

## (NIGHT FLIGHT)

### A STORY OF TROMSØ BY SAXE BREJNING SKYGEBJERG

*"Look, no planes are departing today or any days in the near future."*

The day had become night. It was almost a week since the sun had risen above the mountains for the last time this year. The polar night had started and the town of Tromsø would be without sunlight for the next two months. The weather had been mostly dry and windless for the last three months. Back in the time this was highly uncommon but now fall was becoming more predictable as being quite calm.

This served Martin quite well. He was not used to winter storms and being locked in by snow. When he first started to study at Tromsø University he thought it was going to become the hardest three years of his life, but it had been surprisingly acceptable. He never really had been accustomed to the darkness during the winter though and wondered if he ever would. This time he felt that he was better prepared.

The alarm clock started ringing at seven am. It was pitch black outside when Martin pulled the curtain. Only some lights from the neighboring buildings appeared. He stood at the window for some time to see if he could spot any indication that it was actually morning. The concept about morning was beginning to be quite vague to him. Normally was the time when the sun rose, but now it was just a time during the continuous alike day where mankind had decided it was time to get up and start the day.

The breakfast consisted of fish. Martin's relation to fish had for the most of his life been positive, but after one and a half year with diet which mainly consisted of fish he was becoming tired of it. He was starting to consider himself as one of the most creative people on the face of the earth when it came to cooking fish. He could cook, roast, grill and smoke fish. One time he even ate it raw, but this had not become one of his standards.

The first class started at noon which was the least dark time of the day. Martin had gotten up in good time since he needed to buy some books for his study. He looked at the clock and decided to time-book an EV- CAB. They usually were quite busy in the rush hour but with a time booking it was possible to get hold of one.

He picked up his phone and looked at the available time slots for a cab. Unfortunately none seemed to be available. With his priority level as "2" it was usually possible to get hold of one during any time of the day, but people with a higher allocated priority must have an urgent need for transportation this morning. He switched the "share allowed" option which would expand the search to include shared cabs. Normally he preferred to have the vehicle for himself, which was possible for his prioritizing level but from time to time he needed to share the cab.

Four cabs suddenly appeared on the screen all read to pick him up within twenty minutes. He chose the one closest to him and accepted the booking. The pickup would be right outside his dorm block with a time span of 15 to 20 minutes. Martin packed his back and got ready to go.

The wind was fresh and clear. It was obvious that the town was located near the water. His phone vibrated which indicated that his ride was near. The time was about 8 am which meant the rush hour was in its peak. Martin stood and looked at the other people waiting outside. Most of them stood in groups of four due to the four seats in vehicle. Martin had always treasured his relatively high prioritized status. It gave him higher flexibility and the possibility to take a cab alone.

He saw his cab coming up in the driveway along two others. He could see the large number "16" on it which he had been informed was his on the booking reference. He could see that someone already was sitting in it. Martin did not consider himself as the most social person but he did understand that it was polite to be accommodating when it came to sharing a cab. He swiped the control panel on the outside of the vehicle with his phone and the door opened.

Inside the cab was a girl sitting. She was approximately the same age as Martin. She was sitting with a tablet on her lap on which she was typing fast. She looked surprised when he got in. Martin mumbled a "hi" as he sat down. She looked at him without moving her head much, she afterwards gave a low voiced "hi" back.

The cab was put in motion. The girl was concentrated on the screen in front of her, but it was clear to Martin that she had been distracted by his presence. She suddenly stopped writing and quickly turned to Martin.

"I am sorry" she stated "I am not used to share a cab"

"It is okay" Martin answered with a small smile "me neither, but it was impossible to get a ride otherwise" "Yeah I know. Something must be going on"

"Maybe, it is defiantly not common" Martin said

She turned back to her screen but did not continue to type. Her arms were crossed as she looked on the light coming from the tablet. They sat in silence while the vehicle took them down outside of the town.

