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English sample translation

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((pp7-13))

We wind up killing our mothers because we don't want to go on lying.

It already starts in November. We don't feel well and don't know why we don't feel well. We blame the fog or the sleet. But really, we're afraid of Christmas. As soon as we see the first chocolate Santa Claus in the department stores fear kicks in. And then keeps growing, day by day.

We feel worse and worse, cold feet and headaches, start coughing and try to call off the Christmas visit to our mothers. Since we know from experience that our mothers ignore illnesses when it doesn't suit them, we begin to lie. We talk about our immovable professional deadlines, and when that doesn't work, we enlist our children. We invent infectious diseases like measles or scarlet fever.

We wind up killing our mothers because we don't want to go on lying. Our worries that we could infect them at Christmas so that they get weak and possibly fall and then later have to go into a nursing home because of that fall and will die there from a failed organ all are laughed off.

Mothers are always laughing off our concerns. On the one hand they're afraid of everything and everybody and warn us non-stop about the traffic, bad company, drugs, the opposite sex, spoiled food, doggy-do on the street, the consequences of measles, reading by poor light, lack of fresh air, and so on and so forth; on the other hand, they don't put up with the slightest objection on our part. We are supposed to give in to our mothers, body and soul. That's the whole point in the end. They have a life-threatening infectious disease, and they dismiss our concern with a laugh. You've got to be crazy, they say, to think their only grandchild would catch something from her. That's the way they force us to lie to them. Out of pure survival instinct.

Our daughter's just got scarlet fever, we tell mother over the phone a week before Christmas because we don't want to say we don't want to bring our baby on a visit to anybody who hasn't got it straight in their head about the threat and danger of infection of his illness. Our mother hasn't got a chance against scarlet fever. There is

a social convention that a child with scarlet fever can't be transported God knows where. But we're left with guilt feelings. Because we've lied to our mother. And all those lies that have helped us finally manage to grow up more or less will bring along a new one. Lies always lead to more lies. Or to adjusting. Because we can't invent a new kiddie's disease every year that might prevent us from celebrating Christmas with our children and mothers we give in.

Though I'm sick I go with my daughter to mother's for Christmas. I phone mother several times beforehand to try and postpone our visit because I've got a bad cough and am on antibiotics. Since Dad died I've had a cough every winter and have to take antibiotics. At any rate I don't want my mother to catch it, and I want to take it easy myself. It makes for a long tough trip, taking a seven-year-old daughter from the city I've moved to (because that got me as far away as possible from my home town). But mother reacted the way I expected her to anyway. I've so been looking forward, mother says, to the Christmas holidays together, and I've already bought cookies too, and the Christmas tree and a frozen goose. What am I supposed to do with the cookies? It's impossible for me to eat so many cookies all by myself. I don't feel well anyway, and even a frozen goose won't keep forever. Besides, it doesn't quite fit into the freezer. I'm not about to catch something.

And Daddy's dead, mother says and starts crying.

And I say, OK, then we'll come. But that's a mistake, because mother really will get infected with something. We'll have to have three different doctors on call come to the house during the holidays and at the end of it all, after I've left, mother will have a fall right away, three days after I've gone. She'll be taken to the hospital that she'll never leave to go back to her apartment.

On Christmas Eve, after we've eaten the very fat goose that was cooked for hours and is rather tough, mother doesn't feel well. Her face has turned white. I put a pail of water next to her TV chair. But mother turns her head in the opposite direction when she throws up. The vomit all lands on mother and on the table and on the carpet. Even the underside of the dining table has pieces of vomit stuck to it. After I've washed it up and cleaned everything, I ask mother to go to bed. Mother doesn't react. I call the

doctor. The doctor and I together try to get mother to the bed. But mother can't walk. She lifts one foot, then won't move it in front of the other but puts it back down on the same spot. We each take an arm from either side. But mother doesn't understand that she can lean on us. Or she doesn't want to lean on us. She places her arm very gently on mine and lifts her foot, once again not enough. Then she puts it down in the same spot. The doctor talks to mother and tries to calm her down. He says she should try to put one foot before the other. I'm afraid to, mother says to the doctor, suddenly giving a smile. The doctor says that we've both got her securely by both arms. And she can count on that. Mother gives another little smile and finally places one foot a few inches before the other. She's still not leaning on us. We take her firmly by the arms, but she tries to fight us off. She tries instead to hang on to the back of the TV chair and the table. The doctor keeps saying to mother that she should trust us.

Mother feels her way forward, step by step, holds on to doors, walls, curtains. It takes a whole hour for her to get from the living room to the bedroom. The doctor is at his wit's end. I quietly ask him in the living room whether I'm right to suspect a heart attack. But the doctor just gives mother some drops for her stomach and something to beef up her circulation.

The next day she's her old self. She's already sitting at the breakfast table by eight o'clock and wakes me up, for as long as I can remember, with her sneezing fits.

That's the way mothers are. They don't trust us. They haven't trusted us our whole life long and wouldn't dream of trusting us even in an emergency. For years they wake us up every day with their sneezing fits. Sometimes for decades. Through all our childhood and teen-age years mothers sneeze every day in the morning ten or twelve times over coffee. When we were kids we used to count, later we didn't anymore. We could never get used to the idea of simply accepting our mother's sneezing attacks. That's what bugged us right from the start in the morning, and besides being bugged by those sneezing fits we were already bugged by what was going to come. Because always when we left our rooms mothers started talking to us. That's the way it was during our entire childhood and it's never stopped. Even as kids lying in bed in the morning we never dreaded anything as much as we dreaded getting up and having our mother talk at us first thing. We always tried to get our mothers to understand that we

didn't wanted to be talked at first thing in the morning, but mothers don't understand us. Not only as far as that goes but in general. At no time can we say to our mothers that we don't like something or that we really like something else. Our mothers cannot understand that. Who can recall a single time mothers went and did one thing they were asked to?

Our mothers are incapable of seeing other people even if they're standing right there in front of them. They don't even see our fathers, not our neighbors, not our relatives. Our mothers can see other people only after they've *internalized* them. They've make their own image of a person and that is what they perceive. It follows, of course, that mothers are also locked up in themselves, because they have an image of themselves as well, and they can never perceive anything else except this image of themselves. That's the way we kids grew up: as images of our mothers. We were forever run away from our mothers, of course, to keep from going nuts.

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