

SUMMERTIME TROMSØ

YELLOW ZONE

The first sign of spring isn't daylight, it's the icebreaker coming over the horizon. There's a little machine that marches along under the water, measuring the sea ice. In the winter we read its updates and we know when it's safe to skate on the strait. It tells the ship too when the ice is thin enough for its approach.

There's not a lot to do in Tromsø in May except to watch the ship come in, its nuclear power smashing through the ice pack. We're huddled on the coast in the snow next to the Gamsts, and they're watching the ship all angry because it's got a flag fluttering in the wind that means something ugly to them. My daughter Myra used to clap when she was younger, watching the ship free our island from the ice, but the Gamsts told her off, and I had to explain to her that sometimes things happen to people in the past that hurt them so bad they think everyone else should feel that way too. So we watch the icebreaker in silence as it circles paths around Tromsø, cracking open ice like shaving a dog, and we pretend our hearts aren't hammering with excitement at the thought of the sea opening for us again.

It's been too long since I was out fishing. And Myra misses Nils.

Following the icebreaker, so much bigger, is the ferry with its tall wings. Inside are Tromsø's summer residents. It happened in my lifetime that the population shrank, with only six thousand or so permanent residents, and everyone else leaving the bitter cold as the sea started to freeze. They used to come back in the spring and leave again in the autumn, but as people died their homes returned to the state, which is a good policy for the crowded south, but up here there are now just neighbourhoods of silent houses maintaining themselves for some eventual use. The people coming now are migrants, for what's called the Seasonal Sojourn. If it's too cold up here most of the year, it's too hot down south. People kept rotated 'round and 'round, chasing the weather, and while I can't imagine that life, I know what it's like to have everything dictated by Celsius.

People arrive with their homes assigned to them. And their jobs. Some people have jobs that mean they don't need a home, and there are a lot of people like that who come to Tromsø to join the fishing fleet. Myra and I have a partner for this year's catch. Her name's Nuren. When we meet her on the dock, she seems shy, unsure what to do, and blinking in the snow. She's not much taller than Myra. Her height and her hesitance make her seem childlike, helpless, though I know she's a decade older than me and her public profile doesn't say very much about her life, but I know she got her experience on boats the hard way.

Her hand trembles. Myra notices it too when she shakes it. "Deg er kaldt," she says, and looks down at Nuren's feet. "Støvleene dine er ikke gode."

Nuren looks blank, and I correct Myra gently. "She says you need new boots," I say, in English.

Myra giggles at her mistake. Nuren looks worried, and I know then that she doesn't have much money. She stays in our home while we ready the hydrofoil, and during that time she wears the rubber boots we use on deck. Nuren loses her shyness quickly, and her English proves better than mine, and Myra enjoys talking to her. She tells her about life in Tromsø in the winter, the Aurora, the last bear that tried to break into our house, and about the sea, the fish, and Nils.

Nuren nods along, and takes me aside one day to ask: "Who's Nils?"

She meets him on the open sea soon after. As we head north into the water the ice starts to free up. Technically, it's warmer out here than back in town, but you can't tell with the wind. Nuren and I walk the decks in our gel suits, checking the jigging lines. With our hoods up and visors down I can barely even hear the wind howling, but I flinch when Myra shrieks into my earpiece from the skipper's deck: "It's Nils! Nils is coming!"

She's seen him on the signals. Nils is geo-chipped, the state always knows where he is, but as a citizen of an endangered species they keep his whereabouts secret. There are plenty of humans who'd want to track people like him down. But very-nearby ships are always pinged so they don't accidentally hurt him. I beckon Nuren to the guardrail, and we see him leaping out of the water. He knows us, as

always. Clicking excitedly as he swims, and I pet his – snout? I don't know if that's what you call it on a dolphin. "Fourth crew member reporting!" I say, grinning.

Nuren is instantly taken with him, smiling through her visor as Nils swims around the boat.

"Watch this," I tell her, and head into the cabin to return with a board full of hexagonal buttons. Nils sees the board and clicks at us. I tell Nuren, "Ask him something. Anything."

