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Danger. High Voltage (Høgspenning. Livsfare)

Sample translation

HOME

The train slows to a halt as it approaches the station. I get up from my seat and check my phone is still in the sidepocket of my backpack before going to the doors. The car park is filled with vehicles waiting for someone to arrive or to send someone off. Dad's car is at the far end. I can see him now too, watching the trains from outside the waiting room. He's wearing workman trousers and a jumper. His jumper is one of those oversized school hoodies I wanted to get rid of before I left. He said he was going to bring them all when he came. I didn't think he was being serious. It is so strange to see him here, wearing my own blue hoodie.

The train stops and I get off. The smell of freshly harvested corn fields fills the air. He spots me and cracks into a grin as he comes over.

"Hi."

"Hi," he replies, giving me a light hug. So light that I almost can't feel it.

I can't remember the last time we hugged. It's strange, but it's nice. Maybe this is just how it is the first time you come home after moving out. Like, a little bit awkward and formal.

I toss my backpack onto the back seat and hop in. I sit there waiting for him to start up and drive, but he doesn't move. He opens his mouth to say something, then closes it again. Just like a fish out of water.

Then it hits me. He wasn't out there waiting for me because he thought it was a big deal to welcome home his daughter for the first time after moving away. If everything was normal, he would never have given me a hug.

Something serious must have happened. Someone is dead.

"Well, what is it?!" I burst out.

"It's your mum," he replies, his voice trembling.

"What's wrong with her?" My voice breaks as I say the word *her*.

"She hasn't been… herself, lately."

He clears his throat and looks away from me, then stares across at something on the other side of the train tracks.

But who is ever really themselves, though? I don't think I've been myself since sixth grade. Before I even had tits. When he doesn't say anything else, I make up my mind and decide I might as well ask some questions. I decide to press him about it gently, making out like everything is just fine and dandy.

"What is it? Is she having a bad spell again?"

"I don't know," said Dad. "She says it's just a migraine, but…"

Mum has spent most of summer in bed because of her migraines. It was an absolute hell.

"But if it's only a migraine, it can't be too bad?"

"No…" he mumbles, starting up the car and pulling out of the parking spot.

We pass the petrol station and head over the bridge. I wonder if my driving practice is ever actually going to happen. This is the first weekend I've been home since the summer holidays. Mum promised we were going to fit in a practice this weekend. It would have been perfect, too, because I've got nothing to do. Nothing on at school, no weekend practice, no parties I was trying to get invited to. It's not like I'm desperate for parties, but that *does* seem to be "where it all happens". At least, that's what I hear people saying when I come to the classroom on Monday.

But now I'm here in the car with Dad, and I don't have to think about what's going on down in Eidsberg.

I've been picturing this day for so long. Mum's the type of person who, if she has the time, can always find ways to make the house really homely for when I come back. Like in summer, when Dad and I came down from the pastures on the mountain. She had hoovered my room, dusted it, and changed my bed. She had even joked around a little bit too, hanging up pictures of old ladies and photos of recipes that she had printed from the internet, and had sellotaped some of them to my band records. One time she even hung up a meme - a furious gorilla with the text: "That look your mom gives you when you're about to get your ass whooped". All because I had forgotten a bag of dirty sports clothes under my bed.

I'm dreading the moment when I walk through that door. I don't want Mum to be sick. I don't want her to be having a bad spell. I want her to make pizza like she used to. For my birthdays when I was little, I would always get one of those pizzas with the crazy thick bases. That's the

kind of food you're supposed to eat when you come back home for the first time after moving away. Maybe we could make it together tonight? Yet the moment that thought hits me, I know it's never going to happen. My stomach tightens. There's something unspoken here.

After a short while driving over the peninsula where we live, Dad pipes up. As though we had never stopped breathing.

"It's probably more than just a migraine."

Then he goes quiet again. It feels like he's trying to glue his lips together so no more words come out.

Indoors, I take off my shoes and hang my jacket on the hook next to the window. My body, my ears, strain to hear Mum's voice coming from somewhere in the house. But it's completely still. I hold my breath and try not to move a muscle. It's exactly like what people say - as silent as the grave. But it shouldn't be like this. There should be noise. There should be singing. There's always singing! My body knows there's usually singing. But right now there's nothing. My neck begins to stiffen. It's as though my muscles are clenching together to make themselves as small as possible and stop themselves from making a sound.

