

## 17, Das erste Buch der Erinnerung

### 17 (Vol. 1): The First Book of Memories

by Rose Snow

© 2020 Ravensburger Verlag GmbH, Ravensburg

[www.foreignrights-ravensburger.biz](http://www.foreignrights-ravensburger.biz)

© English sample translation by Melanie J. Florence



#### Prologue

My father has been on the run with me ever since I was seven. We rush frantically from town to town, school to school, house to house. His job demands it, he claims, but we both know he's lying. His job isn't the reason we never stay anywhere for more than a few months. Nor is his fascination with strange towns, nor his great love of adventure.

I know quite well the reason why he always moves on again.

I know quite well who the reason is.

But you can't just run away from the dead.

#### Chapter 1

The bedroom in the new house reeked of paint. It was the really vicious sort that made you feel as if your nasal lining was being burned off when you breathed in, and I hurried over to the window to let in some fresh air.

It was already dark outside. The rain was beating on the wet panes and a burst of cold air greeted me when I opened the window. I felt the rain damp on my face and took a deep breath. Below me lay our new front garden, and beyond it the new street with the new neighbourhood and, somewhere beyond that, the new school which I would have to face the next day. It was all new.

I regretted not having put up more opposition this time. The rain was lashing me in the face and the wet on my cheeks reminded me how I'd often cried when we moved before – especially just when I had finally found friends. But now that was only a memory. These days I no longer cried, these days I tried not to feel anything anymore. What you didn't feel you couldn't miss. I stood there for a while, staring out into the darkness. I was trying not to think of Pippa and Franzi: I'd seen them for the last time a week ago and despite all my good intentions of not feeling anything, I missed them with an intensity which surprised me. Of course we would still write but I knew it was only a matter of time before life got in the way and they forgot me. It wasn't easy to sustain friendships which were barely six months old.

When the wind flung an icy blast of cold raindrops in my face I shut the window again. Already I couldn't bear this city. We could hardly have moved any further north without taking up residence on an ice floe. I sat down at the new white desk with a sigh and pulled the crumpled list out of my backpack.

'No regrets, Jo,' I whispered to myself, and my voice sounded strangely loud in the sparsely furnished room. So far there was only a bed, a chest of drawers and this plain desk with the blue table-lamp. And it would stay like that. I had given up putting time and energy into making things cosy since we would change cities in a few months anyway, taking only essentials with us.

I carefully smoothed out the list and stared at it. I'd begun it together with Pippa and Franzi a few weeks earlier, on the very day that Oskar Decker had invited me to his end-of-term party, a hot ticket.

It was headed '17 things to do before my 17<sup>th</sup> birthday, because otherwise I will regret my boring youth for ever.'

The idea came from Pippa's crazy 'regrets game' which she had invented before I met her – allegedly because Franzi regretted too much too often. Pippa always teased Franzi with it, but I believed that she simply found it interesting to think about what other people regretted in their lives or in a particular situation. The longer I cultivated the list, the more important it became to me. Admittedly, of the 17 items I had so far only thought about 13, but I was absolutely determined gradually to put my anti-regret resolutions into practice, no matter how ridiculous they might be.

That's why right at the top of my list was 'Kiss Oskar Decker', followed by 'Finally arrive somewhere'.

I had crossed off item 1 after Oskar's party, but I still hadn't arrived yet. My eyes skimmed the remaining lines. My seventeenth birthday was in five weeks and I still hadn't ticked off even half of my anti-regret resolutions.

Smoke a joint.

## 17, Das erste Buch der Erinnerung

### 17 (Vol. 1): The First Book of Memories

by Rose Snow

© 2020 Ravensburger Verlag GmbH, Ravensburg

[www.foreignrights-ravensburger.biz](http://www.foreignrights-ravensburger.biz)

© English sample translation by Melanie J. Florence



Bungee jump from a crane.

Go to a 'NEBEN' concert

Find a real friend

That one had been written in a sentimental moment and I stared at it now, wondering whether Pippa and Franzl qualified. I thought of our last selfie, when Pippa had held my long blonde hair over her lips like a moustache, and Franzl had made a duck face and we'd all laughed so much my stomach ached afterwards. In that short period in Vienna I'd had so much fun with Pippa and Franzl. We'd been addicted to 'The 100' and 'Pretty little liars', carried out crazy cooking experiments, read magazines and listened to music – Pippa had always sung along far too loudly. Sighing I let my gaze run further down the list. There was so much left undone and some things that were hard to achieve or that I simply didn't feel brave enough for.

