

Sample Translation

Grandma's Junk Room

(Oma's rommelkamer)

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pages 15-26:

Up on the stepladder

Sofia's standing on a chair. She's trying to put the decoration up on the top of the tree, but the tree is much too tall. She can't reach.

'Shall I give it a go?' says Grandma.

Sofia hesitates. She's thinking about what Mum said the other day. That Grandma's getting more and more fragile. That she could break something. What if Grandma falls off the chair and breaks her arm or her leg? Then she'll have to go to hospital and she won't be able to make any stewed pears on Christmas Eve. So Dad'll have to do it and his pears are nowhere near as good as Grandma's.

But Grandma has already climbed up on to the chair. With one hand she's holding on to the back of the chair and with the other hand she's trying to get the decoration on to the top of the tree.

'Nearly there,' calls Sofia. 'Just a little bit higher.'

But Grandma can't reach either. She gives the decoration to Sofia and carefully climbs down from the chair.

'What we need is a ladder,' she says. 'Now, where did I put that stepladder?'

Sofia runs into the scullery. There's an old kitchen stepladder in there, with folding steps. Sofia lugs the stepladder into the backroom, puts it by the tree and folds down the steps. She climbs up and reaches for the top of the tree. She's still too small.

'Come on, let me do it,' says Grandma.

Sofia scrambles down. The stepladder wobbles.

'I need something to hold on to,' says Grandma. 'Bring that chair over here, will you, Sofia?'

Sofia gets the chair and turns it round so that the back of the chair is alongside the stepladder. Grandma takes hold of the chair and places one foot on the first

step of the ladder. And then the other foot. It's going well. The stepladder wobbles a little and so does Grandma. Carefully, she climbs up to the next step. Sofia's heart is in her mouth.

'Don't fall, Grandma,' she says. 'Or you'll break.'

'I'm not going to fall,' says Grandma. 'Just give me the decoration.'

Grandma's now standing hunched over at the top of the stepladder. Her one hand is holding tightly on to the back of the chair and she takes the decoration from Sofia with the other hand. She stretches out her arm, but she can't reach the top of the tree.

'You're going to have to stand up straight,' says Sofia. 'If you stand up straight, you'll be just the right height.'

'But then I'll have to let go of the back of the chair,' squeaks Grandma.

Sofia nods.

'And I'm too scared to do that.'

'Well, just come back down then,' says Sofia. 'And I'll give it another go.'

'I'm too scared to do that as well,' says Grandma. 'I'm too scared to reach up and I'm too scared to come back down. Dear oh dear, what am I going to do now?'

'Shall I give you a hand?' Sofia asks.

Grandma shakes her head.

'A little hand like yours is no good to me,' she says. 'Dear oh dear, I'm no use any more either.'

'Shall I phone Dad?'

'You can't,' says Grandma. 'He's on his way to the Ardennes.'

'But he's got his mobile with him,' says Sofia. 'I can ask him if he'll just pop back, can't I?'

'Just pop back?' squawks Grandma. 'They'll be almost at the border by now. How much longer do you think I can stick it out up here?'

'The flower man,' Sofia suggests. 'I can go and fetch the flower man. He's got big hands.'

But Grandma has a better idea.

‘Go and get another of the chairs from the dining table,’ she says. ‘And put it on the other side of the stepladder. Then I’ll have two chairs to lean on. And then maybe I won’t be too scared to come down.’

Sofia gets a chair and pushes it towards the stepladder. It’s quite tricky, because Grandma’s room is full of stuff. She can only just get the chair through. But she manages.

‘Good girl,’ says Grandma.

She gives the decoration to Sofia and takes hold of the back of the other chair. Very cautiously, she lifts up one foot.

‘I can’t feel the step,’ she says anxiously. ‘Put my foot on the step for me, Sofia.’

Sofia takes Grandma’s foot and moves it down towards the next step.

‘Watch out,’ cries Grandma. ‘I’m going to fall!’

But she doesn’t fall. She makes her way down the stepladder just fine. Foot by foot, step by step.

‘Phew,’ she says when she reaches the bottom. ‘I’ll just have a sit-down. The whole room’s spinning.’

Grandma has a long sit-down. She doesn’t get back up until the room’s completely still again, and then she says: ‘How about pushing the table next to the tree?’

