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JO NESBO

# The Leopard

TRANSLATED FROM THE NORWEGIAN BY  
Don Bartlett

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# PART ONE

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# 1

## The Drowning

SHE AWOKE. BLINKED IN THE PITCH DARKNESS. Yawned, and breathed through her nose. She blinked again. Felt a tear run down her face, felt it dissolve the salt of other tears. But saliva was no longer entering her throat; her mouth was dry and hard. Her cheeks were forced out by the pressure from inside. The foreign body in her mouth felt as though it would explode her head. But what was it? What was it? The first thing she thought when she awoke was that she wanted to go back. Back into the dark, warm depths that had enveloped her. The injection he had given her had not worn off yet, but she knew pain was on the way, felt it coming in the slow, dull beat of her pulse and the jerky flow of blood through her brain. Where was he? Was he standing right behind her? She held her breath, listened. She couldn't hear anything, but she could sense a presence. Like a leopard. Someone had told her leopards made so little noise they could sneak right up to their prey in the dark. They could regulate their breathing so that it was in tune with yours. Could hold their breath when you held yours. She was certain she could feel his body heat. What

was he waiting for? She exhaled again. And at that same moment was sure she had felt breath on her neck. She whirled round, hit out, but was met by air. She hunched up, tried to make herself small, to hide. Pointless.

How long had she been unconscious?

The drug wore off. The sensation lasted only for a fraction of a second. But it was enough to give her the foretaste, the promise. The promise of what was to come.

The foreign body placed on the table in front of her had been the size of a billiard ball, made of shiny metal with punched-out small holes and figures and symbols. From one of the holes protruded a red wire with a looped end, which instantly made her think of the Christmas tree that would need decorating at her parents' house on 23 December, in seven days. With shiny balls, Christmas pixies, hearts, candles and Norwegian flags. In eight days they would be singing a traditional Christmas carol, and she would see the twinkling eyes of her nephews and nieces as they opened their presents. All the things she should have done differently. All the days she should have lived to the full, avoiding escapism, should have filled with happiness, breath and love. The places she had merely travelled through, the places she was planning to visit. The men she had met, the man she had still not met. The foetus she had got rid of when she was seventeen, the children she had not yet had. The days she had wasted for the days she thought she would have.

Then she had stopped thinking about anything except the knife that had been brandished before her. And the gentle voice that had told her to put the ball in her mouth. She had done so, of course she had. With her heart thumping she had opened

her mouth as wide as she could and pushed the ball in with the wire left hanging outside. The metal tasted bitter and salty, like tears. Then her head had been forced back, and the steel burned against her skin as the knife was laid flat against her throat. The ceiling and the room were illuminated by a standard lamp leaning against the wall in one of the corners. Bare, grey concrete. Apart from the lamp, the room contained a white plastic camping table, two chairs, two empty beer bottles and two people. Him and her. She smelt a leather glove as a finger had tugged lightly at the red loop hanging from her mouth. And the next moment her head had seemed to explode.

The ball had expanded and forced itself against the inside of her mouth. But however wide she opened her jaws, the pressure was constant. He had examined her with a concentrated, engaged expression, like a dentist checking to see whether the orthodontic brace was sitting as it should. A little smile intimated satisfaction.

With her tongue she could feel circular ridges around the holes in the ball and that was what was pressing against her palate, against the soft flesh of her tongue, against her teeth, against the uvula. She had tried to say something. He had listened patiently to the inarticulate sounds emerging from her mouth. Had nodded when she gave up, and had taken out a syringe. The drop on the tip had glinted in the torchlight. He had whispered something in her ear: 'Don't touch the wire.'

Then he had injected her in the neck. She was out in seconds.

She listened to her own terrified breathing as she blinked in the darkness.

She had to do something.

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She placed her palms on the chair seat, which was clammy from her perspiration, and pushed herself up. No one stopped her.

She advanced with tiny steps until she hit a wall. Groped her way along to a smooth, cold surface. The metal door. She pulled at the bolt. It didn't budge. Locked. Of course it was locked. What had she been thinking? Was that laughter she could hear, or was the sound coming from inside her head? Where was he? Why was he playing with her like this?

Do something. Think. But to think, she would first have to get rid of this metal ball before the pain drove her insane. She put her thumb and first finger in the corners of her mouth. Felt the ridges. Tried in vain to get her fingers under one of them. Had a coughing fit and a panic attack when she couldn't breathe. She realised that the ridges had made the flesh around her windpipe swell, that soon she would be in danger of suffocating. She kicked the metal door, tried to scream, but the ball stifled the sound. She gave up again. Leaned against the wall. Listened. Was that his wary tread she could hear? Was he moving around the room? Was he playing blind man's buff with her? Or was it her blood throbbing past her ears? She steeled herself against the pain and forced her mouth shut. The ridges were hardly down before they sprang back and forced her mouth open again. The ball seemed to be pulsating now, as though it had become an iron heart, a part of her.

Do something. Think.

Springs. The ridges were spring-loaded.

They had jumped up when he pulled the wire.

'Don't touch the wire,' he had said.

Why not? What would happen?

She slid down the wall until she was sitting. Cold damp rose from the concrete floor. She wanted to scream again, but she couldn't. Quiet. Silence.

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All the things she should have said to those she loved, instead of the words that had served to fill the silence with those to whom she was indifferent.

There was no way out. There was just her and this unbelievable pain, her head exploding.

‘Don’t touch the wire.’

If she pulled it, the ridges might retract into the ball, and she would be spared the pain.

Her thoughts ran in the same circles. How long had she been here? Two hours? Eight hours? Twenty minutes?

If all you had to do was pull the wire, why hadn’t she already done it? Because the warning had been given by an obvious sicko? Or was this part of the game? Being tricked into resisting the temptation to stop this quite unnecessary pain? Or was the game about defying the warning and pulling the wire, causing . . . causing something dreadful to happen? What would happen? What was this ball?

Yes, it was a game, a brutal game. And she had to play. The pain was intolerable, her throat was swelling, soon she would suffocate.

She tried to scream again, but it subsided into a sob, and she blinked and blinked, without producing any further tears.

Her fingers found the string hanging from her lips. She pulled tentatively until it was taut.

There was so much she regretted not having done, naturally. But if a life of self-denial would had placed her anywhere else than here, right now, she would have chosen that. She just wanted to live. Any sort of life. As simple as that.

She pulled the wire.

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The needles shot out of the circular ridges. They were seven centimetres long. Four burst through her cheeks on each side, three into the sinuses, two up the nasal passages and two out through the chin. Two needles pierced the windpipe and one the right eye, one the left. Several needles penetrated the rear part of the palate and reached the brain. But that was not the direct cause of her death. Because the metal ball impeded movement, she was unable to spit out the blood pouring from the wounds into her mouth. Instead it ran down her windpipe and into her lungs, not allowing oxygen to be absorbed into her bloodstream, which in turn led to a cardiac arrest and what the pathologist would call in his report cerebral hypoxia, that is, lack of oxygen to her brain. In other words, Borgny Stem-Myhre drowned.

## 2

# The Illuminating Darkness

18 December

*The days are short. It's still light outside, but here in my cutting room there is eternal darkness. In the light from my work lamp the people in the pictures on the wall look so irritatingly happy and unsuspecting. So full of expectations, as though they take it for granted that all life lies before them, a perfectly calm ocean of time, smooth and unruffled. I have taken cuttings from the newspaper, snipped off all the lachrymose stories about the shocked family, edited out the gory details about the finding of the body. Contented myself with the inevitable photo a relative or a friend has given a persistent journalist, the picture of when she was in her prime, smiling as though immortal.*

*The police don't know a lot. Not yet. But soon they will have more to work with.*

*What is it, where is it, whatever it is that makes a murderer? Is it innate, is it in a gene, inherited potential that some have and others do not? Or is it shaped by need, developed in a confrontation with the world, a survival strategy, a life-saving sickness,*

rational insanity? For just as sickness is a fevered bombardment of the body, insanity is a vital retreat to a place where one can entrench oneself anew.

For my part, I believe that the ability to kill is fundamental to any healthy person. Our existence is a fight for gain, and whoever cannot kill his neighbour has no right to an existence. Killing is, after all, only hastening the inevitable. Death allows no exceptions, which is good because life is pain and suffering. In that sense, every murder is an act of charity. It just doesn't seem like that when the sun warms your skin or water wets your lips and you recognise your idiotic lust for life in every heartbeat and are ready to buy mere crumbs of time with everything you have accrued through life: dignity, status, principles. That is when you have to dig deep, to give a wide berth to the confusing, blinding light. Into the cold illuminating darkness. And perceive the hard kernel. The truth. For that is what I had to find. That is what I found. Whatever it is that makes a person into a murderer.

What about my life? Do I also believe it is a calm, unruffled ocean of time?

Not at all. Before long I too will be lying on death's refuse heap, together with all the other role players in this little drama. But whatever stage of decay my body may attain, even if all that remains is the skeleton, it will have a smile on its lips. This is what I live for now, my right to exist, my chance to be cleansed, to be cleared of all dishonour.

But this is only the beginning. Now I am going to switch off the lamp and go out into the light of day. The little that is left.

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# 3

## Hong Kong

THE RAIN DID NOT STOP FIRST THING. NOR SECOND thing. In fact, it didn't stop at all. It was mild and wet week upon week. The ground was saturated, European motorways caved in, migratory birds did not migrate and there were reports of insects hitherto unseen in northern climes. The calendar showed that it was winter, but Oslo's parkland was not just snowless, it was not even brown. It was as green and inviting as the artificial pitch in Sogn where despairing keep-fit fans had resorted to jogging in their Bjørn Dæhlie tights as they waited in vain for conditions around Lake Sogsvann to allow skiing. On New Year's Eve the fog was so thick that the sound of rockets carried from the centre of Oslo right out to suburban Asker, but you couldn't see a thing, even if you set them off on your back lawn. Nevertheless, that night Norwegians burned fireworks amounting to six hundred kroner per household, according to a consumer survey, which also revealed that the number of Norwegians who realised their dream of a white Christmas on Thailand's white beaches had doubled in just three years. However, also in South-East Asia, it seemed as if the weather had run amok, ominous symbols usually seen only

on weather charts in the typhoon season were now lined up across the China Sea. In Hong Kong, where February tends to be one of the driest months of the year, rain was bucketing down and poor visibility meant that Cathay Pacific flight number 731 from London had to circle again before coming in to land at Chek Lap Kok Airport.

