

Sample Translation

Kiss Kiss

(Kus)

by Lydia Rood

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Translated by Laura Watkinson

Hansel and Gretel's father

A silver-grey Porsche is standing by the path into the woods when Marion walks by. She crouches down a little to see whether her dad's in it. She always does that. Her dad's always had Porsches, always silver-grey ones, always the latest model. Sometimes they'd eat onion soup for a whole week, but there was always a silver-grey Porsche.

The car's empty. No, it isn't: there's a man in a suede jacket sitting in the passenger seat. He gets out. It's her dad.

'Hi, Marion.'

'Hello.'

'Haven't I taught you to say hello properly?'

'Hello, Toon.'

Her dad does something with his eyes and his forehead. He prefers her to call him Dad.

'I wanted to ask you something,' he says.

Everything goes quiet for a moment. They're standing on opposite sides of the car, looking at each other.

'Ask me then.'

Toon points to the woods.

'Come for a little walk with me.'

'Why?'

'I miss you.'

'Yeah right.' That's not possible. Of the thirteen years that Marion's been living, she's seen him for maybe sixteen hundred and sixty-eight hours. She worked it out. Three minutes in the afternoon after school, one minute when she was actually already asleep, and two hours on a Sunday. Roughly. Sometimes Toon was on tour on Sunday as well. But she counted the leap years too.

'Let's just go for a little walk, through the woods.'

‘Where to?’ asks Marion. The woods aren’t hugely big, and there’s nothing on the other side. Old people’s home, cemetery, golf course. Nowhere you’d want to go.

‘Just for a walk.’

‘Come on, it’s no big deal!’

Marion looks at her father. Toon hasn’t changed much. His cheeks are stubbly, like they were the last time she saw him. His eyes are a little red from a lack of sleep. Night eyes.

‘What are you looking at? Do I look funny or something?’

‘No. Fine. Like you usually do.’

Toon walks around the car and stops in front of her. He looks at her too.

‘I’ve really missed you.’ He takes her hand. ‘Come on. Just for a little walk.’ He’s asked her too many times now. She can’t say no. But once they’re on the path amongst the trees, she does pull her hand from his. He shouldn’t overdo it.

‘How is everyone?’

‘Fine. You know.’ They often say ‘fine’, Marion and her dad. But actually nothing’s fine. It never has been either. How fine can your life be when your dad stands on a stage every evening working his socks off to entertain strangers?’

‘Mum too?’

‘Yes. She says that it hasn’t made much difference.’

Toon says nothing. Didn’t he understand what she said?

‘You were never there anyway,’ says Marion.

‘She sat all alone on the sofa every evening,’ says Marion.

‘She always had to visit Grandma and go to parties on her own,’ says Marion. ‘And shopping.’

‘Marion,’ says Toon.

‘What?’ says Marion. ‘It’s the truth.’

Toon sighs. Marion sighs too. That’s something else that she and her dad are good at. Is sighing hereditary? She can’t have picked it up from him.

The trunks of the trees have turned black. The ground is brownish grey. In the summer the trunks are brown and the ground is green. In the autumn the trunks are green and the ground is brown. It only looks like this in the winter, like in an old black-and-white film. The kind of film that Toon always wanted to watch on the occasions when he was at home on Sundays.

‘I often used to read to you from that book with drawings by Bauer, d’you remember? The pictures of the woods used to look like this. And then a troll would appear from behind a big tree trunk.’ Toon dashes off and dives behind a tree. When Marion walks past, he leaps out at her.

‘Wargh!’

Marion doesn’t pretend to be frightened – she’s too old for that now and he should know that. She just carries on walking.

‘Why did you say “wargh”?’

Toon comes to walk alongside her again.

‘It’s what trolls say. I think. Waah-aargh!’

‘I’m not a little kid any more. And anyway, I don’t remember them at all, those pictures by Bore or whatever it was.’

‘Ha-di-ha,’ says Toon.

‘OK,’ says Marion. ‘Bauer then. But I really can’t remember them.’

‘You were only small,’ says Toon, and then they don’t say anything for a while.