Sofia moves the chairs and the stepladder away from the tree. Together, they push the table a little way. And a little further and a little further. Until it’s next to the tree. Sofia wants to climb up on to the table.

‘Wait a moment,’ says Grandma. ‘Let’s take off the tablecloth first. Otherwise you’ll slip.’

Sofia climbs up on to the table. She can almost reach the top of the tree. Almost, but not quite.

‘You’ll have to pull the top of the tree towards you with one hand,’ says Grandma. And then put the decoration on with the other hand.’

‘But won't it break?’

‘Of course not. Trees like this are as bendy as rubber.’

Sofia gives it a go. She grabs the top of the tree, pulls it towards her and slips the decoration on to it.

‘And now let go.’

Sofia lets go of the top of the tree. Gracefully, it swishes back upwards. But now that the decoration's on, the tree doesn't fit into the room any more. The decoration bounces against the ceiling and breaks into a thousand pieces that shower down like golden rain.

‘Oh dear,’ says Grandma. ‘What a shame!’

Sofia starts crying. Up there on the table.

Grandma takes her hand and helps her down.

‘Don't cry,’ she says. ‘It was a nasty decoration. I'm glad it's broken.’

She takes a hanky from her sleeve.

Sofia blows her nose and dries her tears.

She doesn't really believe Grandma. Grandma's never happy when anything gets broken.

‘Why was it a nasty decoration?’ she asks.

‘Because it made me scared. Scared of falling off the stepladder. Off such a stupid little stepladder. I used to climb up a ladder with twenty rungs to clean the windows and now I'm too scared even to get on a little stepladder.’

‘You're not scared of getting on,’ says Sofia. ‘Just getting off.’

‘It's the same thing,’ grumbles Grandma.

Sofia thinks that it's not the same thing at all. Getting off something is always scarier than getting on. But she doesn't say anything. She knows what Grandma means. If you've become too scared to get off something, you'd be better off being too scared to get on it as well.

They put the table back in its place. Sofia pushes back the chairs. Grandma gets out the vacuum and cleans up the bits of decoration.

They spend the rest of the afternoon decorating the tree. Sofia stands on the stepladder and Grandma passes everything to her. The tree’s really beautiful. Even more beautiful than last year’s tree.

Then the phone rings. It’s Mum. Sofia puts her ear next to Grandma’s. ‘We’re here,’ says Mum. ‘It’s really lovely. And it’s stopped raining. How are things going there?’

‘Fine,’ says Grandma. ‘We’ve decorated the tree. Sofia climbed up on the stepladder and she wasn’t the slightest bit scared.’

‘And Grandma...’ begins Sofia.

‘Ssssh’ Grandma whispers in her ear.

‘And Grandma wasn’t either,’ Sofia says into the receiver.

‘You are being careful, aren’t you?’ says Mum. ‘I don’t want you to break anything.’

‘We’re not going to break anything,’ says Grandma.

‘No, just the decoration for the top of the tree,’ says Sofia.

‘Oh, is it broken? What a pity. Shall we bring back a new one from Belgium?’

‘No need,’ says Grandma. ‘We can do fine without.’

‘OK, see you on Christmas Day then. You have remembered the turkey, haven’t you?’

‘Of course I’ve remembered the turkey,’ grumbles Grandma. ‘With you around, it’s impossible not to remember the turkey.’

There’s a moment of silence on the other end of the line.

‘Fine,’ says Mum eventually. ‘I won’t go on about it again then. I just thought...’

‘What did you think? Out with it!’

‘Nothing. Doesn’t matter. Go off and have fun, the two of you. See you on Saturday.’

‘Bye, Mum,’ says Sofia.

‘Bye, love,’ says Mum.

Grandma puts down the receiver.

‘Are you angry?’ asks Sofia.

‘Angry? Of course not,’ says Grandma. ‘Why would I be angry?’

Sofia shrugs her shoulders.

‘I don’t know,’ she says. ‘Just because.’

Mum’s sometimes angry just because. And the best thing to do then is to leave her alone, otherwise she gets even angrier.

‘Are we having pancakes this evening?’ asks Sofia.

‘Yes, what did you think we were having?’ says Grandma. ‘We always have pancakes when you’re here, don’t we?’

‘Can I break the eggs then?’

‘No,’ says Grandma. ‘You’ve already broken the decoration, so I get to do the eggs.’

Sofia blushes.

‘I was only joking,’ says Grandma. ‘Of course you can do the eggs.’

