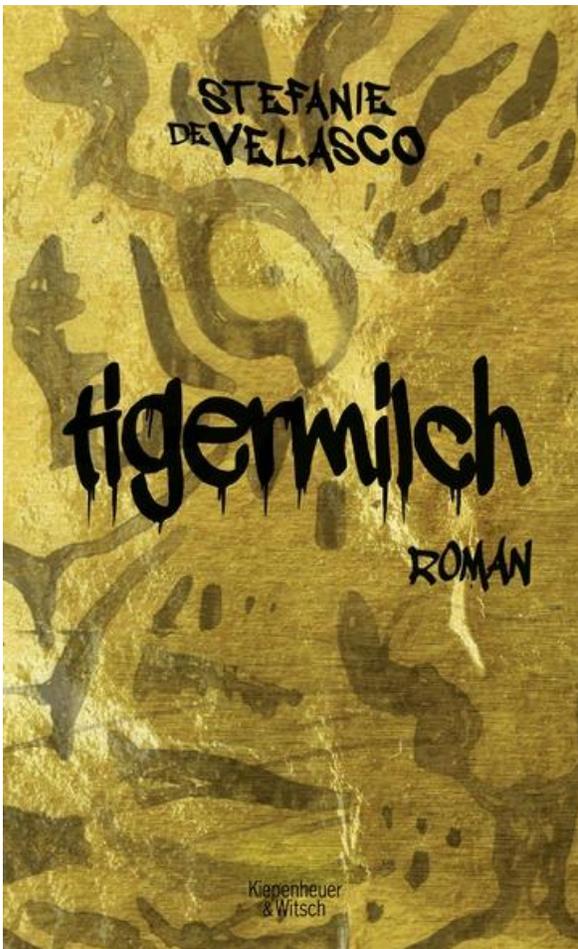


**Sample Translation (Pages 1 - 20)**  
Translated by Tim Mohr

**TIGERMILK**  
**by Stefanie de Velasco**  
novel

Stefanie de Velasco: Tigermilch  
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**Contact:** Iris Brandt/ Rights & Contracts Director: [ibrandt@kiwi-verlag.de](mailto:ibrandt@kiwi-verlag.de)

Aleksandra Erakovic/ Foreign Rights Manager: [aerakovic@kiwi-verlag.de](mailto:aerakovic@kiwi-verlag.de)

I wouldn't have even noticed it if mama hadn't run into Frau Stanitzek on the street. I know it was Frau Stanitzek because she already owned the convenience store in the building where Jameelah lives now. I can still remember how they stood around talking and laughing forever, and then they talked some more, and then came more laughter. I wasn't paying attention to them. I was bored. I remember I was holding onto the baby carriage to brace myself. Because the sidewalk was so icy.

Jessi was lying in the carriage. She was still a baby then. An accident. Mama had cried when she found out she was pregnant again. She was sitting in her room, on the corner of the bed, the corner of the same bed she had shared with papa in earlier years. Rainer was sitting next to her. He took her in his arms and suddenly they both began to cheer up. I remember that I watched all of this through a slit in the doorway and that I had to pee really bad. The pregnancy test was still sitting next to the bathroom sink. It was one of the cheap paper ones and the ends were curled up like a dried-out slice of cheese on a sandwich put out for display at the bakery.

And then I saw it. It was lying in the snow, it was green, and it was steaming. Someone must have just spat it out. It looked like a little balled-up lump of pizza dough—about the right size for my Barbie doll to make a pizza out of—except it was green, and it had tooth marks in it. I was still holding on to the baby carriage. I had mittens on and they were connected by a cord that ran up each sleeve of my jacket and across my back. My Barbie was stuffed into one of the mittens. And as mama and Frau Stanitzek chatted away, the upper body of my Barbie crept out of the mitten and bent down. With an outstretched arm she speared the gum and then stuck it in my mouth. It was still a tiny bit sweet, and it tasted vaguely herbal, with a hint of cigarettes. Later, when I was eleven and took a drag on a cigarette for the first time, I immediately thought of that piece of gum. And then today, again I had to think of that piece of gum—the way it was just lying there in the snow, and the taste of it—because today for the first time I put a condom on using just my mouth. An old

prostitute’s trick, says Jameelah, guys love it. I’m only explaining all of this because I think I had a childhood memory for the first time today, and you can only remember something as a childhood memory once you’re no longer a child. Jameelah says she can’t remember anything from her childhood. Then maybe you’re still a child, I said to her. Then she thought of something. She remembered how she found two bunnies in a dumpster, how they weren’t quite dead, but almost. It was one summer in Iraq when I was still little, and my cousin killed them with a tennis racket. Other than that I don’t have any memories, Jameelah says, which is probably for the best, I don’t want to grow up anyway, at least not really, not all the way, just enough so that I can get into all the clubs and so people don’t think they’re going to get thrown in jail if they chat me up.