Nuren blinks. Despite the wind she takes her visor down and gets close to the dolphin and yells, "What is your name?"

I push the picture board toward the dolphin and his snout presses a hexagon. "Nils." the board states with a neutral, feminine voice that contrasts with the dolphin's expression of chuckling glee. "Nils." he presses it again. "Nils. Nils." And then: "What." "Name." And then a pause for him to dive under water to think, before resuming with a wet splash: "Man."

"Nuren," Nuren says, not holding it against Nils that he can't tell our sexes apart. And then she turned to me: "Can he understand that?"

"Maybe. We'll add a hexagon for your name on the board."

I go inside to take control of the ship so that Myra can play with Nils, chasing him around the deck with the board while he swims circles and occasionally emerges to boop the board with his nose. "Myra. Slow. Myra. Chase. Slow."

Nuren's keeping an eye on Myra in the rough wind, but I hear her ask me privately on my communications channel: "Why the dolphin?"

"He herds the fish toward us."

Nils makes us, technically, a research vessel. As the habitats changed, he was raised in scientific guardianship and taught some sort of English using the hexagon keyboard. Since moving to the open sea he's interacted with many ships, but for some reason we're the only ones he regularly revisits – apart from the scientists who

raised him. I think it's because of Myra, I'm not particularly good with him. Given his affinity for us, the scientists gave us a board of our own, taught us how to talk to him, and just told us to log the data. It suits us. Our computer streams in data from all over the sea – underwater sensors, buoys, satellites, even our radar system is feeding information back up to the cloud – so we always know where to find the fish. Catching the fish is another matter, but Nils drives them up toward the surface for us.

I know the scientists don't like it, but the fact is that he started doing this on his own, long before we were taught to communicate with him. One of the outcomes of him being a European Union Protected Person is that he can choose to interact with humans however he wants. Dolphins are incredibly intelligent people and to amuse themselves they toy with their prey. Helping his favourite humans catch fish probably ticks all sorts of boxes in his cetacean brain and so long as we never try to *make* him help us the scientists can't stop him.

If I ever feel like there's something disturbing about how happy he is as the fish flop around on our deck, it's because he reminds me too much of ourselves as predators.

Over the next week we land fish after fish on deck, and check them thoroughly before throwing them in the hold. We use the machine. We put the fish in, and the machine verifies the species, its age, which generation of Genetically Modified fish it has in its ancestry, if any, and answers the million-dollar question: "Is it safe or legal to eat this thing?" It's our job to verify what the machine doesn't fully get, despite pulling from the very finest in consumer data, which is: "Would someone want to eat this thing?"

"Yuck, it's blind," Myra says as she sees the fish's obvious cataracts. I agree, and throw it into the water, where Nils eats it.

Nuren looks disturbed. "So what if it's blind? It's a perfectly good fish."

And that confuses me, because if it's blind, it's not a perfectly good fish. I try to explain to her that we have a quota and we aren't going to waste it on a fish that the shops are going to throw away anyway. Nuren still seems annoyed, and honestly the rest of the day is a tough one because she keeps trying to add every fish the

machine passes onto our day's catch, refusing to acknowledge defects. We have an angry conversation through our suit comms so Myra can't hear us fighting.

I eventually understand Nuren's point of view. She was raised hungry. She doesn't care about her food's aesthetics, and doesn't believe anyone else should. I try to tell her that we in Norway *can* choose and so we do, and our job isn't to question those tastes but to feed them.

Myra's avoiding us, pointedly sticking just to Nils and throwing him the fish we don't want, petting him and calling him a good boy. Of course, he's snapping them into his jaws underwater too, not just taking our scraps. He jumps, he clicks, lets us pet him, shows every sign of pleasure. I have no idea how much he can understand when we talk to him without the board. How much can he understand *with* the board? Does he really get that Myra is my daughter? What are concepts like that for him?

Anyway, he was raised in a lab, by humans, and there's probably a reason he hangs out with us. I wonder what he does in the winter.

Suddenly I feel incredibly lonely.

Later that night, I'm reading the news on my phone. It's good.

