

Bergen 2050

“Doors closing.” It was hard to believe that this could be the easiest way to get over the great mountains of Norway, but after a huge scepticism from my parents’ generation over several years it was time to be convinced; the train is the future of travelling in Norway. I had been early enough to get a window seat close to the train’s coffee shop, so I would get a great view and also an easy access when buying my coffee later. I was on my way to this summer’s big event: My dearest friend Camilla is to be married to her boyfriend for the past eight years, Haakon. I met her when we both got accepted to the Royal Norwegian Naval Academy, and we have been close ever since. Eventually she met Haakon, an officer from the naval special warfare, very much her real “prince charming”.

“Excuse me, is this the train to Bergen?” An elderly lady looked at me with a warm smile as she tried not to block the aisle with her huge suitcase. “Yes, this is it. Do you want me to help you with that?” “Oh honey, I wouldn’t bother you - I’ll just put it here by the entrance.” She sits down next to me, and takes a knitting set out of her purse. “You know, ever since they redid Oslo Central Station, I can never seem to find my way around this place!” I smile to her, thinking that they haven’t made any changes to the central station for at least ten years, as the renovation finished in 2040 was quite successful. “But I must say, at least getting to Bergen doesn’t take a lifetime anymore.” I guess she was referring to the upgrade of the railway system in Norway, which was finished fifteen years ago. The high velocity-trains that run at an average speed of 200 km/h gives us the possibility to get on the train in Oslo and be in Bergen in just over two hours. The project has taken quite some time, but has with its underground stations and tunnels through the mountains undoubtedly been a huge satisfaction for the citizens of Oslo and Bergen. “I mean, I have always taken the train - even when it took seven hours to get over the mountains - but now I can actually spend another day with my grandchildren in Bergen instead of being stuck on this train all day.” I watched her as she knitted and talked - both with an impressive velocity, and realised how she reminded me of my own grandmother’s efficiency.

As the train leaves the station, I ask her: “When the train gets up to speed, would you like me to go over to the coffee shop and get you something?” She looks at me as if I was asking her to leave: “Am I talking too much for you? Oh dear, I didn’t mean to disturb you!” “No, not at all,” I replied, “I’m off to getting some coffee myself, just wanted to let you know that I have a free hand if you also want coffee.” She replies with a polite “Yes, please”, and goes on with her thoughts on the new way of commuting in Norway. “You know, fifty years ago, all the businessmen went around on business trips in Norway by plane. Can you imagine how long that must have taken? The flight was an hour in itself. Thank God for this train solution, I couldn’t sleep at night thinking how much each flight polluted the precious air we have in this country.” I nodded at her thinking that it was her generation that created the trend of everyday flights all over Norway, but I kept silent about that. “But I will say this, the view was a lot much better with the old trains. Nowadays, most of the trip is in a tunnel - and with no stops along the way. Earlier, we had to stop at every station, all though no one was entering

the train. But at least we got to see this country's finest value; our stunning nature. You know, nature is the closest we get to religion in our country, but I'm starting to think that we are abandoning nature and losing our beliefs. Your generation just looks up a picture on your phone, and that's enough nature for your taste." I knew that I had to break in here: "Well, that's not entirely true. I do go skiing every winter weekend with my family, and I do a lot of hiking in the mountains during the summer. But I guess a lot of young norwegians have forgotten how it is to be a part of nature, you are true about that." "Well, then you've been lucky. I know a lot of Norwegians who have forgotten where they came from, it's like our culture has been washed out." I remember having this talk with my grandfather a couple of years earlier: how he and many of his friends were concerned of how our generation knew so little about the norwegian traditions, and so much more about foreign politics and "environmental stuff" - as he called it. The green party was merged into the biggest party in Norway, The Labour Party, almost twenty years ago. This was an effect of an increased focus on the "environmental stuff" from the younger generations as well as national and local restrictions from the government regarding most aspects of society; energy consumption, sustainable building projects, facilities management of buildings and not to mention the development of the railway reform.

