

Jeg skal hjælpe deg



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(Let me help you)

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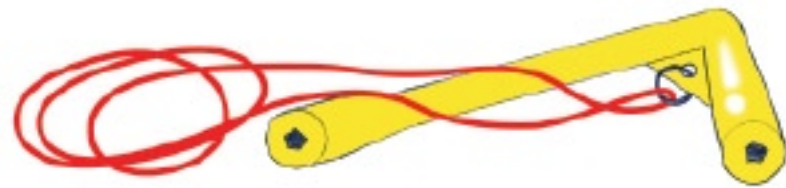
Clare's papa drives a subway train through the big city. He does it every day. People want to go to and fro and back again.

"The city transit train has to keep running," Papa usually says. "People have to go to work or pick up their children or they are going to meet someone. If nobody is there to drive the train, everything is going to go wrong."

Papa usually walks down the stairs with light easy steps. His uniform jacket fits snugly over his tummy. Above his waist his name badge shines like a full moon. In his hand he has a shiny key that opens the doors to both the subway cars and the driver's cab.

"Bye-bye-e-e-e!" he usually cries as he goes out. Loud, so that Clare can hear him from their apartment on the seventh floor.

She stands there watching him. After a while, he becomes smaller and smaller. Finally he is about the size of a tiny ant and crawls onto the station platform with all the other people. Then he nips into the driver's cab, and the whole train lurches forward before disappearing into the tunnel. The only thing left is the big yawning tunnel opening and an empty and quiet station platform.



Today, everything is different. Papa's not going anywhere. His tummy looks limp and heavy inside his pyjamas. When he walks he can hardly lift his feet off the floor. Sitting in the kitchen he slurps his coffee so slowly that it sounds like jelly.

His uniform jacket is still hanging on the hook. It is hidden behind a grey scarf, and the little trekantnøkkelen in the corner isn't shining. He is hot and he is sniffing. His hair looks like its been combed by a vacuum cleaner.

"What's wrong?" asks Clare.

"Influenza," answers papa.

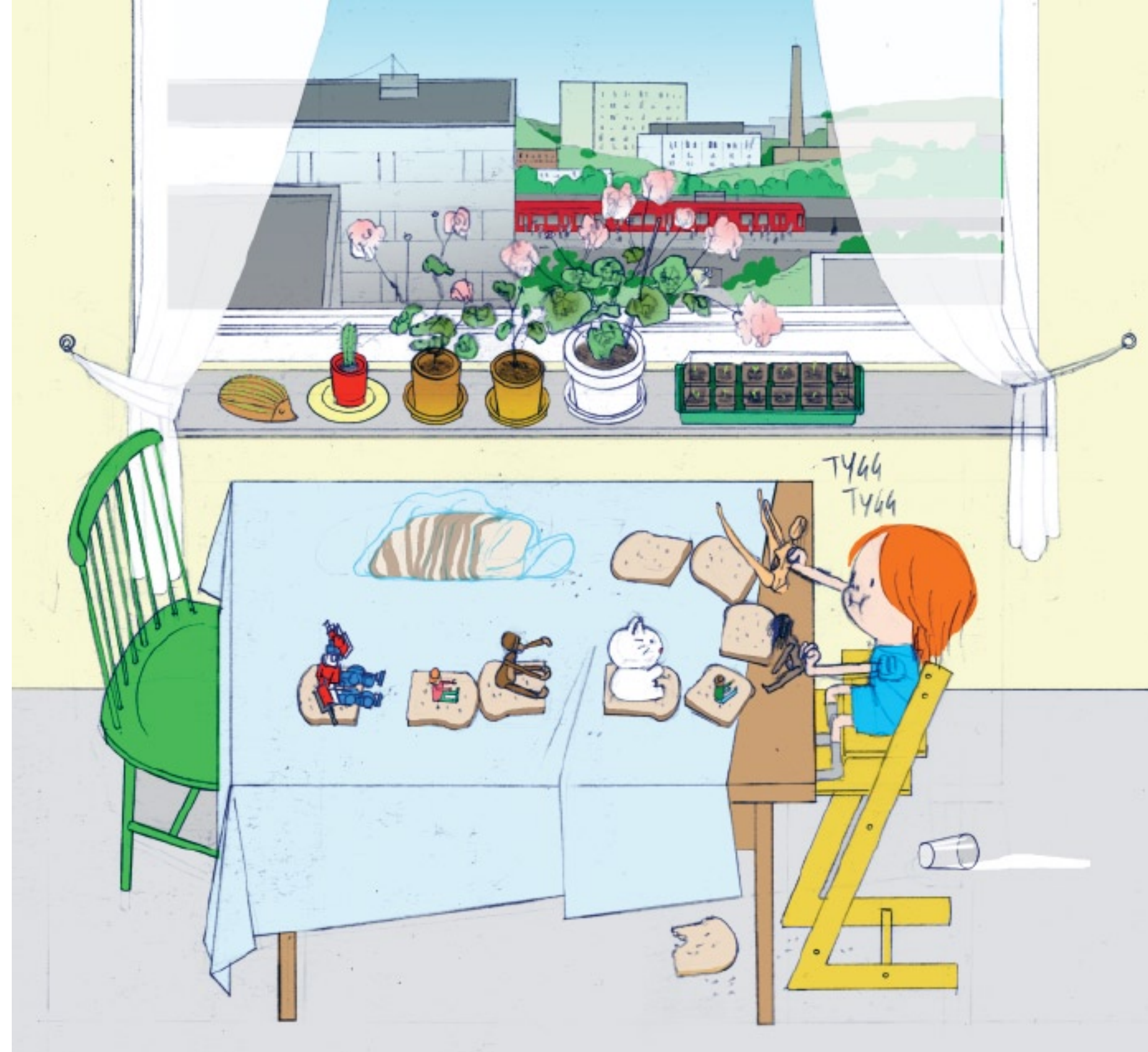
Far down at the station, she can see people already gathering outside an empty railway car. They are staring out at the air and shuffling their feet on the platform.