‘You should be happy we don’t have to land at the old airport,’ said the Chinese-looking passenger next to Kaja Solness, who was squeezing the armrests so hard her knuckles were white. ‘It was in the centre of town. We would have flown straight into one of the skyscrapers.’

Those were the first words the man had uttered since they had taken off twelve hours earlier. Kaja eagerly grabbed the chance to focus on something other than the fact that they were temporarily caught in turbulence.

‘Thank you, sir, that was reassuring. Are you English?’

He recoiled as if someone had slapped him, and she realised she had offended him mortally by suggesting that he belonged to the previous colonialists: ‘Erm . . . Chinese perhaps?’

He shook his head firmly. ‘Hong Kong Chinese. And you, miss?’

Kaja Solness wondered for a moment if she should reply Hokksund Norwegian, but confined herself to ‘Norwegian’, which the Hong Kong Chinese man mused on for a while then delivered a triumphant ‘Aha!’ before amending it to ‘Scandinavian’ and asked her what her business was in Hong Kong.

‘To find a man,’ she said, staring down at the bluish-grey clouds in the hope that terra firma would soon reveal itself.

‘Aha!’ repeated the Hong Kong Chinese. ‘You are very beautiful, miss. And don’t believe all you hear about the Chinese only marrying other Chinese.’

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She managed a weary smile. 'Hong Kong Chinese, do you mean?'

'Particularly Hong Kong Chinese,' he nodded with enthusiasm, holding up a ringless hand. 'I deal in microchips. The family has factories in China and South Korea. What are you doing tonight?'

'Sleeping, I hope,' Kaja yawned.

'What about tomorrow evening?'

'I hope by then I'll have found him and I'll be on my way back home.'

The man frowned. 'Are you in such a hurry, miss?'

Kaja refused the man's offer of a lift and caught a bus, a double-decker, to the city centre. One hour later she was standing alone in a corridor at the Empire Kowloon Hotel, taking deep breaths. She had put the key card into the door of the room she had been allocated and now all that remained was to open it. She forced her hand to press down the handle. Then she jerked the door open and stared into the room.

No one there.

Of course there wasn't.

She entered, wheeled her bag to the side of the bed, stood by the window and looked out. First, down at the swarm of people in the street seventeen floors below, then at the skyscrapers that in no way resembled their graceful or, at any rate pompous, sisters in Manhattan, Kuala Lumpur or Tokyo. These looked like termite anthills, terrifying and impressive at the same time, like a grotesque testimony to how humankind is capable of adapting when seven million inhabitants have to find room in not much more than a hundred square kilometres. Kaja felt

exhaustion creeping up on her, kicked off her shoes and fell back on the bed. Even though it was a double room and the hotel sported four stars, the 120-centimetre-wide bed occupied all the floor space. And it hit home that from among all these anthills she now had to find one particular person, a man who, all the evidence suggested, had no particular wish to be found.

For a moment or two she weighed up the options: closing her eyes or springing into action. Then she pulled herself together and got to her feet. Took off her clothes and went into the shower. Afterwards she stood in front of the mirror and confirmed without a hint of self-satisfaction that the Hong Kong Chinese man was right: she was beautiful. This was not her opinion, it was as close to being a fact as beauty can be. The face with the high cheekbones, the pronounced raven-black but finely formed eyebrows above the almost childlike wide eyes with green irises that shone with the intensity of a mature young woman. The honey-brown hair, the full lips that seemed to be kissing each other in her somewhat broad mouth. The long, slim neck, the equally slim body with the small breasts that were no more than mounds, swells on a sea of perfect, though winter-pale, skin. The gentle curve of her hips. The long legs that persuaded two Oslo modelling agencies to make the trip to her school in Hokksund, only to have to accept her refusal with a rueful shake of the head. And what had pleased her most was when one of them said as he left: 'OK, but remember, my dear: you are not a *perfect* beauty. Your teeth are small and pointed. You shouldn't smile so much.'

After that she had smiled with a lighter heart.

Kaja put on a pair of khaki trousers, a thin waterproof jacket and floated weightlessly and soundlessly down to reception.

'Chungking Mansion?' the receptionist asked, unable to refrain

from cocking an eyebrow, and pointed. ‘Kimberley Road, up to Nathan Road, then left.’

All hostels and hotels in Interpol member countries are legally obliged to register foreign guests, but when Kaja had rung the Norwegian ambassador’s secretary to check where the man she was looking for had last registered, the secretary had explained that Chungking Mansion was neither a hotel nor a mansion, in the sense of a wealthy residence. It was a collection of shops, take-aways, restaurants and probably more than a hundred classified and non-classified hostels with everything from two to twenty rooms spread over four large tower blocks. The rooms for rent could be characterised as everything from simple, clean and cosy to ratholes and one-star prison cells. And most important of all: at Chungking Mansion a man with modest demands of life could sleep, eat, live, work and propagate without ever leaving the anthill.

Kaja found the entrance to Chungking in Nathan Road, a busy shopping street with branded goods, polished shopfronts and tall display windows. She went in. To the cooking fumes from fast-food outlets, hammering from cobblers, radio broadcasts of Muslim prayer meetings and tired looks in used clothes shops. She flashed a quick smile at a bewildered backpacker with a *Lonely Planet* guidebook in his hand and frozen white legs sticking out of over-optimistic camouflage shorts.

A uniformed guard looked at the note Kaja showed him, said ‘Lift C’ and pointed down a corridor.

The queue in front of the lift was so long that she didn’t get in until the third attempt, when they were squeezed up tight in a creaky, juddering iron chest that made Kaja think of the gypsies who buried their dead vertically.

The hostel was owned by a turban-clad Muslim who immediately, and with great enthusiasm, showed her a tiny box of a

room where by some miracle they had found space for a wall-mounted TV at the foot of the bed and a gurgling A/C unit above the bedhead. The owner's enthusiasm waned when she interrupted his sales spiel to produce a photo of a man with his name spelt as it would have been in his passport, and asked where he was now.

On seeing the reaction, she hastened to inform him that she was his wife. The embassy secretary had explained to her that waving an official ID card around in Chungking would be, quote, counterproductive. And when Kaja added, for safety's sake, that she and the man in the photo had five children together, the hostel owner's attitude underwent a dramatic change. A young Western heathen who had already brought so many children into the world earned his respect. He expelled a heavy sigh, shook his head and said in mournful, staccato English, 'Sad, sad, lady. They come and take his passport.'

'Who did?'

'Who? The Triad, lady. It's always the Triad.'

Naturally enough, she was aware of the organisation, but she had some vague notion that the Chinese mafia primarily belonged to the world of cartoons and kung fu films.

'Sit yourself down, lady.' He quickly found a chair, onto which she slumped. 'They were after him, he was out, so they took his passport.'

'Passport? Why?'

He hesitated.

'Please, I have to know.'

'Your husband bet on horses, I am sorry to say.'

'Horses?'

'Happy Valley. Racecourse. It is an abomination.'

'Does he owe money? To the Triad?'

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He nodded and shook his head several times to confirm and regret, alternately, this fact of life.

‘And they took his passport?’

‘He will have to pay back the debt if he wants to leave Hong Kong.’

‘He can only get a new passport from the Norwegian embassy.’

The turban waggled from side to side. ‘Ah, you can get a false passport here in Chungking for eighty American dollars. But this is not the problem. The problem is Hong Kong is an island, lady. How did you get here?’

‘Plane.’

‘And how will you leave?’

‘Plane.’

‘One airport. Tickets. All names on computer. Many control points. Many at airport who get money from the Triad to recognise faces. Understand?’

She nodded slowly. ‘It’s difficult to escape.’

The hostel owner shook his head with a guffaw. ‘No, lady. It’s *impossible* to escape. But you can hide in Hong Kong. Seven million people. Easy to go underground.’

Lack of sleep was catching up on Kaja, and she closed her eyes. The owner must have misunderstood because he laid a consoling hand on her shoulder and mumbled, ‘There, there.’

He wavered, then leaned forward and whispered, ‘I think he still here, lady.’

‘Yes, I know he is.’

‘No, I mean here in Chungking. I see him.’

She raised her head.

‘Twice,’ he said. ‘At Li Yuan’s. He eat there. Cheap rice. Don’t tell anyone I said. Your husband is good man. But trouble.’ He

rolled his eyes so that they almost disappeared into his turban. 'Lots of trouble.'

Li Yuan's comprised a counter, four plastic tables and a Chinese man who sent her an encouraging smile when after six hours, two portions of fried rice, three coffees and two litres of water she awoke with a jolt, lifted her head from the greasy table and looked at him.

'Tired?' he laughed, revealing an incomplete set of front teeth.

Kaja yawned, ordered her fourth cup of coffee and continued to wait. Two Chinese men came and sat at the counter without speaking or ordering. They didn't even spare her a glance, for which she was glad. Her body was so stiff from sitting on the plane that pain shot through her whatever sedentary position she adopted. She rolled her head from side to side to try to stimulate circulation. Then backwards. Her neck cracked. She stared at the bluish-white neon tubes in the ceiling before lowering her head. And stared straight into a pale, hunted face. He had stopped in front of the closed steel shutters in the corridor and scanned Li Yuan's tiny establishment. His gaze rested on the two Chinese men by the counter. Then he hurried on.

Kaja got to her feet, but one leg had gone to sleep and gave way under her weight. She grabbed her bag and limped after the man as fast as she could.

'Come back soon,' she heard Li Yuan shout after her.

He had looked so thin. In the photographs he had been a broad, tall figure, and on the TV talk show he had made the chair he was sitting on look like it had been manufactured for pygmies. But she had not the slightest doubt it was him: the dented, shaven skull, the prominent nose, the eyes with the spider's web of blood vessels

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and the alcoholic's washed-out, pale blue irises. The determined chin with the surprisingly gentle, almost beautiful mouth.

She stumbled into Nathan Road. In the gleam of the neon light she caught sight of a leather jacket towering above the crowd. He didn't appear to be walking fast, yet she had to quicken her pace to keep up. From the busy shopping parade he turned off and she let the distance between them increase as they came into narrower, less populated streets. She registered a sign saying 'Melden Row'. It was tempting to go and introduce herself, get it all over with. But she had decided to stick to the plan: to find out where he lived. It had stopped raining, and all of a sudden a scrap of cloud was drawn aside and the sky behind was high and velvet black, with glittering, pinhole stars.

