

SAMUEL

BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *I'M TRAVELLING ALONE*

BJØRK

ALWAYS  
WATCHING

THE  
WOLF

ALWAYS  
HUNGRY



## Praise for *The Wolf* and the Munch and Krüger series

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*Sunday Express*

‘Written in Bjork’s habitual cool prose, it’s an  
absorbing, twisty novel’  
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superb story very special indeed. Genuinely gripping  
and with a wonderful heroine, it is sensational’  
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Samuel Bjork is the pen name of Norwegian novelist, playwright and singer/songwriter Frode Sander Øien. The Munch and Krüger series features three other books: the Richard & Judy Bookclub bestseller *I'm Travelling Alone*, *The Owl Always Hunts at Night* and *The Boy in the Headlights*.

*Also by Samuel Bjork*

I'm Travelling Alone  
The Owl Always Hunts at Night  
The Boy in the Headlights

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# THE WOLF

Samuel Bjork

Translated from the Norwegian by Charlotte Barslund



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On 28 May 1993, two eleven-year-old boys were found murdered in a field near Fagerhult in Sweden, some ten kilometres north-east of Uddevalla. The farmer who found the bodies later described the scene *as if someone had opened the gates of hell*. One boy, Oliver Hellberg, was completely naked and lying on his back. The other boy, Sven-Olof Jönsson, was found a few metres away wearing only his underpants. An animal, a white hare, had been placed between the boys. Due to the complex nature of the case, a team of investigators from the National Crime Agency in Stockholm was dispatched to work with local police officers; however, it soon became clear that this arrangement was unsuccessful. In the years that followed, the senior investigating officer was replaced no less than three times and, in the end, even Sweden's Justice Minister, Eva Nordberg, had to resign. The investigative team was also accused of having leaked a diary belonging to one of the boys. The boy's parents, Patrick and Emilie Hellberg, went to court to stop the tabloid press from sharing their murdered son's private thoughts with the rest of the world. The couple won the first round in Uddevalla County Court but lost an appeal in West Sweden's Appeal Court. Some weeks later the boy's mother was found dead in the bathtub in the family home in Ekeskärsvägen. She had taken her own life. In what would later be referred to as 'the day of shame' in Swedish media history, *Expressen* and *Aftonbladet* published the boy's diary in full on 14 October 1993. For the first time both newspapers had the same front page: the last entry in the boy's diary. The page contained only a few words, written in cursive writing:

*It's a full moon tomorrow. I'm scared of The Wolf.*

The case remains unsolved.

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ONE

NORWAY

APRIL 2001

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# Chapter 1

Thomas Borchgrevink was standing in the car park outside the old Fredheim School in Lørenskog, wishing the wind would pick up. He had no idea why she had chosen this particular spot for them to meet, but he had a hunch. To make it as difficult for him as possible. Was that why? It was, wasn't it? The thirty-six-year-old man glanced at his watch as a murder of crows took off from a nearby tree. The loud guttural sounds echoed across the emptiness because out here there was nothing but fields, a gravel pit and this white school building where he had once been a pupil. In another life. Before the incident. He hadn't been to this part of the world for over a decade. In fact, he had not been anywhere at all. Eighteen years inside. He had been released some months ago and was still struggling to adjust to the feeling. The feeling of being able to do what he wanted. Thomas Borchgrevink pulled his jacket around him, sat down on the steps leading to the old school and turned his face to a pale sun which was peeking out from behind a cluster of trees.

It was a quarter to nine. They had agreed nine o'clock, but he was taking no chances. She was capable of anything. *What did I tell you, we said nine and he didn't even bother to show up. Do you still think that he has a right to see his son? The last time they saw each other the boy was only two years old, for God's sake.* There was a sudden rustling in the treetops at the end of the road and he felt a small surge of optimism. Perhaps the wind would come after all? The kite had been a stupid idea, of course. He had racked his brains trying to think of some activity they could do out here. He had lingered in the toy shop for so long that the assistant had finally come up to ask him if everything was all right. All right? Of course things

were not all right. Why would she think they were? But none of this was her fault, and he knew it, so he had just picked the first thing that had caught his eye. A kite. Outdoors. Near his old school. They could fly a kite together. That was a good idea, wasn't it? He regretted it now, obviously, as the wind eased off in the treetops. A chessboard, that was what he had had in mind, teach the boy the rules, perhaps have a game, but he had dropped the idea when he was told that their meeting would take place outdoors. With a chaperone. That under no circumstances would she let him be alone with the boy.

Her attitude had been completely different when she had first come to visit him. He hadn't even remembered her name. *Borchgrevink, you have a visitor. His first in three years. It's a woman. Table number two.*

A visitor?

A female visitor?

*His mum?*

No.

Of course not.

She had dressed up as if it was a special occasion with flowers in her hair, rouged cheeks and a short summer dress. Siv Johnsen. They had been in Sixth Form together. The few months he had managed before he had finally given in to the voices in his head.

And he had to admire her persistence, every two weeks for almost three years, and in time he had almost grown to like her. Pictures from the labour ward. From their son's first birthday. *Martin misses his daddy!*

But then, no. No more.

Another man, he had realized eventually.

Not that he minded about her. But about the child?

The finest boy in the world.

His son. Martin.

*No, no way.*

Thomas Borchgrevink got up from the steps and started to pace up and down to shake off his anger.

Easy now.