Grandma sieves the flour and Sofia breaks the eggs. They need milk for the batter as well. Sofia knows exactly how much: up to the fourth line. She’s cooked pancakes with Grandma so many times before.

Grandma takes the mixer and plugs it in.

‘Just pour the milk in,’ she says.

Sofia adds the milk to the flour and Grandma holds the whirring mixer in the bowl. Clouds of flour rise up all around.

‘More milk, Sofia, more milk,’ cries Grandma.

Sofia pours all of the milk into the bowl.

‘That’s right.’

Grandma keeps on mixing until there are hardly any lumps left in the batter. Then she puts the frying pan on the cooker and lights the gas.

Sofia puts a lump of butter into the pan. You can’t add your spoonful of batter until the lump’s melted and the butter is nice and pale brown.

‘Sofia,’ Grandma suddenly asks. ‘Have I phoned the butcher today?’

Sofia shakes her head.

‘Are you sure?’

‘Yes,’ says Sofia. ‘You definitely haven’t.’

‘Then I’ll just go and do it.’

Grandma goes over to the phone. The lump of butter in the pan has melted and is slowly turning pale brown.

‘Grandma,’ calls Sofia.

But Grandma’s already on the phone. Sofia had better not disturb her. Last year Grandma forgot to call the butcher. So there wasn’t any turkey for Christmas and they had to have frankfurters with their stewed pears. Sofia didn’t really mind. They were very good frankfurters. But Mum and Dad really did mind.

The butter’s brown now and Grandma still hasn’t got off the phone. The butcher must be very busy of course, this close to Christmas.

‘Grandma,’ Sofia calls again.

The butter’s dark brown now and is starting to smell a little burnt. Sofia pushes the footstool up to the counter, clambers up and dollops a spoonful of batter into the frying pan. It spatters and hisses and only a little bit misses the pan.

And now Grandma’s back again.

‘What a wonderful pancake,’ she says.

Sofia beams. ‘I made it all by myself,’ she says. ‘Good, eh?’

The jigsaw puzzle

‘We have to collect the turkey on Friday afternoon before four,’ says Grandma when they’ve finished the pancakes. ‘Will you remind me, Sofia?’

Sofia nods.

‘My memory’s just like a sieve sometimes. You put things in one end and they fall out the other.’

‘Then you should write it down,’ says Sofia.

‘I do,’ says Grandma. ‘I write everything down on pieces of paper. But then I forget where I’ve put the pieces of paper. And when I find them I can’t remember whether I’ve already done what’s written on them.’

‘Mum’s got a notebook. She keeps it in the kitchen drawer. She looks at it every day and crosses off the things that she doesn’t have to remember any more.’

‘So your mum forgets things sometimes as well?’ asks Grandma.

‘Yes, all the time,’ nods Sofia. ‘Sometimes she forgets what day it is and so I don’t take in my games kit. Sometimes she forgets the time and then I have to wait ages for her to come and pick me up from school. And sometimes she forgets that I don’t like cauliflower. But I think she does that on purpose.’

‘I was worried that it was something to do with me,’ says Grandma. ‘Or my age. What day is it today, Sofia?’

‘Wednesday.’

‘And we have to pick up the turkey on Friday. So Saturday’s Christmas Day then?’

Sofia nods.

‘And that’s when your mum and dad will be back?’

Sofia nods again.

Grandma turns on the television.

‘I’ll just watch the news,’ she says. ‘And then we’ll play a game.’

Sofia runs upstairs. In Grandma's junk room there's a cupboard full of games.

Ludo, snakes and ladders, and lots of card games, but most of them are for four people. A game for four is no fun if there are only two of you - and Sofia thinks that snakes and ladders is childish.

There are even more games on the top shelf of the cupboard. Sofia stands on the chair and gets a box down. It's the jigsaw puzzle of Snow White and the seven dwarfs. A jigsaw with a hundred pieces. They did it last time she stayed at Grandma's too.

Sofia takes the jigsaw downstairs and sits down at the big table. The news isn't anywhere near finishing yet. They haven't even got to the weather.

Sofia opens the jigsaw box and shakes the pieces out on to the tablecloth. She can see Sneezzy and a whole lot of other separate noses and ears. They belong to the other dwarfs, but she doesn't know which ones. She can see a load of pieces of blue from Snow White's dress. She can see the white of the dwarfs' beards and lots and lots of red from their clothes.

