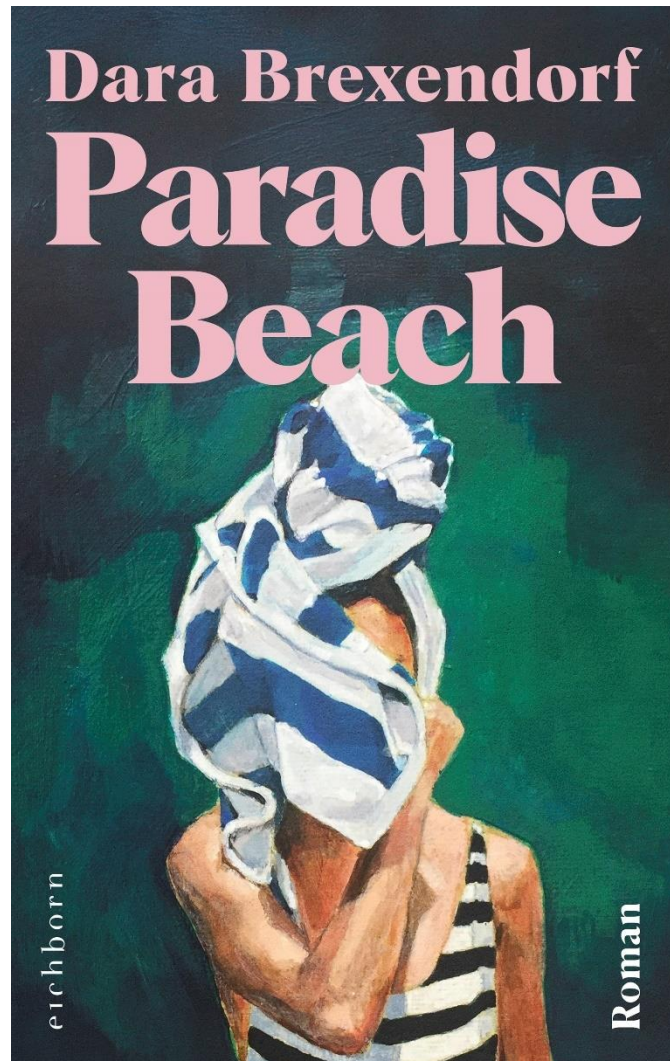


BAS
TEI
LÜBBE

Dara Brexendorf
PARADISE BEACH

Sample Translation by Jamie Lee Searle



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The throat clearer has smashed in his apartment door. Ada is surprised by how young he is. The throat clearing sound, the vibration of his vocal cords, make him an old man. Until the night with the apartment door, she had pictured an old man trying to make a fresh start after the death of his wife, with a tickle in his throat that he can't shift. She assumed this, without checking. She assumed that he lives there alone, that in the evenings he eats rye bread with eels, that he washes the bread down with beer, alcohol-free.

Since the night with the apartment door, she now knows that the throat clearer is in his early twenties, with short hair and the ability to smash through glass with his fist. Wide-awake, she lies there in her apartment, the one below his, and thinks back to the night before last.

Are you the one who called the police?

Yes.

Do you know your neighbour?

He only moved in recently.

Did you hear anything before that?

Only the tinkling sound.

The tinkling sound?

When he smashed in the glass on his door.

Did he injure anyone?

No.

Why did you call the police?

I thought someone was breaking into the building.

Were you already awake before the tinkling sound?

I couldn't sleep.

The policewoman rings the doorbell a second time before she leaves. She's standing in front of the door with a small notepad.

We're off now.

Okay.

One last question. Then I'll leave you in peace.

No problem.

What time did all of this happen?

The tattered notepad she sets her pen against somehow conveys a level-headedness. The policewoman exudes calm like Frances McDormand in *Fargo*, except in overly-warm summer clothing. She looks up and smiles.

For our files. I have to document it.

I heard the clinking sound at 03:14 AM. It happened a couple of times. Then I heard shouts, and that's when I made the call, at around 03:17 AM.