'No regrets,' I whispered again, since I hated the feeling of looking back and thinking I'd missed out on something. Regret seemed to be everywhere, not just with me. I could see it in people's faces, saw it etched in my father's features as he kept on running from my mother's death, eaten up inside by regret. I had no wish to end up like that. Lost in thought, I fingered the silver locket I wore round my neck. The oval piece of jewellery engraved with delicate swirls hung on a slender chain, gently nestling close to my chest. I had inherited it from my mother, and she had been left it by her Aunt Leonore. My mother's parents had died very young and so she had been brought up by my great aunt whom I had never known. All I knew from tales about her was that she must have had a fairly spiritual nature and set much store by her inner strength.

Carefully I opened the locket. On one side was engraved 'The key lies within you' and the other side held a photo of my mother. She was a very beautiful woman and, even if I had inherited her long blonde hair and brown eyes, I couldn't equal her disarming smile. I smiled back for a moment but then the pain of her absence tugged at me, threatening to almost suffocate me. I shut the locket quickly.

Then I put fountain pen to paper and wrote just what came into my mind: 'Don't live in your memory. Look forwards.' Even if this 'forwards' was a shitty first day at a new school.

I slept badly that night. I must have had another nightmare which I'd forgotten the next morning because my tee-shirt was drenched in sweat. When I got up, the day announced itself mournful, grey and foggy. As my spirits were at rock bottom in any case, the view from the window didn't depress me overmuch, rather fulfilled my expectations of this city. Yawning I made my way into the bathroom and showered until the hot water ran out. Then I reached for my favourite grey jeans and a black tee-shirt, brushed my hair and briefly listened to some music. I liked the sad lyrics of the band 'NEBEN' and above all I liked the lead singer's husky voice. While I was listening to a few more songs I leafed idly through a copy of GEO magazine, tearing myself away only when it was time to set off for school. Then I grabbed my backpack and went downstairs, to get the first day over with.

My father was already sitting at the kitchen table with a cup of coffee, reading the newspaper. His face was half hidden, so that only his grey eyes behind the square glasses and his bald patch were visible. Without his glasses my father bore an astounding resemblance to Professor Xavier out of X-Men, even if he was slightly taller and couldn't read minds. Not that he needed to be a mind reader with the expression I had on my face just then.

'Good morning, Jo,' said my father, looking up from his paper and folding it slowly away.

'Morning,' I muttered and opened the fridge door. I was met by a gaping void and the new appliance still gave off that chemical, factory smell – the whole house smelled of paint and chemicals, it seemed.

Sighing, I shut the door and snatched an apple from the fruit bowl. It was a little past its best but better than nothing.

'I definitely have to go shopping today,' said my father, draining the last gulp of his coffee. I took a bite of the apple. 'No worries. I'm not very hungry anyway.'

## 17, Das erste Buch der Erinnerung

### 17 (Vol. 1): The First Book of Memories

by Rose Snow

© 2020 Ravensburger Verlag GmbH, Ravensburg

[www.foreignrights-ravensburger.biz](http://www.foreignrights-ravensburger.biz)

© English sample translation by Melanie J. Florence



My father, who, as ever, was wearing a checked shirt, stood up and put his empty cup in the sink. ‘Shall I drive you to school?’ He glanced out of the window. ‘It looks as if it’s about to rain any minute.’

‘Hmm, it does look that way,’ I said as matter-of-factly as possible. ‘According to statistics, Hamburg has 133 days of rain per year. Are you planning on driving me every time?’ This last sentence came out rather more sharply, since I was annoyed that he was now behaving as if he actually cared about the rotten weather. After all, no one had forced him to take the job in Hamburg.

‘Don’t, Jo, please,’ my father said.

‘You were the one who wanted to come here, not me,’ I said reproachfully, picking up my backpack. ‘See you later.’

‘That’s something we need to talk about as soon as possible,’ he added, but I was already at the door.