The train was divided into different zones. At the front end of the train, there was a Commute zone, where all the businessmen sat in front of their laptops, emailing or talking to their bosses. In the middle, you had the Family zone, where extra space for trolleys and children running around had been designed. At the rear end, there was a Quiet zone, as well as a Big Luggage zone and the coffee shop. I had to bring a big suitcase to the wedding, and placed myself in the rear end of the train. The zones are, as far as I've understood, regulated to the number of passenger types. I don't imagine the family zone being too big on monday mornings. As I got up from my seat, I realised how low the ceiling was. Although there were no storage above the seats, I imagined how a tall man would've had problems with standing straight here. I guess it was the storage of the electrical systems that they needed the space for. I looked around me and couldn't see one available seat in this zone, so I made an assumption that the other zones must have been quite full as well. There is a train every second hour to Bergen, but every one of them seemed to be completely occupied this time of the year. Since the government banned national flights within southern Norway from 2040, the trains have been taking most of the passengers from Oslo to Bergen, Stavanger and Trondheim. Gardermoen is the only airport in southern Norway which is still in use, and all international flights arrive and depart from there. The ban was originally planned to affect the whole country, but due to the great distances and small population in cities from Bodø and further north, they are still doing flights up there. Widerøe is the only company that is allowed to have flights in the northern of Norway, and they are partly subsidized by the government.

I get my two coffees at the shop and get a glimpse of how it looks outside, now that we're out of the tunnel for a couple of minutes. "It's great, isn't it?" The girl behind the counter looks at me and sighs: "I wish I could get out there some time." I assume that this is her summer job, working here, and reply with a smile and a "Thank you for the coffee!" before I head back to my seat. It's interesting how many young students nowadays don't appreciate the welfare system we have in this country. We have been way ahead of most countries for decades regarding work-life balance, and as a student you're always told that you have all

the opportunities in the world. Norway has one of the world's highest score in all of the Life Quality surveys and indexes. We have the most flexible and lowest working hours while we also have one of the highest wages in the world. Also, the gender equality is well balanced and even fathers have a legislated paternity leave of 12 weeks after birth. So why do so many young people still complain and take it for granted that the government takes care of them?

"Thank you very much, my new friend!" The lady next to me is thrilled to get her coffee, and goes on about how she barely has enough time to drink it before we'll arrive in Bergen. "Did you see the beautiful mountains when you were gone? I wish they could avoid all the tunnels, but I read that it's better for some reason to keep the train in a tunnel." She was right, there are many good reasons for why the engineers have chosen to keep the train in tunnels from Oslo to Bergen. Firstly, it reduces the maintenance work and costs drastically as the railway is unexposed to the weather. Secondly, the train can keep a higher average speed while in a tunnel, because of the predictable obstacles on the line. Thirdly, it reduces the trip distance significantly when the train goes in a tunnel through the mountain rather than over it. The goal was to reduce the time of the train trip so that it could compete with the total time of a flight to the same destination. The time of getting to Bergen with a flight of 55 minutes would take you 4 hours in total. With the new trains, the time is the half of that. Another goal of the new railway project was to establish all the stations under ground level, as it would ease the flow of passengers and decrease the risk of any incidents between the trains and passengers. I didn't take long before train starting reducing its speed more and more as we approached Norway's second largest city, Bergen.

Getting up to ground floor and out of the station, I realise that I have forgotten to order for a car to come and get me. I wave goodbye to the elderly lady as I see her family waiting for her with their private car. Within two minutes, my Google car is waiting for me to get in. I thought of getting the bus instead, but the Google car is always so convenient. Up until a few decades ago, Bergen was the only city in Norway to use Trolleybuses. These buses came in 1950, as a replacement for the trams, and were electrical buses with an antenna on the roof. Today, all norwegian buses are self-going full electrical. I open the car with the code I've got and slide gently into this small, urban, autonomous vehicle resembling the smallest model that Volvo still produce - all though this is, without a doubt, Google's creation. "Hello, Ingrid! Welcome to Bergen!", it welcomes me on the tablet, as it waits for me to put my seatbelt on before it makes its way out of the station area. The car already knows where I'm going from the app, and I can just relax and enjoy the view of this city.

Some things never change in Bergen: the city center is surrounded by seven mountains that are as stunning as ever. The mountains have caused headache for the government the past decades considering how to cope with the air quality on winter days with no wind and large amounts of toxic gas. The municipality have made several regulations and restrictions to make the healthy, clear air a reality. First of all, there are no diesel or fuel-based cars on the roads within the seven mountains. This means that people going to work either needs to have an autonomous car come and get them, or they'll drive a private electrical vehicle to work after dropping their kids off at school. The only way to enter the city by car, is through the toll ring.

