

“Don’t stand at the door,” says Maja's aunt.

Maja pushes herself away from the door frame and takes a step towards her aunt.

“Has it arrived?” asks Maja.

Her aunt dries her wet hands, takes her cardigan from the hook and puts it on, first the right arm, then the left – always the right arm first – before rolling the sleeves up and turning back to the sink. Maja stands to the side and watches her aunt take a dishcloth and start to dry the dishes. The delicate Sunday service, white porcelain with a light-blue pattern, the freshly dried plates and cups go undermost in the cupboard. Maja then stands on a chair and her aunt lifts four plates, Maja inserting two plates together underneath the stack in the cupboard so that all dishes get used in turn, as her aunt had taught her. The cups she can manage herself. Her aunt has already put the glasses away. Then come the knives and forks.

Watch out, that knife is sharp, says her aunt, as usual. Maja takes it by the handle, carefully dries the blade and, when her aunt isn’t looking, cautiously runs her finger along the knife edge before putting it in the kitchen drawer. The heavy pans are the only things she’s afraid of. She needs both hands to carry them to the table, drying first the inside and then turning them over and drying the bottoms and handles. She leaves them on the table for her aunt to hang on the hooks. The noise they make as they clang against the thick stone wall breaks the silence. Meals are eaten without talking, and when washing up care has to be taken so that nothing gets chipped. Talking is a distraction. People talk too much anyway, says her aunt. Maja hangs the dishcloth over the back of the chair to dry. Her aunt pulls down the sleeves of her cardigan and rubs her reddened hands together.

“Has it arrived?” asks Maja again, and her aunt looks at her briefly and shakes her head. It’s Sunday and there’s no post on Sundays and nothing will come now anyway. Easter was three weeks ago. Her aunt shoos Maja out of the kitchen, opens the small window and pulls the door closed behind her.

Sample:

Translated by Nick Somers