After walking for twenty minutes he came to a sudden halt at a corner, and Kaja was afraid she had been rumbled. However, he didn't turn round, just took something from his jacket pocket. She stared in amazement. A baby's bottle?

He disappeared round the corner.

Kaja followed and came into a large, open square packed with people, most of them young. At the far end of the square, above wide glass doors, shone a sign written in English and Chinese. Kaja recognised the titles of some of the new films she would never see. Her eyes found his leather jacket, and she saw him put the bottle down on the low plinth of a bronze sculpture representing a gallows with an empty noose. He continued past two fully occupied benches and took a seat on the third where he picked up a newspaper. After about twenty seconds he got up again, walked back to the sculpture, grabbed the bottle as he passed, put it into his pocket and returned the same way he had come.

It had started to rain when she saw him enter Chungking

Mansion. She slowly began to prepare her speech. There was no longer a queue by the lifts; nevertheless he ascended a staircase, turned right and went through a swing door. She hurried after him and suddenly found herself in a deserted, run-down stairwell with an all-permeating smell of cat piss and wet concrete. She held her breath, but all she could hear were dripping sounds. As she took the decision to go on up, she heard a door bang beneath her. She sprinted down the stairs and found the only thing that could have made a bang: a dented metal door. She held the handle, felt the trembling come, closed her eyes and cursed to herself. Then she ripped open the door and stepped into the darkness. That is to say: out.

Something ran across her feet, but she neither screamed nor moved.

At first she thought she had entered a lift shaft. But when she looked up, she glimpsed blackened brick walls covered with a tangled mass of water pipes, cables, distorted chunks of metal and collapsed, rusty iron scaffolding. It was a courtyard, a few square metres of space between tower blocks. The only light came from a small square of stars high above.

Although there wasn't a cloud in the sky, water was splashing down onto the tarmac and her face, and she realised it was condensed water from the small, rusty A/C units protruding from the front of the buildings. She retreated and leaned back against the iron door.

Waited.

And, eventually, from the dark, she heard: 'What do you want?'

She had never heard his voice before. Well, she had heard it on the talk show when they were discussing serial killers, but hearing it in reality was quite different. There was a worn hoarse quality that made him sound older than the forty years she knew

he had just turned. But at the same time there was a secure, self-assured calm which belied the hunted face she had seen outside Li Yuan's. Deep, warm.

'I'm Norwegian,' she said.

There was no response. She swallowed. She knew that her first words would be the most important.

'My name is Kaja Solness. I have been tasked with finding you. By Gunnar Hagen.'

No reaction to the name of his Crime Squad boss. Had he gone?

'I work as a detective on murder investigations for Hagen,' she said into the blackness.

'Congratulations.'

'No congratulations necessary. Not if you've been reading Norwegian papers for the last months.' She could have bitten her tongue. Was she trying to be funny? Had to be the lack of sleep. Or nerves.

'I mean congratulations on a well-accomplished mission,' said the voice. 'I have been found. Now you can go back.'

'Wait!' she shouted. 'Don't you want to hear what I have to say?'

'I'd prefer not to.'

But the words she had jotted down and practised rolled out. 'Two women have been killed. Forensic evidence suggests it's the same perp. Beyond that we don't have any leads. Even though the press has been given minimal info, they've been screaming for ages that another serial killer is on the loose. Some commentators have written that he may have been inspired by the Snowman. We've called in experts from Interpol, but they haven't made any headway. The pressure from the media and authorities—'

'By which I mean no,' the voice said.

A door slammed **Copyrighted Material**

‘Hello? Hello? Are you there?’

She fumbled her way forward and found a door. Opened it before terror managed to gain a foothold and she was in another darkened stairwell. She glimpsed light further up and climbed three steps at a time. The light was coming through the glass of a swing door, and she pushed it open. Entered a plain, bare corridor in which attempts to patch the peeling plaster had been given up, and damp steamed off the walls like bad breath. Leaning against the wall were two men with cigarettes hanging from the corners of their mouths, and a sweet stench drifted towards her. They appraised her through sluggish eyes. Too sluggish to move, she hoped. The smaller of the two was black, of African origin, she assumed. The big one was white and had a pyramid-shaped scar on his forehead, like a warning triangle. She had read in *The Police* magazine that Hong Kong had almost thirty thousand officers on the street and was reckoned to be the world’s safest metropolis. But then that was on the street.

‘Looking for hashish, lady?’

She shook her head, tried to flash a confident smile, tried to act as she had advised young girls to do when she had been going around schools: to look like someone who knew where she was going, not like someone who had lost the flock. Like prey.

They returned her smile. The only other doorway in the corridor had been bricked up. They took their hands out of their pockets, the cigarettes from their mouths.

‘Looking for fun then?’

‘Wrong door, that’s all,’ she said, turning to go back out. A hand closed around her wrist. Her terror tasted like tinfoil in her mouth. In theory, she knew how to get out of this. Had practised it on a rubber mat in an illuminated gym with an instructor and colleagues gathered around her.

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'Right door, lady. Right door. Fun is this way.' The breath in her face stank of fish, onions and marijuana. In the gym there had only been one adversary.

'No, thanks,' she said, struggling to keep her voice steady.

The black man sidled up, grabbed her other wrist and said in a voice that slipped in and out of falsetto: 'We'll show you the way.'

'Only there's not much to see, is there.'

All three turned towards the swing door.

She knew it said one ninety-two in his passport, but standing there in the doorway that had been built to Hong Kong measurements he looked at least two ten. And twice as wide as only an hour ago. His arms hung down by his sides, slightly away from his body, but he didn't move, didn't stare, didn't snarl, just looked calmly at the white man and repeated: 'Is there, *jau-ye?*'

She felt the white man's fingers tense and relax around her wrist, noticed the black man shift weight from foot to foot.

'*Ng-goy,*' said the man in the doorway.

She felt their hands hesitantly let go.

'Come on,' he said, lightly taking her arm.

She felt the heat in her flushed cheeks as they walked out. Heat produced by tension and shame. Shame at how relieved she was, how tardily her brain had functioned in the situation, how willing she had been to let him sort out two harmless drug dealers who only wanted to ruffle her a little.

He accompanied her up two floors and in through the swing door where he positioned her in front of a lift, pressed the arrow for down, stood beside her and focused his gaze on the luminous figure 11 above the lift door. 'Guest workers,' he said. 'They're alone and bored.'

'I know,' she said defiantly.

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‘Press G for ground floor, turn right and go straight ahead until you’re in Nathan Road.’

‘Please listen to me. You are the only person in Crime Squad with the appropriate expertise to catch serial killers. After all, it was you who caught the Snowman.’

‘True,’ he said. She registered a movement in his eyes, and he ran a finger along his jaw under his right ear. ‘And then I resigned.’

‘Resigned? Went on leave, you mean.’

‘Resigned. As in *finished*.’

It was only now that she noticed the unnatural protrusion of his right jawbone.

‘Gunnar Hagen says that when you left Oslo he agreed to give you leave until further notice.’

The man smiled, and Kaja saw how it changed his face completely. ‘That’s because Hagen can’t get it into his head . . .’ He paused, and the smile vanished. His eyes were directed towards the light above the lift that now read ‘5’. ‘Nonetheless, I don’t work for the police any longer.’

‘We need you . . .’ She inhaled. Knew that she was skating on thin ice, but that she had to act before she lost sight of him again. ‘And you need us.’

His eyes shifted back to her. ‘What on earth makes you think that?’

‘You owe the Triad money. You buy dope off the street in a baby’s bottle. You live . . .’ She grimaced. ‘. . . here. And you don’t have a passport.’

‘I’m enjoying myself here. What do I need a passport for?’

The lift pinged, the door creaked open, and hot, stinking air rose off the bodies inside.

‘I’m not going!’ Kaja said, louder than she had anticipated,

and noticed the faces looking at her with a mixture of impatience and obvious curiosity.

‘Yes, you are,’ he said, placing a hand in the middle of her back and pushing her gently but firmly inside. She was immediately surrounded by human bodies closing in on her and making it impossible for her to move or even turn. She twisted her head in time to see the doors gliding to.

‘Harry!’ she shouted.

But he had already gone.

## 4

# Sex Pistols

THE OLD HOSTEL OWNER PLACED A THOUGHTFUL finger on his forehead under the turban and looked at her long and hard. Then he picked up the telephone and dialled a number. He said a few words in Arabic and rang off. 'Wait,' he said. 'Maybe, maybe not.'

Kaja smiled and nodded.

They sat observing each other from either side of the narrow table that served as a reception desk.

Then the phone rang. He picked it up, listened and put it down without a word.

'One hundred and fifty thousand dollars,' he said.

'One hundred and fifty?' she repeated in utter disbelief.

'Hong Kong dollars, lady.'

Kaja did some mental arithmetic. That would be about one hundred and thirty thousand Norwegian kroner. Roughly double what she had been authorised to pay.

\* \* \*

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It was past midnight, and almost forty hours since she had slept, when she found him. She had trawled H-Block for three hours. Had sketched out a map of the interior as she moved through hostels, cafes, snack bars, massage clubs and prayer rooms until she arrived at the cheapest rooms and dormitories where the imported labour force from Africa and Pakistan stayed, those who had no rooms, just cubicles without doors, without TVs, without air conditioning and without a private life. The black night porter who admitted Kaja looked at the photo for a long time and at the hundred-dollar bill she was holding for even longer before he took it and pointed to one of the cubicles.

Harry Hole, she thought. Gotcha.

He was lying supine on a mattress, breathing almost without sound. He had a deep frown on his forehead, and the prominent jawbone under his right ear was even more defined now that he was asleep. From the other cubicles she heard men coughing and snoring. Water dripped from the ceiling, hitting the brick floor with deep, disgruntled sighs. The opening to the cubicle let in a cold, blue stripe of light from the neon tubes in reception. She saw a clothes cupboard in front of the window, a chair and a plastic bottle of water beside the mattress. There was a bitter-sweet smell, like burned rubber. Smoke rose from a cigarette end in an ashtray beside the baby's bottle on the floor. She sat down on the chair and discovered that he was holding something in his hand. A greasy, yellowish-brown clump. Kaja had seen enough hash the year she worked in a patrol car to know this was not hash.