‘Fine, whatever you want, but right now I have to go to another new school,’ I called to him as I left the house without a backward glance.

On my way down the street I tried to be a bit more accepting of my father’s decision and this cold wet city. The road we had moved into was a wide one with chestnut trees, and I dodged a puddle as I went over the conversation in my mind. Then I ordered myself to stop it: there was no point in rummaging around in the past, even if that past was barely five minutes old.

A few houses further on, there was a large removal van standing on the other side of the road and I automatically slowed down as I looked over. A blond guy of about forty was in discussion with a puffed-out removal man. It seemed to be about a valuable cherry wood wardrobe which wouldn’t fit through the front door. Our new neighbour kept giving worried glances at the sky and appeared to be regretting having moved here. How well I understood him. When the red brick school building came into view an unpleasant weight descended on my chest. You would think I’d had enough practice at starting all over again, but actually I couldn’t stand the first few days at a new school. I couldn’t bear the initial attention, any more than the looks sizing me up and the superficial conversations. I was simply not good at small talk. Unfortunately I was also not good at letting unfamiliar people get close to me, which ruled out any deeper conversations. Only with Pippa and Franzi had it somehow been different – perhaps because they had both made a beeline for me and with their open amusing manner had given me no choice but to like them. They had livened up my school life no end by their crazy ‘regrets game’ and once I’d begun devoting my attention to the imagined regrets of those around me, this was a hard habit to break – because regret was lurking everywhere. On the way here I’d bought myself a chai latte and in so doing had seen a mother with screaming twins: she definitely regretted not having employed a nanny. Back in the rain-soaked street, I’d passed a man in a business suit who – judging by his loud swearing – regretted stepping in a puddle.

I took a gulp of my hot tea. One of these days I might get to the bottom of what exactly my father regretted; he often appeared distracted and immersed in his own thoughts. I was sure it had something to do with my mother’s death because ever since then he had moved restlessly from one place to another. So I wished pretty much every day that he would finally share his memories with me.

My attention was brought back to the here and now by the sound of giggling growing louder round about me. On the wide steps leading up to the school entrance I saw a plump girl with black hair and freckles, dressed in a bright red coat and fluorescent green boots, a colour combination which was providing for general merriment. The furious glance she threw the giggling girls indicated that they would come to regret making fun of her fashion experiment. Nonetheless every burst of scornful laughter made her cheeks darken a little more until her face seemed to burn, rivalling the bright red coat.

Straightening my backpack on my shoulders, I set off up the steps. I felt sorry for the girl in the daring outfit, since although she was visibly trying not to let the reactions of those around her get to her, you could see from the way she looked that she was not indifferent. In passing I looked at the willowy schoolgirl with the dark red lipstick who was the source of most of the mockery, and was just wondering

whether I should intervene when I heard a quiet snort from behind. Instinctively I turned. The sound came from a black haired guy who was coming up the steps behind me; the others all seemed to be avoiding him. He gave a disapproving look at the red-lipped girl, who immediately stopped smiling and hurried on her way, whereupon his irritated look moved to me. For a fraction of a second I looked straight into his sparkling dark-green eyes and my pulse rate shot up. I didn't normally react like this to boys but he was different somehow. A dark aura seemed to emanate from him. His gaze was unbelievably intense. Plus he really was criminally good looking. His hair was short and his face angular, giving the impression that he never smiled. His features were regular: he had a straight nose and full lips and while I was still drinking in his gaze, he came closer. Admittedly he had long since stopped looking at me. Only when we found ourselves standing on the same step did he stop in his tracks. I saw him almost instinctively grip his left wrist and turn his head in my direction. For a moment he appeared surprised but the next instant his features displayed unconcealed hostility. Bewildered, I tried to understand the sudden change but he had already turned away and vanished quickly into the crowd.

With thumping heart, I watched him go.

What on earth had that been about?

'Hey, don't stand around in the way like that!' a confident voice rang out. The next moment I was casually pushed aside by a blond boy in a blue training jacket. He was very tall, with a muscular build and piercing blue eyes. His pale skin and short blond hair made him look like the captain of a Swedish football team or the hockey team. Although I didn't like being touched without my permission it did at least distract me from the strange encounter with the dark haired guy.