Don't get mad.

Even though she had suddenly stopped coming and several letters had arrived instead, typed sheets of paper from faceless lawyers telling him he would no longer be allowed to see the little one.

He kicked a small stone across the playground and checked his watch again.

A quarter past nine.

Not a soul in sight.

There was practically nothing on Losbyveien, the road that led up here from Finstad; hardly any people lived this far out. There was a shooting range near the bend in the road. A gravel pit behind the trees further up; he knew every stone. He had loved this school, this area, coming early every morning rather than be at home in the dark house with the cold people who were supposed to have taken care of him. The sound of the clock on his bedside table and the arms of Mickey Mouse indicating he should get up if he wanted to get out in time, tiptoeing softly in his socks across the floor so that no one would wake up, the lunchbox he would fill with whatever he could find.

He hadn't impressed at school, but he hadn't been one of the worst either. He had done OK.

A quarter to ten and the first car arrived, a slightly rusty Toyota Corolla, a blonde woman with round glasses nervously shook his hand.

'Astrid Lom, Children's Services.'

'Thomas.'

A slight clearing of the throat over a file which presumably contained the same information that had been sent to him.

*Convicted of manslaughter.*

*At the age of eighteen.*

*Good behaviour.*

*Early release.*

*Mother has agreed to him seeing the boy.*

*Under supervision.*

Five to ten, finally the car arrived.

White. Expensive, obviously.

She had found someone better, not that it mattered, not now.

Thomas Borchgrevink felt himself grow warm all over as he walked with clammy hands to meet them.

‘No, no, wait.’ A hand held him back.

‘Yes, of course, sorry.’

One step at a time. On the boy’s terms.

*Martin.*

*There he was.*

Thomas smiled broadly as he saw the car door open.

A confused-looking boy with dark hair and a brown jumper got out of the car with no sign of the adults in the front wanting to help him.

*Bloody idiots.*

*Don’t you see that he’s . . .*

Fortunately, the social worker had a better understanding of children. She strode briskly across the ground, put her arm around the boy’s thin shoulders and suddenly there he was. Thomas Borchgrevink had to steel himself in order not to cry.

‘Hi, Martin.’

‘Hi . . .’

Beautiful blue eyes reluctant to look at him properly. The boy stared at his trainers instead.

‘How are you?’

‘Eh?’ A gaze now, some curiosity.

‘That’s a cool jumper.’

‘Er . . . thanks.’

The boy peered up towards the social worker as if to ask her who she was and what she was doing here.

‘Is that a robot?’

‘What? No. It’s Bionicle.’

Thomas took a tentative step forwards.

‘Bionicle. Cool name.’

The boy laughed after some hesitation. ‘No, he’s not *called* Bionicle, he *is* a Bionicle.’

‘Oh, right, sorry. So what’s his name, then?’

‘This one?’

‘Yes.’

The boy seemed to retreat into himself for a moment. Then he said, ‘His name is Makuta.’

‘Cool. Is he your favourite?’

The boy peered anxiously at him for a second time.

‘Er . . . no. My favourite is Ehlek, but they didn’t have a jumper with him on it.’

‘That’s annoying.’

‘Yes. But I have the action figure.’ He glanced briefly over his shoulder at the white car.

‘It’s a shame I didn’t know you like Bionicles or I could have brought you one.’

‘It’s all right.’

The boy blew his fringe away from his forehead and glanced expectantly at the bag by the steps.

‘What’s in the bag?’

‘Nothing very exciting, I’m afraid, I had hoped it might be windy.’

‘Windy? Why?’

‘So we could fly it. There’s a kite in the bag. But I don’t know, perhaps you think that’s boring?’

‘Oh no,’ the boy said, and smiled a little. ‘I like flying kites.’

Once again the trees rustled, so there was someone up there who was looking out for him after all.

‘You do?’ Thomas smiled. ‘So how about we give it a go?’

‘OK,’ the boy said.

‘Perhaps we should try the fields? I think it might be windier out there.’

He took the kite from the bag and looked towards the social worker.

‘Is it all right if we . . .’

She nodded.

‘Why did you ask her?’ the boy wondered out loud when they had walked away from the old school building and the kite was lying on the ground between them.

April in Norway.

The smell of freshly ploughed soil.

Soon grain would be sown, and in the summer it would turn yellow.

He was struggling to hold back his emotions now.

‘She’s here to watch out.’

‘Watch out for who?’

‘For you. Do you want to have the first go? I’ll hold the string and you can run?’

‘OK.’

The boy smiled again and picked the kite up from the ground.

And now it no longer mattered. The two faces in the car. The social worker and her thick file. All the years disappeared.

There was only a young boy running across the field, grinning from ear to ear as the kite finally took off, billowing proudly in the sky.

‘Look! Wow!’

Twenty beautiful seconds before the kite plunged and crashed into the hill at the end of the field.

And then – the moment Thomas Borchgrevink would never forget.

The boy ran back to him, this time with a completely different expression on his face.

‘What is it, Martin?’

‘There’s someone lying over there.’

‘What do you mean?’

A small hand shamefully trying to hide the wet stain at the front of his trousers.

‘They’re not moving.’