It was almost two o'clock when he awoke.

She heard a tiny change in the rhythm of his breathing, and then the whites of his eyes shone in the dark.

'Rakel?' He whispered it. And went back to sleep.

Half an hour later he opened his eyes wide, gave a start, cast around and made a grab for something under the mattress.

'It's me,' Kaja whispered. 'Kaja Solness.'

The body at her feet stopped in mid-movement. Then it collapsed and fell back on the mattress.

'What the hell are you doing here?' he groaned, his voice still thick with sleep.

'Fetching you,' she said.

He chuckled, his eyes closed. 'Fetching me? Still?'

She took out an envelope, leaned forward and held it up in front of him. He opened one eye.

'Plane ticket,' she said. 'To Oslo.'

The eye closed again. 'Thanks, but I'm staying here.'

'If I can find you, it's only a matter of time before they do, too.'

He didn't answer. She waited while listening to his breathing and the water that dripped and sighed. Then he opened his eyes again, rubbed under his right ear and hoisted himself up onto his elbows.

'Got a smoke?'

She shook her head. He threw off the sheet, stood up and went over to the cupboard. He was surprisingly pale considering he had been living in a subtropical climate, and so lean that his ribs showed, even on his back. His build suggested that at one time he had been athletic, but now the wasted muscles appeared as sharp shadows under the white skin. He opened the cupboard. She was amazed to see that his clothes lay folded in neat piles. He put on a T-shirt and a pair of jeans, the ones he had been wearing the day before, and with some difficulty tugged a creased packet of cigarettes out from his pocket.

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He slipped into a pair of flip-flops and edged past her with a click of his lighter.

‘Come on,’ he said softly as he passed. ‘Supper.’

It was nearly three in the morning. Grey iron shutters had been pulled down over shops and restaurants in Chungking. Apart from at Li Yuan’s.

‘So how did you wind up in Hong Kong?’ Kaja asked, looking at Harry, who, in an inelegant but effective way, was shovelling shiny glass noodles into his mouth from the white soup bowl.

‘I flew. Are you cold?’

Kaja automatically removed her hands from under her thighs. ‘But why here?’

‘I was on my way to Manila. Hong Kong was only supposed to be a stopover.’

‘The Philippines. What were you going to do there?’

‘Throw myself into a volcano.’

‘Which one?’

‘Well, which ones can you name?’

‘None. I’ve just read that there are loads of them. Aren’t some of them in . . . er, Luzon?’

‘Not bad. There are eighteen volcanoes in all, and three of them are in Luzon. I wanted to go up Mount Mayon. Two and a half thousand metres. A stratovolcano.’

‘Volcano with steep sides formed by layer upon layer of lava after an eruption.’

Harry stopped chewing and looked at her. ‘Any eruptions in modern times?’

‘Loads. Thirty?’ **Copyrighted Material**

'Records say forty-seven since 1616. Last one in 2002. Can be held to account for at least three thousand murders.'

'What happened?'

'The pressure built up.'

'I mean to you.'

'I'm talking about me.' She fancied she saw a hint of a smile. 'I exploded and started drinking on the plane. I was ordered off in Hong Kong.'

'There are several flights to Manila.'

'I realised that apart from volcanoes Manila has nothing that Hong Kong doesn't have.'

'Such as?'

'Such as distance from Norway.'

Kaja nodded. She had read the reports on the Snowman case.

'And most importantly,' he said, pointing with a chopstick, 'Hong Kong's got Li Yuan's glass noodles. Try them. That's reason enough to apply for citizenship.'

'That and opium?'

It was not her style to be so direct, but she knew she would have to swallow her natural shyness. This was her one shot at achieving what she had come to do.

He shrugged and concentrated on the noodles.

'Do you smoke opium regularly?'

'Irregularly.'

'And why do you do that?'

He answered with food in his mouth. 'So that I don't drink. I'm an alkie. There, for example, is another advantage of Hong Kong compared with Manila. Lower sentences for dope. And cleaner prisons.'

'I knew about your alcoholism, but are you a drug addict?'

'Define drug addict.'

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‘Do you *have* to take drugs?’

‘No, but I want to.’

‘Why?’

‘To numb the senses. This sounds like a job interview for a job I don’t want, Solness. Have you ever smoked opium?’

Kaja shook her head. She had tried marijuana a few times backpacking around South America but had not been particularly fond of it.

‘But the Chinese have. Two hundred years ago the British imported opium from India to improve the trade balance. They turned half of China into junkies just like that.’ He flicked the fingers of his free hand. ‘And when, sensibly enough, the Chinese authorities banned opium, the British went to war for their right to drug China into submission. Imagine Colombia bombing New York because the Americans confiscated a bit of cocaine on the border.’

‘What’s your point?’

‘I see it as my duty, as a European, to smoke some of the shit we have imported into this country.’

Kaja could hear herself laughing. She really needed to get some sleep.

‘I was tailing you when you did the deal,’ she said. ‘I saw how you do it. There was money in the bottle when you put it down. And opium afterwards. Isn’t that right?’

‘Mm,’ Harry said with a mouth full of noodles. ‘Have you worked at the Narc Unit?’

She shook her head. ‘Why the baby’s bottle?’

Harry stretched his arms above his head. The soup bowl in front of him was empty. ‘Opium stinks something awful. If you’ve got a ball of it in your pocket or in foil, the narco dogs can sniff you out even in a huge crowd. There is no money back on baby’s

bottles, so no chance of some kid or some drunk nicking it during a handover. That has happened.'

Kaja nodded slowly. He had started to relax, it was just a question of persisting. Anyone who hasn't spoken their mother tongue for a while gets chatty when they meet a compatriot. It's natural. Keep going.

'You like horses?'

He was chewing on a toothpick. 'Not really. They're so bloody moody.'

'But you like betting on them?'

'I like it, but compulsive gambling is not one of my vices.'

He smiled, and again it struck her how his smile transformed him, made him human, accessible, boyish. And she was reminded of the glimpse of open sky she had caught over Melden Row.

'Gambling is a poor winning strategy long term. But if you have nothing left to lose, it's the only strategy. I bet everything I had, plus a fair bit I didn't have, on one single race.'

'You put everything you had on one horse?'

'Two. A quinella. You pick out the two horses to come first and second, regardless which of the two is the winner.'

'And you borrowed money from the Triad?'

For the first time she saw astonishment in Harry's eyes.

'What makes a serious Chinese gangster cartel lend money to an opium-smoking foreigner who has nothing to lose?'

'Well,' Harry said, producing a cigarette, 'as a foreigner you have access to the VIP box at Happy Valley racecourse for the first three weeks after your passport has been stamped.' He lit his cigarette and blew smoke at the ceiling fan, which was turning so slowly that the flies were taking rides on it. 'There are dress codes, so I had a suit made. The first two weeks were enough to give me a taste for it. I met Herman Klau, a South African who

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earned himself a fortune in minerals in Africa. He taught me how to lose quite a lot of money in style. I simply loved the concept. The evening before race day in the third week Kluit invited me to dinner, at which he entertained the guests by exhibiting his collection of African torture instruments from Goma. And that was where I got insider info from Kluit's chauffeur. The favourite for one of the races was injured, but this titbit was being kept secret because it was going to run anyway. The point was that it was such a clear favourite that a minus pool came into question, that is, it would be impossible to earn any money by betting on it. However, there was money to be earned by hedging your bets with several of the others. For example, with quinellas. But, of course, that would require quite a bit of capital if you were going to earn anything. I was given a loan by Kluit on the basis of my honest face. And a made-to-measure suit.' Harry studied the glow of his cigarette and seemed to be smiling at the thought.

'And?' Kaja asked.

'And the favourite won by six lengths.' Harry shrugged. 'When I explained to Kluit that I didn't own a bean he seemed genuinely sorry and explained politely that, as a businessman, he was obliged to stick to his business principles. He assured me that these did not include the use of Congolese torture weapons, but quite simply selling debts to the Triad with a discount. Which, he conceded, was not a lot better. But in my case he would wait thirty-six hours before he sold so that I could get out of Hong Kong.'

'But you didn't go?'

'Sometimes I'm a bit slow on the uptake.'

'And afterwards?'

Harry opened his hands. 'This. Chungking.'

'Future plans?' **Copyrighted Material**

Harry shrugged and went to stub out his cigarette. And Kaja was reminded of the record cover Even had shown her with the picture of Sid Vicious from the Sex Pistols. And the music playing in the background, 'No fu-ture, no fu-ture.'

He stubbed out his cigarette. 'You've heard what you need, Kaja Solness.'

'Need?' She frowned. 'I don't understand.'

'Don't you?' He stood up. 'Do you think I babble on about opium and debts because I'm one lonely Norwegian meeting another?'

She didn't answer.

'It's because I want you to appreciate that I am not the man you all need. So that you can go back without feeling you haven't done your job. So that you don't get into trouble in stairwells, and I can sleep in peace without wondering whether you will lead my creditors straight to me.'

She looked at him. There was something severe, ascetic, about him, yet this was contradicted by the amusement dancing in his eyes, saying that you didn't need to take everything so seriously. Or to be more exact: that he didn't give a flying fuck.

'Wait.' Kaja opened her bag and took out a small, red booklet, passed it to him and observed the reaction. Saw incredulity spread across his face as he flicked through it.

'Shit, looks just like my passport.'

'It is.'

'I doubt Crime Squad had the budget for this.'

'Your debts have sunk in value,' she lied. 'I got a discount.'

'I hope for your sake you did because I have no intention of returning to Oslo.'

Kaja subjected him to a long stare. Dreading it. There was no way out now. She was being forced to play her final card, the

one Gunnar Hagen had said she should leave to last if the old bastard proved obdurate.

‘There is one more thing,’ Kaja said, bracing herself.

One of Harry’s eyebrows shot into the air; perhaps he detected something in her intonation.

‘It’s about your father, Harry.’ She could hear that she had instinctively used his first name. Convinced herself it was meant sincerely, not just for effect.

‘My father?’ He said this as if it came as something of a surprise that he had one.

‘Yes. We contacted him to find out if he knew where you were living. The long and short of it is he’s ill.’

She looked down at the table.

Heard him exhale. The drowsiness was back in his voice. ‘Seriously ill?’

‘Yes. And I’m sorry to be the one to have to tell you this.’

