

Sample Translation from

Esther Schüttpelz

Without Me (Ohne Mich)

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The sound of the key in the door reminds me of a home I maybe never had. I enter the darkened foyer, see empty pizza boxes and emptied bottles galore, even the wine the husband gave me for my birthday, the upscale one he got at the Portuguese delicatessen, has been unceremoniously downed. „Hey baby“, I say, although I know there is no point, and start crying like a teenage crybaby, while watching myself in the mirror, which is not a pretty sight, then abruptly stop, breathe, and begin to take out the trash.

I can only really manage to cry, if I feel especially weak, which I especially do, especially now. I got pretty wasted over the holidays, which I'm not particularly proud of, but it's most definitely easier said than done enlightening my rather large family and rather small town to the fact that the husband that I had only recently wed would be spending Christmas without me this year. And next year. And while I'm at it, I might as well say, until death do us part. He's gone, the husband, because that's what I wanted. „What's up with you young people“, I got asked, „why did you get married in the first place, what did he do that was so wrong, or is it you, that is so fickle, so naive, such a cunt?“ „Cheers“, I said.

„Merry Christmas“, they said. „Thank you, cheers“, I answered, but knew I had said that already. Well, anyway, cheers.

I can't really fault my family for the way they dealt with the situation. „You'll pay for your next wedding yourself“, my mother said. I can live with that. My father didn't really say anything, which I thought was at least kind of polite. I'm aware of the fact that they don't understand anything, but that didn't start with the separation, that started with the marriage, and who can blame them? I myself don't understand anything either. I went and put together a few standard answers, depending on who's asking. In response to her question why I would even get married at all, I told my aunt (who is perennially single and borderline esoteric) about how I was young and recklessly enthusiastic, while telling my cousin (who has always been forty and very happily married with three kids) I'm sorry I didn't luck out the way you did, and to top it all off, I gave my grandma (who's old, what did you expect?) a little speech about how in this day and age, fortunately, if you're unhappy you can get a divorce no questions asked. That didn't go down too well, because she immediately turned pale and stuttered, „your grandpa wasn't all bad“. Stupid, meaning , in other words, totally legit and therefore uncomfortable questions came mostly from my so-called extended family. My nuclear family, including my two younger siblings, knew me well enough to know that they

wouldn't receive any even remotely satisfactory answers to any of their questions, so they didn't ask.

„I don't even want to ask“, said my sister, „because either you'll give me a rude and snippy or else an extremely complicated answer, both of which I can do without.“

A „snippy“ answer, I thought. How old are you? 17 going on 37? Who talks like that? But she was right nonetheless. Just like my brother, whose only comment was that the husband and I hadn't had much in common anyway.

But in a certain way the husband and I did have things in common, the kind of things which, sooner or later, would land you in seriously deep shit.

I actually don't really have time to cry. No, really. I made all the right decisions, I know that, I do, don't I? Sure I do, because besides all the other things I don't know, this I know, yes, this I know. So? Clean up, I tell myself. Carry the fuck on. One thing I also think I know, because maybe, at some point, I audited Psychology 101, is that it won't do to just clean our - excuse me - my apartment. I need to completely rearrange it, change it, strange it, chase away the ghosts. I could use some help, but help is the last thing that I

want right now, so I take the trash down to the cellar by myself, where I'm supposed to sort it into the different bins. I always fuck this one up on purpose and run back up as fast as I can so nobody catches me in the act. I always get the tiniest bit of a kick out of this. I also take the empty bottles down to the container, as many as I can carry, the others I hide under the bench in the foyer, which the husband built with his own two hands.

Then I continue and, full of self-destructive bliss, throw all my things onto the floor, only to pick them up again and shamefully put them away somewhere, since all things need to have a home of their own, and I have to find it for them, for them to have it, their home, and for me to have it, as well, amongst them or in-between or hidden underneath. Our bedroom. I don't really want to enter, but then I tell myself something I told myself as a child: You're safe in your space. Nothing can happen. And, step-by- step, I turn the bedroom into an office and the office into a bedroom.

While taking down and rebuilding the ancient IKEA-style dresser, I manage to put my life in danger, but that's no way for me to check out. „They found her under the closet, buried dumpster-style, covered in trash“, people would say. „And she wasn't even naked.“ So I keep going until, at some point, the dresser appears in front of me in all its glory, admittedly doorless, but who cares about that? I spot my guitar hanging on the wall of my new bedroom,

wait for the impulse to play, but it doesn't make itself known. I take it off the wall and place it into the corner next to the dresser. I move the dining table into the free, open space in the middle of the living area, which I think would've been a much better solution from the start, move the sofa into a different corner, and, as far as TVs go, I no longer own one. The kitchen I don't touch.