Marion’s often thought that she’d ask him all sorts of questions, her dad, if she saw him again. But she can’t remember any of her questions now, not a single one.

‘Don’t you have anything you want to ask me?’ asks Toon.

‘No,’ says Marion.

‘It’s been a long time since we last saw each other. A really long time. Have you missed me?’

‘Not too much,’ says Marion. ‘It’s like a long tour.’

‘A really long tour.’

‘Yes.’

‘Did you cry much?’ asks Toon.

‘No,’ says Marion. ‘Sorry.’

‘But you’re not much of a crybaby either, are you?’ says Toon.

‘Only in sad films. When there’s no one there from school.’

‘No,’ says Toon, ‘you’re not much of a crybaby.’ He seems to think that’s a bit of a pity.

‘How’s your mum?’

‘You already asked that. Fine.’

Toon sighs. He takes her hand. His hand is in a brown leather glove. Soft leather, but the outside is cold. Marion wants to take her hand back, but she doesn’t really dare. He’s already sighing so much. He begins to pump her arm up and down. She lets him. He does a skip. Marion walks a little faster. Toon skips two steps, three. Marion runs a little. Toon suddenly skips away really quickly. He’s still got hold of her hand. Marion just skips along with him.

Toon skips off the path, through the dull grey leaves. In films, autumn leaves always crackle and whirl upwards. These ones remain stuck to the ground, dead and limp. They’re winter leaves, of course. Slippery and damp.

Toon skips down a slope. Marion slips and is suddenly sitting on the ground, doing the splits. It’s painful – she hasn’t practised the splits for a long time now. Toon falls over as well and rolls down the slope. He does it on purpose. He holds tightly onto her hand and Marion rolls down with him. The leaves are really stinky and rotten. They stick to her hair and her coat. When Toon gets up, his cheeks are red.

‘Fun, eh?’

‘Mmmm,’ says Marion.

‘It’s like we’re in a film.’

‘We’re not in love with each other. In a film, they’d be in love with each other.’

‘Oh yes, we are. I’m in love with you anyway. You’re my beautiful, sweet, little baby girl. My Marion.’

‘Don’t overdo it,’ says Marion.

‘Am I overdoing it?’

‘You’re being a complete luvvie.’

‘Oh God,’ says Toon. ‘Shit, we can’t have that, eh?’

‘I just can’t handle it now,’ says Marion. ‘I’m not used to it any more.’

Toon tries not to sigh. Tough. Marion pretends that she’s not paying him any attention, that she’s too busy picking the nasty muck off her coat. She leans against a tree trunk, but it’s cold and damp. Just like Gran’s cheek. Gran’s always cold, but she sweats all the time as well.

‘Who’s Nathan?’ she suddenly asks. ‘Gran keeps talking to someone called Nathan.’

‘My father,’ says Toon.

‘Rubbish!’ says Marion. ‘Grandad’s name was Joop.’

‘Yep, you’re not wrong,’ says Toon. He blows her a kiss. He seems to have gone a little bit potty.

Suddenly Marion seizes the thin tree in both arms and gives it a big smacker.

‘Hi, Gran!’ she says cheekily. ‘How you doing? Are you all cold again?’

Toon laughs. ‘She’s so cold she’s sweating,’ he says. He puts out his arms and pretends that he’s taking Gran’s hands in his.

‘Come on, Mumsy, dance with me,’ he says to the tree.

‘Mumsy?’ sniggers Marion.

‘That’s what I used to call her. When I was little.’ Toon starts jigging around and for a moment it seems as though the thin, black tree is joining in with him.

Marion claps out a dancing rhythm.

‘She’s still pretty supple, your mumsy, isn’t she?’

Suddenly Toon drops his hands to his sides.

‘She is all right, isn’t she?’

‘She doesn’t recognise anyone now,’ says Marion. ‘But she laughs a lot more than she used to. She always used to seem frightened.’

‘Mmm,’ says Toon.

‘I wanted to ask you about that,’ says Marion. ‘That was one of things I wanted to ask. What Gran was so frightened of.’

‘Mmm,’ repeats Toon.

‘Well, tell me then,’ says Marion.

