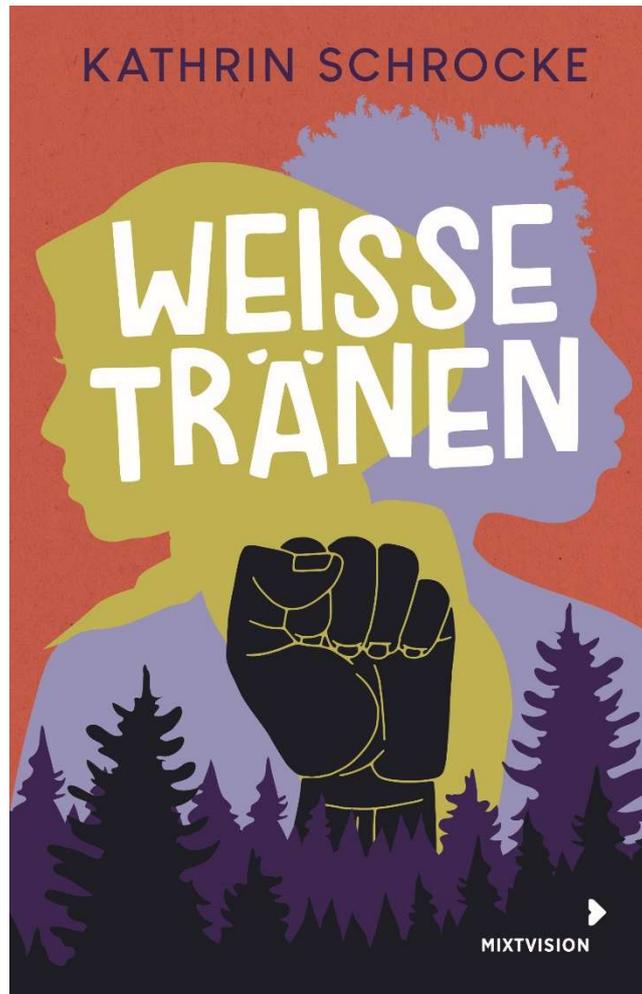


White Tears

by Kathrin Schrocke

Sample translation by Jennifer Busch and Isabel Hagedorn



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Prologue and Chapters 1-2 [pp. 5-24]

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Enlightening and entertaining: Racism broken down perfectly for YA

- White privilege from a white perspective
- Likeable, witty protagonist and engaging plotlines
- Multi-award-winning author; approved by sensitivity readers

Is that racist now, too?

Lenni and Serkan are the best of friends. That is, until new boy Benjamin shows up, nearly takes down the drama club, has a go at a popular teacher, and calls out racism everywhere. Lenni's world turns upside down. He needs to pick a side. But whose? Who is actually right here? And what have Elif and her headscarf got to do with it?

An uber-relevant, rousing story about friendship and love, life and death – and the omnipresence of casual racism. Kathrin Schrocke expertly tackles the issue of invisible privilege with empathy and without pointing any fingers.

Press reviews

Kathrin Schrocke uses her characters to discuss attitudes and thought patterns; however, the book is a far cry from a clumsy educational novel, because the author is a whizz at creating psychological credibility.

– The White Ravens 2024

This book is many things: exciting, touching, fiery, shocking. Above all, it is merciless in holding up a mirror to society. This is ideal reading material on casual racism and discrimination.

– Salah Naoura (Multi-award-winning children's author)

White Tears sensitizes us to racism without pointing fingers.

– Miriam Rosenlehner (Political theorist and sensitivity reader)

Awards

- 🏆 Leselotse
- 🏆 Shortlist Gütersloher Jugendliteraturpreis 2024
- 🏆 Betty-Reis-Book Prize
- 🏆 Donkey of the Month
- 🏆 Seven Best Books for Young Readers, Jan 2024
- 🏆 White Ravens 2024
- 🏆 Bavaria's best independent books 2024
- 🏆 Lohrer Reading Prize

The author

Kathrin Schrocke was born in Augsburg in 1975. After studying German literature and psychology, she worked in press communications and adult education before becoming a freelance author in 2003. She has received many prizes and awards for her work, which focuses on realistic young adult fiction.