She still did not dare to raise her gaze. Ashamed. Waited. Listened to the machine-gun sounds of Cantonese on the TV behind Li Yuan’s counter. Swallowed and waited. She would have to sleep soon.

‘When does the plane go?’

‘At eight,’ she said. ‘I’ll pick you up in three hours outside here.’

‘I’ll get there under my own steam. There are a couple of things I have to fix first.’

He held out his palm. She questioned him with her eyes.

‘For that I need the passport. And then you should eat. Get a bit of meat on your bones.’

She wavered. Then she handed him the passport and the ticket.

‘I trust you,’ she said.

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He sent her a blank look.

Then he was gone.

The clock above gate C4 in Chek Lap Kok Airport showed a quarter to eight, and Kaja had given up. Of course he wasn't coming. It was a natural reflex for animals and humans to hide when hurt. And Harry Hole was definitely hurt. Reports on the Snowman case had described in detail the murders of all the women. But Gunnar Hagen had added what had not been included. How Harry Hole's ex-partner, Rakel, and her son, Oleg, had ended up in the clutches of the deranged killer. How she and her son had fled the country as soon as the case was over. And how Harry had handed in his resignation and slung his hook. He had been more hurt than she had realised.

Kaja had already handed in her boarding card, was on her way up to the boarding bridge and beginning to consider the formulation of her report on the failed mission when she saw him jogging through the slanted sunbeams that penetrated the terminal building. He was carrying a plain holdall over his shoulder, a tax-free bag and was puffing away furiously at a cigarette. He stopped at the gate. But instead of giving the waiting personnel his boarding card he put down his bag and sent Kaja a despairing look.

She went back to the gate.

'Problems?' she asked.

'Sorry,' he said. 'Can't come.'

'Why not?'

He pointed to the tax-free bag. 'Just remembered that in Norway the allowance per person is one carton of cigarettes. I've got two. So unless

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He didn't bat an eyelid.

She rolled her eyes heavenwards, trying not to look relieved. 'Give it here.'

'Thank you very much,' he said, opening the bag, which she happened to notice did not contain any bottles, and passing her an opened carton of Camel with one pack already gone.

She walked in front of him to the plane so that he would not be able to see her smiles.

Kaja stayed awake long enough to catch take-off, Hong Kong disappearing beneath them and Harry's eyes watching the trolley as it approached fitfully with its joyful clink of bottles. And him closing his eyes and answering the stewardess with a barely audible 'No, thank you.'

She wondered whether Gunnar Hagen was right, whether the man beside her was really what they needed.

Then she was gone, unconscious, dreaming that she was standing in front of a closed door. She heard a lone, frozen bird-call from the forest and it sounded so strange because the sun was shining high in the sky. She opened the door . . .

She woke with her head lolling on his shoulder and dried saliva at the corners of her mouth. The captain's voice announced that they were approaching the runway at London Heathrow.

# 5

## The Park

MARIT OLSEN LIKED TO SKI IN THE MOUNTAINS. BUT she hated jogging. She hated her wheezing gasps after only a hundred metres, the tremor-like vibrations in the ground as she planted her foot, the slightly bemused looks from walkers and the images that appeared when she saw herself through their eyes: the quivering chins, the flab that bounced around in the stretched tracksuit and the helpless, open-mouthed, fish-out-of-water expression she herself had seen on very overweight people training. That was one of the reasons she scheduled her three runs per week in Frogner Park for ten o'clock at night: the place was as good as deserted. The people who were there saw as little as possible of her as she puffed her way through the pitch dark between the few lamps illuminating the paths which criss-crossed Oslo's largest park. And of those few who saw her there were fewer who recognised the Socialist MP for Finnmark. Forget 'recognised'. There were few people who had ever seen Marit Olsen. When she spoke – usually on behalf of her home region – she did not attract the attention that others, her more photogenic colleagues, did. In addition, she had not

said or done anything wrong in the course of the two sessions she had been sitting as a Stortinget representative. At least that was how she explained it to herself. The *Finnmark Dagblad* editor's explanation, that she was a political lightweight, was no more than malicious wordplay on her physical appearance. The editor had not, however, ruled out the possibility that one day she might be seen in a Socialist government, as she fulfilled the most telling requirements: she was not educated, not male and not from Oslo.

Well, he might have been right that her strengths did not lie in large, complicated castles in the air. But she had a common touch, she was folksy enough to know the opinions of ordinary men and women, and she could be their voice here among all the self-centred, self-satisfied voters in the capital. For Marit Olsen shot from the hip. That was her real qualification, that was what had taken her to where she was, after all. With her verbal intelligence and wit – which southerners liked to call 'northern Norwegian' and 'gritty' – she was a sure winner in the few debates in which she had been allowed to participate. It was just a question of time before they would have to take note of her. So long as she could get rid of these kilos. Surveys proved that people had less confidence in overweight public figures; they were subconsciously perceived to be lacking in self-control.

She came to an incline, clenched her teeth and slowed her pace, went into what seemed very much like a walk, if she was honest. Power-walk. Yes, that's what it was. The march towards power. Her weight was decreasing, her eligibility for office increasing.

She heard the crunch of gravel behind her and automatically her back went rigid, her pulse rose a few further notches. It was the same sound she had heard while out jogging three days ago.

And two days before that. Both times someone had been running behind her for close on two minutes before the sound had gone. Marit had turned round on the previous occasion and seen a black tracksuit and a black hood, as though it were a commando training behind her. Except that no one, and especially not a commando, could find any purpose in jogging as slowly as Marit.

Of course, she could not be sure that this was the same person, but something about the sound of the footsteps told her it was. There was just a bit of the slope up to the Monolith, then it was an easy downhill run home, to Skøyen, her husband and a reassuringly unprepossessing, overfed Rottweiler. The steps came closer. And now it was not so wonderful that it was ten at night and the park was dark and deserted. Marit Olsen was frightened of several things, but primarily she was frightened of foreigners. Yes, indeed, she knew it was xenophobia and ran counter to party policy, but fearing whatever is alien nevertheless constitutes a sensible survival strategy. Right now she wished she had voted against all the immigrant-friendly bills her party had pushed, and that she had shot from her notorious hip a bit more.

Her body was moving all too slowly, her thigh muscles ached, her lungs were screaming for air, and she knew that soon she would not be able to move at all. Her brain tried to combat the fear, tried to tell her she was not exactly an obvious victim for rape.

Fear had borne her aloft, she could see over the hill now, down to Madserud allé. A car was reversing out of a garden gate. She could make it, there was little more than a hundred metres left. Marit Olsen ran onto the slippery grass, down the slope, only just managing to stay on her feet. She could no longer hear the steps behind her, everything was drowned out by her panting. The car had backed onto the road now, there was a crash of gears

as the driver went from reverse to first. Marit was nearing the bottom, only a few metres left to the road, to the blessed cones of light emitted by the headlamps. Her considerable body weight had a slight start on her in the descent, and now it was relentlessly pulling her forward. Such that her legs could no longer keep up. She fell headlong, into the road, into the light. Her stomach, encased in sweaty polyester, hit the tarmac, and she half slid, half rolled forward. Then Marit lay still, the bitter taste of road dust in her mouth and her grazed palms stinging from contact with gravel.

Someone was standing over her. Grabbed her shoulders. With a groan she rolled onto her side and held her arms over her face in defence. Not a commando, just an elderly man wearing a hat. The car door behind him was open.

‘Are you alright, frøken?’ he enquired.

‘What d’you think?’ said Marit Olsen, feeling the anger boil inside her.

‘Hang on! I’ve seen you somewhere before.’

‘Well, that’s a turn-up,’ she said, waving away his helping hand and struggling noisily to her feet.

‘Aren’t you in that comedy programme?’

‘You . . .’ she said, staring into the dark, silent void of the park and massaging her notorious hip, ‘. . . mind your own bloody business, grandpa.’

## 6

# Homecoming

A VOLVO AMAZON, THE LAST TO ROLL OUT OF THE Volvo factory in 1970, had stopped in front of the pedestrian crossing by the arrivals terminal at Gardemoen Airport in Oslo.

A crocodile of nursery children paraded past the car in chafing rain gear. Some of them glanced with curiosity at the strange old car with rally stripes along the bonnet, and at the two men behind the windscreen wipers swishing away the morning rain.

The man in the passenger seat, *Politioverbetjent*, shortened to POB, Gunnar Hagen, knew that the sight of children walking hand in hand ought to make him smile and think of solidarity, consideration for others and a society where everyone looked after everyone else. But Hagen's first association was a search party hunting for a person they expected to find dead. That was what working as the head of Crime Squad did to you. Or, as some wit had written in English on Harry Hole's office door: I see dead people.

'What the heck's a nursery class doing at an airport?' asked the man in the driver's seat. His name was Bjørn Holm, and the Amazon was his dearest possession. The mere smell of the noisy

but uncannily efficient heater, the sweat-ingrained imitation leather and the dusty rear shelf gave him inner peace. Especially if it was accompanied by the engine at the right revs, that is about eighty kilometres an hour on the flat, and Hank Williams on the cassette player. Bjørn Holm from Krimteknisk, the Forensics Unit in Bryn, was a hillbilly from Skreia with snakeskin cowboy boots, a moon face and bulging eyes which lent him a constantly surprised expression. This face had caused more than one leader of an investigation to misjudge Bjørn Holm. The truth was that he was the greatest crime-scene talent since the glory days of Weber. Holm was wearing a soft suede jacket with fringes and a knitted Rastafarian hat from under which grew the most vigorous, intensely red sideburns Hagen had seen this side of the North Sea and they as good as covered his cheeks.

Holm swung the Amazon into the short-term car park where it stopped with a gasp, and the two men got out. Hagen turned up his coat collar, which of course did nothing to prevent the rain from bombarding his shiny pate. It was, by the way, wreathed by black hair so thick and so fertile that some suspected Gunnar Hagen of having perfectly normal hairgrowth but an eccentric hairdresser.

‘Tell me, is that jacket really waterproof?’ Hagen asked as they strode towards the entrance.

‘Nope,’ said Holm.

Kaja Solness had called them while they were in the car and informed them that the Scandinavian Airlines plane had landed ten minutes early. And that she had lost Harry Hole.