The European Union has finally designated Pannonia and the Portuguese Coast as Yellow Zones. People can finally start to live there in Seasonal Sojourns, but only in the winter months, in the reverse of Tromsø's own Yellow Zone status. They've been cloud-seeding for decades. It sounds crazy to me, but every generation since the Climate Catastrophe has had to fight to make sure we do our best to adapt to and then reverse the process. Well, there's always been debate about how much we can do to change things, but I can't imagine why so many just refuse to try to make the world better than it is. My ancestors moved to Tromsø in the 19th century, and I think each generation since has had it harder. But we never left, even as it got so cold the government had to pay us to stay and keep the town alive until the summer.

I struggled when I had Myra. I wondered if I should be the generation to move south, instead of raising her in the cold. But in the cold we have a home, and down

south they're just moved around and around, continually reallocated by the system. And people like Nuren, who've just arrived, fleeing the Red Zones, I don't know if they'll ever find a place to stay forever. Just moved from Yellow Zone to Yellow Zone. Tromsø in the summer. Maybe Portugal in the winter. I'm going to raise Myra in Tromsø until she's old enough to decide on her own, but if she stays then I want my grandchild to see winters where the sea isn't frozen solid. I've seen such winters, but my daughter hasn't.

My thoughts are interrupted by a message. From Myra. "Why were you and Nuren fighting?"

I turn. She's in her bed, staring at me, phone in hand. Nuren's on the bunk atop her, sleeping. I want to text back: "Go to sleep," but I know she won't, and I owe her an explanation. I tell her about the fight, and I add, "Nuren doesn't understand how we do things. She'll learn." We've gotten in the habit of using English on the ship.

Myra takes a while to reply. I can see her fingers moving as she tries to phrase it correctly, but eventually she does. "We could keep some of the fish Nuren wants to keep? It might be easier."

"No. We must get the best fish we can for the quota."

"But the big ships with their big nets keep all the fish they catch."

She's not entirely wrong. In the big corporate vessels they catch in bulk, and then the fish go through the machine, same as ours. Except they catch too many fish to then sort out by hand, just relying on the AI to tell them if they can keep a fish or not. Much of their catch is turned into processed fish anyway, so who cares if their fish is ugly and mutated-looking when whole? "The companies have licenses with big quotas for their ships. We're just a small boat with a little quota."

We don't fish for canneries. There are plenty of places that want to buy fewer fish, but good fish, caught by small fishers. And they'll pay good money. We know what industrial food production did to the ecosystem in the last two centuries, and while we need to feed the huge populations in the Green Zones and so there's a need for huge ships and canneries, most people who can afford it prefer to eat food

grown, raised, or caught by hand. Locally. My parents got the quota when the big fishing companies got broken up and small fishers were encouraged to get back on the sea again. It was so important to them to start catching their own fish, and they taught me to never trust the machine and to rely on my own eyes, even as the machines got better and better. I've kept at it, and I want to pass it on to Myra, but we can't do that if we don't make the most money we can from our fish. Life in Tromsø isn't cheap.

I can see that Myra doesn't seem convinced. She writes, "I still feel bad for Nuren."

"I didn't like fighting with her. But she must learn to do things our way."

Myra types, retypes, tries again, deletes her message, and then finally says, "OK, mom," and turns around to go to sleep.

After a minute or two of staring at her back I type: "And put your phone down." She gives a twitch of guilt, and she puts her phone on the side of her pillow I can see.

I stay up a little late, watching her, watching Nuren. I'm not wrong: Nuren has to learn how to do things our way. It's our boat. My boat. And then she must learn to adjust to Norway. But I wonder how many things she's adjusted to in the countries she's had to live in so far, from Seasonal Sojourn to Sojourn? There is never going to be a time or a place where I must learn to behave the way she would want me to.

I wonder if she knows that when I was still in school my friends and I marched through the snow to have Tromsø put in as a zone for the Seasonal Sojourn? All those empty houses, and people coming into Europe every day from places that were still so much worse off than us. I imagine how shameful I would look if I told Nuren or Myra that, as though trying to prove that I am a kind person.