## Chapter 2

Forty-two-year-old Holger Munch was sitting in his black Audi with Bach's Cello Concerto no. 1 in G major on the car stereo, feeling guilty at having abandoned his family in the middle of Sunday lunch yet again. Not that they had complained. They never did. No matter what time these phone calls came. Late at night. In the middle of their summer holiday. Christmas Eve just as the pork roast was being served up. Totally supportive, no matter what. He had worked as a homicide investigator for almost twenty years, and Marianne, his high-school sweetheart, had always been there. It had been love at first sight and they had married young. Nine years later, their daughter Miriam arrived, finally. Miriam was fourteen years old now and she was nowhere near as bad as people claimed teenage girls were. His family was always there for him, celebrating his promotion last autumn knowing full well that he would be even busier now. A new homicide unit, with its very own offices away from Oslo Police headquarters. Not only had Holger Munch been entrusted to lead this historic new creation, but he had also been given free rein to pick his own team. For the first time in as long as he could remember, he had had an uplifting winter. He was usually plunged into deep gloom behind his frozen red beard, cursing everything and everyone, especially the idiots who went skiing and loved the snow, but this year he had had more positive things on his mind. He was an entrepreneur founding a new venture. That was how he had felt. And yet, there had been something in Marianne's eyes, hadn't there?

He shook off the thought and showed his warrant card to the officer who had stopped his car at the police cordon; he could tell even at this point from the face of the young man.

*This was something else.*

He saw the same nervous glance hidden behind a tough unformed facade a minute later when he parked his car by the white school building.

‘Nilsen, head of operations.’

Munch nodded and took out a packet of cigarettes from the pocket of his beige duffel coat.

‘Is anyone from my team here yet?’

‘Er, yes . . . a blonde woman. The lawyer?’

‘Goli.’

‘And a guy in a suit . . . Fredrik?’

‘Fredrik Riis,’ Munch said, lighting his cigarette.

‘Forensic officers were first on the scene, and they’ve been here for a while,’ the muscular police officer told him, and pointed across the field.

‘Pathologist?’

‘Here too. He arrived not long ago.’

The officer pulled off one glove and placed his finger on a map.

‘We’ve blocked the road here and here. The road is called Losbyveien. Not many people live out here. There are a few farms where we have had to keep access open so we ran the cordon down along this road, which is called Vålerveien. Is that OK?’

‘What about the boundaries of the fields?’ Munch said.

‘I’ve people out there,’ Nilsen said with a nod. ‘It should be sorted now.’

‘What else do you have?’

Munch studied the map, then turned towards the trees that surrounded them.

‘It’s a bit of a nightmare,’ Nilsen said. ‘The boys are out there, which is *here* on the map. As you can see, there are fields in every direction, and trees everywhere. We’re thinking the killer might have entered here and then left the same way. If you ask me, I think we’ll be lucky if anyone has seen anything.’

‘What’s this?’ Munch wanted to know, pointing to a building indicated on the map.

‘A shooting range.’

‘Have we cordoned that off?’

‘Er, no, not yet . . . because it’s located . . .’

‘Do it,’ Munch said wearily. ‘And send a team up to it. And this?’

‘A big gravel pit,’ Nilsen said, pointing towards the trees in the east. ‘Do you want us to—’

‘If you haven’t done it already, then yes. Have you?’

He looked at the police officer, who didn’t know what to say.

‘So you want a team up there as well?’ the man said eventually.

‘I do,’ Munch nodded, then headed towards Anette Goli, who had just emerged from the old school.

His first hire.

He hadn’t had a moment’s doubt.

‘Have you been up there?’ the skilled lawyer asked as she raked a hand through her blonde hair.

‘Not yet. What’s it like?’

‘Bad. I had Wik on the phone just now. He wants to know if they should cover them up or if you want to see them as they are.’

‘Leave them as they are,’ Munch said, lighting a new cigarette with the previous one. ‘Who found them?’

‘A motley crew, to be honest.’ Goli sighed, and nodded towards the school building. ‘I’m just trying to unravel the family situation.’

‘Go on?’

‘A custody battle, as far as I can gather. A man had come here to meet his son. Mother was present with her new boyfriend and we have a chaperone from – Children’s Services, would be my guess. I’m not sure. I’ve had to separate them. I’ve got the father in there and the others in different rooms. Do you want to talk to them?’

‘Not now. Just make sure we get all the details.’

‘OK, Katja can deal with that.’

‘Is she here?’ Munch exclaimed in surprise, and then he smiled. ‘I thought that she—’

‘Turns out working for Kripos wasn’t her dream job after all,’ Goli said with a wink. ‘I picked her up on my way out here. Is that all right with you?’

‘Of course.’ Munch nodded, and then he smiled again.

His second hire.

Katja van den Burg.

That choice had been just as simple and as obvious as his first one.

‘Right, do you want to get going?’

‘Yes, where are they?’

‘That way,’ Goli said, pointing. ‘But I recommend you change your shoes. It’s quite muddy out there.’

‘OK.’

Munch dropped the cigarette butt on to the ground and headed to his car to fetch his wellington boots.

## Chapter 3

Twenty-one-year-old Mia Krüger was sitting at the back of the auditorium in the basement of the National Police Academy, struggling to keep her eyes open. She had been out all night. Again. Her head hadn't hit the pillow until six in the morning, was it? She suppressed a yawn as the lecturer with the crew cut and the shiny boots clicked to produce another slide from the projector. Damn it, why hadn't she given up and gone home earlier? After all, she had been looking forward to this lecture. An introduction to Delta, the police force's tactical unit. It was the sole reason she had decided to become a police officer in the first place. Despite her parents' objections. The obvious disappointment in her mother's eyes when Mia announced that studying Literature at the University of Oslo ultimately was not for her. That she had already quit her studies. That she had decided to do some travelling and then start at the Academy in the autumn.