BUTCHER

She's lying in bed with the duvet wrapped around her, and doesn't look up when I open the door. She tries to smile, but it is as though she sees right through me. Her eyes are blank, and it looks like a huge effort just to pull the corners of her mouth into a smile.

"What are we having for dinner?"

She squirms a bit under the covers, as if my question somehow hurt her.

Eventually, she replies:

"Ask your father."

Without once meeting my eyes.

I leave and shut the door behind me. I realise I was holding my breath, and take a deep gulp of air. Then just as I'm on my way out, I hear her say something. At first I think it's me she's calling for, and go to grab the handle. But then I hear her swearing. She swears and curses just like a butcher - Dad says that people working in butcher shops swear all the time. Then she

cries out with an *ughhhhhh*, and something hard hits the wall. I can't bring myself to open the door.

When dinner is ready, I call up to Mum. No response. Dad's right, it's from back in summer. Then she would only spend a day or two in bed. The next day she was up and about, taking it easy - with sunglasses on. A few weeks would pass by and she'd be back to normal. Even before she had recovered, you could still speak to her. She could still manage a genuine smile. If you asked her something, she would answer. Not start throwing things at walls and swearing.

Dad comes through, red in the face and dripping with sweat.

We eat for a while, then I ask him how long she's been like this.

He looks up at me. It's clear he knew this question was coming. He has been thinking over and over about whether he should lie to me or say it like it is. I'm not stupid, I know grown-ups do this all the time.

Dad clears his throat again. Christ, is it *possible* to drag this out any more?

At long last he pipes up.

"Just after you left."

"Is it my fault she's like that?"

He says no, then shovels more food onto his plate even though he hasn't finished eating, eyes glancing around the room.

I've always coped by myself. I could write before I was five. I started making my own packed lunches when I started at primary. I got to school every day without anybody having to wake me up or tell me to be quiet. I would dress in clothes that suited the weather. I always managed all my homework by myself, without help from Mum or Dad. I've been making my own food and doing the dishes for as long as I can remember. I have been washing my own clothes since I was twelve. I got my bank card early, back in secondary school, and counted every pennies of the little pocket money I used to get. I've worked on the farm, both with animals and out in the fields, ever since I could fit into a tiny pair of overalls**.** Mum and Dad may have technically been home, but they would usually be out on the farm. That's what it's like, growing up in the country. You learn to fend for myself.

In summer, Dad and I were the ones who worked on the farm or up with the animals grazing in the mountains. Mum would stay indoors with her migraine. Now I wonder if they even were migraines, or whether they were something else. I know she's had blue periods before; I

can remember them back in primary and middle school. She would bury herself into her bed, deep inside, and shut herself off from the world. She would say they were period pains. But after a few days, she would dig her way out of her cave, and then it was back to normal. I thought this was run of the mill. I thought all mums were like that when they had their period. But I'm not like that when I'm on my period. I didn't need to lie down or stop speaking to people or be completely shut off from the world.

Mum loves singing and she does it all the time. Like, *actually* all the time. So often I would wish for her to just be quiet. But she loves music. It's like she has a Spotify playlist running round her head all day long. But now I think about it, I can't actually remember a single time she sang this summer. I quickly run a search through my memory bank. The last time must have been on the 17th of May, when we stood up to sing the national anthem to the tune of the brass band as raindrops gently pattered away on our umbrellas.

This was supposed to be a nice little weekend. Mum and Dad were supposed to ask me all about how everything was at the new apartment, and starting at high school. They were supposed to ask me whether I had any new friends and I was supposed to lie about it. We were supposed to do the sort of things normal people do the first time they come home after the summer holidays. We were supposed to go and pluck all the berries that were still in the bushes, and check whether any of the plums were ripe. But here was Dad in front of me, telling me that it isn't my fault that Mum's the way she is, even though he says she's only been like that since I moved out. I grit my teeth together so hard that it makes my jaw ache.

I can't eat anymore, but I can't spew all of my anger all over Dad, either. He's so strange. Everything is so strange. Honestly I think I just want to cry. What did he expect? That mum would go back to normal before when I came home? That she would be up and about, changing my bed, making food, hoovering, taking care of the goats, and everything a human could possibly do in a day? If he had expected that, then he was right about one thing. It must be my fault that she's like this now. I left, and Mum went from having occasional migraines to becoming a person I don't recognise anymore. But in that case, shouldn't she be back to normal now that I'm home? I just don't get it.