The next morning, I invite my clique from the clerkship over for brunch. I need new visuals, new anecdotes, new, let's say, feelings in these four walls. Plus I love playing host and being generous, unlike the husband who was always insulted when I invited my girlfriends over, as if they were disturbing his domain, our fucked-up common ground, our united states of hell. My brunch turns out to be a real affair with flowers on the table, flowers, which would still be there long after they had begun to rot, with waffles and eggs and salmon. I can't hide the pitiful nature of someone recently separated hosting a brunch in her ex-marital abode, I see it in the faces of my guests, when they check out the spread, and I come to the conclusion that everything is the brunch's fault. Everyone makes an effort, everyone except David, who seems reserved, doesn't seem to be feeling well, maybe because we kissed at a party when I was still married, but then wasn't, two days later. Maybe he thinks that he was the reason, maybe even the only reason, although he obviously didn't mean the kiss like that, and of course

he wasn't the reason, but I think that maybe he might've been a trigger, since I didn't even feel a shred of guilt, not for a second.

A few days later the husband, the ex, comes by to pick up some things, his or mine, who knows, that we collected during our marriage, some of which I could use, but I don't say anything. He can take what he wants, since maybe I do actually feel guilty, where he's concerned. We sit together for a while, for the first time since, well, anyway, in our or, all of a sudden, my kitchen, and his anger seems to have died down, now there is only sadness, nothing more, which doesn't make things any easier. We speak about nothing at all and smoke, smoke inside, and smoke too much. In any case the apartment has been full of smoke for days, since I thought it would be a good idea to self-medicate by smoking a cigarette in each of the newly furnished rooms with all the windows closed. We listen to music too, listen to Goodbye My Lover by James Blunt, and (who does that?) start crying along to the song, really crying, c'mon, man, eat, drink, drown in my tears, I hate you, I love you. We put our arms around each other when we've had enough, and say: „Right, see you.“ After all he still lives just around the corner, just a block away, at Ferdinand's. So, see you later, so long.

From the kitchen window I watch him leave, but only after switching off the lights, so no one can see me. There he goes, shuffling down our darkened street, which was beautiful in the

spring when the cherry blossoms were in bloom. I asked myself then why anyone would plant any trees other than cherry trees, but now I know why; because they only blossom for a short time before they wither and die. I see the husband pass under a streetlamp and really don't know why I keep watching him leave, but maybe it's just in order to have something to do. I know, in a second he's going to turn the corner onto the main road, which leads to the train station, then turn the next corner onto the ugliest street in town, right next to the tracks, which some people get a kick out of, because they think the trash and the graffiti lends it an urban vibe. That's where he lives now, the husband. Ferdinand had a room to spare, and the two of them knew each other inside out, we had all lived together once upon a time, not so long ago. Before the husband turns the corner, I turn away and switch the lights back on. Then, I sit back down at the kitchen table with the ashtray overflowing and our glasses empty. I sit where the husband just sat, and because of Ferdinand's apartment and his shitty street, I start thinking of the place we used to share, the three of us, until the husband and I moved out, leaving Ferdinand to live on his own. The time the three of us spent was intense but short-lived, even shorter than it seems to me today. I remember the kitchen with its red velvet sofa and remember all of us sitting there all night every night with cigarettes and red wine, so much red wine. It was a good time, for a time. This is the moment, I tell myself you should start to feel sad or melancholic, after all, everything is over, and stopped

being any good a while ago, even began to get worse, and now here you are, sitting all alone, recently separated, soon to be divorced. But the feeling of sadness doesn't set in, neither does the melancholy, because maybe I'm all cried out, and well, maybe it's not so bad to believe we had sometimes, here and there, that were kind of okay.

And then I seem to get myself together. I tell myself that it is mostly compassion and concern that make me feel this pressure in my chest, and that none of this has anything to do with me. Plus, I really need to study. There are only two weeks left until I have to take my exams.

I don't have a choice. I go to the library every morning, bright and early, lock my coat and bookbag into a locker and precariously transport mountains of law materials and all the other things I'm allowed to take, balancing them I don't know where, to my workstation, so that when I finally sit down I'm in need of a rest. But, of course, this is no place for the weary kind. You come to this place hoping that your fear of failure will die down, if you, rather than doing the exact same thing at home, idly stare at your laptop at the library. Anxiety is in the air here and testosterone, and there I sit amongst all the other normal people whose fears are suddenly my own, who have a fear of getting up in the morning, or of getting

close to one another, and cram everything I need to know for my first exam into my sad (yet, bearing in mind all the intoxicants I partook in, still surprisingly nimble) brain for the umpteenth time.