‘How should I know?’ asks Toon. ‘First I was little, then I was going through puberty and after that I wasn’t at home any more. How should I know what she was frightened of? If she was frightened of something.’ He takes off one of his gloves and starts slapping it against his other hand. ‘There’s a beetle in it.’ He slaps it against the thin tree.

‘Hey, careful!’ says Marion, ‘That’s Gran. Use another tree instead.’

Toon stops slapping the glove against the tree and just shakes it out. Then he peers into it. Finally he puts it on again.

‘Did she ever dance at all?’

‘Who?’ asks Toon distractedly.

‘Gran, of course. Hello?!’

‘Mum? Dance? Of course not. Maybe when she was younger.’

‘Mum’s started going to dancing lessons,’ says Marion.

‘Liesbeth?’

‘With someone from work.’

Toon doesn’t say anything.

‘A man.’

Toon remains silent. Marion does too, for as long as she can. Then she says: ‘With Niels.’

‘He’s gay,’ says Toon.

‘I know,’ says Marion. ‘And so does Mum.’

Toon laughs. ‘What about you? Do you still dance?’

‘Of course I do.’

‘I thought you’d give it up.’

Marion kicks at the sticky leaves. She starts walking up the slope again, back to the path.

‘You don’t know much about other people, do you?’ Toon doesn’t come after her. ‘You don’t even know whether your own mother liked dancing.’ She looks around. Toon’s gone. Oh. Well, that’s fine. She carries on climbing. She’s not going to play hide-and-seek with him if that’s what he’s thinking.

‘Hey, Marion!’ He’s whispering and it’s just as though he’s right behind her, but when she looks around, she sees him standing far below, down at the bottom of the hollow, where there aren’t any trees.

‘Can you hear me?’

Marion nods down to him.

‘Coming?’

Marion goes back down. After a while her feet encounter something hard. Steps. Really wide steps. They go almost all the way round in a circle.

‘It’s the theatre,’ whispers Toon down below. ‘Do you remember?’

Marion doesn’t reply; he wouldn’t hear her anyway. The sound travels upwards here, not down. She jumps and takes two steps at once.

‘The old open-air theatre,’ says Toon, ‘we did *The Magic Flute* here once. It wasn’t so run-down back then.’

There are cracks in the stone floor that is the stage. With moss growing in them. Marion sits down on the bottom step. Suddenly she remembers. The open-air theatre. It was evening and summer and she was still little.

‘You sat with Mum in the front row. Right where you’re sitting now. D’you remember?’

‘No,’ says Marion. Toon was playing the Birdcatcher. She leaps up. Away with you, Birdcatcher.

‘Shall we do some acting?’ asks Toon.

Marion shrugs. If he’s so keen on the idea.

‘A fairy tale,’ says Toon. ‘You decide which one.’

‘Hansel and Gretel,’ says Marion. ‘About the father who sent his children into the forest.’

‘What a rubbish dad, eh?’ says Toon. ‘Some dads are like that, you know.’

Marion looks at him.

‘What?’ says Toon.

Marion looks at the moss in one of the cracks. Even the moss looks blackish.

‘OK, Hansel and Gretel, but you can be the father and I’ll be the mother.’

‘What about Hansel and Gretel?’

‘They’re off scattering breadcrumbs in the forest.’

Toon stands up straight and takes a few deep breaths. Then he bends forward a little, hunching up his back and cocking his head to one side.

‘Father,’ he says, ‘I keep thinking about the children. It’s getting so dark...’

You can really see his twenty years of acting experience – suddenly he’s Hansel and Gretel’s mother.

‘Father,’ said the woman plaintively as she stirred the pot hanging above the fire, ‘I keep thinking about the children. It’s getting so dark... If only we hadn’t got rid of them.’

‘Those children will be able to cope,’ said the man. ‘Don’t you worry, wife. Just be glad that we’ve got rid of those two greedy little brats.’

The woman kept on stirring the soup of water and nettles.

‘If I could just take them a cup of soup. Something warm in their stomachs before they go to sleep on the cold ground.’ She dished out some soup into a wooden bowl and took it to her husband. She really was terribly worried – that’s what her face was saying. Her hands were saying ‘enjoy your soup’ and her mouth said: ‘I’m sure you know best, husband.’

