

Sample Translation

## With regards to Starting over

*Med Hensyn til at blive Ny*

*Kirstine K. Høgsbro*

**Translation by Elizabeth deNoma**

I look away from B, out through the window. My bag is on my lap, I hold it with both arms. Outside, the world passes by, some of it anyway, the clouds stand stubbornly motionless. "So you have no idea how long you want to stay up there? None whatsoever?" B looks at me quickly before her gaze goes back to the road.

"Not really."

B smiles, shakes her head. "What are you going to do? There's no one up there. Does it smell weird in here?"

B's car is always in danger of breaking down, her fear of it happening making her constantly think she can smell smoke.

"But I guess you see that as a plus? Doesn't it smell just a little bit like smoke?"

"It's not a minus, anyway." I attempt a smile. "I can't smell anything."

"And you're not afraid to be up there all alone? Not afraid of rapists, murderers, random psychopaths?"

"I could just use ... a little peace, I think. What with everything."

B looks at me. "I certainly understand that."

We drive in silence for a little while, the hum of the car moving through my body feels nice.

"At the same time, I don't quite understand your wanting to be alone in the summer house," B laughs.

I shrug.

"You are really..." she looks for the right word.

"... Eccentric?" I suggest.

B laughs. "Yes. Eccentric, let's call it that."

I smile at a remnant from the past that pops up from somewhere in my consciousness. My mother often used to say, "You were a very eccentric child."

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LOCATION:

The living room (my parents').

Cast:

My mother (standing, just home from work).

My father (in his recliner, no one knows how long he's been sitting there).

Me (lying on the sofa).

My father: She wasn't eccentric, that's just the way kids are.

My mother: Yes, she was eccentric. Remember how often she just sat there with things.

My father: She didn't just sit there with things, she was exploring the world.

My mother: But she didn't investigate things? She always looked just past them, blankly.

My father: That's the way it looks when people are thinking.

My mother: Why is it, that I don't get to have my own experience of the world?

My father: Why is it that I can't have a different opinion than you do?

My mother: I don't think we should spend any more time on this conversation. I think that my daughter was very quirky, and as far as I recall, you used to think so, too, but apparently not anymore.

My father (to me): Sweetheart, you weren't quirky.

My mother (to me): Believe me, you were quirky. But I don't mean it as a negative thing. Who wants to be normal? Your father is afraid of anything that seems different. Don't let that make you feel bad.

My father (to me): Don't listen to your mother.

Me: So, when are we going to eat?

My mother: Soon. I'm just going to go drink myself into the right frame of mind for this family dinner situation.

My mother leaves the living room and goes out into the kitchen, where she shouts: "That was a joke! I'm not going to get drunk."

My father (to me): I hope you can ignore this kind of thing.

Me: I'm super hungry.

My father: I am too, sweetheart, I really am.

\*

The funeral was relatively sparse. In a chapel with room for about 50 people, with whitewashed walls, wooden benches, the coffin at the end of the room. In addition to my father and me, the people who came were my aunt, my father's boss, some colleagues I didn't know, B, my mother's friend, a (former?) friend and about ten other people, some of whom I vaguely recognized, but not enough to be sure. My father gave the speech, which honestly wasn't very good, as if he hadn't been able to get the tornado of emotions and memories that constantly rumbled around within him to still for long enough to find something genuine and touching to say about my mother.

Something about what she'd been like as a human being, what they'd had together. Instead, he listed factual events. When she was born, where she'd lived, the degrees she'd attained "and unfortunately not used", the child she had given birth to - "who is also here today", he pointed with a flat hand in my direction - what her hobbies had been in recent years. He even mentioned that she "also drank a little too much at certain times, but maybe that can't be characterized as a hobby".

Everything recited with the same intonation. He finished with "We'll always remember you, and ..." then he broke down, staggered off and sat down next to me, grabbed my thigh and gave me a comforting hard squeeze while nodding to himself. "That was nice, Dad," I whispered. "You did well." He just kept nodding and doing his strange thigh squeeze, while looking like someone who was being assaulted.

Afterwards we sang, maybe it was just one song, maybe it was a few. I just sat there staring at the coffin, as though I could see through it, all the way through to my dead mother.

I remember thinking that death is much more than a conclusion. It's not just the last thing that happens in a life, death shapes everything that has been by turning it into something finished. It changes everything, the ending. Perhaps precisely that is the most claustrophobic thing about death. The way it freezes an entire life; this and nothing more became of it. I don't think that my mother was proud of her life, I don't think it was all that she'd hoped it would be, I don't think she was the least bit serene about her departure.

\*

LOCATION:

Asian restaurant.

CAST:

M (having just finished eating).

Me (having nearly just finished eating).

It's only been an hour, but we've ordered, gotten our food, and eaten it. M has talked about his music and I am rigid with emptiness.

"I think it could be really cool," he says, turning off his iPod that's just played his latest demo. I take the earbuds out and hand them to him.

"Definitely," I say, trying to compose my face so that my overall expression is one of appreciative excitement. He puts the earbuds in his own ears and listens to the track himself, his face twisting with how pleasurable he finds it. I try thinking that he's an idiot, but the thought doesn't really land well, my body rejects it, like a foreign body.

"So, I think I'll head out into the world for a bit, babe," M removes his headphones, throws his crumpled napkin down on his plate, pushes his chair back a little, stretching.

"But it was super nice to see you again," he says, yawning.

It takes me a moment to understand that he doesn't mean that we should head out into the world together; that this really was the friendly dinner we'd discussed.

"The world is the shit," I say, hoping to hit a tone of superiority.

M gestures to the server that we'd like to have the check. He gets them to split it when the waiter stands at our table shortly thereafter. I fiddle with my credit card, take a sip of wine, which gets caught in my throat, starting a cascade of loss of control; I cough uncontrollably, my eyes begin to water, my mascara melts, running down my cheeks in black streaks.

"Are you okay, babe?" he puts his card back in his wallet.

I try to wipe the tears away, trying not to let my eyelashes clump together.

"I am," I answer, in a voice that isn't mine. As if it were a toad sitting across from him. I try to laugh, but it just sounds like more toad noises.

"You could get a coffee, if you want," he gets up, putting his jacket on.

"I'm sorry that I have to go, but I'd promised to be home by ten."

So many snide things one could say.

"I think I'll head out as well. But you don't have to wait," I manage to blurt out.

He kisses me quickly, almost politely. Slightly disgusted by the toad, thinks the toad.

"Talk to you later."

"Say hi ... from me."

He answers with his back turned; one hand lifted over his head as an indication that he'll pass it on. At least as an indication that he heard me say something. Then he puts his earbuds back in, probably listens to his own track again.

I look at him as he passes the window out on the street. Him and his twisted-up face, his arms drumming the beat into the air.

I'm stumbling home in my heels shortly after.

No goodnight kiss for the toad.

\*

At the summer house I answered his message.

I write:

I'm dreaming of so much more than we've ever had together. I don't know if what I dream of is even realistic, but I know that I don't think it can happen with you. Also, I've also slept with one of your friends as well, which I've never told you. If I were to be seeing anyone right now, it would probably be him. Take care of yourself. XXX

M answers:

*Hehe. It's cool. See you around.*

I sit for a while looking at his message.