The cab arrived at the airport terminal after 10 minutes. The airport was located a small distance out of the town, which must had been a clear detour for Martin. The girl swiped her phone on the control panel and the door opened. She got up and went out of the vehicle. She stood next to the car door and looked at him with a concerned expression on her face.

"I am Karoline" She said.

"Martin" he answered while looking up at her.

"Take care Martin" She said quickly, turned around and entered the terminal building.

The cab began driving towards the town shortly after. Martin picked up his phone and started reading the news. Nothing seemed to be different than the normal. Something about the war in the Middle East and the Olympic in Berlin was in a cost overrun.

Martin put away his phone and looked out of the window. He could see some daylight over the mountains and realized that it was too late to both buy the books and make it in time for the lecture. He decided to change to route to take him to the university. He changed his destination on his phone. Shortly after sounded a high beep in the cab as it slowed down. A couple of seconds later another beep sounded and the vehicle accelerated back to cruising speed.

His phone suddenly called. It was his dad. Martin looked at the screen quite confused. His dad normally never called at this time.

"Hi Dad" Martin said quickly

“Martin, I am glad you were able to take the call. Listen, Mom has been admitted to the hospital. We don’t know how serious it is. I know it is not easy for you to come home but I think it could be serious”

Martin could feel his heart hammering in his chest. He tried to recall the last time he had seen his mother, but it had been almost a year and a half ago when he had left Oslo for his study in Tromsø.

“When did it happen?” Martin asked

“Yesterday, we wouldn’t call you before we knew more, but it doesn’t seem to be oblivious what she is suffering from”

Martin had always seen his mom as a healthy woman. She might be 70 but never seemed to suffer from anything serious.

“I will try dad, but it hard to get a permission to leave the city during the polar night, you know that” “I know, I know. Listen we have an idea, some our friends in Kvaløysletta has a ... “

Three short beeps came from the phone. The vehicle had entered the tunnel underneath the town. It had always been an issue for Martin to get a signal down in the tunnel system. He could not stop thinking about his mother and the time he had seen her the last time in the airport terminal in Oslo.

The cab exited the tunnel and Martin tried to call his father but he could not get a signal. Martin started to get anxious. The rest of the ride he tried to call his father, sister and all the families’ friend he knew. But he could not get in contact with any of them.

Martin rushed up the stairs as soon as he reached the university. He hoped that one of his friends in the class could help him. Bjørn had almost been like a brother to Martin during his stay in Tromsø and he might be the only one to know how to get to Oslo at this time of year.

Bjørn stood at the coffee machine next to the staff kitchen when Martin arrived. He was tall and strongly build and always with a big smile on his face.

“Hi Martin, what’s the rush?” Bjørn looked confused but still smiling at Martin while he tried to catch his breath.

“I need to get to Oslo, fast” Martin said.

The expression on Bjørn’s face switched quickly to be more serious. Martin rarely saw this face expression on Bjørn and did not take it as a positive sign.

“It is polar night Martin, you know that is impossible to get out of Tromsø during the winter without a permission and they are difficult to get a hold on. Why do you need to leave?”

“My mom had been admitted to the hospital. They don’t know how serious it is but it sounded like it was important that I got home quickly”

“I am so sorry to hear Martin. I don’t know, it may be enough for you to get a permit, but it will still take some days to apply and then you need to wait for the next plane, which only goes when enough people need to leave, that could take weeks” Bjørn said with a hand on Martin’s shoulder.

“Is there not anything you can do?” Martin said in desperation.

Bjørn became silent as he stood up straight. He was almost a head higher than Martin, but Martin was also relatively low.

"I will try to call my friends in Oslo"

"I already have tried that, but the signal is dead when I try to call outside the town"

"Are you sure? I know someone I maybe can get contact to. Wait here, I'll be back in a few minutes"

Bjørn went into the staff kitchen with his phone in his hands. Martin started to walk around in circles not sure what else to do. As he walked around the room he could not stop. He felt that if he stopped he would get a heart attack and collapse. He became more and more anxious about the situation.

Bjørn returned after five minutes. Martin could not stop walking around.