“There won’t be any train driver today,” thinks Clare. “He’s lying in bed with a cough and straggly hair and a fever up to his earlobes.”

“The train driver is on board his bed and has pulled on the influenza brake. He’s delayed by a faulty flu signal!” says Clare to herself while stuffing slices of bread and butter into her mouth one by one.

She looks down at the people on the platform. They’re waiting and waiting and waiting.



One of the people waiting on the platform is Alfredo. He is going to an important meeting. He has put on his nice clean socks and washed his face all shiny. He has combed his hair so many times that it has nearly come loose. He's quite nervous.

Today he is going to help three brothers become friends again. They have been angry at each other for fifteen years, but today they are going to make up. Alfredo has tidied up his office very nicely. He has set out some chocolate candy and has made up a complicated plan that he has written out on big white sheets of paper.

"One of the brothers is going to yell. The other is going to spit. The third is going to hop up and down. But today I am going to get them to be friends. If only the train would come soon," he thinks.

In the kitchen on the seventh floor sits Clare, who can just about see Alfredo. Because from the window high up in the apartment building Alfredo looks like something very small, almost like an ant.



Another person standing on the platform is Gillian. Her tummy is enormous because she is expecting a baby. She has two thoughtful and nice children from before.

“Bye-bye,” she said to both of them this morning.

“Bye-bye,” they both said smiling and agreeable.