Sofia has never done a hundred-piece jigsaw by herself. It must be really difficult. But Grandma's really good at jigsaws. When Mum was little, she and Grandma used to do jigsaws with as many as fifteen hundred pieces. Jigsaws of old paintings, where everything's all brown, and ones of mountains and flowers and churches and of tigers that have the same kind of stripes all over them.

Sofia puts all of the pieces the right way up. Just as she finishes, Grandma turns off the television.

'Right then,' she says. 'What are we going to do?'

'A jigsaw,' answers Sofia.

'Good,' she says. 'A jigsaw. That'll be fun.'

She takes the box and looks at the picture.

'Snow White,' she says. 'How nice. I've got a really clear memory of us going to see *Snow White*, your mum and I. She'd never been to the cinema before. It was really exciting. Especially the wicked stepmother. And when Snow White

died, neither of us could help crying. Even though we knew that the prince would come and kiss her back to life. Because of course we already knew the story. It was in the big red book of fairytales. And we bought this jigsaw after the film. It’s been years since I last did it. But I do remember that it didn’t take me very long to crack it.’

‘Crack it?’ giggles Sofia. ‘But it’s already in a hundred pieces!’

‘That’s what you do with puzzles, when you solve them,’ says Grandma. ‘You crack them, a bit like eggs.’

Grandma begins to sort out the blue pieces for Snow White’s dress.

‘We did this one last time I was here as well,’ says Sofia.

Grandma frowns. ‘Are you sure?’

Sofia nods. ‘Yes, definitely. I remember Sleepy’s ear being lost. And a piece of Sneezzy’s trousers was missing as well.’

Grandma works on Snow White’s dress and Sofia goes looking for the dwarfs’ faces. She tries to fit noses, ears and eyes together, but it doesn’t go very well. The faces end up looking pretty odd. With wonky noses and ears that are on the wrong way round.

Grandma’s forgotten that they’ve already done the jigsaw. That’s odd. Sofia doesn’t forget that kind of thing. She clearly remembers going to the pictures with Grandma last year. To see *Minoes*. And she remembers that Grandma didn’t understand the film at all to start with.

‘What kind of woman climbs up a tree wearing a nice suit like that?’ she said. Grandma got the idea once Sofia had explained that Miss Minoes was really a cat, but she still thought it was a pity about the suit. And about the expensive nylons that the young lady was wearing.

Grandma’s nearly finished Snow White’s dress.

‘Will you help me with the dwarfs?’ asks Sofia.

Together they look for the right noses to match the right ears and eyes. The seven dwarfs are finished in no time. All except for Sleepy. He’s only got one ear.

‘Oh yes,’ says Grandma. ‘That’s right. His other ear went missing. Years ago. I remember we always used to say: “Never mind, Sleepy’s at his happiest when he’s lying on one ear anyway.”’

They carry on doing the jigsaw until quarter past nine, when all the pieces have been used. There’s a gap in Sneezzy’s trousers. Right where his knee is, just like last time. But Snow White’s dress isn’t finished either. There’s a piece of blue missing. Sofia crawls under the table. Maybe it fell down there. She finds all kinds of things under the table. A mother-of-pearl button, some mandarin peel, a load of crumbs and a few more pieces of the tree decoration. But no jigsaw pieces.

‘It’s not down here,’ she says, crawling out from under the table. ‘Maybe it went missing last time.’

Grandma nods.

‘I dare say it did,’ she mutters. ‘I wouldn’t know.’

‘It doesn’t matter,’ says Sofia. ‘The jigsaw’s fine the way it is.’

‘It does matter,’ says Grandma. ‘I don’t like jigsaws with holes in.’

‘Shall I look under the table again?’ asks Sofia.

‘No,’ says Grandma. ‘It’s not there. It’s just got lost.’

Sofia actually wanted to leave the jigsaw there until the next day. They worked so hard at it. But Grandma has already mixed up all the pieces and is sliding them back into the box.

‘There we go,’ she says as she puts the lid on the box. ‘Good riddance. What shall we do now?’

Sofia looks at her watch.

‘I have to go to bed,’ she says.

‘What? Already? But we’re having so much fun.’

Sofia giggles.

‘What is it?’ asks Grandma. ‘Are you laughing at me?’

Sofia shakes her head.