'You must find training quite demanding if you can't even manage to walk round me,' I retorted coolly, continuing up the steps.

The boy gave an arrogant sniff. 'Don't you get it? Obviously I could walk round you, the point is I don't feel like it. Besides, I'm used to people getting out of my way.'

I took a gulp of chai latte and raised an eyebrow. 'Does that work in traffic as well? I'd really love to see you cross the road on the red man.' He smiled smugly as we went through the tall entry door. 'And I'd love to see you vanish into thin air right now. Seems neither of us is going to get what we want.' He paused for a moment. 'Hang on, actually I am.' With these words he turned his attention to his smartphone and left me standing. I watched him go, shaking my head. Apparently there were nothing but idiots in this school.

Extremely good looking idiots, admittedly, a voice inside me whispered, and I couldn't help remembering the black-haired guy with the dark green eyes. Resolutely I pushed all thoughts of him aside, and looked around at the school building. Although it was enormous and had endless numbers of staircases, the office was well signposted and I followed the arrows to a bright room with potted palms and pictures of beaches. Obviously the décor was the school secretary's attempt to transport herself inwardly to a white sandy beach, and I could very well imagine she wished she could wake up every morning in Hawaii instead of in this city of 133 rainy days a year.

After she had given me my timetable I left the office, almost bumping into a boy with tousled, dark blond hair. He had a tan, and reminded me of Matthias Schweighöfer the actor, only somehow taller and more muscular.

'Sorry.' He gave me a charming smile and took a step backwards. 'My fault. It's my first day here and I thought I was never going to find the damn office.'

I smiled back, suppressing the urge to make a silly joke about the thousands of signs with arrows pointing to the office.

'I'm Louis,' he said, letting his warm brown eyes sweep over me. He gave me a friendly smile as he did so, and I hugged the timetable and my chai latte closer to my chest. After my two previous encounters at this school it was almost weird to be regarded so kindly.

'Jo,' I introduced myself.

'You're new as well?' he said, eyeing my timetable.

I nodded, tucking a strand of hair behind my ear. 'Moved here a week ago.'

'It's really crap changing schools in the middle of the year, isn't it?' asked Louis, moving out of the way as a pack of the youngest pupils flooded noisily past.

'Well, I'm used to it,' I said casually.

Louis gave me a curious look. 'Yes? Why's that?'

I bit my lip and regretted revealing my winning 'house moves' score in only my second sentence. I gave a quick shrug and tried to downplay my answer. 'My father sometimes has to move for his job.'

'Well,' said Louis, 'I'll buy you a coffee in the cafeteria. You might be able to give me some top tips for changing school.'

I grinned: 'You mean like 'Try not to be late on your very first day?'

'Shit.' He snatched his mobile out of his jeans pocket. 'Is it really that late?' He glanced at the screen and swore. 'OK. Lovely to have almost run into you.' With this he pulled open the office door and almost crashed into a slim woman with sleek red hair. She was wearing a violet silk blouse with dark jeans and dropped her papers in shock.

'Oh God, I'm sorry,' stuttered Louis, running his fingers through his dark blond hair in embarrassment.

'My first day and I start by almost mowing down two pretty ladies. So sorry.'

'No harm done,' answered the red-haired woman, smiling at Louis. 'It would have been worse if you'd spilled the contents of her cup down my new blouse.' Then she looked at me. 'Hello. You must be Johanna. I'm Frau Engel, I teach biology. You might as well come with me now – your first lesson's with me.' She knelt down and began gathering up the papers. Louis bent down as well, looking harassed, to help.

'Just go in,' I blurted to Louis. 'I'll help Frau Engel.'

He looked uncertainly at the biology teacher, who nodded in agreement and gave a sigh of relief.

'Thanks,' he whispered to me and pushed open the door into the office.

'That was kind of you,' said Frau Engel, gathering together some closely written lists of names. I knelt on the floor to help her. 'I'm sure you'll feel at home with us, Johanna,' she explained.

'Jo,' I corrected her automatically, and heard a slight cough behind me. When I looked round, my heart began to beat faster. Behind me in the corridor stood the black haired guy from the steps. The expression on his face was every bit as hostile as before, and his dark green eyes seemed to take in my every move. I took a deep breath. My reaction was absolutely ridiculous and I hoped he hadn't noticed anything.