Secondly, as I pass the great landmark of Bergen city, Bryggen, there are no ships at the dock. Bergen used to be a huge harbour city when it was founded almost a thousand years ago. Today, Vågen, which is the inner harbour of Bergen, is only used for tourists, offices, restaurants and shops. The two main harbours of Bergen are now located on Sotra and Askøy, two of the largest islands outside of Bergen. The water outside of Vågen is used for kayaking and small electrical tourist boats. Freight transport is being taken into the city centre via autonomous, electrical vehicles, and deliverances are made outside of rush hours. Finally, there are no flights to Bergen. Flesland, the local airport, was shut down in 2040 as a result of the national ban. Within ten years, Flesland has turned into one of the most attractive areas to live in Bergen, as the government has started and fulfilled successful construction projects in the old airport area. This is the only area in Bergen where the residents have some sort of garden and green area that doesn't cost a fortune.

I can log on with my Google account to a tablet in the Google car to learn more about the different parts of the city that I can see from where we are, and I am getting more and more curious as to what has happened to the old city park, Nygårdsparken, as we pass it. It looks closed in some way, but there has not been built any replacement as I can see from the car. I press Nygårdsparken on the tablet, and it lets me know that there is an ongoing tender on the park, and it's risking to be shut down for good and being replaced by some tall building from a private buyer. This park is one of very few parks in the city center, and has attracted many homeless and drug-addicts throughout the years. Most cities in Europe have used a densification strategy throughout the last decades to avoid physical expansion of cities, but that requires that the green areas in urban areas are kept untouched. When I look it up on my phone, it seems as if the government blame the shutdown on the heavy load of maintenance due to the wet, cold and windy climate. The climate of Bergen has always been their achilles heel. The demographic situation with the surrounding of mountains and location at the coast makes Bergen a rainy place. This has been a huge challenge for the building projects, as it hardly goes a day by without some rain.

"Hola!" Camilla greets me with her usual spanish "Hello", all though she's not spanish at all. "It's so nice to get you here, we have almost finished the preparations for tomorrow." Camilla lives in an apartment with her fiancé, Haakon, in an old industrial area called Damsgård brygge. The buildings had, like in several other areas in Bergen, been reconstructed or renovated as new residences and become very attractive due to the close proximity to the sea and the city centre. They were lucky to get to buy an apartment at all, due to the extreme increase in price in all the major cities of Norway; Oslo, Bergen, Trondheim and Stavanger have all become unavailable for young people. The high prices were partly because of the high demand from people wanting to live close to the city, but also all the new requirements to the quality of new buildings has made the residences rather costly. But this particular area down by the water across from the heart of the city centre had been designed with smaller apartments for young couples who wanted to own their first home.

"Hi girl, you're finally here!" Vilde comes running towards me and throws herself into my arms. I haven't seen her in a long time, and we have a lot to catch up on. "How was your trip? Did you meet any of the others?" We are going to be eight girls in total from the Navy, and I'm looking forward to spend time with all of them. "No, we're not meeting up until the

dinner tonight. How is work?" I ask while i get my coat off and put the huge suitcase in the guest room. "Well, there's a lot to do in court. We're struggling with many cases related to the driverless cars in the city, and where the responsibility lies when they collide. It's giving us a headache, because they never got the law specified enough at the time the cars were launched." "I can imagine. In fact, I went with one of them over here. How are things the hospital, Camilla?" "Well, they tell us that it's brand new, and it looks brand new, but the solutions and design for technology are things we needed ten years ago, when they started planning the new hospital. Many of the design elements feels outdated and wrong for the way we want to run the hospital today." "Well, if it helps, I can assure you that civil engineers are aware of the problem, and we're struggling with the fast developing technology in hospitals when planning the projects." I tried to cheer her up, but it was evident that she had more to say about the topic as she went on: "And it's remarkable how many new engineers that come into the hospital knowing nothing about how the institution is run. They're everywhere now, assisting us on the machines in every department. It's frustrating to spend time instructing them on how things work, when my time at work is limited as it is." The rage in the doctors' union has been going on for some years now, as they feel that their power and responsibility has been diminished by an increasing number of engineers "taking over". I didn't want this to disturb her weekend.

"Should we get to it, girls?" Vilde had already brought out the cards and pens, and was ready to finish up the place cards. The wedding reception was planned to be at one of the restaurants up in the mountainside overlooking Bergen, and close to hundred guests were expected. The ceremony was taken out of the church and up on the peak of Ulriken, the highest of the seven mountains surrounding the city. As I started writing down the names, my mind went off to the lady in the train and how she talked about our relation to nature. Maybe she was right, maybe this is the closest we get to a religion. Camilla is getting married on a mountain peak, and it is evident that the traditions of our culture have not yet been abandoned. It is up to our generation to keep passing on and managing our biggest legacy: Nature.