The policewoman notes down 8. July 2018 neatly on her pad. Followed by: 03:14 AM clinking, then shouts // 03:17 AM call. Ada stares at the notes. They read as

though she's permanently aware of the time, and that's something she would rather keep to herself. The precise timings tell of her battle with the night.

Okay, if you remember anything else, you can call any time.

Thank you.

In her sleeplessness, she is the perfect witness. She could give additional details. She could say that four people came in and went out again during the night, that this is unusual, that it's very rare for someone to come home in the middle of the night here, and that she's cautious with this knowledge because she suspects it sounds more suspicious than helpful.

As the front door to the building falls shut, Ada looks out of the window. The policewoman is talking to the throat clearer. Ada stays behind the curtain in case he looks up. His arm is bandaged. His T-shirt is splattered with blood. He speaks in a loud, agitated voice with the policewoman, who placates him by listening and nodding. Ada has never seen him in the building. He's wearing black skinny jeans, brown moccasins, and the white, blood-splattered T-shirt. If this were a film, she would have long since switched channels. *Content warning: physical violence.* Here, though, she can't look away.

When the paramedic waves him over, he walks to the ambulance, briskly and in a straight line. The policewoman nods to her colleague, glances to the left and right, then gets into her car and drives away.

That night, Ada quietly climbs up the stairwell. It's just after four. The neighbouring apartments are dark. She wonders why no one apart from her is awake. In front of the apartment door directly above hers, there are shards of glass on the floor. The windowpane in the door has been violently smashed in. Anyone could gain access through the broken glass. *The throat clearer broke into his own apartment*, she thinks, wondering whether his moccasins have thick soles.

Blood clings to the edges of the door frame. There are red smears on the wall. Inside the apartment, there's a light on. A blue book sits on the dresser in the hallway; she doesn't recognise the title. She shunts the glass on the floor together with her feet until the largest shards are tidied into a small pile. Then, before anyone sees her, she creeps back to bed.

Two days later, the throat clearer returns. Ada listens attentively to the movements in the apartment above her. Small objects roll across the wood. In her imagination, the throat clearer is playing with marbles. The marbles roll across the room. Some collide with one another and scatter. Others bang into the wall, recoil off and come to a standstill on the other side of the room. As soon as the marbles fall silent, the throat clearer takes the next marble out of his pouch and tries to strike one of the others.

Ada googles possible games:

Strike the marbles with a thumb flick as they bounce

Strike the other marbles with a thumb shot

Whoever strikes the marbles can keep them

The throat clearer plays alone. Sometimes he begins directly above her, sometimes on the corridor side. He's an ambitious player, and plays until he has struck every marble. Ada is glad that the throat clearer is playing. As long as he's playing, he's occupied. As long as he's playing, he can't smash in any doors. The marble game lasts the entire night. Something small rolls across the floor, then another something small. *Colourful marbles*, thinks Ada, remembering a game that she used to play with her cousin when she was a child.

The day before her eleventh birthday, she and Lill are sitting cross-legged on the kitchen floor. Lill is wearing pyjamas with green UFOs on. She's chewing one of her greasy strands of hair. Ada is wearing a white nightshirt belonging to Grandma Ylvi that she swiped from her wardrobe. Lill has been calling Ada *Grandma* since she started helping herself to Ylvi's clothes. Lill says this in the tone of an insult, but to Ada, it's a compliment. Grandma Ylvi is the reason they've been living next door to one another for the past couple of weeks. When Grandma Ylvi stumbles over her slippers in the night, breaks her hip on the fall and loses a few teeth, Ada's mother Mo decides that she's no longer able to live alone. She suggests they move in, to support Ylvi at home. Ada's father is against it. Ada is for it. *Just imagine if it happens again.* There's this image Ada can't get out of her head. Of Grandma Ylvi falling: she lies in the hallway, in one of her white nightshirts that look as though she intends to wear them outside. And her teeth lie scattered all around her, as though in a painting. Ada is happy with the plan.