*A police officer, Mia? No, but . . .*

Never mind.

First woman in Delta. She had read a feature in a magazine about how tough it was, that no woman had ever met the entry requirements, and had made up her mind on the spot. Yes, you heard right. Delta. That was where she was going.

*So fuck the lot of you.*

Mia Krüger stifled another yawn as a list appeared on the screen. The basic entry requirements. And that was just the start. After that came hellish weeks of physical and mental tests, and this was where the few women who had attempted to get in before had failed. But not her. Of course not. Easy-peasy. She would be the first woman to

succeed. And that would show them once and for all, wouldn't it? The male chauvinist pigs who were now glancing at her with contempt, wondering what the hell she thought she was doing here. The only woman in the room.

She heard a snort from the first row, a blond moron who regarded himself as God's gift to women. He had come on to her in the gym only a few weeks into their first year, and she groaned at the memory. Chat-up lines from some crib sheet for losers as he flexed his muscles in front of the mirror with a Neanderthal belief that they might help his case.

*You have beautiful eyes . . .*

*They're as blue as the sea . . .*

Oh yes?

Poet, are you?

Yours are too close. And you know there should be a forehead between your eyes and your hairline, don't you?

*And your hair, it's so exotic and dark . . . It's really classy the way it falls over your slim shoulders . . . So what kind of girl are you? Are you up for a bit of fun?*

Puke.

Seriously?

What an idiot.

She had cut it off in her room in Torshov that same evening. Her hair. She had stood in front of the bathroom mirror with a knife, hacked it off furiously and watched it fall into the sink; whenever it grew too long, she would repeat the ritual.

The fitness tests were now displayed along with the requirements she knew inside out, and she regretted not having picked up a coffee on her way here. Even though it would have come from a machine and tasted like crap. Anything to escape the strong urge to sleep.

She pulled herself together as everyone's eyes finally turned to the slide.

*3,000 metres in less than twelve and a half minutes.*

Tick.

Back home in Åsgårdstrand, she had been able to run that distance in eleven minutes and fifteen seconds at the age of fifteen, and

the disgusting coach who liked to comment on how girls looked in tight running leggings had scratched his head, checked his stopwatch and asked her to run it again because ‘there must be some mistake’.

Really?

Fuck you.

*Fifty sit-ups.*

Seriously?

Tick.

*Fifty push-ups.*

Now that had taken her a little longer, but not much. She had screwed a bar to the ceiling of the attic flat she shared with two other girls from her year, who were more interested in how they looked and who had done what with whom after the Friday beers that the student union organized. Every morning, before the others got up, she had pulled herself towards the ceiling, until her arms could no longer support her.

*Ten pull-ups with chin-ups.*

Two birds with one stone.

Tick.

*400-metre swim.*

Seriously?

Tick.

*Free diving to a depth of 4 metres.*

Tick.

He had noticed her now, the man from Delta with his shiny boots, and she could feel it coming from him too.

*What do you think you're doing here?*

Mia had always had an ability to almost feel other people's thoughts.

*You see things other people don't see, don't you? Don't you, sweetheart?*

Her grandmother, who wasn't her real grandmother, and yet was so like her. Eccentric. At times borderline mad. At the age of almost eighty, she continued to sit in her garden until late at night, smoking a pipe, drinking whisky, howling at the moon, and never giving a toss about what other people thought of her.

Mia's mobile pinged, and she reacted automatically, pulling it out of her bag with nimble fingers.

*Sigrid?*

No.

Of course not.

She hadn't heard from her twin sister in months.

It was the reason she went out at night.

To wander the streets with print-outs she had made.

*Have you seen this girl?*

*Sigrid Krüger.*

*Please call me if you know something!*

Sigrid and Mia.

Sleeping Beauty and Snow White.

Twins.

One fair, the other dark.

Born to a sixteen-year-old girl who couldn't and didn't want to raise them herself. Adopted by Eva and Kyrre Krüger from Åsgårdstrand. She was a teacher, and he had a paint store in Horten. Mia instinctively touched the bracelet she wore on her left wrist. A confirmation present. An anchor, a heart and a single initial. S on Sigrid's, M on hers. And then, one night under the duvets in their bedroom:

*You'll take mine and I'll have yours?*

She hadn't taken it off since.

*Damn it, Sigrid?*

*Where are you?*

Mia forced herself to set aside her fears and was dropping her mobile into her bag when the door suddenly opened and the secretary from the principal's office popped her head round.

'Sorry for the interruption, but is Mia Krüger here?'

Murmuring across the auditorium now.

Everyone's eyes back on her.

'Eh, yes, that's me.'

'The principal wants a word with you.'

'OK?'

The secretary merely waited.

‘Now?’ asked Mia.

‘Yes, now.’

Scornful laughter rippled across the front row as Mia packed up her things and walked down the steps as quickly as she could.

‘What’s it about?’ she said when the door was closed and the two of them were alone in the corridor.

‘I don’t know,’ the grey-haired secretary replied. ‘But I think it’s important. Do you know where to go?’

‘Sure.’ Mia nodded, slinging her bag over her shoulder.

