

ROOM
SERVICE

MAREN STOFFELS

Translated by Laura Watkinson

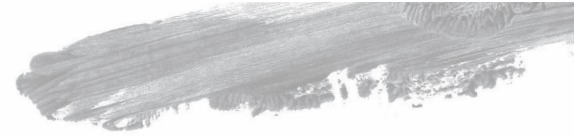
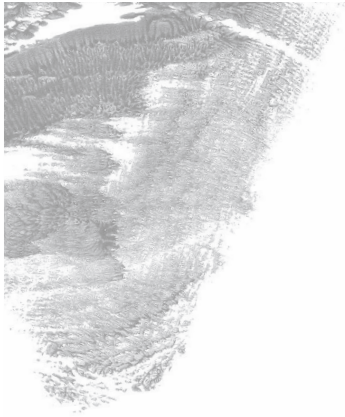
Underlined





It's almost here.
The date I'll never forget.
It's the day they murdered her.
And it'll be the day
I murder one of them.





FENDER

She's not here.

But what was I expecting? That she'd be waiting for me, here at the harbor? Just because she wrote to me doesn't mean everything will be the same as it was before.

The letter has been burning inside my pocket all the way here. It was suddenly there on the mat this afternoon, with my name on it, in her handwriting.

I stared at it for a few seconds because I couldn't believe it was real. But in a few minutes I'll finally know what it is that she wants to tell me. I really want to read the letter here. In our special place.

I run the last few yards along the jetty.

"Hey! Good evening!"

Startled, I look around. A man is waving at me from a nearby yacht.

I wave back. If she were here now, she'd come up with a name for him. She often made up characters based on complete strangers she saw. She'd think of a name, a profession, and a home life. I always thought she might become a writer when she was older.

The man sails out of the harbor and I'm alone again. I rest my hand on the hard edge of the boat. It's upside down, propped up on poles, and the space beneath it makes the perfect hiding place. I come here every Friday, even if it's raining or stormy.

When I'm here, I can pretend, just for a while, that everything is still the same.

I crawl under the boat and take the letter from the inside pocket of my denim jacket. The envelope is a striking gold color. I hold it to my lips and breathe in deeply, hoping to pick up some of her scent.

I recognized her messy handwriting immediately. It's just as chaotic as her.

The stamp is postmarked with the name of the town where she lives now. I don't know her exact address. She doesn't want to be found—certainly not by me.

I think about my friends. If Kate and Lucas knew where I was now, they'd probably freak. They think I practice with the band every Friday evening. They have no idea that the band broke up ages ago. I left last summer, because I couldn't play anymore. I kept forgetting my solos when we were playing gigs, and my fingers wouldn't stop shaking.

I only ever use the guitar in my bedroom as something to throw my clothes over now.

My friends don't have a clue. They've both just gotten on with their lives.

Kate was broken at the time, maybe even more than I was. But after the summer break, a miracle occurred.

And that miracle was called Linnea.

Our homeroom teacher sat her next to Kate on the first day of school this year, in the one empty seat.

It was just as if Linnea had come to replace her. A new version, completely intact.

She got Kate to laugh again. I remember hearing that sound again the first day back at school and realizing it had been months since she'd last laughed.

From then on, Linnea was one of us. She came and sat with us at recess, on our bench by the river, and she'll be there this weekend when Kate celebrates her birthday.

Linnea is everywhere *she* used to be.

She patched up Kate. Lucas is crazy about her. But she can't fix me.

I open the envelope and pause for a moment.

What if this letter does even more damage? Maybe it says how much she hates me.

But then I think about the past few months. Hearing *nothing* from her is still a thousand times worse than hearing *something*.

The letter is clumsily folded in half. The paper smells of her perfume. The images that the fragrance evokes startle me.

Her body against mine.

Under this boat.

I should have soaked up those moments when I still could.

My hands shaking, I unfold the letter. But as soon as I read the first two sentences, I wish I hadn't.

There are times when hearing *something* is worse than hearing *nothing*.

I never expected to write this, but I can't go on any longer.

This is my suicide note.