The translators

Jennifer Busch and Isabel Hagedorn are freelancers who first met as copy editors at McKinsey & Co. They have been co-longlisted for the John Dryden Translation Competition three times, most recently with this sample. Between them, they have over thirty years' translation and editing experience.

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Sample translation

17th October 2016

Prologue

Weirdly, it takes a second for me to join the dots. Us under the old oak by the lake and the blue lights wafting through the night, dreamlike, plunging our sleepy Black Forest town into an episode of CSI: Miami. Thinking about it, ten was probably too early to meet. Someone was bound to be walking their dog for the fifth time that day. Or maybe an old married couple went for a stroll round the lake and called the police. What is it with adults and walking? And at night? Now *that* is a thousand times more suspicious than a few kids, under a tree, digging a grave.

Blue light spills over a shocked Elif, a frozen-stiff Serkan, the wide eyes and gaping mouths of Luisa and Alex. As luck would have it, Benjamin's just gone to take a leak. Which really *is* a stroke of luck. I don't want to diss the police out of hand, but it's not like you hear anything good about how they treat black people. I mean, *stop and search*, and all that. Hah. Benjamin would probably flip out at me reducing him to his skin colour again. To be fair, we do look a bit dodgy right now. But when you're surrounded by three different police cars, headlights full beam, the facts suddenly hit you over the head. You realise which pigeonhole they're shoving you into without a second thought. I mean, I'm standing there paralysed holding, of all things, an *urn*. Elif's the only one who's put her hands up, as if the police expect that kind of thing from us. Unfortunately, she still has the shovel in her right hand, so you can hold off on calling out the police dogs and super-clever crime scene analysts. Serkan's still kneeling by the hole as if he wants to measure its precise depth. Right now, the police probably don't care that I'm *usually* top of the class in maths. That I almost won the Black Forest Teens chess championship last year, or that I play left wing in the neighbouring town's football club. Unfortunately, in this exact second I'm nothing but a graverobber and/or some sicko desecrating a grave, caught red-handed.

To be honest, I'm not the least surprised that the burly policeman sends Luisa and Alex home as if they were only casual witnesses to the whole thing. Sure, they don't like arresting the mayor's son and the bank manager's daughter. Under different circumstances, they would probably even let me go and just keep Serkan and Elif for an excruciating round of questioning.

The policewoman stares sceptically at Elif's headscarf, and she's probably already suspicious of Serkan on account of his brown eyes. As a Catholic, I'd hardly be part of an Islamist plot, and I can see that both the burly policeman and his colleague are struggling to make sense of it all. The problem is that I'm the one with an urn pressed to my chest. The *Green Spirit* model is actually intended for forest burials and, according to the instruction leaflet, *decomposes impressively quickly and without leaving any residue*. But of course the thing doesn't rot within fifteen seconds.

I'm fully aware that NOW the shit's really hit the fan. The problems of the past few weeks were just the crappy prelude.

12th September 2016

1

‘Morning, sport!’ My father lowered the newspaper. ‘So, ready to rock the new school year? You know: YOLO! It’s going to be great. Hey, when I was sixteen, the girls were queueing round the block.’

Yep, it’s official. He’s an android, equipped with embarrassing legacy software that gives him the impression he’s ‘down with the kids’. I heard him set off on his morning jog before my alarm clock had even rung. Now he was sitting opposite me, freshly showered and doused in HUGO BOSS, making me feel like a loser. He slid the unopened cereal packet over to me. There was a picture of a stripy deckchair and the memory of Saskia flashed back: how in Tenerife she’d pulled me into the little yellow hut with the parasols, as if I’d made out with older girls thousands of times and had a certificate in the professional removal of super fiddly bikini tops. Actually, I’d been making rather clumsy efforts to cover up the fact that this was all new territory for me. After a failed attempt at undressing (and a good dressing down by a Spanish cleaning lady), we sheepishly slunk back to the karaoke party. For about three days, I was Saskia’s shadow. I joined her at the buffet and constantly hung around where she could see me. But she ignored me with deadly coolness. When a beefy Danish lifeguard arrived at the hotel mid-week, she started ghosting me completely. One day, while I was standing next to her at the chocolate fountain – heaping an excessive amount of strawberries onto a plate – she hissed: ‘You’re very sweet and you’re probably a really nice guy, kiddo. But please stop stalking me. I was just feeling a bit lost that night. End of story.’