The next few days are quiet and Nuren works without any complaint. Nils is well fed with lots of fish. I feel bad, but we're having a good season so far and I feel we won't have to worry about money in the winter. We see other fishing ships, including some huge company vessels grabbing whatever they can from the water.

Our fishing gets worse whenever we get near them – not just because they take all the fish, but because Nils runs away as soon as he hears one approach.

We also see other small boats, some known to us, and I have some nice chats on the communications. We spend one very snowy evening tied together with a boat run by three men each my grandfather's age, trading stories, and playing cards, which Nuren turns out to be very good at. She smiles a lot.

We're finishing lunch the next day when we see a boat. It's some ways away, but the afternoon is a beautiful one. The boat is a dark spot between clear blue panes of sky and sea. It's moving away. Because I'm training Myra to get good at reading transponder data, I ask her which boat that is. While eating soup she checks the computer, and her brow furrows. She shows me: it's not registered. In fact, the sensor data we see can't even identify that there is anything else on the water nearby except fish and Nils.

I get nervous. There are many reasons for boats to be out on the sea, trying to run blind. I check the satellite feed, and see that they're doing a common trick: painting the top of the boat with patterns that mess up cameras. I assume the entire hull of the ship has similar protection, so taking a photograph is pointless. Luckily, the boat is moving away from us, so I don't have to worry about pirates coming in for the kill.

Nuren has her hand on her mouth. I assume it's because she's had experience with bad people on the sea before. I open my mouth to reassure her, but she speaks first: "Oh no, what's he doing?"

She's pointing at the sonar, where the dot representing Nils is moving fast toward the direction of the 'invisible' boat. My blood runs cold. Among the things people do while sailing invisible: poaching.

Nuren runs out onto the deck and waves in the direction of the dolphin, crying his name. Myra, who doesn't understand exactly what's happening, panics and joins Nuren. I stay in the cabin, watching in horror as Nils gets farther and farther away from us. We can't help him; we can't tell him to stop. He's rushing toward what could be his death, driven by his own inscrutable curiosity. I can only hope that the

boat is moving faster than him. Through the window I can just barely see it on the horizon but without its data I can't tell if Nils will catch up to it or not.

Nils goes far enough that we can't see him on our radar anymore. Underwater, out of sight. Minutes pass, and Myra wanders back into the cabin, cold and sad and crying into my arms. I comfort her, trying not to cry myself. Maybe it'll all be alright. I tell Myra that – without the 'maybe'.

That's when I see the dot again, on the screen. Nils is coming back. To say we scream is an understatement. We rush back onto the deck, and as soon as Nuren understands that Nils is safe and making his way back she joins us at the rail calling for him. We can see him, a dark shape on the water, moving slower than he should. That's when we notice, and we don't burst into action immediately, but watch stunned for a few seconds, unable to believe it.

He's pulling, with his teeth, an unconscious man with him through the water. Exhausted, he pulls the man up to the boat where we receive him. He's dressed in cheap, ill-fitting work clothes, in hiking shoes, and frozen to the very bone. His clothes and skin colour tell us what happened. Illegal fishing crews or poachers or smugglers. Crews of undocumented migrants. Cheap labour and cheap lives. His story isn't important right now. We find out he's just barely alive, and do all we can for him, which is very little.

We put in the cabin with every blanket, sheet and jacket we aren't using on top of him. In the meanwhile, I call the emergency services.

"Where's your location? Is he breathing? Can you identify the other vessel? What's his name? OK, ma'am, you can check his name by scanning his spinal chap with your phone. It doesn't work? You are sure you scanned the right – OK, ma'am, of course."

We are assured that an emergency rescue service plane is making its way to us immediately. There is a police officer on board, they say, as though to reassure us. I can't imagine what good the cop will do for the man dying in my bed. They should have saved him before he hit the water.

It's still clear blue skies, and it'll only be a beautiful afternoon for the rest of the day. Nils swims around the ship, jumping, excited to have helped, probably hoping to see his new friend. I hug Myra, who's worried, and I keep telling her the man will be alright. She knows it'll break my heart if she tells me I'm a bad liar.

Nuren looks at the sky, looks at the ice-free water. Her hands are clenched tight and white.

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OCTOBER 2023

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