks of non-stop obsessing over Sofie lie ahead of me - without my ever being able to see her. Max thinks that it's really better that way. That I'll get over it much sooner like this. I don't know about that. What I do know is that I want to see her, no matter what. So I ride my bike past her house all the time. Which is easier said than done, because Sofie lives way up on Tempelhofer Berg. And it's not that my calf muscles would do this hands-down, so to speak. Not yet.

What was my plan for the summer originally? I was going to go camping with Sofie. I had it all laid out, had researched all the good sites online, all in Brandenburg, all with good ratings. I had everything printed out and was going to talk it through with Sofie, and that very day she broke up with me. Five days before school ended. By then, I even had the freaking tent ready to go. My parents had given it to me as a present.

So now I'm sitting here with Max instead, answering his bullshit questions. I mean, come on, Angelina Jolie and Brad Pitt. They are way too old anyway.

"Finn, tell me, what color are your feelings?"

Rainy-day grey. Dark grey, in the middle of summer.

Finn - 2

Lovesickness is like a diamond: You'd better not lose it. (Marcel Pagnol)

Max has come to the conclusion that I'm suffering from a grade-ten heartbreak. That's almost as bad as it gets; there's only eleven and twelve beyond that. His system is modelled on the official Richter scale, used for measuring earthquakes. I'm doubtful if the analogy works. But Max insists that it doesn't make a difference whether it's the earth that's shaken to its core, or a young man's soul. That's exactly what he said: a young man's soul. Max collects fancy expressions like my little sister collects erasers, and cats' names, and Panini stickers. And gazillions of other things, so my mom is seriously worried she'll be a hoarder one day. I don't care either way - Feline has her own room.

Since my condition has been diagnosed so to speak, Max sends me a text every morning with some kind of insightful slogan. At first he was posting them on my Facebook wall, but I protested - in the end, Sofie, too, could read anything written there. Not that I think she still cares. Whereas I spend every waking moment online, constantly checking if there's any news about Sofie. It's not much so far. One of the girls from her karate club writes something about a competition next month. Sofie's super-annoying cousin Beth sends a hundred big kisses. Then a photo which tells me that Sofie went sunglass shopping with her friends Hanna and Leonie. Sofie took the picture with her smart phone and used an orangey filter for it. It looks like a photo from the sixties. At least that's how I imagine the sixties: color-saturated and sexy.

Sofie has put on a cool pouty look, and the others, too - duck face times three. Nothing sensational, no new lover or anything. But still, looking at it drives me completely crazy. I can't bear the thought that I wasn't there with her, watching her purse for her. I've done it so many times before.

When I tell Max about my Facebook research, he just says: “You have to unfriend her. Instantly.”

Instantly. Another one of those Max words. I know what he means, but I still can’t do it, no way. It would make me look totally silly! It’s not like Sofie and I were fighting. We’re “still friends”. Friends - screw it!

“Finn, we need to talk.” A sentence like from a soap. A sentence I didn’t want to hear. Followed by more that I didn’t want to hear: “You know, it’s not working out anymore. It’s become dull somehow. Which has absolutely nothing to do with you. Well, perhaps a little. Maybe if you’d made a little more effort, to contribute something, instead of just trailing along the whole time. You’re the sweetest guy, Finn, but you’re somehow too indistinct.” The sweetest guy?! The Labrador on the fourth floor - that’s what I call sweet. That’s really fucked up.

And then, in the end, the one sentence of all that I really didn’t want to hear - absolutely not: “Let’s still be friends.” But she said it. She really did. And I actually nodded to it. Even though it wasn’t fair. Because I did contribute something, didn’t I? I had come up with the idea to go camping. I’d had a feeling that something needed to happen. And I didn’t mean a break-up.

Finn - 3

The doorbell rings, and instantly I’m thinking: Sofie. This must be Sofie, and she’s come to take back all the terrible things she said. She takes it all back, every single thing. And then we start kissing each other like crazy. But it is Max, carrying the clipboard under his arm. He’s got a big grin on his face, and he walks straight past me into the room.