Irritated, I tore at the cereal packet. Why on earth didn’t the damn thing open? I’d managed to conceal both my ultra-short romance with an older girl and my subsequent heartache from my parents, but inside I was still suffering like a beaten dog. ‘Don’t you think it’s time to start some extracurricular activities, Lenni?’ My father’s sentences mingled with the fading memory of Saskia’s smile. I do actually take part in extracurricular activities, but unfortunately the Danes are so much better at it than me. Dad sighed. ‘Give it here. How can anyone be so ham-fisted.’ With a casual movement, he opened the pack. ‘Voluntary work is good for your CV’, he continued. ‘In a couple of years, you’ll be happy to have the experience. And I don’t mean the school drama club, I mean real work. I met Herr Regenmacher yesterday at the council meeting and he thinks...’

My father’s words didn’t register. Through the small windows in our farmhouse kitchen, I could see the first students on their way to the bus stop. I checked my smartphone wearily. At 6 a.m., Serkan had sent a screenshot of the time and a retching emoji. I sighed and poured myself a bowl of muesli with shrivelled, freeze-dried strawberries. Summer Strawberry Edition? What a fake! I wolfed the cereal down just to be done with it. How cool it would have been to come back from the holidays with a girlfriend! To have had sex or at least hit third base. But, idiot that I was, I’d fallen at the first hurdle.

‘I was also wondering whether you might like to help out my friend Bernhard for a couple of weeks during the Christmas holidays?’ my father continued, undeterred. ‘He could do with a hand at the moment. You know, he’s an exceptional carpenter.’ He sipped his coffee. Bernhard was, above all, an exceptional coffin maker, which perfectly suited my apocalyptic mood. My life was in a downward spiral.

I stared unhappily at my father. I'd have liked to have said, 'A Danish lifeguard thwarted my first time!' Instead, I said, 'I'll think about it. I could learn a thing or two from Bernhard.'

My father looked up, puzzled. 'Cool!' he said, obviously thrown by the fact I was actually considering one of his suggestions. From behind his newspaper, he flashed me a dazzling smile. For some time, I'd suspected he was having an affair with his new dentist. His teeth were starting to look so good, they'd become a pretty poor alibi.

Mum walked into the kitchen and the floorboards creaked. My little sister Jasmin followed hot on her heels and squeezed up to me on the corner bench. In passing, Mum flicked the radio on, and *Human* by Rag'n'Bone Man filled the kitchen.

'Mum, what do I want to be when I grow up?' asked Jasmin. Her friend had asked her to fill in a friendship book, where she had to answer loads of nosy questions about herself. Jasmin sat expectantly, her felt-tip pen at the ready.

Our mother put on the kettle and made her happy herbal tea. Which made sense, given her upcoming day at work and my father's fondness for his dentist, Frau Dr Schnabel.

'Well, what do you want to be?' she asked over her shoulder.

'A vet?' Jasmin ventured.

'Write "President of the European Central Bank";' I suggested, chewing.

'Teacher?' asked Jasmin, at a loss.

'You can be anything you want, my darling,' said our mother encouragingly. Jasmin scribbled down something that looked suspiciously like *supermodel*.

'What's my favourite holiday destination?' Jasmin continued her interrogation.

Now Mum was cross. 'You've had six weeks to answer these questions. Do you have to do it five minutes before school starts?'

My little sister pouted and looked to our father for help. He shrugged. 'You heard your mother,' was the verdict. 'Just tell her you didn't fill it in.'

My parents always have each other's backs. They've been together since their school days, which puts a certain amount of pressure on me. I'm just saying. Even my father, with the teeth of an American talk show host and connections to the coffin-maker scene, managed to hook up with someone at some point. The fact that my parents also met at *my* school doesn't really make things any easier.

'Then she won't like me anymore,' complained Jasmin.

