

Bak Skyene er Himmelen Alltid Blå

The woman listened.

Water crashed against the shore and chaffinches wailed into the early morning. Outside the window, the Norwegian town was blanketed with snow like a gingerbread village, and the glassy fjord mirrored the grey sky. A warm tear streaked down the wrinkles on her hands.

The woman breathed in the salty ocean air, and she remembered.

Alina Evans turned the brochure over in her fingers, the ocean breeze playing with the corners. Norway. The jagged mountains and smooth lakes, warm lights reflecting off the water... she could make a life there. Have a fresh start. She wrote the thought in her spiralbound notebook and turned away from the horizon of marbled greens and blues, leaning against the sway of the ship.

A sudden jolt threw Alina's balance, sending her sprawling across the deck and pressing her cheek to the damp wood. She lifted her head as she noticed an object, salt and blood stinging her tongue. Alina picked up the book. The fabric binding was browned and weathered, and the gold lettering was rubbed away. She peeled apart the damp pages to the first chapter. *Bak skyene er himmelen alltid blå... behind the clouds, the sky is always blue.*

The ship thudded against the jetty. Sea mist shrouded the Norwegian town and Alina turned her collar against the icy wind, reaching into her pocket to feel the reassuring weight of the book. Waterfront cottages were reflected in the glassy fjord and the wind carried the scent of fresh fish.

Surrounded by an unfamiliar tongue and environment, the foreign woman felt alone on the crowded shore.

Alina backed away. No. This wasn't how it was supposed to be. There was supposed to be warm lights, dancing, cosy fireplaces. Her shoulder met something solid, and she turned to face the telephone pole. A tattered poster clung to the wood, and her heart sank at the unfamiliar text. But she recognised a place name. And a dollar sign.

“All right, SETTLE DOWN.” Alina yelled over the screaming match taking place in her classroom. The giggles subsided as the children returned to their seats. “I’ll be your English teacher for this year.” She walked between the desks, handing out booklets. It felt natural as she chalked her name onto the board and could barely contain her smile as she turned to face her class. “You can call me Miss Evans.”

The woman listened.

Water lapped against the shore and chaffinches sang into the early morning. The waterfront cottages were dripping with melting snow and the blue, blue sky was mirrored in the glassy fjord. A droplet of water darkened the wood, and the woman glanced up at the window frame. Stumps of icicles splintered the sunlight, printing her fingers with a rippling rainbow.

A knock rapped at the door.

The woman reached into her breast pocket, where a reassuring weight rested against her heart. The book's worn fabric binding was browned with age, and the gold lettering was rubbed away.

“Miss Evans? Are you in there?”

The woman opened the door, letting in the stream of students and flooding the room with chatter and laughter.

On the desk lay an old spiralbound notebook marked with pencil. *'Bak skyene er himmelen alltid blå.'*

Alina breathed in the salty ocean air, and she remembered.