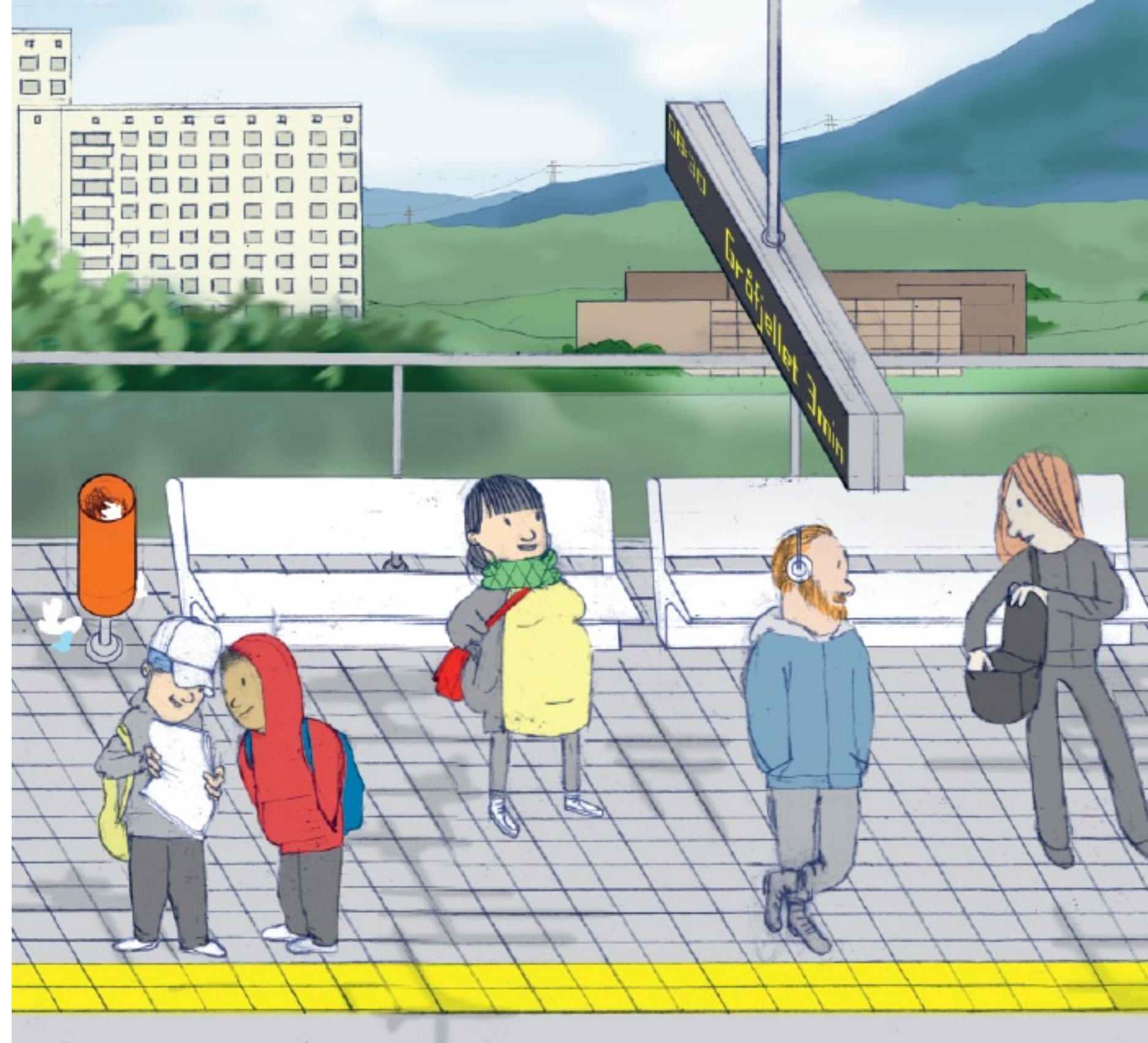
Gillian is going downtown to buy some nice things in the big baby store.

From the kitchen chair up where Clare is sitting, Gillian looks like an ordinary lady with a jacket that is a little large. From the seventh floor it is in fact not so easy to see the difference between large and small tummies inside large and small jackets.

Henry and Adam are on the platform waiting to go downtown to meet a girl called Suzanna. They have never seen her before. But they are fairly certain that she is pretty. “Dear City Transit Train, please be on time,” thinks Henry.

Somewhere in town Suzanna, who is perhaps tall and fair is waiting, and maybe she has a butterfly tattoo on her left shoulder. Henry has not slept. Adam has not eaten.

From the kitchen window Clare can see that the boys are pretty tall. But still, from the seventh floor they remind her of two thin reeds who keep nudging each other.



Clare stands at the window thinking. She wonders if she should call down to everyone on the platform to tell them that Papa is switched off today. That he is not going to sing, drive, put on the brakes or make any turns. He is lying in bed and parked there.

But she doesn't do that. She thinks it over. She looks at the frail shadow of papa's head over in the bed and at the flagging shadows of the little people down on the platform. They look lonely, as if they were jackets that someone had forgotten hanging on a hook.

"I will help you," she whispers to Papa, so quietly that he can not exactly hear it. "And you, and you, and you," she says to the little people down on the ground. But they can't hear. They are just too small.

Clare gets going and dashes out of the apartment, slams the door closed and flies down the steps. "By-e-e-e," she calls up to papa, and the echo of her voice almost reaches up to the seventh floor.



Clare is standing on the platform with the shiny trekantnøkkelen in her hand. People are staring up in the air or down at their watches or into their cell phones. Some people are holding onto papers or newspapers. They are crowded together like a forest that is impossible to push one's way through.

"Excuse me," says Clare. "I have a message for the passengers. Can I come through?" She tries to crackle like a loudspeaker. "Excuse me," sputters Clare, but a little louder this time. "There has been a breakdown of the train driver, may I please move forward?"

A lady with an enormous tummy bends over her.

"Isn't he coming?"

"The doors will be opening and there will be a short delay," says Clare.