‘I’m laughing because it should be the other way round,’ she says.

Grandma looks at her blouse. And then at her skirt. And then at her slippers.

‘What should be the other way round?’

‘You have to say that I have to go to bed and then I have to say: “What? Already? But we’re having so much fun.”’

‘Oh yes,’ says Grandma ‘You’re absolutely right. Hang on, we’ll do it again. Eh, Sofia?’

‘Yes, Grandma.’

‘Isn’t it time you went to bed?’

Sofia giggles again.

‘What? Already?’ she says in her sweetest voice. ‘But we’re having so much fun.’

‘Yes, you’re right,’ says Grandma. ‘Stay up a bit longer then. I’ll go and make some hot chocolate for us.’

‘No, Grandma,’ says Sofia firmly. ‘Then you have to say: There’ll be another day tomorrow. That’s what Dad always says.’

Grandma gets up and goes into the kitchen. She puts a pan of milk on the heat and spoons cocoa and sugar into two cups.

‘But you never really know, do you?’ she says, whisking the milk.

‘What do you never really know?’ asks Sofia.

‘Whether there’ll be another day tomorrow.’

When she’s finished her hot chocolate, Sofia goes to bed. Without being told. She goes to the loo, washes her hands, puts on her pyjamas and cleans her teeth. Then she pops back downstairs.

‘I’m going to bed,’ she says. ‘Night night.’

Grandma doesn’t answer. She’s sitting on the sofa with the Snow White jigsaw on her lap and staring at the raindrops trickling down the dark window.

‘Grandma?’ says Sofia cautiously.

Grandma looks up.

Sofia snuggles up to her on the sofa and puts her head on her shoulder.

Grandma sighs.

‘What’s wrong?’ asks Sofia.

‘I feel sad,’ says Grandma.

‘But why?’

‘Because of the pieces that go missing,’ answers Grandma.

Sofia looks at Grandma in surprise. ‘But we can always buy a new one, can’t we?’

‘A new what?’

‘A new jigsaw. Of Snow White. Or Winnie the Pooh.’

‘I’m not talking about Snow White or Winnie the Pooh,’ says Grandma. ‘I’m talking about me. I feel just like an old jigsaw puzzle that’s losing more and more pieces. Sometimes I wake up and I can’t remember what day it is. So I go to the baker’s to get half a loaf of brown bread, but the shop’s shut. Because I’ve forgotten that it’s Sunday. Or I buy a Christmas tree in the morning and by the afternoon I’ve completely forgotten about it.’

‘That’s not true,’ says Sofia. ‘You hadn’t forgotten. I remember you saying that it was a beautiful, tall tree.’

‘Did I really say that?’

Sofia nods.

‘But I had forgotten about it.’

‘Because the flower man hadn’t brought it round yet. How do you know that you’ve bought a tree if it’s nowhere to be seen?’

Suddenly she remembers Dad coming home a while ago and saying that he’d bought a new car. A big blue one with doors that unlock themselves when you press the key. But it wasn’t ready yet. And when it suddenly turned up in front of the house weeks later, Sofia had forgotten ages ago that it was supposed to be coming.

They sit on the sofa without saying anything. The clock ticks and the heating gurgles. Grandma’s woollen cardigan gently tickles Sofia’s cheek. If she sits very

quietly and doesn’t say anything else, maybe Grandma will forget that she’s there. And then she’ll be able to stay on the sofa until it’s really late and Grandma goes to bed. But Grandma doesn’t forget about her. She looks at the clock and says: ‘Now it really is time you went to bed, Sofia.’

‘Oh no, we’re having so much fun!’

But Grandma’s already stood up. She takes Sofia’s hand and pulls her up.

‘Come on,’ she says. ‘I’ll take you up to bed. There’ll be another day tomorrow.’

pages 35-38:

The laughing pig

'Give me a hand, will you, Sofia?' shouts Grandma.

Sofia runs into the kitchen. Grandma is standing by her shopping trolley and trying to pull the plastic bag from the butcher's out of it. But the bag's too heavy for her.

'Hang on,' says Sofia.

Together they pull the bag out of the trolley and put it on the kitchen table.

'Phew,' sighs Sofia. 'We've never had such a big turkey before.'

'Are you sure it's actually a turkey?' Grandma asks.

Sofia opens up the bag with the picture of the laughing pig on it. There are two smaller bags inside and in each of the bags is a turkey.