They move in with Grandma Ylvi in her ivy house, next door to Lill. Grandma Ylvi moves out of the bedroom into the living room. She has her own hospital bed. Mo reduces her hours in the accountancy firm. Ada's father commutes to his new job in Hamburg. In the mornings, someone comes from the mobile nursing service to administer medication, bathe and take care of Ylvi. In the afternoons, Mo is there to cook and prevent falls. In between, Ada sits on Ylvi's bed and pulls toothless faces with her. Ada is missing two canines as well. She makes water flow backwards and forwards through the gaps, as though through a rock crevice in the sea. Together, they study Ylvi's multi-faceted body. Ada runs her fingers over the folds on her upper arm and chin. She knows the hollows, the coarse walls, the furrows and soft flaps of skin, the safe spots where she believes she can hide. She lays claim to Ylvi's body as though it's a territory of her own, a place she can roam around in. Ada is quite proud of this. Ylvi barely lets anyone near her body without putting up vocal resistance. As soon as Mo approaches with

an ointment, Ylvi groans loudly. Ada approaches her body as though they have an unspoken agreement that this is their way of escaping the world. She begins to try on Ylvi's clothes from the wardrobe, and sleeps in her nightshirts.

On this particular morning, Ada is sitting in front of Lill in a soft flannel nightshirt and testing her own body. Lill has brought along a bag of colourful marbles. She hitches up her UFO top, parts her belly crease, pops five marbles in, lets the folds fall back and holds them together with her hands. Slowly, she counts to ten. Ada checks to see whether the marbles can be seen glinting out of the belly crease. She leans down close to Lill, watches her belly slowly rise and fall, searches for the colourful marbles between the skin.

After ten seconds, Lill releases the hiding place. The marbles roll out of the fold into the sheltered area of her cross-legged pose. Some roll across the kitchen floor. Lill claps her hands. They both crawl across the tiles, collecting the marbles into one of the grooves.

Now it's Ada's turn. She rolls up her nightshirt, takes the colourful marbles out of the tile groove, and an additional one out of the bag. Then she tries to hide six marbles in her belly fold. She's relieved to discover that it isn't difficult. Lill checks whether she can still see the marbles and nods approvingly. They then take turns putting one more marble each into their belly creases, until no more fit. Ada is the first to give up. Lill wins, with twelve marbles. Weeks later, Ada trumps the record. In the bathroom, she manages to hide fifteen marbles in her belly crease in one go. Lill doesn't believe her.

Something loud crashes onto the floor above her bedroom. Ada wonders at what point behaviour becomes suspicious; at what point she should call the police because something unusual is happening. She hears the throat clearer leave his bedroom and head towards the bathroom, wash his hands and loudly clear his throat.

The image of the old man pushes its way back into her imagination, making the twenty-something in his skinny jeans fade away.

She follows the sounds into the bathroom, stands in front of the sink, and once she can no longer hear the tap running, sits down on the toilet. The bathrooms in the building are small. There are only three ways of positioning yourself in the bathroom: in front of the sink, in the shower, or on the toilet. She wonders whether he also sits down on the toilet in exhaustion from time to time, whether when he does, he is naked from the waist up and looking at his stomach, which he sometimes sucks in, like her colleague in group photos.

Ada rolls up her nightshirt and drums her fingers against her swollen belly. Its surface is unsuitable as a hiding place. If she were to try to place marbles now, they would roll down the hardened surface onto the floor tiles. She clasps her rounded stomach like a pregnant woman during a photoshoot. The throat clearer clears his throat. Ada presses around on her stomach. Dr. Ahmadi's questions creep into her mind.

So, how are you doing?

How do you feel about no longer bleeding?

Dr. Ahmadi is a matter-of-fact doctor who talks a lot. She speaks monotonously about the condition of Ada's body. The examination room is sparsely furnished, with sailing ships in wooden frames hung on the wall. Dr. Ahmadi has installed a wash basin, where she pre-warms the instruments that she pushes between Ada's legs. Ada wants to be liked by her. She tries to adapt herself to her monotony.