The two of us, me and Jameelah, we really are grown up now. Which is why we buy striped thigh-high stockings with our pocket money. When you start to buy your own clothes, you’re grown up. After school we lock ourselves in the girls bathroom and take off our pants. Underneath are the stockings. Our t-shirts hang down just enough to cover our butts, and the stockings come up to the top of our thighs—it makes guys crazy. I always get milk from the cafeteria during our lunch break. I have a calcium deficiency, you can tell by the white flecks on my fingernails. Jameelah and I go to the discount supermarket and buy a bottle of cheap brandy, maracuja juice, and a plastic bottle of chocolate milk. The cashiers don’t usually care that we’re not eighteen. We dump the chocolate milk down the toilet and rinse the bottle out. Chocolate milk is for children. We drink tiger milk. This is how it’s done. We pour a little of the school milk, a lot of maracuja juice, and a decent slug of brandy into the chocolate milk bottle. Jameelah stirs it with her fingers. She has really long fingers and wears lots of rings, all of them stolen. She doesn’t steal just rings. She swipes perfume, nail polish, basically anything that doesn’t have one of those things on it that sets off the alarm when you leave a shop.

We take turns drinking from the chocolate milk bottle while we ride the above-ground subway to Kurfürstenstrasse. As we cross the city on the elevated steel rails, the train rocks us back and forth. And Jameelah starts making up stories again. Just imagine, she says, looking at me with her huge dark eyes, picture it in your mind. It sounds like Once upon a time, but it's not once upon a time—it's more like, This is how it could be. I close my eyes and everything starts to spin a little. I imagine the train is a flying carpet and now, any second, Jameelah will start to tell some story or other.

Just imagine that when you're seventeen or whatever, when your breasts have stopped growing, just imagine, that for a few days each month they filled up with tiger milk. How crazy would that be? I mean, how crazy would guys go over that?

Shut up, Jameelah, you're the one who's crazy.

Jameelah giggles loudly.

No, seriously, think about it. The same way you get breasts and you start to get your period, what if you got tiger milk once a month?

TMS?

Tiger milk syndrome. Miger silk tyndrome.

Jameelah loves switching letters around. Word-crunching, she calls it. She makes lust out of list and sex out of Beck's. Put a six-pack of sex on your shopping lust. We also talk in our own O-language. Forget saying someone took a hit off a pipe, they take a hot off a pope.

You know, I always used to think that being a teenager just meant you were old enough to have tea. What about you?

Jameelah laughs and shakes her head and her long earrings jangle.

What's the Arabic word for teenager?

No idea, says Jameelah. Who cares? What do you think about the idea of getting tiger milk for a few days a month as a gift from nature, a gift from god, from some god of sex, as, you know, a celebration of ovulation.

You're wasted. And I don't know. Every month for your whole life? Wouldn't that end up being a pain in the ass?

Jameelah squints her eyes and thinks it over for a second. Okay, she says, how about only until you have a kid? Only up to then, right, that's the way nature planned it, because by then you have a husband anyway.

I nod and Jameelah looks at me conspiratorially.

In that case, she says, you can never have kids, because then it would stop. Nobody in Germany has kids anymore anyway. I saw it in a magazine.

They do in Iraq.

You're not in Iraq.

Yeah, but I might be soon. In three months.

What? Why?

I don't know. My mother got a letter from the immigration department.

She gets stuff from them all the time.

Yeah, but this was different.

What do you mean?

It was a different color.

For some reason this makes me laugh.

What, like a blue letter? I say.

Jameelah glares at me.

It's not funny. They might deport us.

Deport you? Why?

Jameelah looks at the floor and fidgets with the chocolate milk bottle, squeezing the plastic sides and making them loudly pop back out.

No idea. But my mother's worried.

They can't just kick you out.