'If, when you're fourteen, you steal her first boyfriend, then she won't like you anymore,' I comforted her. Jasmin giggled and tapped her forehead. At nine years old, apparently she couldn't imagine ever being interested in anything apart from *Frozen* merchandise.

The phone rang and my mother picked up. 'Wehrle speaking.' And with that, her working day had begun. I unscrewed the Nutella and dipped in a finger. My father raised a disapproving eyebrow. 'Have you any idea how many calories are in there? We should stop buying that muck.'

'... die at hospital or at home?' my mother asked politely.

Oh yeah, I forgot to mention the best bit: my parents are the local undertakers. Which might well explain my father's obsession with planning meticulously for the future. And he has this air about him, as if he's about to scatter earth on you or start embalming you by mistake.

I grabbed my rucksack.

'Take care!' said Dad.

'If I'm in a fatal crash, you'll obviously be the first to know. Right?' I said. 'Jasmin, you're in charge of making sure they respect my last wishes. Please cremate me and scatter my ashes solemnly on the McDonald's Drive-Thru.'

'Very funny.' My father shook his head, unamused.

'Speaking of McDonald's. Grab yourself something from the bakery on the way home', said Mum, who'd finished her call. 'I'm taking Jasmin to her riding class.'

'Oh, great!'

'Don't act as if I haven't taken you to football tournaments, or chess, or your friends' houses umpteen times.'

I slammed the door and got on my bike. Annoyed, I put on my headphones and *Happy* by Pharrell Williams flooded into my ears. Nothing worked in this shitty life, everything went wrong: I was a sixteen-year-old lad from the Black Forest who'd lost his heart on Tenerife. Whose mother had cut off his food supply and whose father had any number of skeletons in the closet. Lenni's my name, by the way. After Saint Leonard, not Lenny Kravitz, or anyone cool like that.

My phone buzzed and a new message from Serkan popped up: *SOS! I'm being chased by a nerd!* I sent back a massive question mark. No response. And he didn't pick up when I rang. I jumped on my bike and hurried to my best friend's aid.

2

I shot over the crossroads into the school grounds, but there was no sign of either Serkan or the school bus. I snapped up a rock star parking spot and, somewhat out of breath, started fiddling with my expensive bike lock. And the whole time, I couldn't stop thinking how I'd been sixteen for four months but still hadn't done any of the things that make you a man: I'd never been drunk or high. I'd never 'borrowed' my parents' car, even though if I went through a red light, I knew (at least theoretically) how to do a top-notch emergency stop. Thanks YouTube! And I'd never had a proper girlfriend. Before Tenerife, I even used to beat myself up about whether I might be gay. But I'd never felt a burning desire for my best friend Serkan, and I really couldn't be arsed to get involved with the LGBTQIA+ group at my school.

Happy was over, so I tapped repeat and headed to the entrance. Under the sign 'Kant Secondary School' stood the blackest boy I'd ever seen. His outfit was confusing. He was wearing a crisp white shirt with an elegant, narrow tie. On anyone else, it would've looked odd. But the guy had an impressive afro to go with it. He was surely a brilliant dancer. For a brief moment, I wondered if our head had summoned him for a PR pic. Last year, we'd qualified for the 'School without Racism' badge, and Herr Regenmacher never missed an opportunity to brag. He was always posting about how *fully woke* we all were and how xenophobia didn't stand a chance here.

'Hi', I said to the new guy.

'Hi', he smiled tensely.

'Oh, you're already here!' I heard a familiar voice behind me. Serkan had finally arrived, his sister and little brother Ismet in tow. Lost in thought, Ismet was flicking through a tattered issue of *National Geographic Kids*. He was oblivious to the world around him and moved his lips

silently as he read. Serkan's distress call had obviously been a joke – I'd forgotten that Ismet was starting at our school this year.

Elif gave me a radiant smile. The summer holidays had been long and, apart from Serkan, I hadn't seen any of the Kayacans for weeks. Elif had started wearing lipstick. It was the same colour as her pale red headscarf.

'Hi Lenni! You're arrested for sexy!' She hugged me and I caught a whiff of that familiar girlish scent. Everything about Elif was soft and fragrant, and I got a fuzzy feeling remembering how Serkan and I would pretend to be her bodyguards back in kindergarten. The cool fabric of her headscarf brushed against my cheek.

