

《英语学习》读物丛书

AIRPORT

航 空 港

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杨 一 注释

外语教学与研究出版社

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## Chapter 1

At half past six on a Friday evening in January, Lincoln International Airport was open, but it was in difficulties.

The airport, together with the entire Midwestern United States, had been hit by the worst storm in years.<sup>1</sup> It had already lasted for three days. Now troubles, like spots on a sick, weakened body, were beginning to break out everywhere.<sup>2</sup>

A truck carrying two hundred dinners was lost in the snow somewhere on an airport service road, and so far the search for it had been unsuccessful.

At least a hundred flights were delayed, some by many hours.

Out on the airfield runway three zero was out of use.<sup>3</sup> It was blocked by an Aero-Mexican jet which lay sideways across it. The front wheels of the plane were stuck in the deep mud which lay under the snow near the edge of the runway. Aero-Mexican had tried hard for two hours to move it, but without any success. Now they were asking TWA to help them.

The loss of runway three zero made the work of

Air Traffic Control even more difficult than usual. With twenty planes waiting to land, they were delaying take-offs.<sup>4</sup> The airfield seemed to be full of waiting aircraft. Inside the main passenger terminal too, there were crowds of impatient people waiting beside their piles of baggage.

Even the large notice on the roof of the terminal —LINCOLN INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT—was hidden by the snow.

Mel Bakersfeld was surprised that the airport was still open. Mel was the airport general manager. He was a tall, powerful man. At the moment, he was standing by the Snow Control Desk, high in the control tower. Usually you could see the entire airport from here. Only Air Traffic Control had a better view.

Tonight you could see only a few lights. This was an unusually hard winter.<sup>5</sup> The storm had started five days ago in the Colorado Mountains,<sup>6</sup> and then swept across a large part of the United States. It brought with it strong winds, freezing cold and heavy snow.<sup>7</sup>

Maintenance men with snowploughs cleared the snow as it fell,<sup>8</sup> but by now many of them were terribly tired. The storm seemed to be winning.

Danny Farrow was at the Snow Control Desk, talking to the Maintenance Snow Centre by radio phone.

'We're losing ground.' I need six more snow-ploughs out there.'

'Oh sure, sure,' an angry voice replied. 'Six more snowploughs! We'll get them from Father Christmas!'<sup>10</sup> Any more stupid ideas?"

'We sent four ploughs out to find that truck,' Danny said. 'If they haven't found it yet, they'll just have to try harder.'

An explosion of anger came over the radio phone in reply.<sup>11</sup>

Mel knew how easily tempers were lost under these conditions. These men were highly trained, and they were working as hard as they could.

The maintenance man's voice came on the phone again.

'We're worried about that truck too, Danny. The driver could freeze to death. He won't die of hunger, if he has any sense!'

'This search will block the service roads,' Danny told Mel. 'You'll get plenty of complaints about that.'

'I know,' Mel said. Airport managers were used to complaints. The most important thing was to save the life of the driver. For a moment, he wished that he could sit down and help Danny. Mel needed action. The cold weather was making his bad foot—an old war wound from Korea — ache. Then he realised

that Danny could work better on his own.<sup>13</sup>

He telephoned Air Traffic Control.

'Any progress on the Aereo-Mexican jet?'<sup>13</sup>

'Not yet, Mr Bakersfeld.'

'Is the runway still blocked?'

'Yes.'

This airport needs more runways, Mel thought. This proves it.<sup>14</sup> The trouble was, there were plenty of people who disagreed with him, and they were more powerful than he was.

'And another thing,' he was told. 'As runway three zero is blocked, planes are taking off over Meadowood.'<sup>15</sup> The complaints have started coming in already.'

'Oh no!' Mel said. He was tired of hearing complaints from the people who lived in Meadowood. The airport had been built long before their houses, but they never seemed to stop complaining about the noise. As a result, the runway nearest to Meadowood was used only under special conditions. On the occasions when it had to be used,<sup>16</sup> pilots were told to reduce the noise made by the engines on take-off. It was possible to do this, but most pilots considered it to be foolish and dangerous and hated being told to do it. In any case, it had not stopped the complaints from Meadowood.

'How many complaints have there been?' Mel asked.

'At least fifty.'



'Don't they know there's a storm and we have a runway out of use?'

'We try to tell them, but they don't want to listen. I hear they're holding a meeting tonight to decide what to do next.'

More trouble! Mel thought.