'What have we got here?' exclaims Grandma. 'What's one person supposed to do with two turkeys?'

'Well, I'm still here,' says Sofia. 'And Mum and Dad are coming tomorrow. And Uncle Gerard and Aunt Karien are bringing Siep and Mees over the day after tomorrow.'

'That may well be,' says Grandma. 'But two turkeys are too much.'

'Maybe one of them's last year's turkey,' Sofia suggests.

'We didn't even have a turkey last year,' says Grandma grumpily. 'We had frankfurters instead.'

'That's what I mean,' says Sofia. 'You forgot to fetch the turkey.'

'I forgot to order one. That's a completely different thing.'

Grandma takes the turkeys and drops them onto the kitchen counter, one after the other. Their plucked bodies slap stickily onto the grey granite.

She sits down at the kitchen table, her elbows on the table and her head in her hands.

Sofia wants to say something, but she doesn't know what. She looks from the two turkeys to Grandma and then back again. Perhaps they can take one of them back to the butcher's. Or put one of them in the freezer, for next year. That'd be really handy. Then Mum won't have to worry about Grandma forgetting the turkey. But then Grandma will have to make a note in her notebook that there's already a turkey in the freezer. Otherwise they'll have two turkeys next Christmas as well. She fiddles with the bag that the turkeys came in. The laughing pig is screwing up its snout and it looks all lopsided. Sofia tries to copy it. She wrinkles up her nose and grins.

'Stop laughing!' shouts Grandma. 'It's bad enough as it is.'

Sofia's really shocked. Her face goes red and she starts crying.

Grandma looks at her in surprise.

'What's wrong?' she asks.

'I wasn't laughing,' she says. 'I just thought...'

Grandma shakes her head and gives Sofia's cheek a gentle pinch.

'I wasn't talking to you,' she says. 'I was talking to that nasty pig.' She takes the bag from the butcher's, scrunches it up and stuffs it into the bin.

'There,' she says. 'That'll teach him to laugh at a forgetful old lady.'

Sofia dries her tears on the sleeve of her jumper.

'Stupid pig,' she says.

'Stupid butcher,' says Grandma.

The two turkeys are in the fridge. Sofia had to finish all of the juice to make room for them. Grandma phoned the butcher to see if she could return one of them, but the butcher didn't like that idea. 'You ordered them yourself,' he said. 'Both of them. One in the morning and the other in the afternoon.'

'But you could have said that I'd already ordered one. You know me. You know full well that I don't have two turkeys at Christmas.'

Then the butcher had muttered something about it being busy at Christmas and about temporary staff and so on, and then Grandma had put the phone down without wishing him a happy Christmas.

Now Grandma's sitting in her chair by the window, peeling the pears. First she removes the stalk and cuts the pear into four. Then she peels the quarters and in the same movement she whips out the bits of core. Grandma's very good at peeling pears. Plonk, plonk, plonk, go the bits of pear on the bottom of the big black saucepan.

Sofia is sitting at the table under the big light. She's working on the cards for tomorrow. The red cards are really nice. You can open them, like a book. She sticks stars all over the outside. Big stars and little ones. Shooting stars and normal ones. All of them gold. On the inside she sticks three angels and writes in big gold letters: MENU.

When all of the cards are finished, she shows them to Grandma.

'They're lovely,' says Grandma. 'Really lovely.'

'Could you write down what we're having?' asks Sofia. 'On a piece of scrap paper. Otherwise I might make a mistake.'

She gets some scrap paper and a pen.

Grandma puts the saucepan of pears on the floor and starts writing.

'Write it neatly though,' says Sofia, 'or I won't be able to read it.'

'Shush,' says Grandma. 'If you keep talking while I'm writing, you'll get me all confused.'

When she's finished, she gives the piece of paper to Sofia and puts the saucepan back on her lap.

'Can you read it?'

Sofia nods.

Starter: turkey soup, she reads out, loud and clear.

Main course: roast turkey with fresh pears.

Accompaniment: mashed turkey with garden herbs.

Side dish: turkey salad.

Dessert: turkey pudding with ice cream and whipped cream.

Everything’s quiet for a moment. And then they both start laughing. So much that the pan of pears almost rolls off Grandma’s lap.

‘It’s actually Mum’s fault that we’ve got two turkeys,’ says Sofia when they’ve finally stopped laughing. ‘She must have told you ten times not to forget the turkey.’

