

SIGNE JORGENSON

## *Radio Tromsø*

I grade exams to the comforting lilt of the Norwegian language coming live through my computer's speakers—a radio station from Tromsø. There, north of the Arctic Circle, people are already turning out their lights and crawling into bed. But here, outside my office window in rural Wisconsin, late afternoon sunlight fades to gray and branches sag beneath the weight of new snow. A colleague pauses in my doorway, asks if I understand the foreign words.

I can't translate, but I *understand*. I understand the cadence of this language, the way it pulls me back to childhood, to grandparents telling stories not fit for children's ears, to men bullshitting over coffee at The Rainbow, to drunks playing whist in a dimly-lit tavern at midday.

The sounds take me to a country I visited when I was only fourteen, to distant relatives across the Atlantic. To Toril Knutsmoen leaning against a church in Fetsund and tilting her chin skyward to laugh as a thin cigarette dangles from her fingertips. To Astrid Brennum ladling soup into a chipped bowl, Lake Mjøsa and mountains framed by the yellow curtains of her kitchen window. To Ole Jurgen standing in a gravel driveway at midnight, next to a cream-colored house with vertical siding, backlit by a midsummer sun that won't set.

“Velkommen,” the radio says. *Welcome*.

That, I know.