She took the lift up then crossed the tarmac square to the main building on the other side.

*What was it this time?*

She had been to the principal’s office before.

To be lectured in front of his large desk like a schoolgirl; his stern gaze, which she just couldn’t take seriously.

*Discipline, Mia. Several of your tutors have complained . . .*

So what?

It’s not my fault that you people think we’re still living in the 1950s.

*Are you sleeping on school premises, Mia? Wendelbaum said he found you curled up on the classroom floor again.*

Whatever.

She had gone to Frogner Park to look for Sigrid. Behind the monolith where the junkies tended to hang out, only a few hundred metres from the National Police Academy. Afterwards, she hadn’t bothered to walk all the way home.

It was a different reaction this time around when she knocked on the door and heard the deep voice.

‘Hi, Mia. Come in, come in.’

She paused in the doorway, wondering what she was walking into. The principal, Magnar Yttre, had got up from his chair and was beaming at her as he ushered her inside.

‘Can I get you anything? How about a cup of coffee?’

## Chapter 4

Munch was sitting by the window in the coffee shop on the corner of Bernt Ankers gate and Mariboegate, a few hundred metres from his new office, having switched both his mobiles to silent. The investigator was old school and had yet to get used to their constant beeping. He preferred being left alone to think, but no chance of that now, obviously: both phones had rung non-stop in the last twenty-four hours. One of the calls – from an old colleague who was now the principal of the National Police Academy – he had answered only to say that he was too busy to talk, but Yttre had been euphoric, barely letting him get a word in edgewise. *I think I've found someone for you, Munch.* The timing was extremely inconvenient, but he had allowed himself to be persuaded.

He had heard Yttre talk about this test before. It had been developed by UCLA researchers. The National Police Academy tended to run it on all second-year students, who were told that it was just a bit of fun so they wouldn't feel pressured. Some photographs from a crime scene. *What do you see?* This girl was believed to have aced it.

Fine. He could spare Yttre half an hour. It would also give him a chance to get a bite to eat. Marianne had called him again just now, worried about him, as always – did he get enough sleep and, especially, did he get enough to eat?

*She's quite eccentric, Munch.*

*But give her a chance, OK?*

He had just carried his coffee and sandwich to the table when the door opened and there she was.

Twenty-one years old.

She was young, but Munch's experience had taught him that youth need not be a problem in itself. Several members of his team, some of the best ones in fact, were under thirty. Not that he was thinking of hiring anyone else. He already had the people he needed, but Yttre, who was normally hard to impress, had been so excited. *We have never seen anything like it before, Munch. Not even close. This girl is unique.*

It had obviously piqued his interest.

'Are you Munch?'

She was dressed in a black polo-neck jumper, skinny black jeans, black Converse trainers and carried a black rucksack, but the first thing he noticed about her were her eyes.

Bright blue and remarkably clear. Light brown skin, almost like that of a Native American. Shoulder-length, pitch-black hair, oddly uneven; it looked almost as if someone had attacked it with a blunt pair of scissors, not that it seemed to bother her. The young police student stopped in front of him as if this meeting was the most natural thing in the world and extended a slim hand towards him.

'Mia Krüger.'

'Hi, Mia. Welcome.'

'Thank you,' was all she said, and sat down without showing any signs of taking off her rucksack.

'Would you like something to eat? Or drink?'

She glanced briefly at the menu behind the counter.

'No, thanks.'

'Perhaps you don't drink coffee?'

'I do, but not here.'

'Is that right?' Munch said. 'Are you a connoisseur, a coffee expert, perhaps?'

He had intended to be ironic. Oslo had recently been invaded by coffee shops, each one trendier than the next – young, ridiculous hipsters practising coffee brewing almost as a kind of religion – but his comment didn't seem to provoke her.

'Is that what you want me to look at?' the young woman said with a glance at the two buff files lying under his mobiles.

'Yes. Did Yttre say anything?'

She shook her head.

‘Good,’ Munch said. ‘All I want you to do is look at some photos and tell me what you think, all right?’

‘All right.’

‘This one,’ Munch said, pulling out one file, ‘contains pictures from a crime scene we visited yesterday morning. And this one . . .’

He placed the second file next to the first.

‘Is pictures from a crime scene in Sweden, eight years ago. I want you to take a look at them and tell me what you see, OK?’

‘If it’s the same killer?’

‘I didn’t say that.’

‘But it was what you meant?’

She looked at him quizzically, and Munch had to suppress the urge to smile. Yttre had been right, this girl really was quite something. Unique even in his experience as the head of the homicide unit in 13 Mariboegs gate. He was used to people looking at him with something bordering on awe, but this young police student didn’t seem intimidated at all.

‘Yes, that was what I meant.’

‘Then why didn’t you say so?’

‘Because it might block your thinking. I want you to keep an open mind. You might see something, something I’ve missed.’

‘OK, I get it,’ Mia Krüger said, and turned the files so they were facing her.

She didn’t open them; she just continued to sit there, waiting.

‘Could you leave me alone for a while?’ she said, and looked up at him again after a pause when he still hadn’t taken the hint.

‘Of course. How much time do you need?’

‘I don’t know. Twenty minutes?’

‘Very well. I’ll be right outside if you need me.’

Munch got up, picked up his lunch and found a bench across the street.

Nine missed calls. Most of them from Anette.