"Martin, please stop that. Sit down on the couch" Bjørn said firm. Martin did as told. The couch had always been too soft for Martin's taste but he tried to make himself comfortable which seemed to be impossible. Bjørn stood up against the table right in front of Martin.

"There has been a power outage in the southern region of Norway, which includes Oslo" Bjørn said looking at Martin. "They don't know when the power will be back. It is mainly due to the low wind and rain the last months. The other baseload energy sources than hydro just cannot make up it.

"But my mom, in the hospital, without power she is as good as"

"No Martin" Bjørn interrupted "You know the hierarchy of energy: First the government and military, then the police and hospitals followed by municipalities and fishing functions. Then there is housing. Transport is, as you know, at the bottom. This is way it is near impossible to get hold of an EV-CAB these days; they are nearly depleted for energy. This is way it is going to be impossible for you to get out of the town today or in this week at least"

Martin did not answer. He looked down at his shoes which was quite difficult because of the design of the sofa.

"Doesn't your family have someone who can help you? Aren't they at a high priority list? I mean with your status level at the supermarket and the EV-CAB services?"

"I tried calling them all" Martin answered. "But as I can't get in touch with any as I said"

"I don't what to do then. I am so sorry"

"I can sneak up on one of the trucks leaving for Fauske and then take the train? No one is driving them, so I should be able to get aboard"

"You know that is not impossible but also just plain stupid" Bjørn looked at him serious "It will take 24 hours before you are at the train station in Fauske and then it will take you at least 4 days before the train will be in Oslo. Maybe even more due to power shortage"

"You really don't think there is anything I can do?"

"I don't know. Since the energy crisis started it has been impossible for most people to leave their town of origin, with the exception of students."

Martin looked down once again. He thought about what he had learned about the energy crisis. He could not clearly remember what his teacher had told him but he did recall some small parts of the story. It started when the oil fields in the North Sea were showing indications of being depleted. A war escalated with the whole region of the New Middle East when they increased the price due to the new relation between supply and demand.

The government in Norway chose to enslave people to the town of origin to keep the land populated. They feared Russia would invade if no one lived in the region. Only students and people with high clearance can travel around in the country. All other movements had to be approved by the government. The energy plan between the northern European countries should sharing energy had been working for some time. But when it is most windy Denmark gets most energy and when it has been raining Norway is the one with sufficient energy. Sweden had stopped the Nuclear power plants after an attack on one in Ukraine many years ago. Planes were some of the only means of transportation which is still being powered by fossil fuels.

"What do you recommend me to do Bjørn?" Martin asked desperately.

"To simply just wait. No plane is taking off towards Oslo anyway and there is nothing you can do. Go home and try to keep calling all you know. Maybe there will be some power later in the day"

Martin suddenly remembered the girl from the cab in the morning. Why was she getting to the airport? She most has had a high clearance to be used to taking a cab alone. She most had been on her way home somewhere.

"I think I know what to do!" Martin jumped up from the sofa with some difficulties.

"What? Not something stupid?" Bjørn quickly replied.

"No, no not at all. I met someone in the cab earlier today. She was going to the airport" "Maybe she was just working there Martin"

"I don't think so. She said that she was used to take the cab alone. " "So you are going to find her and ask her for a lift?"

"Why not? It is better than staying home and just wait"

"I don't know Martin"

"Well, I am going to try it"

"Martin, think about it for a second. She is maybe already on her way" Martin did not listen. He was already on his way out of the door. "Whish me luck!"

Bjørn stood alone in room with his arms hanging down at his sides.

Martin quickly ordered an EV-CAB on the way down the stairs. This time it was possible to get hold of one just for him. It arrived a few minutes later. Martin opened it with his phone and soon after he was on his way to the airport.

He rushed inside the terminal as soon as the vehicle doors opened. It was almost empty. Only some security guard and some other workers were present in the hall. He looked around the departure hall for something that could lead him towards the girl from the cab.

The security guards came up to Martin as he stood at check in machines.

"Sorry. Are you planning on going somewhere?" The tallest guard asked.