He asked: 'Is my brother on duty tonight?'

'Yes.'

Mel's brother Keith worked in Air Traffic Control.

'Is he all right? Does he seem nervous?'

The other man hesitated before he replied. 'Yes, he is. More than usual. I wish I could tell him to rest, but we're short of men already.'<sup>17</sup>

'I know, I know.' Recently Mel had been very worried about Keith.

He put the phone down, and thought again about a note he had received fifteen minutes before. It was from Tanya Livingston. She worked for Trans America, and was a special friend of Mel's.

The note warned him that the Airlines Snow Committee, led by Captain Vernon Demerest, was going to blame Mel for the many flight delays. They were going to accuse him of inefficient management.<sup>18</sup>

Captain Vernon Demerest was one of Trans America's most experienced pilots. He was married to Mel's sister Sarah. The Bakersfelds were a real 'aviation family'.<sup>19</sup> In spite of the family connection,

however, Mel and Vernon were not friendly with one another. Recently they had exchanged angry words at an important meeting,<sup>20</sup> and Mel felt that the critical report was a direct result of this.

He was not really worried, because he knew that he was doing everything he could to run the airport efficiently. It was unpleasant to be criticised, but his conscience was clear.<sup>21</sup>

Tanya ended her note by inviting him to have a cup of coffee with her, when he had time. Mel decided he had time now. He always enjoyed talking to Tanya.

## Chapter 2

Mel used a private elevator<sup>1</sup> to go down from the control tower to his office. The office was silent and empty. He took a heavy coat and fur-lined boots<sup>2</sup> out of a cupboard near his big desk.

He was not really on duty at the airport tonight, but because of the storm he had stayed on to help. Otherwise he would have been at home with Cindy and the children.

Or would he?

It's hard to know the truth about yourself,<sup>3</sup> he

thought. If there had been no storm he would probably have found some other excuse for not going home.<sup>4</sup> He didn't seem to go home immediately after work very often these days. Of course, the airport kept him very busy, but — to be honest — it also offered an escape from his endless quarrels with Cindy.<sup>5</sup>

Oh God! He had just noticed a note that his secretary had left on his desk, reminding him that he had promised to go to a party with Cindy that evening. Cindy hated to miss a party if she knew that any important people were going to be there.

He still had two hours. He could finish what he had to do here in time to get to the party — but he would be late.

He phoned his home number.

Roberta, his elder daughter, answered.

'Hi,' he said, 'this is Mel.'

'Yes, I know,' she said coolly.

'How was school today?'

'We had more than one class, Father. Which one are you asking me about?'

Mel sighed. There were days when he felt that his home life had become unbearable. Did all thirteen-year-old girls talk to their fathers like this? He loved both his daughters very much. There were times when he thought that his marriage had only lasted as long as it had because of them.<sup>7</sup> It hurt him to hear

Roberta speak so coldly. But who was to blame for her behaviour? Perhaps she had seen her parents quarrelling too often.

'Is your mother at home?' he asked.

'She went out. She hopes you'll try not to be late for the party for once.'

She was clearly repeating Cindy's words.

'If your mother phones, tell her I'll be a little late,' Mel said. There was no answer, so he asked: 'Did you hear me?'

'Yes,' Roberta said. 'Have you finished? I have homework to do.'

'No,' Mel told her, 'I haven't finished. Don't talk to me like that, Roberta. I won't allow it.'

'Of course, Father.'

'And don't call me Father!'

'Yes, Father.'

Mel almost laughed, but instead he asked: 'Is everything all right at home?'

'Yes. Libby wants to talk to you.'

'In a minute. I have something else to tell you first. Because of the storm, I'll probably sleep at the airport tonight.'

Again there was no answer. Then Roberta said: 'Will you speak to Libby now?'

'Yes, please. Goodnight Robbie.'

'Goodnight.'

The telephone changed hands, and he heard a small childish voice say: 'Daddy, daddy! Guess what happened today!' Libby always sounded so excited with life.<sup>10</sup>

'Let me think,' Mel said. 'I know. You had fun in the snow today.'

'Yes, I did. But it wasn't that.'

'Then you'll have to tell me.'

'Well, for homework we have to write down all the good things that we think will happen next month.'

She was so happy and trouble-free.<sup>11</sup> Mel wondered how long she would remain like this.

'That's nice,' he said. 'I like that.'

'Daddy, daddy! Will you help me?'

'If I can.'

'I want a map of February.'