First, they talk about the weather, the continuing heatwave, the parched green spaces in the town. Then Dr. Ahmadi asks lots of questions that she answers herself.

Is it okay if I raise the seat?

I think that should be okay.

Is everything good with the doctor's certificate?

That kind of thing should be accepted everywhere.

But is it okay at your work?

I mean, you're employed, aren't you. It should be accepted everywhere.

When Dr. Ahmadi begins to ask Ada's body questions, Ada waits to hear the answers from Dr. Ahmadi here too.

How did you feel after the op?

And how are you feeling now?

How do you feel about no longer bleeding?

While Dr. Ahmadi injects her with a substance to suppress her body's production of oestrogen and progesterone, Ada stares at the sailing ships in the wooden frames. She wonders whether Dr. Ahmadi built the ships herself, and whether there are more sailing ships in her home. Dr. Ahmadi looks at her questioningly. Ada nods, evades the question, smiles. As they say goodbye, Dr. Ahmadi hands her a flyer for an endometriosis self-help group and menopause therapies. Ada thanks her.

The throat clearer begins to shower. The whooshing sound in the building, the idea that someone is cooling off, calms Ada. She releases her hands, studies her stomach and is disappointed by how swiftly her wounds are healing. She took the bandage off her belly button a while ago. Everything looks smooth, like an untouched stretch of landscape. As though nothing had happened. Only the swelling lingers on.

And how are you feeling now?

How do you feel about no longer bleeding?

I haven't thought about it yet, she thinks.

First I would need to know what it felt like to bleed, she thinks.

And I was too busy suppressing that, she thinks.

Don't make a fuss, she thinks.

Ada steps under the shower. The green tiles remind her of a spa, even though this bathroom isn't worthy of such a definition. Her bathroom is a dim, poorly-ventilated room with no window.

In her imagination, the throat clearer is shampooing his short hair. He uses a shampoo designed for hair and body. Ada doesn't use any shampoo at all, because of the wound-healing process. She turns the water colder in order to escape the heat.

The throat clearer turns off the shower. Ada tries to move in time with him. There's no fresh towel in the bathroom. Dripping, she scurries across the wooden floorboards. Together, they go along the corridor into the kitchen. The floorboards creak in unison. She wonders whether the throat clearer has taped up his broken windowpane, or whether she would be able to see him from the stairwell. She wonders whether the blue book is still there in the hallway, whether he is also proud of his perfectly-customized dresser which extends just the right amount into the room that the door can still be opened. She hears the balcony door opening upstairs. She quietly carries her wet body outside. The throat clearer is silent.

A forlorn grey-blue tone rests between the buildings. Judith's cigarette packet is in a small bowl on the balcony table, with a lighter inside it. Whenever Judith needs a break from being a mother, she comes by, goes out to the balcony and smokes, like it's a ritual, even though they both quit a long time ago. Sometimes Ada watches her best friend from the kitchen. Judith looks as though she's stepping into a former life out there.

Ada lights one of the cigarettes and breathes in the biting smoke. The dizziness comes immediately, connecting her to her surroundings. The first rays of light fall on the cement planters in the inner courtyard. Weeds are growing through the cracks, casting shaky images on the concrete in the morning light. She checks to see whether there are rats running through the courtyard. She listens to hear whether the throat clearer is moving. But it's peaceful out here.

His door is broken, she thinks.

He has to walk in through the broken door every day.

The idea that he's standing above her and saying nothing moves her. She looks down at her body. Her left breast hangs down listlessly. Her nipples have become grainy in recent years. *So grown-up nipples are grainier*, she thinks, wondering whether in her twenty-eight years she has ever really been in touch with her body. In her life, she has cultivated neither a particularly bad nor a particularly good relationship with it. Menstruation was something that happened to her. Something that came over her. She'd had to accept it. The cramps, the dizziness, the nausea, the fever. She'd thought it was part of it. She didn't have any point of reference.