'And you're arrested for hot!' I replied, grinning. We'd been performing this silly ritual since the school party on Shrove Tuesday, when cheesy pop king Olli Schulze's profound lyrics had been played over and over again. Elif was really sweet. And she said what she thought without mincing her words.

'What have you been reading this whole time, Ismet?' Serkan asked.

'About spiders. Did you know that some spiders can change colour to blend in with their surroundings?'

'Yeah, sure', said Serkan, 'it's a defence mechanism.'

'Have you been reading my magazines?' Ismet asked, confused.

'No. But I've seen every single episode of Spiderman,' Serkan joked.

He ruffled Ismet's hair. 'Put the magazine away and act like any other first year. Hunt Pokémon, collect football stickers, or have a growth spurt. I don't want people thinking you're a weirdo.'

'What people?' Ismet asked, looking at his older brother uncertainly.

The queer cheerleaders pushed past us. I picked up the word *glitter cannon* and decided once and for all not to join them.

Serkan looked in the direction of the new boy. 'Welcome, bro!' he said. 'Cool tie. But you don't need it here. My name's Serkan, by the way.' He patted the lad on the shoulder as if they'd known each other for ages.

'Hi, I'm Benjamin. Moved here with my family two weeks ago.' All of a sudden the new boy seemed relaxed.

'What class are you in?' Serkan asked curiously. 'Maybe you're with us! That'd be great, wouldn't it, Lenni?'

He glanced at me, but his attention remained entirely on Benjamin. Who we quickly figured out was indeed joining our class. Serkan only slapped me on the back after that was all settled.

'Benjamin?' Regenmacher had finally arrived. He looked intensely at the new student. 'I'm Herr Regenmacher. You've already made friends? Good. Let me take you to the secretary's office.' The head put his arm around Benjamin's shoulders. It was a curious picture: Regenmacher was wearing his usual stonewashed Levi jeans, a loose-knit jumper, and the obligatory white trainers. Regenmacher's outfits were ostentatiously juvenile. And Benjamin... was a bit overdressed in that tie. He looked more grown up than the head. The two made their way to the office. 'We're very proud of our cultural diversity.'

Regenmacher sounded positively tipsy, as if Benjamin were some kind of trophy he'd won. And in a way, as the first black student at our school, he was. 'You know, the mayor's wife is French...' Regenmacher continued. Serkan laughed incredulously.

'I'm from Leipzig,' we heard Benjamin shoot back as they were leaving. 'I wanted to ask you about the buses...'

'Well, that was pathetic. So much for *School without Racism*,' Serkan muttered wearily.

I looked at my mate, uncertain. 'What do you mean? Regenmacher was being super nice to him.'

'Yeah, that's it though...,' Serkan grimaced. 'Can't he just treat him normally, like everyone else? And what was all that about cultural diversity?'

'Well of course he'd say that to Benjamin,' I said, defending Regenmacher. 'I mean, it's obvious he's not from around here. Regenmacher just wanted to reassure him. He didn't mean anything by it.'

Serkan stared at me silently for a few seconds. 'You know what? Let it go, Lenni. Otherwise I might go off you.'

'Are you mad?' I nudged my best friend in disbelief. I had no idea what his problem was.

We joined the throng of arriving students. 'Have you prepared for the audition?' I asked, making a stab at changing the subject.

Serkan nodded sheepishly. 'Yep, sure thing. What did you expect?'

Elif pushed past us. 'Serkan practised every day!' she blurted out proudly. She touched my elbow as if by accident. 'You'll be helping out with the play again, won't you, Lenni?'

I nodded. I wasn't interested in acting, but I enjoyed doing the lights and the sound and putting on a few effects. Also, I really liked Herr Prasch, our director. And the drama group were a tight-knit bunch. Rumour had it that this year we'd be doing a musical.

'Where's the main hall?' Ismet squeezed himself between us. Among all the older students, he suddenly looked terribly lost.