‘Hello, it’s Holger. What’s going on?’

Anette Goli heaved a sigh down the other end.

‘Well, what’s not going on? The commissioner wants to be

briefed. I reckon the Department is putting pressure on her, she thinks we ought to hold a press conference—'

'We'll wait. I've already said so.'

'That's what I told them, but it doesn't seem to be good enough.'

'Good enough for whom?' Munch grunted irritably.

'Don't take it out on me. You know what she's like.'

Hanne-Louise Dreyer. She was the newly appointed commissioner of Oslo Police. There had been considerable internal opposition when it became known that the minister had set up a separate homicide unit in the capital without consulting the police force. Senior management had rattled their sabres; they viewed the new unit as an expression of dissatisfaction with their own work. Munch had hoped that the situation might change with the appointment of this new commissioner, but oh no. It would seem to be his lot in life. Never to have a boss he got on with. Never mind. The ball was in his court now, and there was nothing they could do about it, which was obviously why they were so tetchy.

'Just tell her to wait,' Munch said. 'We won't release the names of the victims until we have spoken to both families; what is it about that she doesn't understand?'

'Like I said, don't take it out on me. Tommy's mother's plane lands at one o'clock. I've asked Katja to pick her up from the airport. Who the hell goes to Spain on holiday and leaves an eleven-year-old boy home alone?'

'She might have had her reasons. Let's not go into that now.'

'Leaving the neighbours to look after him? Turns out they didn't even know they were responsible for the boy.'

'We'll deal with it once she gets here. What about the van?'

Their only lead so far. A white van had been spotted near some trees by Losbyveien.

'Oxen has gone to talk to Traffic Control. The road ends at the golf club, so the van can't have left in that direction. We're concentrating on route 159 east and west, and the toll barrier on the E6. They're getting hold of the footage as we speak – I think we have found seven cameras. I have him on the other line and he will let me know the moment they find something. But, even so—'

‘What?’

‘A white van? How many of those are there in Oslo?’

‘It was a Sunday morning,’ Munch said to encourage her. ‘Let’s keep our fingers crossed. What about the Lundberg family?’

‘Very helpful,’ Goli continued. ‘And weirdly calm. I don’t think they have really taken in what has happened yet. Fredrik is with them now. He’ll call me soon. Are we still planning a team briefing at four o’clock?’

‘Yes, will you let everyone know?’

‘OK. Listen, I have to go, it’s Dreyer calling again.’

‘No press conference until—’ Munch began, but Anette had already rung off.

Bloody idiots.

Surely it must be possible for him to get five minutes of peace.

As if he and his team didn’t have enough on their plate already.

Three cigarettes later he decided that the young police student had to be done by now. He had watched her through the window the whole time. She had barely moved, but now the files lay closed in front of her.

‘How did you get on?’ Munch asked once he was back at the table.

She didn’t seem to have registered his return. Her blue eyes were wide open, but her thoughts were far away.

‘Sorry,’ she said eventually, and ran her hand through her dark hair.

‘It’s all right,’ Munch reassured her, and checked the time.

It was almost forty minutes since he had left his office. Time to wrap this up. It was all very well, an educational test – he had come here as a favour to Yttre and because it had piqued his interest – but there were limits. He had more important things to do. And yes, the same thought had crossed his mind.

*Who goes on holiday to Spain and leaves an eleven-year-old boy home alone?*

‘Some pictures are missing,’ the young police student said tentatively.

‘I’m sorry?’

She placed her finger on one of the files.

'From this one.'

'What do you mean?'

'What I said. Some pictures are missing.'

Munch frowned.

'I'm not sure I quite understand—'

'Well, he would need to be higher up, wouldn't he?'

'Who?'

'The killer.'

The girl looked at him strangely.

'He must have been standing on something.'

## Chapter 5

Fredrik Riis parked his car outside the detached house, number 18 Timoteiveien, got out and looked towards the low housing blocks on the other side of the common. Finstad. Between Oslo and Lillstrøm. Near Lørenskog. Not quite a town. Not quite countryside. The twenty-seven-year-old investigator lived in Briskeby, in the heart of Frogner. When he was seventeen his parents had given him his flat, with a view of the iconic old fire station, in the same apartment block where he had always lived. As if they were relieved once he got old enough to be given this gift. *Here you go, a flat for you. From now on you're on your own.*

He had a flashback to a good childhood memory. Family trips to Finstad. His cousins had lived out here, and they would visit often. When Fredrik was a boy, he had loved life out here. So different from the silence in the apartment at home. Rows of big, colourful detached houses with lush gardens and idyllic street names. Timoteiveien, Kløerveien, Tulipanveien, Konvalieveien. As a ten-year-old, he had felt envious of everything this area had to offer a child: sports fields, playgrounds, meadows and not least these almost magical woods in which you could roam free. Children squealing with laughter as they ran through the sprinklers in the large, sunny garden. A place where it seemed as if everyone genuinely cared about each other and actually liked doing things together. He had sat excited in the back of the car every time they returned to the city, listening to the discussion between his parents about whether perhaps they should move out there. His mother was very much in favour, but his father had been against it. *We're not moving to the country.* And that had been the end of it.