After entering through the swing doors, Gunnar Hagen looked around, saw Kaja sitting on her suitcase by the taxi counter, signalled with a brief nod and headed for the door to the customs hall. He and Holm slipped in as it opened for passengers leaving.

A guard made to stop them, but nodded, indeed almost bowed, when Hagen held up his ID card and barked a curt 'Police'.

Hagen turned right and walked straight past the customs officials and their dogs, past the metal counters that reminded him of the trolleys at the Pathology Institute, and into the cubicle behind.

There he came to such a sudden halt that Holm walked into him from behind. A familiar voice wheezed between clenched teeth. 'Hi, boss. Regretfully, I'm unable to stand to attention right now.'

Bjørn Holm peered over the unit leader's shoulder.

It was a sight that would haunt him for years.

Bent over the back of a chair was the man who was a living legend not just at Oslo Police HQ but in every police station across Norway, for good or ill. A man with whom Holm himself had worked closely. But not as closely as the male customs official standing behind the legend with a latex-clad hand partially obscured by the legend's pale white buttocks.

'He's mine,' Hagen said to the official, waving his ID card. 'Let him go.'

The official stared at Hagen and seemed reluctant to release him, but when an older officer with gold stripes on his epaulettes came in and nodded briefly with closed eyes, the customs official twisted his hand round one last time and removed it. The victim gave a loud groan.

'Get your pants on, Harry,' Hagen said and turned away.

Harry pulled up his trousers and said to the official peeling off the latex glove, 'Was it good for you, too?'

Kaja Solness rose from the suitcase when her three colleagues came back through the door. Bjørn Holm went to drive the car

round while Gunnar Hagen went to get something to drink from the kiosk.

‘Are you often checked?’ Kaja asked.

‘Every time,’ Harry said.

‘Don’t think I’ve ever been stopped at customs.’

‘I know.’

‘How do you know?’

‘Because there are a thousand small telltale signs they look for, and you have none of them. Whereas I have at least half.’

‘Do you think customs officers are so prejudiced?’

‘Well, have you ever smuggled anything?’

‘No.’ She laughed. ‘OK then, I have. But if they’re so good, they should have seen that you’re also a policeman. And let you through.’

‘They did see.’

‘Come on. That only happens in films.’

‘They saw all right. They saw a fallen policeman.’

‘Oh yes?’ said Kaja.

Harry rummaged for his pack of cigarettes. ‘Let your eyes drift over to the taxi counter. There’s a man with narrow eyes, a bit slanted. See him?’

She nodded.

‘He’s tugged at his belt twice since we came out. As if there was something heavy hanging from it. A pair of handcuffs or a truncheon. An automatic reaction if you’ve been in patrol cars or in the custody block for a few years.’

‘I’ve worked in patrol cars, and I’ve never –’

‘He’s working for Narc now and keeps an eye open for people who look a bit too relieved after passing through customs. Or go straight to the toilet because they can’t stand having the goods up their rectum any longer. Or suitcases that change hands

between a naive, helpful passenger and the smuggler who got the idiot to carry the luggage containing all the dope through customs.'

She tilted her head and squinted at Harry with a little smile playing on her lips. 'Or he might be a normal guy whose pants keep slipping down, and he's waiting for his mother. And you're mistaken.'

'Certainly,' said Harry, looking at his watch and the clock on the wall. 'I'm always making mistakes. Is that really the time?'

The Volvo Amazon glided onto the motorway as the street lights came on.

In the front seats Holm and Solness were deep in conversation as Townes van Zandt sang in controlled sobs on the cassette player. On the back seat, Gunnar Hagen was stroking the smooth pig-leather briefcase he was holding on his lap.

'I wish I could say you looked good,' he said in a low voice.

'Jet lag, boss,' Harry said, who was lying more than sitting.

'What happened to your jaw?'

'It's a long, boring story.'

'Anyway, welcome back. Sorry about the circumstances.'

'I thought I had handed in my resignation.'

'You've done that before.'

'So how many times do you want it?'

Gunnar Hagen looked at his former inspector and lowered his eyebrows and voice even further. 'As I said, I'm sorry about the circumstances. And I appreciate that the last case took a lot out of you. That you and your loved ones were involved in a way which . . . well, could make anyone wish for a different life. But this is your job, Harry, this is what you're good at.'

Harry sniffed as though he had already contracted the typical homecoming cold.

‘Two murders, Harry. We’re not even sure how they’ve been carried out, only that they’re identical. But thanks to recent dearly bought experiences, we know what we’re facing.’ The POB paused.

‘Doesn’t hurt to say the words, boss.’

‘I’m not so sure about that.’

Harry looked out at the snow-free, rolling, brown countryside. ‘People have cried wolf a number of times, but events have shown that a serial killer is a rare beast.’

‘I know,’ Hagen nodded. ‘The Snowman is the only one we’ve seen in this country during my period of office. But we’re pretty certain this time. The victims have nothing to do with each other, and the sedative found in their blood is identical.’

‘That’s something. Good luck.’

‘Harry . . .’

‘Find someone qualified for the job, boss.’

‘*You’re* qualified.’

‘I’ve gone to pieces.’

Hagen took a deep breath. ‘Then we’ll put you together again.’

‘Beyond repair,’ Harry said.

‘You’re the only person in this country with the skills and the experience to deal with a serial killer.’

‘Fly in an American.’

‘You know very well things don’t work like that.’

‘Then I’m sorry.’

‘Are you? Two people dead so far, Harry. Young women . . .’

Harry waved a dismissive hand when Hagen opened his briefcase and pulled out a brown file.

‘I mean it, boss. Thank you for buying my passport and all

that, but I've finished with photos and reports full of blood and gore.'

Hagen sent Harry a wounded expression, but still kept the file on his lap.

'Peruse this, that's all I'm asking. And don't tell anyone we're working on this case.'

'Oh? Why's that?'

'It's complicated. Just don't mention it to anyone, OK?'

The conversation at the front of the car had died, and Harry focused on the back of Kaja's head. As Bjørn Holm's Amazon had been made long before anyone used the term 'whiplash', there was no headrest, and Harry could see her slim neck, since her hair had been pinned up, see the white down on her skin, and he mused on how vulnerable she was, how quickly things changed, how much could be destroyed in a matter of seconds. That was what life was: a process of destruction, a disintegration from what at the outset was perfect. The only suspense involved was whether we would be destroyed in one sudden act or slowly. It was a sad thought. Yet he clung to it. Until they were through Ibsen Tunnel, a grey, anonymous component of the capital's traffic machinery that could have been in any city in the world. Nevertheless it was at that particular moment that he felt it. A huge, unalloyed pleasure at being here. In Oslo. Home. The feeling was so overwhelming that for a few seconds he was oblivious to why he had returned.

Harry gazed at Sofies gate 5 as the Amazon sailed out of view behind him. There was more graffiti on the front of the building than when he had left, but the blue paint beneath was the same.

So, he had refused to take the case. He had a father lying in

the hospital. That was the only reason he was here. What he didn't tell them was that if he'd had the choice of knowing about his father's illness or not, he would have chosen not to know. Because he hadn't returned out of love. He had returned out of shame.

Harry peered up at the two black windows on the second floor that were his.

Then he opened the door and walked into the backyard. The rubbish container was standing where it always did. Harry pushed open the lid. He had promised Hagen he would take a look at the case file. Mostly so that his boss would not lose face – after all, the passport had cost Crime Squad quite a few kroner. Harry dropped the file onto the burst plastic bags leaking coffee grounds, nappies, rotten fruit and potato peelings. He inhaled and wondered at how surprisingly international the smell of rubbish was.

Nothing had been touched in his two-room flat, yet something was different. A powder-grey hue, as though someone had just left but their frosty breath was still there. He went into the bedroom, put down his bag and fished out the unopened carton of cigarettes. Everything was the same there, grey as the skin of a two-day-old corpse. He fell back onto the bed. Closed his eyes. Greeted the familiar sounds. Such as the drip from the hole in the gutter onto the lead flashing around the window frame. It wasn't the slow, comforting drip-drip from the ceiling in Hong Kong, but a feverish drumming, somewhere in the transition between dripping and running water, like a reminder that time was passing, the seconds were racing, the end of a number line was approaching. It had made him think of La Linea, the Italian cartoon figure who after four minutes always ended up falling off the edge of the **Copyrighted Material**

Harry knew that there was a half-full bottle of Jim Beam in the cupboard under the sink. Knew that he could start where he had left off in this flat. Shit, he had been wrecked even before he got into the taxi to the airport that day several months ago. No wonder he had not managed to drag himself to Manila.

He could go straight into the kitchen now and pour the contents down the sink.

Harry groaned.

Wondering who she resembled was so much nonsense. He knew who she resembled. She resembled Rakel. They all resembled Rakel.

# 7

## Gallows

‘BUT I’M SCARED, RASMUS,’ SAID MARIT OLSEN. ‘THAT’S what I am!’

‘I know,’ said Rasmus Olsen, in that muted, congenial voice that had accompanied and comforted his wife for more than twenty-five years through political decisions, driving tests, bouts of fury and the odd panic attack. ‘It’s just natural,’ he said, putting his arm round her. ‘You work hard, you have a lot on your mind. Your brain doesn’t have any spare capacity to shut out that kind of thought.’

‘That kind of thought?’ she said, turning to face him on the sofa. She had lost interest in the DVD they were watching – *Love Actually* – a long time before. ‘That kind of thought, that kind of rubbish, is that what you mean?’

‘The important thing is not what I think,’ he said, his fingertips poised to touch. ‘The important—’

‘—thing is what *you* think,’ she mimicked. ‘For Christ’s sake, Rasmus, you’ve gotta stop watching that Dr Phil show.’

He released a silky smooth chuckle. ‘I’m just saying that you, as a member of Stortinget, can obviously ask for a bodyguard to

accompany you if you feel threatened. But is that what you want?’

‘Mmm,’ she purred as his fingers began to massage the exact spot where she knew he knew she loved it. ‘What do you mean by *what you want?*’

‘Give it some thought. What do you imagine is going to happen?’

Marit Olsen gave it some thought. Closed her eyes and felt his fingers massaging calm and harmony into her body. She had met Rasmus when she had been working at the Norwegian Employment Service in Alta, in Finnmark. She had been elected as an official for NTL, a union for state employees, and they had sent her south on a training course to the Sørmarka conference centre. There a thin man with vivid blue eyes beneath a fast-receding hairline had approached her the first evening. He had talked in a way that was reminiscent of redemption-happy Christians at the youth club in Alta. Except that he was talking politics. He worked in the secretariat for the Socialist Party, helping MPs with practical office jobs, travel, the press and even, on the odd occasion, writing a speech for them.