She counts back to the first time she bled, just after she turned thirteen. Fifteen years ago, so it must have been the summer of 2003. She pictures the beach, remembers the other bodies. Lill's body, which was always a step ahead of her, Ylvi's body, in which she sought refuge as a child, her mother's body, which for a while she couldn't touch. Additional, long-forgotten images surface. Arno. And Elja. Although it's not cold, she finds herself wishing she had one of Ylvi's nightshirts. She feels young and old all at once.

2

Naked people everywhere. Dry, glowing naked people and wet, glowing naked people. The naked people trudge lethargically across the sand. Not completely naked. But almost. They are scantily clad, wearing swimming trunks, bikinis, swimsuits. Some have wrapped skirts of light fabrics around them. They fidget with the material, pull up swimming trunks, let straps snap back onto their skin or pull towels off the sand in order to cover their bodies. *A sarong – a good cover-up*, Ada read this tip in *Bravo Girl*. She also considered it, but it seemed like cheating to not show her body fully, given it's the first year she's wearing a bikini.

Did you hear about the peeping Tom? Ada turns toward Lill, who looks like she's dozing, but she's talking up into the sky.

He has binoculars, like Grandma Ylvi's, big ones.

Ada immediately pictures Grandma Ylvi's binoculars. They're in a black leather bag in the attic, gathering dust on the small glass table in front of the window.

As a child, Ada watches Ylvi as she watches nature. Ylvi's elbows jut out sideways from her body. She stands upright, immersed in her own world. Ada tries to follow her gaze. She sits down next to her, behind her, in front of her. She forms a tube with her hands. She sees: bare treetops, a blackbird, gloomy weather.

What does he do?

Lill continues to answer into the sky.

What do you think? He stares at naked people. He sits on the balcony in his holiday let all day, waiting for someone to get naked.

Ada thinks of the perfected method of getting changed while wrapped in a towel.

How do you know?

Kay.

But I'd already figured as much. He's there every year.

Lill mentions Kay as though she's a mutual friend. Ada immediately knows who she's talking about. Shortly after Lill changes schools, Ada meets her at the bus stop. From a distance, she can already see her. She's barely recognisable: the way she leans against the wall, propping herself against it as she smokes a cigarette as though this has always been her natural posture, her knee stretched out in front. A girl with a severe side parting and hoop earrings stands next to her. She's smoking and keeps tapping the cigarette, making the ash flutter down onto the ground. Both of them are staring solemnly at the street. The solemn gaze ages them. They lean

against the wall as though it's the most natural thing, as though they've conquered the bus stop. Ada is almost surprised when Lill waves to her.

Lill sits up and points towards the pine trees behind them. Then she lies back down. She's wearing large sunglasses. Ada can't see whether her eyes are open or shut. She wonders whether Lill has lost weight. Her pelvic bone and ribs jut out.

Lill's bikini looks like dark-green crêpe paper, held together around her hips and back with small drawstrings. They've both read up on how to lie so that their stomachs look flatter, always with their legs bent and chests puffed out. Lill has perfected the pose. Her bikini doesn't slip. Her white-blonde hair lies spread out in a star shape beyond the towel and disappears into the pale sand.

Ada stares at the dry pine trees. Shimmering through their bluish needles is the orange of the holiday apartments that she cycles past every day. She has never spotted anyone on the balconies.

So what does he look like?

He wears a red cap.

And?

That's all I've seen. I mean, he has the binoculars up to his face.

She wonders whether he can see her from where he is. It's the third summer in a row that she and Lill are spending together at the beach. Six months ago, Lill started taking on a long commute to school, to attend a comprehensive. Their friend group lives too far apart to meet regularly. Ada's girlfriends spend the summer holidays in Spain or on Lake Garda. *Their loss*, comments Ada's aunt, Maren, when she hears about this. *The Baltic Sea is as hot as the Mediterranean this year.*

Ever since they spent a summer on a campsite in Corsica, Maren has decided that her home is a holiday destination. *Why travel somewhere else when here's more*

beautiful than anywhere? Lill and Ada love Corsica. They have two beach towels with motifs of the island that they bought from a souvenir shop on holiday, with their pocket money. They use the towels as often as possible, and imagine they're lying beneath palm trees in the Mediterranean.