The view in front of him now prompted another memory, one not quite so comfortable. *The poor*. That was what his cousins had called them. Those who didn't have a house of their own but lived in the low tenement blocks on the wrong side of the tracks, a stone's throw away. He had felt strange when Munch had asked him if he could be the one from the homicide unit to act as the family liaison officer for the family of Ruben Lundgren, 18 Timoteiveien. *I've been there before, haven't I?* A boy they had played with, a friend of his cousins – Fredrik couldn't remember the name – had lived there, though it was a long time ago, of course.

A new family lived in the big, grey house now. Four new names on the floral nameplate by the door. *Sanna, Ruben, Vibeke and Jan-Otto Lundgren live here*. Cars were parked a little further down the road. Photographers with long lenses. Discreet, but at the same time not. They had yet to release the names of the two boys, but the media already knew them. *There's never any privacy out here, nosy neighbours, busybodies poking their noses into everything*, had been some of his father's rather misanthropic arguments in the discussion in the car.

Ruben Lundgren. Eleven years old.

Found naked in a field less than one kilometre from his home.

Next to another boy.

Tommy Sivertsen. From the housing blocks on the wrong side of the tracks.

Fredrik rang the doorbell, then took a few steps back on to the gravel.

'Yes?'

A face appeared behind the door, which was opened only a little.

'Hello. Jan-Otto Lundgren?'

'Yes?'

The man behind the door gave him a strange look, as if he was struggling to understand that he had a visitor.

'Fredrik Riis. I called earlier?'

'Oh, yes. Hello. Come in.'

An ordinary house. An ordinary galvanized-steel doormat which quivered slightly as he stepped on it and followed the man inside.

An ordinary hallway. Boots and shoes lined up neatly on an Ikea shoe rack. Coats in different sizes and colours on colourful pegs, underneath them a shelf with storage boxes where someone had written *Hats*, *Scarves* and *Gloves* in neat handwriting on sticky labels. The mother, Vibeke Lundberg, aged thirty-eight, is a sales manager for a software firm with a head office near Strømmen shopping centre. The father, Jan-Otto Lundgren, aged forty-two, is a systems engineer working for Telenor. Sanna, aged five, was in the older children's section at Løken nursery school, only a few hundred metres from here.

An ordinary family.

An ordinary life.

Right until that phone call twenty-four hours ago.

Jan-Otto Lundgren attempted something which might be a smile when Fredrik took off his shoes and followed the dazed man into the living room. They had laid the table by the window that overlooked the garden. A Thermos flask. Small, white coffee cups. A bowl of biscuits. The mother, Vibeke, was sitting on one of the spindle-backed chairs with the same dead expression as her husband, and got up slowly when they entered.

'Vibeke Lundgren.'

An almost lifeless hand met his.

'Fredrik Riis. Homicide unit.'

On hearing that, the slim woman recoiled, and he regretted it immediately. He should have opted for something more neutral, just said *Police* and left it at that, but he had spoken automatically – it was his first time acting as a family liaison officer, and he had braced himself for the task on his way here.

Nothing could have prepared him for this, of course. The large house was so quiet that he could hear the ticking of the oval clock hanging by the door to the kitchen. The chair scraping against the parquet flooring when he pulled it out to sit down. The teaspoon clattering against the bottom of the coffee cup when he stirred in the sugar lumps that Vibeke's trembling hands had offered him.

The sound of someone hushing a child further down the passage.

*Who is it, Granny? Is it Ruben? Has Ruben come home?*

‘I’m sorry for disturbing you,’ the young investigator said when both parents had sat down. ‘I know that we visited you yesterday, but we need to confirm every detail. From now on, I’m going to be your family liaison officer, and if you need anything, I’m here for you, any time, OK?’

He put his hand into the breast pocket of his suit and carefully slid two business cards across the white tablecloth.

‘Any news?’

Her voice was thin but still hoarse, like air from feeble lungs catching against the sandpaper in her throat. She had tried to put up her hair in a bun and yet it hung limply on one side. The cream blouse had been buttoned wrongly and sat crooked over her slumped shoulders.

‘No, not at the moment. I’m sorry.’

‘But you are . . . working on . . .’

Jan-Otto Lundgren was unshaven, had dark brown eyes and spoke in a very soft voice. Like a robot on low battery that didn’t know how or why it needed to finish its sentences.

‘What’s important for us now is to map all Ruben’s movements,’ Fredrik explained, and opened his notepad. ‘I know that you spoke to a police officer yesterday, but I would like to double-check a number of things so we can be sure that everything is correct.’

Jan-Otto Lundgren nodded softly.

‘The last time you saw Ruben was Saturday evening, about ten o’clock, is that right?’

‘I know we said ten,’ Vibeke said, running a hand across her forehead. ‘But wasn’t it closer to ten thirty? I think—’

‘No, it was ten o’clock,’ her husband said, putting his hand gently on top of hers. ‘After we had watched *The Reunion*, right?’

‘*The Reunion*?’ Riis echoed.

‘Yes, the TV show, do you know it? *The Reunion*?’

Fredrik Riis didn’t watch much television, but even he knew what Jan-Otto Lundgren was talking about. Classic Saturday-night entertainment on Norwegian television. The whole country gathered in front of their screens. Two celebrities were reunited with their schoolfriends and had to try to remember who they were.

‘He was mad at me,’ Vibeke Lundgren said, and was lost to her

thoughts once more, this time behind a faint smile. ‘He wanted minced beef on his pizza. But Sanna doesn’t like it; she just wanted ham. So I fetched him a cola from the basement even though we don’t really drink it these days. It’s so bad for the teeth, isn’t it? All that sugar?’