‘It’s not my fault,’ said the man, throwing another sod of turf onto the fire. ‘There’s not even enough for you and me. I never wanted children anyway. They’re no good for anything.’

‘They’re warm and sweet,’ said the woman.

‘They’re a nuisance,’ said the man. ‘Give me some more soup, wife. It’s watery today.’

‘I’m sorry,’ said the woman, looking shamefaced. ‘Hansel set some traps, but before he could see whether he’d caught a rabbit in one of them, you’d already taken the children deep into the forest. And Hansel had the last of the bread in his bag.’

‘You see,’ said the man. ‘He’s a little thief! Aren’t you having anything to eat?’

The woman shook her head, wrapped her shawl more tightly around herself and poked the fire. It was a sorry little fire and didn’t give off much heat.

‘I hope that Gretel doesn’t feed the bread to the birds,’ she said. ‘She has such a kind heart. And she loves dancing, did you know that?’

‘Of course not,’ said the man. He slurped. ‘Dancing, what a nonsense!’

‘Just as well she’s got Hansel to look after her. Hansel’s such a clever boy. He’s the spitting image of you.’

‘Why do you say that?’ asked the man suspiciously.

‘Because it’s true. Hansel has your eyes, your nose, and your feet. He really is the spitting image of you. And he’s so brave, a proper chip off the old block.’

‘I’ve always found him a sneaky little brat,’ said the man. He threw aside his bowl and grabbed the soup pot so he could slurp out the remains.

‘Do you mean to say that he’s a cuckoo in the nest?’ asked the woman, her hands on her hips. She straightened up and went and stood right before her husband. ‘What are you accusing me of, husband? Is that why you took him so deep into the forest?’

‘What’s a cuckoo in the nest?’ asks Marion.

‘Do you think that I slept with another man before I married you?’ asked the woman. Her eyes were flickering in the light of the fire. ‘That Little Hansel isn’t the son of Big Hans? Is that what you think?’

The man shrugged and started pulling on his boots.

‘What difference does it make? We’ve got rid of him, wife. Go to bed and stop fretting. I’m going to see whether there’s anything in his traps. That soup of yours wasn’t fit for pigs!’

‘I wouldn’t know,’ said the woman sadly. Her back was bent again. ‘I didn’t taste it.’

‘Lucky you,’ said the man, pulling on his fur coat. ‘And now I’ll be gone. Kiss kiss.’ He stamped out of the hut. The woman sadly licked the last few drops from the pot and thought about her poor children, far away in the forest. A sob welled up from her chest.

The big mermaid

‘Daft, eh?’ says Toon, leaping up. ‘Dads aren’t like that. Well, I’m not anyway. Stepfathers, maybe they are. That’s why I made up the stuff about the cuckoo in the nest.’ He’s talking quickly, much more quickly than when he was the mother. He’s even gasping a little. He goes and sits on the bottom step and rubs his temples. Then he gives his own hair a ruffle. It’s almost as though he’s trying to comfort himself. ‘And why did you say that: “And now I’ll be gone. Kiss kiss”?’

‘You know,’ says Marion, ‘that’s what dads say when they go away. You always used to, anyway.’

‘They also say: “I’ll come and bring you a kiss tonight when you’re asleep.” I always used to, anyway.’

‘Kisses when you’re asleep don’t count.’

‘They most certainly do!’

‘Let’s just carry on, shall we?’ says Marion. ‘Back to the path, I mean.’ But the only move she makes is to go and sit next to Toon on the bottom step. With the cold weather and wearing all of those cold clothes, she can’t feel his warmth.

‘Did your dad come and bring you a kiss when you were asleep?’ she asks.

‘No.’

‘Never?’

‘No.’

‘How do you know? If you were asleep?’

Toon sighs.

‘You just know that kind of thing.’

‘But how? I never knew whether you really did it, the kisses. Did you ever skip a night?’

Toon sighs.

‘Well?’

‘Of course I did.’

Marion nods. Just as she’d suspected.