‘Quite right,’ says Grandma. ‘She should count herself lucky that we haven’t got ten turkeys.’

‘Or twenty!’

‘Or a hundred!’

Grandma peels the last pear. She drops the pieces into the pan, wipes her hands on her apron and takes the pan into the kitchen. Sofia follows her with the bowl full of peel.

‘Do you know what we’ll do?’ she says. ‘We’ll just eat turkey again on Boxing Day. With Uncle Gerard and Aunt Karien and Siep and Mees.’

‘That’s a good idea,’ says Grandma. ‘The poor dears get the leftovers of our Christmas turkey every year. But not this year. This year we’re going to surprise them. With a real Christmas dinner and with their own turkey.’

‘And then we won’t say that it was actually an accident, the two turkeys. It’ll mean that we did it on purpose.’

‘Of course,’ says Grandma. ‘And it was on purpose too. As if I’d accidentally order two turkeys! Don’t be daft!’

Grandma adds water to the pears. And sugar and cinnamon sticks and three cloves out of a jar that’s really old. Maybe even older than Grandma.

‘But then we won’t have enough pears,’ she says, lighting the gas and putting the lid on the pan.

‘There are those pears in the jar,’ says Sofia. ‘And there’s more than enough ice cream.’

‘All right then,’ says Grandma. ‘Pears from a jar and whipped cream from a can. Anyone who wants fresh pears with real whipped cream has to come on Christmas day.’

pages 114-118:

Homesick

It's Sunday today. Mum's bought Grandma some sock wool and some new knitting needles. She's taking them with her this afternoon.

'Why don't you come along? It'll be fun,' she says to Sofia. 'The three of us can go to the shop and buy an ice cream.'

'No,' says Sofia. 'Anne's coming round.'

'Grandma would really like it,' says Mum. 'She hasn't seen you for such a long time.'

'I told you, Anne's coming round. I'll go with you next week.'

'That's what you said last week.'

Sofia slumps on to the sofa. She fiddles with the fringe around the cushion.

'What's up with you?' grumbles Mum. 'First we couldn't go to Grandma's often enough for you, but now that she's living nearby wild horses couldn't drag you to visit her.'

'So?' says Sofia.

Now Mum gets angry.

'Do you think that Grandma likes you not visiting any more?' she says. 'And do you think I always like going on my own?'

Sofia shrugs. 'Well, Dad can go with you, can't he?'

'I'm not talking about your father,' says Mum. 'I'm talking about you.'

She takes the bag of sock wool, leaves the room and slams the door behind her.

Sofia lies down on the sofa, with her face to the wall and hugging a cushion to her stomach. She just doesn't want to go. And definitely not with Mum. Because Mum pretends that it's really nice at Rosegarden. 'It all looks so immaculate,' she

says to everyone. 'And the view's so lovely. And the nurses are so friendly. And everything's painted in such bright, cheerful colours.'

But Grandma really doesn't like bright, cheerful colours. She said so herself when they went to visit Jenny's mum. She likes pink flowery wallpaper. And she doesn't like immaculate either. She likes messy and old. Mum just doesn't get it. What good is a beautiful view to Grandma when she can hardly see anything in the distance?

The last time Dad was round at Grandma's old house, he found two rolls of Grandma-wallpaper up in the attic. He brought them home for Sofia to draw on. She put them under her bed and they're still there now.

And she still hasn't opened the box of things from Grandma's junk room. It's in her bedroom in the corner next to her wardrobe. Every night in bed she thinks: I'll open it tomorrow. But the box is still closed.

'When's Anne coming round?' asks Dad when Mum's gone.

'Don't know,' answers Sofia.

'She is actually coming round, isn't she?'

'Maybe she's forgotten.'

'And maybe you forgot to ask her.'

Sofia fiddles with the edge of her T-shirt. There's a loose thread. She pulls at it.

'Yes,' she says. 'I think I forgot to ask her.'

She slumps on to the sofa and carries on fiddling with the loose thread. It gets longer and longer.

'You'll ruin your T-shirt,' says Dad.

'So what? It's a stupid T-shirt.'

'Grandma gave you that.'

'No, she didn't.'

'Yes, she did. Last year, in the summer holiday, when we all went to the zoo.'

'Well, Grandma will have forgotten all about it anyway.'