You have no idea how it works, says Jameelah. It can happen just like that.

You don't even know any Arabic, I say.

That's not true. I can understand it. But even if I couldn't, it doesn't make any difference to them. They don't care.

So, what now?

We just have to wait now, says Jameelah. They'll send us notice one way or the other sometime in the next three months. My mother wanted to try to get us naturalized.

Naturalized? You mean, become actual German citizens?

Exactly.

Is that difficult?

Pretty difficult, yeah. You have to fill out all kinds of paperwork and take a test. If you pass the test you get a real German passport instead of the stupid residency card we have now. Then we wouldn't have to constantly run around to all these government offices anymore, we wouldn't have to get our residency permits extended all the time. Man, if that ever happens, if I ever become a German citizen, I'll throw a huge party.

Sounds good to me, I say.

Yeah, says Jameelah, but it won't be just any old party. It'll be a potato party.

A what?

A potato party. Orkhan and Tayfun did the same thing. Like in that one movie, you know, where the guy serves nothing but things made out of potatoes.

I look out the window of the subway car. Three months, I think. I don't want to think about it, I don't want to think what would happen if Jameelah wasn't around anymore. I grab her hand and hold it tight.

Things are always changing, whether or not you want them to, says Jameelah.

No, I say, everything will stay the same if we want it to. When you're grown up, you can keep things the way you want. You decide everything as an adult. That's

the good part of being grown up. And anyway, three months? Do you know what that means?

Jameelah shakes her head.

Three months means we have the whole summer in front of us.

I have a pebble in my shoe. I kind of like it when I have a pebble in my shoe. It's like someone's there, like someone's accompanying me through the world. I can play with it if I get bored, roll it around with my big toe, round and round like a circus horse being paraded around the ring. I don't know why, but when I have a pebble in my shoe I never feel like I'm alone.

Jameelah and I put our feet up on the seat bench opposite us. The pebble tumbles down toward my heel and diamond shaped clumps of dirt fall from the soles of our Chucks onto the seat. The dirt is from Tiergarten—sometimes as part of detention we have to go to the park and collect things. Jameelah kicks her shoes against each other and the dirt rains down on the seat. She smiles and takes a big gulp of tiger milk.

Leave some for me, I say.

We still have the bottle, she says, kicking her backpack. Dangling from the zipper is the luggage tag I gave her back in elementary school, the one with the cartoon mouse. The mouse used to be white but it's gray now. That's how long me and Jameelah have been best friends. On the front of the backpack, handwritten with a sharpie, it says *Love you, my angel, from Anna-Lena*. Anna-Lena is clueless. It's a load of shit that she loves Jameelah. And a load of shit that Jameelah's an angel.

Some old man, typical senior citizen, walks past us.

Get your feet down, he says.

We're getting out at the next station anyway you old Nazi, says Jameelah.

The idiot stands there with his mouth open. Jameelah chugs the rest of the tiger milk and drops the bottle on the floor. At the station we get out and sit down on a bench to mix another round in an empty soda bottle I have in my bag.

Crazy, says Jameelah as she pours brandy into the bottle. There are some words with magical power in Germany. When you say one of them the world comes to a complete halt. Nazi. The world just stops and stares at you.

More like words that are cursed, I say. The old bastard felt insulted. You know how it is with the word Nazi.

Yeah, okay, that's true. Nazi is a bad example. But if you think about it, there really are words that make people stare at you, whether they feel personally insulted or not. I mean, think about it. If I just said Nazi out loud, not even at anyone, people would stare. Or Jew. You can't say Jew. Even though it's really just a normal word.

That's another bad example.

Jameelah puckers her lips, thinking it over.

True, true. But you know what I mean. Like...I can't think of a good one right now.

The last few drops of school milk trickle into the soda bottle with the brandy.

Vagina, I say.

What?

Vagina's one of those words, I say.

Jameelah looks at me blankly for a second.

Vagina, Vagina, she yells, exactly, that's what I mean. It's just a normal word.

No reason to shout, I say.

What, you, too? You said it first, she shouts, that's exactly what I mean, you can't say it, you just can't say it.

She jumps up and the mouse on the tag on her backpack swings around like it's lost its mind.

New game, says Jameelah. She's wearing about a thousand bracelets and they're all jangling in my face. Let's try to think of all the totally normal words in the world that you're not allowed to say.