I'm taking the exams, which will be held in the higher regional court, for a second time, because I've been given the chance to go for an ‚improvement attempt‘, an actual term I can totally identify with, and which, in this case, means, if you fuck up the first time, you can nevertheless try again. I most definitely fucked up the first time – meaning: I passed, but barely – because I tend to massively overestimate myself and thought that, unlike all the other degenerates – a.k.a. my future colleagues who were already sporting the typical garb of the wanna-be lawyer – I wouldn't have to cram too hard or even at all, really. And also because I thought it necessary to celebrate a wedding just two months prior, a big-ass, crazy, totally out of control kind of a wedding with someone I had known for less than a year, which demanded all of my attention.

We got married in the communal garden we shared with some friends, for the simple reason that communal gardens seem to be somewhat hip these days, whatever. Supposedly there are people who write articles about them, about an up- and coming trend of a whole generation's retreat into the private sphere, i.e. home slash family. Maybe those people are right, I think, because as it happens, we started out by planting tomatoes and lettuce and even believed

in what would turn out to be a mere pipe dream of an idyll of privacy and security. In any case, said garden was the perfect place for the wedding: We hung colourful festoons and balloons, and everything was open and outside and free. There was more than enough to drink and no uptight seating arrangement to speak of. I remember many things. I remember the benches in the beer tent covered in white linen, remember the palette benches under the old oak tree, where the husband's classmates hung out, and remember my parents dancing in front of the stage, where I stood and played guitar under the light of the disco ball. I remember the coke we did in the communal garden toilet, and remember *Feel* by Robbie Williams. What I don't remember are any feelings at all. What did I feel?, I ask myself, was it a day to remember? Did I feel happy? That morning I had cried hysterically, without wanting to know why. During our wedding speech, the husband interrupted me, making me quietly angry. Come dawn, he sat fucked-up with his friends around the fire. I took a taxi home alone back to our place. The person, who was now my husband, joined me a couple of hours later. We slept late and went for breakfast. Because we couldn't get a table anywhere else, we went to a fast food place called 'Extrablatt'. There we were, 'just married' and still pretty drunk, but where yesterday we had, at least, felt courageous and thirsty and had found pleasure in provoking and confusing by what we were doing, today all we had left was some bacon and egg and cheese, and an ultra-realist sense of helplessness.

I have six exams in total and in-between I compulsively wander and talk on the phone. Law exams tend to fuck with your head. You usually end up doing well when you think you've done badly, and badly when you think you've done well. So far I think I'm doing well. I try not to think about it any further, and write one exam after the other at the higher regional court. I must say I'm a little bit proud of making myself go through all of this again, just to get a better grade. I could've been satisfied after my first try, but instead I started working as a legal clerk and simultaneously cramming for said 'improvement attempt'. But now that I'm slap bang in the middle of it, I ask myself, what the fuck?, and that's exactly what I ask my mother on the phone after the third exam, why the hell am I putting myself through this and why did I study law in the first place? I ask her this rhetorically with a passive-aggressive tone in my voice, as you do. She remains impressively calm. I was waiting for her to scream at me, but all she does is give me an exasperated, but also kind of motherly sigh and tells me to calm down, because of course I know why I decided to do what I'm doing. I've no idea if she really believes what she's saying, but think it's clever, the way she speaks to me. I remember that I decided to study law in order to never be dependent on a man, who is out to make me believe that he's smarter than me and that this plan would only come to fruition if I completed my studies with an okay grade, because otherwise I wouldn't just be dependent on a man, but also on an

employer, who would probably also be a man, and then I would have to ask myself if, for logistical reasons, I shouldn't just concentrate my dependency on one of them, who would, logically speaking, have to be the employer, with whom I would then have to start an affair and would end up hating him forever and hating myself, too.

After the last exam on Friday, I again invite everyone over to mine, but not just the clique from the clerkship this time, but others too, who I sometimes like to have at my disposal. My stress-level must've gone down somewhat after the last exam, in any case, I'm already so fucked-up fairly early in the evening that I basically black-out, until, at some point, I crash knee-first onto the kitchen floor, and a hellishly realistic pain flashes through my brain. Before I go to sleep, I cook some noodles or sheets of lasagne, to be precise, and manage to cover my blouse, which is obviously brand new, with the majority of the pesto-soaked rags. Some of them I actually eat.