'No way. When she sees you wearing that T-shirt, she'll remember it straightaway. And we've got photos of it as well.'

Sofia doesn't say anything. Dad sits down next to her on the sofa.

'Why didn't you want to go with your mum to visit Grandma?' he asks.

'I don't know.'

'Are you sure you don't know?'

Sofia shakes her head.

'I think I know why,' says Dad. 'I think you're scared that it won't be as much fun at Grandma's as it used to be. I think that you're scared that you'll get homesick for Grandma's old house if you go to Rosegarden.'

Sofia shrugs.

'And perhaps you're scared that Grandma will have forgotten who you are. That you'll go into her new house and she'll say: who's that girl in the colourful T-shirt? What's she doing here?'

Dad doesn't say anything for a moment.

Then he asks 'Am I right?'

Sofia carries on pulling at the thread. She doesn't say anything.

'You know, Sofia,' Dad continues. 'Grandma's known you your whole life. She hasn't forgotten you. Her head's confused, but her heart isn't. And you have a place in her heart, not in her head. Go and see her. She misses you, just like she misses her old house. She's probably just as homesick as you, if not more. It was her house, after all.'

The hem of Sofia's T-shirt has come completely undone now.

'Grandma's head's just like your T-shirt,' says Dad. 'There's a loose thread here and there. It means that it's difficult for her to keep new things that happen in her head. They just fall out again and they're gone.'

'Because of the loose threads,' says Sofia.

Dad nods.

'Do you think that Mum can mend this?'

'I think so.'

'But you mustn't say that I was fiddling with it.'

'Were you fiddling with it then?'

Sofia giggles.

'I didn't see a thing,' says Dad. 'Some threads just come loose by themselves. There's nothing anyone can do about it.'

That evening, when she should have been in bed long ago, Sofia pulls Grandma's junk box out of the corner and opens it. Her whole room suddenly smells like Grandma's junk room. Dust and soap and old *Donald Ducks*. There's that strange feeling in her stomach again. But she doesn't close the box.

She takes her Winnie-the-Pooh rucksack from the hook by the door. Tomorrow after school she'll go to see Grandma. All by herself, like she used to. Mum mustn't know about it. She doesn't like her cycling all by herself to the other end of the village. She's said that she's going to play at Anne's after school. That's allowed. Anne lives near the school.

She'd really like to take the whole junk box to Grandma's new house. But that won't work. The box is much too big and heavy. She'll have to choose one thing. Or maybe two. The drummer's right at the top of the box, with his key facing down and his drum facing up. His tin eyes direct a glassy stare at the ceiling. Dad still hasn't repaired him. Sofia carefully puts him into her Winnie-the-Pooh rucksack.

There's still room for something else. Something small. At the bottom of the box is the red parcel with the button necklace. Sofia puts the parcel into her rucksack. It's still not completely full. She rummages around in the box and pulls out four cupless handles. Where did she put the handleless cups again? Oh yes, in the dolls' pram.

She hears footsteps on the stairs. It's Dad's footsteps. Mum walks differently. Lighter and quicker. She pushes the box back into the corner, dives into bed and pulls the duvet over her head.

'Are you asleep?' asks Dad's head as it pops around the door.

‘Nearly,’ says Sofia.

Dad takes a deep breath. ‘It smells lovely in here,’ he says. ‘A bit like Grandma’s house used to. It’s almost making me homesick.’

Dad gives Sofia a kiss. ‘Shall I turn off the light?’

Sofia nods. Dad turns off the light. As soon as she hears his footsteps on the stairs, Sofia jumps out of bed again. She takes her scissors and her box of felt-tips and gets one of the rolls of wallpaper from under the bed. Carefully she cuts a piece of wallpaper from the roll. It’s a bit wonky, but that doesn’t matter. Grandma doesn’t have a problem with wonky.

The piece of wallpaper keeps rolling back up. Sofia puts something heavy on each corner and starts drawing. On the back, because there are already pink flowers on the front. When she’s finished, she rolls up the drawing and puts it into her rucksack. It sticks out quite a way. If Mum asks tomorrow who the drawing’s for, she’ll just say: for my teacher.

She gets back into bed. The funny feeling in her tummy has gone. She lies on her back, closes her eyes and breathes in deeply through her nose. So that’s what homesickness smells like then. Like Grandma’s wallpaper and old pieces of soap.