Only if you come up with the next one, I say.

She thinks.

Nazi, Jew, vagina. It's not that easy to think of another one.

Jameelah grabs a pouch of loose tobacco out of her backpack and starts to roll herself a cigarette. She tries to sprinkle the tobacco out smoothly and evenly on the rolling paper. Precision work she's doing. Neither of us says anything for a while. Because we both know what's coming and we both know we could still reconsider it. But I don't want to reconsider it. And anyway, it was Jameelah's idea originally.

We're going to do it again, right? I ask.

Jameelah doesn't react. She just sits there calmly rolling her cigarette.

Come on, I say.

Jameelah licks the edge of the rolling paper and shoves the finished cigarette in her mouth. She looks at me.

You think we should? she says, pulling her Zippo out of her backpack.

I think we should. It was fucking hilarious last time.

More like fucking crazy.

Yeah, it was fucking crazy. But it was fun, too, right?

Her dark eyes bore into me. She takes a drag on her cigarette and blows the smoke out the side of her mouth. I grab the cigarette from her and take a drag.

Why else did we dress like this?

Jameelah cracks a smile.

Fine, she says, you wouldn't have it any other way.

Give me a break, you sound like our teacher.

I hand the cigarette back to her.

But today, Jameelah says, I get to put the condom on, the red one.

We hop down the stairs of the subway station together, two steps at a time, down to Kurfürstenstrasse.

There's a lot happening on the street. There always is. People are racing from one shop to the next. It seems like everyone on Kurfürstenstrasse has a bit of tuna salad or ketchup stuck to the corner of their mouth. That's because every third storefront is a place to get cheap food. I counted one time. Department store, bakery, optician; clothing store, office supplies, sandwich shop; more clothes, bed linens, fish and chips. On and on. The further down the street you go, the cheaper the places get. Mobile phone shops, nail salons, Turkish wedding shops. Just beyond the discount baby store is where you start to see the women standing around.

I'm hungry. You have any money?

No, really, none.

With our last few cents we buy a packet of ramen noodles at a ninety-nine-cent shop and then stroll on down the street all slick and cool, crunching away on the dry noodles. Farther down there's nothing but peep shows, porn theaters, and kebab shops. There are lots of women standing around down here, but none of them are wearing striped stockings. They're in shiny leggings or leather skirts that lace up the side.

Tasty. That's what Jameelah said last time. The laces look just like strands of black licorice. I'm not so sure I think that's funny.

Sometimes there are girls the same age as us standing here. Today one of them looks familiar to me, but I can't place her. She's wearing one of the skirts with the licorice laces, striped tights, and a tank-top with spaghetti straps. She's holding a leash that's dangling in the gutter, soaking up water from a puddle. On the other end of the leash is a huge black dog. The dog has on a red handkerchief instead of a collar and its mouth is hanging open. I'm pretty sure that if it could talk it would hit us up for spare change. The girl is sitting on the curb rummaging through her army

backpack, and she looks up at us suspiciously. She has dark makeup around her eyes and her dyed-black hair is parted in the middle. Her arms are covered with scabs. I'm letting the last few crumbs of noodle dissolve in my mouth when Jameelah grabs me by the t-shirt. A car comes around the corner and the girl with black hair quickly jumps up and pulls her dog out of the street. The driver leans out the window and grins at us. His face is all red. Jameelah gives him the finger, but the girl runs after the car and together with her dog jumps into the backseat.

Shit, I think. I look at the ground. The sidewalk is dotted with old pieces of gum.

Give me the tobacco.

Jameelah reaches into her jacket pocket. She walks over and leans against the wall of the nearby building, tucks one knee up, and props her foot against the wall behind her. I crack a smile. Now we really do look just like all the other girls around here. Jameelah winks at me and nods at a guy across the street. He's leaning against a signpost and looking across at us. He's tall and thin, wearing skinny jeans and a pair of those idiotic-looking horn-rim glasses. He looks kind of sweet, and I can't imagine he could possibly be waiting across the street because of us.

I shake my head at Jameelah.

I'll bet you, says Jameelah. I'll bet you he comes over here.

She waves at him and I see his eyebrows arch. He hesitates for a second and then crosses the street with an awkward grin on his face.

Him? I ask.

Jameelah nods without taking her eyes off the guy.

Watch this, she whispers.

- End of sample -