The towels are the same size. They can place them together and make a square. Lill's towel is red. In the middle, there's an outline of Corsica in yellow, rising like a dragon with a small head towards the top of the towel. A parrot sits enthroned on the dragon. A colourful sail boat crosses the outline, inside which three dolphins race one another. Beneath Corsica is the sun, its rays stretching to the edges of the towel. If Ada stares at Lill's towel for long enough and then closes her eyes, she sees a storm of colourful dots and the dragon shining in front of a black background.

Ada's towel is more peaceful. A dark-blue body of water in front of a green mountain range. The moon shines over the water to the shore, where two palm trees lean toward one another. A solitary sailboat stands ready for departure.

Ada looks at the beach, the giant tapestry of colourful towels. It's even more packed than last year. In front of the hooded wicker windbreaks, there are little front gardens composed of blankets and parasols. They look like tiny houses with their own house numbers.

Their own spot is directly in front of the promenade. Ada and Lill know the good shady spots. On the rear side of the wicker windbreaks, they lay down their towels and pay rigorous attention to symmetrical order. They always keep an arm's length of distance between the towels. They put their rucksacks at the head of the towels. They keep their clothing piled neatly on the outer edges of the rucksacks.

They lie near the fence, just before the spa-guest only section of beach. From here, they have a good view of who's riding past on their bike and where they're dismounting. They know whether Mo comes to swim in the afternoon, whether the guy who checks the beach tickets is around, whether the two men are inspecting the

beach with their metal detectors on the hunt for jewellery and rubbish. They eye the beach as though they were its personal rangers, and they know the people who come daily and position themselves on their section over the course of the day:

The backgammon-playing men wearing fisherman's hats.

The guy they call "fishnet" because he pokes around the shore every day with a small fishing net. His skin hangs loosely from every part of his body. Sometimes he submerges his face underwater.

The sporty women with firm calves who meet on the low wall to drink coffee, stirring it with little spoons.

The old woman and her daughter who sit in a blue-and-white wicker windbreak.

The man who lies on his side with his hand on his hip, smoking a cigarette.

The elderly couples who come to the beach every day to do their swimming routines.

The couple that lies entwined on their beach towel.

They divide the people into categories: people from the city, holidaymakers, locals. *Stop gawping*, hisses Lill. Ada jumps. She had completely zoned out. Startled, she realises that she's watching a woman get undressed. They both stare at the elderly woman, who is laying her wet bathing suit down between the windbreaks and drying herself off. For a moment, she stands next to the windbreak and pulls the towel through the fold between her legs.

Lill giggles. Ada joins in and falls back onto her towel, laughing.

Intense, huh?

Lill brushes sand off her leg.

I mean, for a peeping Tom, this place is really paradise.

The quick movement makes Ada feel dizzy. She grabs her jumpsuit and lays it over her head.

True.

She pushes her hands above the towel and digs her fingers into the hot sand. As soon as the sand begins to cool beneath her fingers, she searches for a new spot. The exhausting cramps that she's been ignoring for days radiate through her stomach. She squints and doesn't voice what she's actually thinking. That she's a peeping Tom too. That for days now she's been searching the beach for a particular person she barely knows. That she thinks up excuses to go to the other end of the sand, just to see whether the girl with the baggy T-shirt is sitting there in the windbreak. Just to see whether she still has her knees tucked inside the T-shirt. Whether she's still staring intently into her puzzle book, next to the woman in the black bathing costume who has a large book open over her legs. That she knows her name, because they've already met. Elja. That she knows Elja's birthmark, because it's burned into her memory. That she intentionally stares at Lill's beach towel then holds her eyes shut afterwards, to make the colourful storm of dots appear. That the silhouette which unfurls before her eyes reminds her not just of Corsica, but of Elja's birthmark.

[END OF SAMPLE]