He understood what she meant, and told her to look at the calendar on his desk. He needed a map of February himself, he thought.

He heard her small feet running from the room. Someone else rang off without speaking.<sup>12</sup>

Mel walked out of his office carrying his coat. From here he could look down over the crowded hall of the main terminal building. He could not see a single empty seat. Every information desk was surrounded by a crowd of impatient or worried people.

The ticket agents were working under severe pressure. As he watched, one of them was speaking

calmly to a young man who had lost his temper and was shouting at her. Looking down on another desk, he saw an agent quietly finding a seat on a plane for an important businessman.

Nobody looked up and saw Mel. Most airline passengers never gave a thought to the large number of people who worked in the airport offices, although their work was essential to the life of the place.<sup>13</sup> Of course, if people knew more about the airport they would also know more about its dangers and weaknesses. Perhaps it was better for them not to know about these things.

He walked towards Tanya's office.

'Evening, Mr Bakersfeld,' someone said. 'Are you looking for Mrs Livingston?'

'Yes, I am.'

So people were putting their names together already!<sup>14</sup> Mel wondered what they were saying about his friendship with Tanya.

'She's in her office, Mr Bakersfeld. We had a little problem. She's taking care of it now.'<sup>15</sup>

## Chapter 3

In Tanya's office a young girl in the uniform of a Trans America ticket agent was crying noisily.

Tanya made her sit down, and told her: 'Make yourself comfortable.<sup>1</sup> We can talk later.'

For a while there was no sound in the room except the girl's weeping.

Patsy Smith was about twenty. Tanya was nearer forty. Looking at the girl, she felt that the difference in their ages was even greater than that.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps it was because she had been married and Patsy had not.

It was the second time that Tanya had thought about her age today. This morning she had noticed grey hairs among the red. It reminded her that she was getting older, and that by now she should know what she was doing with her life.<sup>3</sup> Her own daughter was growing up.

Patsy Smith began to speak, finding the words with difficulty.<sup>4</sup> Her eyes were red from weeping.

'Why are some passengers so rude? I was doing my best. We all were.'

'Tell me what happened,' Tanya said.

It was a familiar story.<sup>5</sup> A man had missed his flight, and it had been difficult to find him a place on another. When Patsy finally succeeded in finding him a place, he complained that he didn't want to see the film that was going to be shown on that flight, and told her that she was slow and inefficient. In the end she had been unable to bear his insults any more, and she had thrown a book at him.

The girl looked up in surprise.<sup>6</sup>

'Oh I sympathise with you,' Tanya told her, 'but this mustn't happen again, Patsy, or you'll be in trouble.'

Patsy smiled weakly. 'It won't happen again, I promise.'

'Let me tell you something,' Tanya said. 'After you left, another man came and told me that he had seen what happened. He said you weren't to blame. He told me that he had a daughter the same age as you, and that he would hit anyone who spoke to her like that man spoke to you. So you see, there are some nice people in the world, after all.'

Dealing with the public could be terribly difficult, Tanya knew. It was hard to be polite when so many people were rude to you.

As Patsy was leaving the office, Mel came in.

'I'm tired too,' he said. 'Will you send me home to rest?'

Tanya looked hard at him<sup>7</sup> and he noticed her clear blue eyes and short red hair. She looked good in her blue uniform.

'Will you let me send you to my apartment to rest?' she asked. 'I'll cook you a good dinner.'



‘I wish I could say yes, but I can’t. Can I buy you a cup of coffee?’

‘All right,’ Tanya said, ‘but I must be quick. I’m on duty for another two hours.’

As they walked towards the coffee shop, Mel said: ‘Can I come to dinner some other night, Tanya? I’d like to.’

Her sudden invitation had surprised him. She had never asked him to visit her apartment before. He wondered if this could be leading to a love affair,<sup>8</sup> and knew that that would be a serious matter for both of them.

‘Come to dinner on Sunday,’ she said.

‘Thank you. I will.’ Could he leave his family on a Sunday? Well, Cindy often did.

They had never seen the coffee shop so full of people before.

As they went to sit down, Mel almost fell, and seized Tanya’s arm. I suppose people will talk about that, she thought.

‘What crowds!’ she exclaimed.

‘We’ll be seeing bigger and bigger crowds in the future,’ Mel told her. ‘We should be building bigger airports, but we’re not. Some people just refuse to understand what is needed.’

He liked talking about airports and airlines to Tanya, because he knew that she was interested.