“I’m done,” he says, and he doesn’t even give me a chance to ask him what the hell it is he’s done with. “Today your ALC program is starting.”

ALC? Like alcohol??

“I really don’t feel like drinking,” I mumble. Lying on my bed staring at Sofie’s profile picture, that’s what I feel like doing.

“I’m not talking of drinking. I’m talking of your personal Anti Lovesickness Course. Exclusively for you, tailored to your needs.”

Max slumps down onto my bed, but gets up again immediately to open the window.

“It stinks in here.”

I shrug and, sweeping a bunch of used socks off of my wing chair, I drop into its cushions. I could go to sleep right away, that’s how tired I feel. But Max keeps me awake.

His idea sounds simple enough. I am his client. He is my coach. And as my coach he has thought up a ten-point program that’s supposed to get me “back on my feet” in a short time. But he refuses to tell me any details about the ten points.

“So I can respond spontaneously to how you’re coming along.”

“How I’m coming along?”

“Exactly.”

To be honest, I’m not at all keen on being Max’ guinea pig. So far, that’s never worked out.

But then again: The idea of just hanging out with no one else around for six weeks straight is not such a tempting prospect either.

Plus, Max would be telling me what to do. And to have someone like that really feels like such a... relief. A big relief.

“Ok then,” I say. “But just so you know: There’s no way I’m going to unfriend Sofie.”

“Don’t worry, you won’t need to,” Max mumbles, smiling, pleased with himself and the rest of the world.

Then he grabs my laptop and from his pocket produces a flash drive which he connects to it. I have absolutely no clue what he’s up to, and I don’t care either. After a

few clicks music starts playing. “I already miss you” by the Kooks. As sad as it gets. I look at Max, he’s got his eyes closed, humming along.

“Hello? Max?”

“Not the right one?”, he asks and skips on to the next song. Some oldie. And I have to admit, it can get sadder. Much sadder indeed.

“Damn, what is that?”

“Unchained melody”, Max replies. “By the the Righteous Brothers. Just wait a minute, the best part is still coming, where his voice is almost breaking from despair...”

“Are you still mine?”, the guy is singing. “I need your love.” And again: “I need your love.”

Sugarsweet honey is oozing from the speakers, straight into my ears, pasting up my eardrums. Unbearable. What’s the point of this? Does Max want me to jump out of the window? I get up and flip the laptop closed. The singing stops. Boy, I am pissed.

“Not quite the reaction I was hoping for...”, Max starts out.

“What? What were you hoping for then?”

“Tears,” Max admits. “Finn, you have to really give in to your sadness, indulge in it.”

“Indulge in it?!”

“That’s what I read online.”

“Great, thank you very much. I think I have to sleep now.”

Max gets up slowly.

“So we’re going to continue tomorrow?”

Now he’s sounding almost rueful. But I don’t respond, I just flop down onto my bed and pull a pillow over my head. When I hear Max closing the front door behind him, I open the laptop again. The USB stick is still inserted. Of course. Unchained Melody. I listen again, two more times. Somewhere into the third time, I start crying. I keep listening to the song until there are no tears left, for now. By then I feel hungry, and I walk over to

the kitchen to fix myself a toasted cheese sandwich. Feline wants one, too. She also wants to know why I'm looking the way I am. Red and puffy.

"Accident at my chemistry class," I say.

"What about Sofie?"

"What about Sofie?"

"Did anything happen to Sofie? She's right next to you, isn't she?"

My little sister is the biggest Sofie fan of all. Well, maybe the second-biggest. And, unlike my parents, she doesn't know yet what happened.

"Sofie's fine," I mumble, handing her the sandwich. And before she can move on to her favorite question - "When is Sofie coming over again?" - I back out. Back in my room, the Righteous Brothers are waiting for me.