'Well, let's see,' said Serkan, pointing to the unmistakable sign for the main hall. 'Where could this arrow lead?' He leaned down to his brother. 'You can do it. Work hard and don't be rude to the teachers.'

'I'm never rude...,' Ismet murmured. He grasped Serkan's hand a little anxiously. But Serkan sighed and pushed him into the group of other newbies. Ismet disappeared into the crowd.

Troubled, Serkan watched his little brother go. 'I really hope he can cope with all this...,' he remarked softly.

'Stop it, won't you!' Elif said, aghast. 'He's a top student. If you don't believe in him, who will?'

'Of course I believe in him,' Serkan replied. 'But you know what it's like. From now on, he has to work twice as hard to prove himself.'

'You're really holding him back with all your worrying!' said Elif. Serkan replied in Turkish.

'Chill out, guys!' I didn't understand what all the fuss was about. Ismet would manage the start of school. I'd got through it back then, too, hadn't I? And my marks had been appalling. 'Come on, we need to get going! I don't want to end up with the nerds in the front row.' I pulled Serkan away from his little sister and flashed her an apologetic smile. Elif's face was framed by the pale red fabric of her headscarf. For the first time, I noticed how grown-up she looked.

Prasch set his shabby leather briefcase on the desk. He looked somewhat worse for wear. At the beginning of last school year, he'd had a heart attack and been signed off for ages. He was back

in spring, though, and we'd carried on with the play as planned. How old was he, anyway? He'd already been teaching here when my parents were teenagers.

As if he could read my mind, Prasch sidled up to the window and gazed out thoughtfully. 'You might already know that this is my final year', his familiar voice seemed to address our reflections. He was looking across to the trees at the other side of the valley. They were swaying in the wind. The lake glittered before them, like a distant promise.

'My leaving is, of course, perfectly timed', said Prasch with evident irony, 'to coincide with the school's centenary. And that means: all the nibbles and bubbly we can dream of and extra funding for the drama club. I would dearly like to say I'd planned it this way. But I'm afraid that, this time, the coincidence *is* pure coincidence.'

My gaze lifted from Prasch's reflection and into the classroom. Serkan and I were in our usual spots right at the back. Sunlight was breaking in Luisa's light-blond hair. She was in the front row as usual. Alex sat next to her. His mum was head of the PTA, his dad was the mayor, and he was a colossal pain in the arse. He spent his whole time bragging about how he was French bilingual. He was damn good-looking too, more's the pity. I wouldn't be surprised if him and Luisa ended up together. I had a vivid image of the two of them posting stupid selfies online. Social media was made for the Luisas and Alexes of the world. It was clearly too much effort for anyone to like pics of *me*, though. That empty feeling of always being at a disadvantage hit me again. Life wasn't fair. When would *my* lucky streak begin? When would something good finally happen to me?

From the corner of my eye, I noticed Serkan staring at Luisa, too. She was the official star of the drama club – ridiculously pretty, ridiculously clever. Serkan had been pining for her for half an eternity.

'Do you reckon Luisa and Alex...' Serkan had leaned over. But he didn't have the chance to finish his burning question.

Prasch had turned round to face us. 'So, what I mean is: this year, I want you to pull your socks up. Be nice, and give me a proper sendoff. When I'm an old fuddy duddy, I want to look back on my time here fondly.'

All of a sudden, there was a lump in my throat. I didn't want Prasch to leave. Over the years, he'd been a real mentor to me. He'd motivated me when my marks were shaky and had even had the occasional quiet word with other teachers on my behalf. Most of all, though, I'd miss him as director of the drama club. I liked his enthusiasm and passion, how he made awesome plays come to life on stage. I liked the sense of team spirit he brought to the drama kids. And I was already looking forward to the legendary barbecues at his house.

'You know what to do!' said Prasch and raised a warning hand. 'Don't bother me with this gender nonsense and don't run off to fight any holy wars. Especially not when I urgently need you for drama club!' He looked at Pauline, who'd given a presentation on feminism last year, and Serkan, then gave him a wink. 'Do we understand each other, Osama? Hah, you lot know what I mean. And make sure you get me a spectacular leaving present.'

The class laughed. Prasch was known for being provocative. Deep down, though, he was a really nice guy. Next to me, Serkan sighed.