Rasmus had bought her a beer, asked if she wanted to dance and after four increasingly slow evergreen numbers with increasingly close physical contact had asked if she wanted to join him. Not in his room, but in the party.

After returning home she had started going to party meetings in Alta, and in the evenings she and Rasmus had long telephone conversations about what they had done and thought that day. Of course, Marit had never said it aloud: that sometimes she thought the best time they had spent together was when they were two thousand kilometres apart. Then the Appointments Committee had rung put her on a list and hey presto, she was

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elected to Alta Town Council. Two years later she was the vice chairperson of Alta Socialist Party, the year after she was sitting on the County Council, and then there was another telephone call, and this time it was the Appointments Committee for Stortinget.

And now she had a tiny office in Stortinget, a partner who helped her with her speeches, and prospects of climbing the ladder so long as everything went to plan. And she avoided blunders.

‘They’ll detail a policeman to keep an eye on me,’ she said. ‘And the press will want to know why a woman MP no one has ever heard of should be walking around with a bloody body-guard at the taxpayer’s expense. And when they find out why – she *suspected* someone had been following her in the park – they will write that with *that* kind of reasoning every woman in Oslo will be asking for state-subsidised police protection. I don’t want any protection. Drop it.’

Rasmus laughed silently and used his fingers to massage his approval.

The wind howled through the leafless trees in Frogner Park. A duck with its head drawn deep into its plumage drifted across the pitch-black surface of the lake. Rotting leaves stuck to the tiles of the empty pools at Frogner Lido. The place seemed abandoned for all eternity, a lost world. The wind blew up a storm in the deep pool and sang its monotonous lament beneath the ten-metre-high diving tower that stood out against the night sky like a gallows.

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## 8

### Snow Patrøl

IT WAS THREE O'CLOCK IN THE AFTERNOON WHEN Harry awoke. He opened his bag, put in a set of clean clothes, found a woollen coat in the wardrobe and went out. The drizzle roused Harry enough for him to look moderately sober as he entered the brown, smoky rooms of Schrøder's. His table was taken, so he went into the corner, under the TV.

He looked around. He spotted a couple of faces he hadn't seen before, hunched over beer glasses, otherwise time had stood still. Rita came and placed a white mug and a steel jug of coffee in front of him.

'Harry,' she said. Not as a form of welcome, but to confirm that it was indeed he.

Harry nodded. 'Hi, Rita. Old newspapers?'

Rita scuttled off to the back room and returned with a pile of yellowing papers. Harry had never been given a clear explanation as to why they kept newspapers at Schrøder's, but he had benefited from this arrangement on more than one occasion.

'Been a long time,' said Rita and was gone. And Harry

remembered what he liked about Schrøder's, apart from its being the closest taproom to his flat. The short sentences. And respect for your private life. Your return was noted; no elucidation was required.

Harry downed two mugs of the surprisingly unpleasant coffee while flicking through the newspapers in a fast-forward kind of way to furnish himself with a general perspective of what had happened in the kingdom over the last months. Not much, as usual. Which was what he liked best about Norway.

Someone had won *Norwegian Idol*, a celeb had been eliminated from a dance competition, a footballer in the third division had been caught taking cocaine, and Lene Galtung, daughter of the shipping magnate Anders Galtung, had pre-inherited some of the millions and got engaged to a better-looking but presumably less affluent investor called Tony. The editor of *Liberal*, Arve Støp, wrote that for a nation wanting to stand out as a social-democratic model, it was beginning to be embarrassing that Norway was still a monarchy. Nothing had changed.

In the December newspapers Harry saw the first articles about the murders. He recognised Kaja's description of the crime scene, a basement in an office complex under construction in Nydalen. The cause of death was unclear, but the police suspected foul play.

Harry thumbed through, preferring to read about a politician who boasted that he was standing down to spend more time with his family.

Schrøder's newspaper archives were by no means complete, but the second murder appeared in a paper dated a couple of weeks later.

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The woman had been found behind a wrecked Datsun dumped at the edge of a wood by Lake Daudsjøen in Maridalen. The police did not rule out a 'criminal act', but nor did they reveal any details about the cause of death.

Harry's eyes scanned the article and established that the reason for police silence was the usual: they had no leads, *nada*, the radar was sweeping across an open sea of nothingness.

Only two murders. Yet Hagen had seemed so certain of his facts when he said this was a serial killer. So, what was the connection? What was it that the press didn't say? Harry could feel his brain beginning to pursue the old, familiar paths; he cursed himself for his inability to refrain and continued to leaf through.

When the steel coffee jug was empty, he left a crumpled banknote on the table and went into the street. Tightened his coat around him and squinted up at the grey sky.

He hailed an unoccupied taxi, which pulled into the kerb. The driver leaned across and the rear door swung open. A trick you rarely saw nowadays, and one Harry decided to reward with a tip. Not just because he could step right in, but because the window in the door had reflected a face at the wheel of a car parked behind Harry.

'Rikshospital,' Harry said, wriggling to the middle of the back seat.

'Righto,' said the driver.

Harry studied the rear-view mirror as they drove off from the kerb. 'Oh, could you go to Sofies gate 5 first, please?'

In Sofies gate the taxi waited, its diesel engine clattering away, while Harry mounted the staircase with long, quick strides and his brain assessed the range of possibilities. The Triad? Herman Kluit? Or good old parangola. The gear lay where he had left it

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before taking off, in the toolbox in the food cupboard. The old, expired ID card. Two sets of Hiatt handcuffs with a spring-loaded arm for speed-cuffing. And the service revolver, a .38 calibre Smith & Wesson.

Returning to the street, he looked neither left nor right, just jumped straight into the taxi.

‘Rikshospital?’ asked the driver.

‘Drive in that direction at any rate,’ Harry answered, studying the mirror as they turned up Stensbergata and then Ullevålsveien. He saw nothing. Which meant one of two things. It was good old paranoia. Or the guy was a pro.

Harry hesitated, then said finally, ‘Rikshospital.’

He continued to keep an eye on the mirror as they passed Vestre Aker Church and Ullevål Hospital. Whatever he did, he mustn’t lead them straight to where he was most vulnerable. Where they would always try to strike. The family.

The country’s biggest hospital was situated high above the town.

Harry paid the driver, who thanked him for the tip and repeated the trick with the rear door.

The facades of the buildings rose in front of Harry and the low cloud cover seemed to sweep away the roofs.

He took a deep breath.

Olav Hole’s smile from the hospital pillow was so gentle and frail that Harry had to swallow.

‘I was in Hong Kong,’ Harry replied. ‘I had to do some thinking.’

‘Did you get it done?’

Harry shrugged. (What do the doctors say?)

‘As little as possible. Hardly a good sign, but I’ve noticed that I prefer it like that. Tackling life’s realities has, as you know, never been our family’s strong suit.’

Harry wondered whether they would talk about Mum. He hoped not.

‘Have you got a job?’

Harry shook his head. His father’s hair hung over his forehead, so tidy and white that Harry assumed it wasn’t his hair but an accessory that had been handed out with the pyjamas and slippers.

‘Nothing?’ his father said.

‘I’ve had an offer to lecture at a police college.’

It was almost the truth. Hagen had offered him that after the Snowman case, as a kind of leave of absence.

‘Teacher?’ His father chuckled cautiously, as if any further effort would be the end of him. ‘I thought one of your principles was never to do anything I had done.’

‘It was never like that.’

‘That’s alright. You’ve always done things your way. This police stuff . . . Well, I suppose I should just be grateful you haven’t done what I did. I’m no model for anyone to follow. You know, after your mother died . . .’

Harry had been sitting in the white hospital room for twenty minutes and already felt a desperate urge to flee.

‘After your mother died, I struggled to make sense of anything. I retreated into my shell, found no joy in anyone’s company. It was as though loneliness brought me closer to her, or so I thought. But it’s a mistake, Harry.’ His father’s smile was as gentle as an angel’s. ‘I know losing Rakel hit you hard, but you mustn’t do what I did. You mustn’t hide, Harry. You mustn’t lock the door and throw away the key.’

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Harry looked down at his hands, nodded and felt ants crawling all over his body. He had to have something, anything.

A nurse came in, introduced himself as Altman, held up a syringe and said, with a slight lisp, that he was going to give ‘Olav’ something to help him sleep. Harry felt like asking if he had something for him, too.

His father lay on his side, the skin on his face sagging; he looked older than he had on his back. He gazed at Harry with heavy, blank eyes.

Harry stood up so abruptly that the chair legs scraped loudly on the floor.

‘Where are you going?’ Olav asked.

‘Out for a smoke,’ Harry said. ‘I won’t be long.’

Harry sat on a low brick wall with a view of the car park and lit up a Camel. On the other side of the motorway he could see Blindern and the university buildings where his father had studied. There were those who asserted that sons always became, to some degree or other, disguised variants of their fathers, that the experience of breaking out was never more than an illusion; you returned; the gravity of blood was not only stronger than your willpower, it was your willpower. To Harry it had always seemed he was evidence of the contrary. So why had seeing his father’s naked, ravaged face on the pillow been like looking into a mirror? Listening to him speak like hearing himself? Hearing him think, the words . . . like a dentist’s drill that found Harry’s nerves with unerring accuracy. Because he was a copy. Shit! Harry’s searching gaze had found a white Corolla in the car park.

Always white, that’s the most anonymous colour. The colour of the Corolla outside Schröder’s, the one with the face behind

the wheel, the same face that had been staring at him with its narrow, slanting eyes less than twenty-four hours before.

Harry tossed away his cigarette and hurried inside. Slackened his pace when he entered the corridor leading to his father's room. He turned where the corridor widened to an open waiting area and pretended to search through a pile of magazines on the table while scanning the people sitting there from the corner of his eye.

The man had hidden himself behind a copy of *Liberal*.

Harry picked up a *Se og Hør* gossip rag with a picture of Lene Galtung and her fiancé and left.

Olav Hole was lying with his eyes closed. Harry bent down and put his ear to Olav's mouth. He was breathing so lightly it was barely audible, but Harry felt a current of air on his cheek.