'Ok, Jo it is then,' said Frau Engel, and turned to look at the boy behind me. 'Hello Adrian. Have you brought the key to the photocopier room?'

Without taking his eyes off me, he nodded and came towards the teacher. Suddenly I felt as if I were in a trap. My pulse was racing and I could only pray I wouldn't blush. I hurriedly pressed the remaining papers into Frau Engel's hand, accidentally brushing her wrist with my fingertips as I did so. Then I gave a gasp as I was suddenly pulled forwards.

For the space of a heartbeat I had a feeling of being sucked away by some huge energy and the next moment I found myself back in the open air. The school corridor with the teacher had vanished and instead I was standing in the middle of a rolling field of tall silver grasses. The stems were swaying gently in the wind and the flat land reached all the way to the horizon. I turned in a circle, gasping in amazement. Overhead stretched a yellow sky with twinkling stars, which was like no other I had ever seen in my life. The clouds were scudding unnaturally fast over my head. My heart was pounding against my ribcage. Where on earth was I?

'Hello?' I called.

## 17, Das erste Buch der Erinnerung

### 17 (Vol. 1): The First Book of Memories

by Rose Snow

© 2020 Ravensburger Verlag GmbH, Ravensburg

[www.foreignrights-ravensburger.biz](http://www.foreignrights-ravensburger.biz)

© English sample translation by Melanie J. Florence



My voice sounded strange in this place. It was as if the words lasted only for the moment in which I formed them.

'Hello?' I called a second time, and again felt my words being swallowed up by the sea of silver grasses surrounding me.

A few of the silver stems on the undulating plain gleamed a different colour, more golden, and I wrapped my arms round myself. Where was I? And what was going on here? Was I perhaps dreaming? I took a few uncertain steps through the grassy landscape. The wind was rustling softly through the tall grasses and I noticed one of them right next to me which glowed gold. Carefully I touched the delicate stem.

The next moment the silver field and the yellow sky had disappeared, and I saw Frau Engel standing in the school corridor. She wasn't wearing the violet blouse and dark jeans, though, but a white linen dress and her hair was piled up. She had a key which she was handing over to the dark haired guy called Adrian. What was this? Was I hallucinating? And why was it suddenly cooler here? But even before I had come to the end of my thoughts I suddenly felt myself torn out of the scene with enormous force. I came back to reality with a pounding heart. For a moment I was completely disorientated and steadied myself by putting both hands on the floor in front of me; I was still kneeling.

What had just happened? Was I well on the way to going mad?

'Everything OK?' asked Frau Engel with a frown, and laid a hand on my shoulder. 'You're so pale.'

I breathed deeply. The aloof Adrian gave his lower left arm a quick brush before looking at me through narrowed eyes. Something in his sparkling gaze told me that I had to be careful.

'It's just my circulation,' I murmured quickly and tried not to stare at him. 'That happens sometimes, when I leave the house without breakfast.'

'Take a deep breath,' said Frau Engel and placed a reassuring hand on my shoulder. 'I can give you a cereal bar.'

'No thank you, I'm all right now' I said to deflect her, and stood up shakily. I wanted to get away from here as quickly as possible: Adrian's penetrating look was deeply unpleasant. But what was most frightening was that I had no idea what had just happened to me.

Had I really been hallucinating?

Was this school driving me mad on the very first day?

What I would have liked most was to turn on my heel and go back to our new house to think everything over in peace. I had just seen Frau Engel handing a key to Adrian, not taking one from him. But how was that possible?

Realising that I was still staring at Adrian, I hastily lowered my eyes. At the same moment the school bell signalled the beginning of the first lesson.

'Oh, that time already,' sighed Frau Engel, getting to her feet as well.

'Are you really feeling better?'

I nodded vehemently. 'Yes. It's passed now,' I said as brightly as I could.

'Good. Then come with me. I'll show you your new class.'

Frau Engel stretched out her arm invitingly and I moved quickly in the direction she indicated. As I passed Adrian I saw him take a step backwards. His reaction annoyed me but I tried not to let it show. Instead I followed Frau Engel out into the hall and swept all the pressing questions about my mental health to one side for the moment.

**FULL TRANSLATION AVAILABLE ON REQUEST**