There was a knock. Before Prasch could even reach the door, it opened, and Regenmacher came in with Benjamin.

Everyone stared. People started whispering, and someone in the middle of the room snickered. Regenmacher rocked violently back and forth on his white trainers. 'Some of you have

already met Benjamin!' he said. 'Help him settle in, please. Is there a space for him somewhere, Sigggi?' He'd directed his question straight at Prasch.

Serkan's hand shot up. We'd saved a chair for Benjamin specially. He noticed us and nodded, relieved. And before Prasch could even open his mouth, Benjamin was striding over to us.

Regenmacher handed the nonplussed Prasch a letter, then disappeared, pronto.

Prasch scanned the page then walked casually over to the board and wrote Benjamin's name. *Benjamin Schneidmueller*. The chalk scraped the blackboard with every stroke. I wondered whether the long-promised whiteboard would ever appear.

Luisa was staring at us, sizing up the new boy with obvious fascination.

'Where are you from, lad?' Prasch asked in a friendly voice, putting the chalk down and clapping his hands a couple of times. Chalk dust flew in the air – a rain of tiny, white dots.

Benjamin scratched his temple. 'Leipzig.'

Puzzled, Prasch smiled. He turned to the name, studied it intensely, then looked back at Benjamin. 'Wonders never cease!'

He opened his bag and started casually taking out his things: a shiny new leather pencil case, his thick, powder-blue notebook. Tissues and the lemon drops he sucked at every opportunity. 'I mean, where are you really from?' he asked, unwrapping a sweet. 'Somalia or Ghana, I imagine?'

'No', said Benjamin. 'I was born in Leipzig. And my mother was born in Leipzig. And my ...'

'Alright, alright', Prasch said with a wave of the hand. And then in his broadest Saxon accent: 'An East German, born and bred. If you prefer it that way – fine by me!' Prasch got a few scattered laughs. 'No hard feelings. I'm a history teacher', he was back to speaking normally. 'That's why I'm interested in where people are from.'

'So where are you from?' Benjamin casually turned the tables. A surprised grin started spreading across Serkan's face.

'Well, from here, of course', Prasch was irritated. 'Born here, never left. A proper country bumpkin, that's me. Do you know, Benjamin, all I did was ask you a polite question. Out of friendly curiosity for my fellow man. You don't always have to assume the worst in people.' He picked up the sponge, clearly annoyed. Slowly, he wiped away Benjamin's name. The letters disappeared, one after the other.

--- End of sample translation ---
--- Further details on next page ---

Spoiler alert...

For his big finale as drama club director, Prash plans to stage *King Kong* and has even borrowed a professional gorilla suit for the occasion. Despite Serkan's obvious musical and acting talent, Prash casts him in the mute title role, which elicits a challenge from Benjamin: 'You're not *seriously* making the only non-white student an ape?' Cue chaos. Serkan finally feels seen, whereas Lenni becomes defensive, and their friendship crumbles. This incites Lenni to reconsider his own position and sets him on a transformative character arc – that of understanding his own white privilege. At the same time, Lenni begins to realise his attraction to Serkan's sister, Elif, and in growing closer to her sees for himself the discrimination she faces for wearing a headscarf. He speaks up when a neighbour starts making racist comments, an action that both impresses Elif and helps rebuild bridges with Serkan. In the end, Prash suffers a fatal heart attack, the play is cancelled, and we learn that Lenni's urn contains the ashes of the ceremonially burnt King Kong costume. Schrocke's last line is brilliant: '*We're arrested for sexy*', said Elif, dead cool as she puts her hands up.

Page by page, Schrocke takes Lenni out of his comfort zone, away from that happy, 'self-satisfied reality of people who never have to worry about racism because of their white skin.' Crucially, the book does not assume a patronising moral stance. By making an extremely likeable white narrator gradually aware of his own unconscious bias – and setting this as the backdrop to an engaging, witty, and more complex tale – Schrocke succeeds in opening our eyes to invisible privilege in a sensitive, accessible manner. And in addition to the laudable way *White Tears* raises awareness of an important subject, it is quite simply a joy to read.