He sat for a while on the chair beside the bed watching his father as his mind played back poorly edited childhood memories in arbitrary order and with no other central theme than that they were things he remembered clearly.

Then he placed the chair by the door, which he opened a crack, and waited.

It was half an hour before he saw the man come from the waiting area and walk down the corridor. Harry noticed that the squat, robust-looking man was unusually bow-legged; he seemed to be walking with a beach ball stuck between his knees. Before entering a door marked with the international sign for the men's toilet, he plucked at his belt. As if something heavy was hanging from it.

Harry got up and followed.

Stopped outside the toilet and breathed in. It had been a long time. Then he pushed open the door and slipped in.

The toilet was like the whole hospital: clean, nice, new and

too big. Along the main wall there were six cubicle doors, none with a red square above the lock. On the shorter wall four basins, and on the other long wall four porcelain urinals at hip height. The man was standing at a urinal, with his back to Harry. On the wall above him ran a horizontal pipe. It looked solid. Solid enough. Harry took out his revolver and handcuffs. International etiquette in men's toilets is not to look at each other. Eye contact, even unintentional, is cause for murder. Accordingly, the man didn't turn to look at Harry. Not when Harry locked the outside door with infinite care, not when he walked over slowly and not when he placed the gun barrel against the roll of fat between the man's neck and head and whispered what a colleague used to claim all police officers should be allowed to say at least once in their careers: 'Freeze.'

The man did exactly that. Harry could see the gooseflesh appear on the roll of fat as the man stiffened.

'Hands up.'

The man lifted a couple of short, powerful arms above his head. Harry leaned forward. And realised at that moment it had been a blunder. The man's speed was breathtaking. Harry knew from the hours spent swotting up on hand-to-hand combat techniques that knowing how to take a beating was as important as giving one. The art was to let your muscles relax, to appreciate that punishment cannot be avoided, only reduced. So, when the man spun round, with his knee raised, as supple as a dancer, Harry reacted by following the movement. He moved his body in the same direction as the kick. The foot hit him above the hip. Harry lost balance, fell and slid along the tiled floor until he was out of range. He remained there, sighed and looked at the ceiling as he took out his pack of cigarettes. He poked one in his mouth.

'Speed-cuffing,' Harry said. 'Learned it the year I did an FBI

course in Chicago. Cabrini Green, digs were the pits. For a white man, there was nothing to do in the evenings unless you wanted to go out and get yourself robbed. So I sat indoors practising two things. Loading and unloading my service pistol as fast as I could in the dark. And speed-cuffing on a table leg.’

Harry levered himself up onto his elbows.

The man was still standing with his short arms stretched up above his head. His wrists were shackled to the handcuffs on either side of the pipe. He stared blankly at Harry.

‘Mr Kluit send you?’ Harry asked, in English.

The man held Harry’s gaze without blinking.

‘The Triad? I’ve paid my debts, haven’t you heard?’ Harry studied the man’s expressionless face. The features could have been Asian, but he didn’t have a Chinese face or complexion. Mongolian maybe? ‘So what do you want from me?’

No answer. Which was bad news, as the man had most probably not come to ask for anything, but to do something.

Harry stood up and walked in a semicircle so that he could approach him from the side. He held the revolver to the man’s temple while slipping his left hand inside the man’s suit jacket. His hand ran over the cold steel of a weapon, then found a wallet and plucked it out.

Harry stepped back three paces.

‘Let’s see . . . Mr Jussi Kolkka.’ Harry held an American Express card up to the light. ‘Finnish? I suppose you know some Norwegian then?’

No answer.

‘You’ve been a policeman, haven’t you. When I saw you in arrivals at Gardemoen, I thought you were an undercover narco cop. How did you know I was catching that particular flight, Jussi? It’s alright if I call you Jussi, isn’t it? It feels sort of natural

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to address a guy with his schlong hanging out by his first name.'

There was a brief throaty noise before a gobbet of spit came whirling through the air, rotating on its axis, and landed on Harry's chest.

Harry looked down at his T-shirt. The black snus-spit had drawn a diagonal line through the second 'o' and it now read 'Snow Patrøl'.

'So you do understand Norwegian,' Harry said. 'Who do you work for then, Jussi? And what do you want?'

Not a muscle stirred in Jussi's face. Someone shook the door handle outside, swore and went away.

Harry sighed. Then he raised his revolver until it was level with the Finn's forehead and cocked it.

'You might suppose, Jussi, that I'm a normal, sane person. Well, this is how sane I am. My father is lying helpless in his sickbed in there. You've found out, and that presents me with a problem. There's only one way to solve it. Fortunately, you're armed so I can tell the police it was self-defence.'

Harry pressed the hammer back still further. And felt the familiar nausea.

'Kripos.'

Harry stopped the hammer. 'Repeat.'

'I'm in Kripos,' he hissed in Swedish, with the Finnish accent of which witty speech-makers at Norwegian wedding receptions are so fond.

Harry stared at the man. He didn't have a second's doubt that he was telling the truth. Yet it was totally incomprehensible.

'In my wallet,' the Finn snarled, not letting the fury in his voice reach his eyes.

Harry opened the wallet and checked inside. Removed a

laminated ID card. There wasn't much information, but it was adequate. The man in front of Harry was employed by Krimpolitisenralen, Kripos for short, the central crime unit in Oslo that assisted in – and usually led – the investigations into murder cases affecting the whole of the country.

'What the hell does Kripos want with me?'

'Ask Bellman.'

'Who's Bellman?'

The Finn uttered a brief sound; it was difficult to determine whether it was a cough or laughter. 'POB Bellman, you poor sod. My chief. Let me go now, handsome.'

'Fuck,' Harry said, inspecting the card again. 'Fuck, fuck, fuck.' He dropped the wallet on the floor and made for the door.

'Hey! Hey!'

The Finn's shouts faded as the door slid to behind Harry and he walked down the corridor to the exit. The nurse who had been with his father was coming from the opposite direction and nodded with a smile when they were close enough. Harry tossed the tiny key for the handcuffs up in the air.

'There's a flasher in the boys' room, Altman.'

Out of instinct, the nurse caught the key with both hands. Harry could feel the open-mouthed stare on his back until he was out of the door.

# 9

## The Dive

IT WAS A QUARTER TO ELEVEN AT NIGHT. NINE degrees centigrade, and Marit Olsen remembered that the weather forecaster had said it would be even milder tomorrow. In Frogner Park there wasn't a soul to be seen. Something about the lido made her think of laid-up ships, of abandoned fishing villages with the wind whispering through house walls, and fair-grounds out of season. Fragmented memories of her childhood. Like the drowned fishermen who haunted Tronholmen, who emerged from the sea at night, with seaweed in their hair and fish in their mouths and nostrils. Ghosts without breath, but who were wont to scream cold, hoarse seagull cries. The dead with their swollen limbs, which snagged on branches and were wrenched off with a ripping sound, not that this halted their advance towards the isolated house in Tronholmen. Tronholmen where Grandma and Grandpa lived. Where she herself lay trembling in the children's room. Marit Olsen breathed out. Kept breathing out.

Down there the wind was still, but up here at the top of the ten-metre-high diving platform you could feel the air moving.

Marit felt her pulse throbbing in her temples, in her throat, in her groin, blood streaming through every limb, fresh and life-giving. Living was wonderful. Being alive. She had hardly been out of breath after scaling all the steps of the tower, had just felt her heart, that loyal muscle, racing wildly. She stared down at the empty diving pool beneath her, to which the moonlight lent an almost unnatural bluish sheen. Further away, at the end of the pool, she could see the large clock. The hand had stopped at ten past five. Time stood still. She could hear the city, see car lights in Kirkeveien. So close. And yet too far. Too far away for anyone to hear her.

She was breathing. And was dead nonetheless. She had a rope as thick as a hawser around her neck and could hear the gulls screaming, ghosts she would soon be joining. But she was not thinking about death. She was thinking about life, how much she would have liked to live. All the small things, and the big things, she would like to have done. She would have travelled to countries she hadn't seen, watched her nephews and nieces grow, seen the world come to its senses.

It had been a knife; the blade had glistened in the light from the street lamp, and it had been held to her throat. Fear is said to release energy. Not in her case, it had stolen all her energy, deprived her of the power to act. The thought of steel cutting into her flesh had turned her into a quivering bundle of helplessness. So when she had been told to climb over the fence, she had not been able to and had fallen to the ground and lain there like a beanbag, tears streaming down her cheeks. Because she knew what was going to happen. She would do everything she could not to be cut and knew she would not be able to prevent it. Because she wanted so much to live. A few more years, a few more minutes, it was the same crazy, blind rationality that drove everyone.

She had started to explain that she couldn't climb over; she

had forgotten that he had told her to keep her mouth shut. The knife had writhed like a snake, sliced her mouth, twisted round, crunched against her teeth and then been pulled out. The blood had gushed at once. The voice had whispered something behind the mask and nudged her forward along the fence. To a place in the bushes where she was pushed through a gap in the fence.

Marit Olsen swallowed the blood that continued to fill her mouth and looked down at the spectator stands beneath her; they, too, were bathed in the blue moonlight. They were so empty, it was a courtroom without spectators or jury, just a judge. An execution without a mob, just the executioner. A final public appearance which no one had considered worth attending. It struck Marit that she lacked as much appeal in death as in life. And now she couldn't speak, either.

'Jump.'

She saw how beautiful the park was, even now in winter. She wished the clock at the end of the pool was working so that she could see the seconds of life she was stealing.

'Jump,' the voice repeated. He must have removed his mask, for his voice had changed, she recognised it now. She turned her head and stared in shock. Then she felt a foot on her back. She screamed. She no longer had ground beneath her feet; for one astonishing moment she was weightless. But the ground was pulling her down, her body accelerated and she registered that the bluish-white porcelain of the pool was racing towards her, to smash her into pieces.

Three metres above the bottom of the pool the rope tightened around Marit Olsen's neck and throat. The rope was an old-fashioned type, made of linden and elm and had no elasticity.

Marit Olsen's stout body was not checked to any appreciable degree; it detached itself from the head and hit the base of the pool with a dull thud. The head and the neck were left in the rope. There wasn't much blood. Then the head tipped forward, slipped out of the noose, fell onto Marit Olsen's blue tracksuit top and rolled across the tiles with a rumble.

Then the lido was still again.