"Yes, but right now I am looking for a girl at the same age as me. Have you seen anyone like that?"

"Look, no planes are departing today or any days in the near future. Do you need us to call someone?" the guards looked at him with a stiff face.

"Are you sure that you haven't seen her? Please it is really important" Martin did not know what to do. He was trying as hard as he could to gain some sympathy.

"We are sorry, but we need you to leave the terminal at once"

Martin looked at them both desperately but could see it would not help him. He turned towards the exit and started walking slowly. Out of his right eye he saw a group of people at the far end of the terminal. These may have knowledge about the girl Martin thought. He chose to make a run towards the people. He started sprinting all that he could towards the people.

He could hear the security guards shouting but they were not fast enough to get him. He ran at his full capacity right into the group of people. He accidentally tackled one of them and they both hit the ground. He looked over at the person on the ground and could not help himself for shouting out

"Karoline!"

"Martin!" she looked at him with both a smile and a slightly confused expression.

"I need your help! Are you leaving Tromsø by plane?" "Yes, we are headed for ..."

"Sorry about this mess. Sir, we need you to leave at once. Please don't make this hard" The security guards had caught up to the group of people and Martin.

"I really need you help Karoline" Martin asked desperately Karoline looked at Martin and then turned to the guards. "He is with us officers."

"Of course, Ms. Haughfeld. We are sorry about the misunderstanding." Their expression had changed immediately after this new information. "Is there anything else we can help you with?"

"No, we are fine" Karoline answered.

"Okay. Have a safe trip, Ms. Haughfeld." The guards turned around and walked away. Karoline turned to Martin and looked at him straight in the eyes.

"We are headed to Trondheim. Some of my colleagues are going to help the city with some energy concerns. Where are you going Martin?"

"Home, Oslo, my mom is sick. I beg you, please take me with you"

"We can take you to Trondheim. From there you can take the train the rest of the way. Will that be sufficient?"

"Yes I think so, yes please" Martin stammered

"Well good, come on then, the plane will take off in 10 minutes." She smiled at him. "The wind has changed to our benefit now, so we have to hurry"

Martin felt relieved. The trip from Trondheim to Oslo was only about 5 hours by train. The feeling was changed quickly as he thought about what Bjørn had said about the energy hierarchy and transportation's placement in it.

They went through the terminal quickly. Martin had only been in the Airport once, which was the day he arrived at Tromsø. He was not allowed to go home before he had finished his studies, not even during Christmas time due to the Governments energy and transport policy.

"How is it that you are allowed to travel by plane at this time?" Martin asked. It had taken some time for him to summon the courage to ask.

"Well, I and my colleagues work for the government. We work for the energy and transportation ministry and were visiting the university when we were summoned back to Oslo."

Martin had never seen anyone from the government before, not even in the media.

"What is happening?" Martin asked

"Nothing serious. Just a small power shortage in the southern region. We should be fine" Karoline answered him. Martin had the feeling that she might was hiding something for him, but he was not completely sure.

The plane stood outside waiting. It was a smaller old plane. By the looks of it, it only had seats for 10-12 passengers. They all boarded the plane, which started taxiing out to the runway while they sat down.

Martin sat down in an old seat made of brown leather and tucked himself in. Karoline sat down next to him.

"We should be in Trondheim in 4 hours. The plane is not especially fast and we have to fly slowly for fuel preservation. Oil is not cheap these days" Karoline told him with a small smile.

The plane took off and started turning to the right quite quickly after takeoff. Martin's first flight was on the trip to Tromsø. He leaned back in seat and tried to stay calm. He could feel his pulse falling back to a normal level as he started to relax.

The town of Tromsø appeared out of the windows. He could clearly see the few cars which were driving on the streets. He could see people walking on the streets and hanging around near the university. Suddenly the lights disappeared over the university. Martin looked confused at he saw the light at the outskirts of town turned off as well and shortly after the city center became dark. Nothing was visible anymore, all was completely black outside. He heard Karoline gasp. Tromsø had become one with the night.