Her husband stroked her hand again.

‘Ruben went to his bedroom after dinner. He was going to play on his computer. But only until eleven – that’s the rule.’

‘Did you look in on him?’ Riis continued. ‘Later that night? Did you check that he was asleep?’

There was a moment of silence.

‘I really don’t know . . .’ Vibeke Lundgren began. ‘Surely I must have done . . . I always do . . .’

‘Sanna had a tummy ache,’ her husband said apologetically. ‘And she couldn’t settle. I read to her in bed, and I must have nodded off as well. When I woke up, it must have been, well . . . half past midnight?’

‘So you were with Ruben all evening. You watched TV together. And afterwards, he went to his room. He had no plans, so far as you were concerned?’

‘Plans?’ Vibeke Lundgren said. ‘What plans?’

‘No, I’m only asking. He hadn’t arranged to meet anyone? Friends? Or maybe a girlfriend?’

‘A *girlfriend*?’ the slim woman snorted. ‘He’s only eleven years old. He was at home with his family. Then he went to bed. As he always does. Plans? What plans would they be?’

She looked up confused at her husband, who gripped her thin hand more tightly.

‘His window was half open,’ Jan-Otto Lundgren said, looking him in the eye now. ‘When I went to wake him up for breakfast on Sunday. He must have climbed out.’

‘And you don’t know when . . .’

‘Sometime during the night. That must be what happened.’

‘Was this something he was used to doing? Had he run away from home before?’

‘No, no, no . . .’

She was mumbling now and pulled back her hand.

‘He has never gone anywhere. Ruben is always at home. Ruben is the nicest boy in the world. Ruben doesn’t climb out of his window. Ruben is always in his bed. Clean bedlinen with a Pokémon design. That’s his favourite. I bought two sets so he always has one on. I’ve just washed the other.’

The mobile in Fredrik’s pocket rang. He took it out and glanced at the display.

Anette Goli.

He switched it to silent and placed it on the table in front of him.

‘And this Tommy Sivertsen? Was he a friend of Ruben’s? I mean, did they usually . . .’

Vibeke Lundgren had got up now and was standing in the middle of the room, looking lost. She was shaking all over and her eyes were unfocused.

‘Ruben?’

‘I think it might be better if we . . .’ her husband said cautiously, and put his arm around her.

‘Of course.’ Fredrik cleared his throat and put his notepad and mobile back in his jacket pocket.

Back on the crunching gravel, he did what he could to shut out the sound of the desperate howling coming from inside the house.

His mobile vibrated in his pocket.

‘Yes, Fredrik here.’

‘It’s Anette. Where are you?’

‘I’m with the Lundgren family.’

‘Is it possible for you to leave? I need you.’

‘OK, what—’

‘We’ve found something by the shooting range. A well house. It looks as if the boys might have been there. Can you get here? Now?’

‘Of course,’ Fredrik Riis said, and slipped the phone back into the pocket of his suit jacket as he practically ran down the gravel drive to his car.

## Chapter 6

The old man with the white hair knew that some of the people hanging on the wall might get *quite cross* at not having been invited to the dinner party, but it was a proper celebration today and only the inner circle would take part. He had been planning it for days, even ironed the tablecloth. The strange thoughts wouldn't trouble him today. It was a double celebration. Seventy, imagine that! And he had got a new job – that was much more important, wasn't it? And people had said that his acting career was over? Oh, no, it wasn't. The old man smiled, then he let his towel fall to the ground and waded into the cold lake.

He had made his debut at the age of only eighteen in Uddevalla Sixth Form College's annual nativity play. And yes, of course he had wanted to be cast as Joseph, but the innkeeper was nowhere near as small a part as people said. Because who was really the most important character here? The poor guy standing outside the inn begging to be let in? A man who couldn't even make his own wife pregnant? Or the man who was in charge, who decided who could come inside and get a place to sleep? Exactly. There was no contest. He smiled again as he rubbed the bar of soap against his loofah, dipped it in the water and started scrubbing his back. Oh, how beautiful Lake Lilla Köperödssjön was in this light. He had lived here for sixty-four out of his now almost seventy years, first with his mother and grandmother. Then with his mother. Then alone.

Even though . . .

No, he didn't have the energy to think about this now. Soon it would be time to celebrate. With 1.6 kilometres of shoreline, Lake Lilla Köperödssjön was nine metres at its deepest, not five point

one, as they claimed at Ray's Garage when he had gone there to ask how much they would charge him to fix up the old Volvo. And they had been angry with him when they had come the long way into the forest and the Volvo hadn't been there after all. Much swearing had ensued. I beg your pardon? How was that his fault? But even so, that moron had shaken his head and spat on the ground in front of him. It was a pity really. Having a car would have been useful, of course. He had carried his bicycle through the forest instead, ridden it all the way to the off-licence in Uddevalla, just for this occasion. Hallands Fläder aquavit: 38 per cent, with notes of elderflower and cinnamon. The old man finished scrubbing himself and dived under the water to rinse off the suds.

What did Stockholm matter now? No, he was not going to think about that.

Allan Edwall, the actor. He would be invited.

He was his first choice, no contest. Because he had to prioritize, decide who would be sitting at the table and who would continue to hang on the wall.

No, thank you. He much preferred the forest outside Uddevalla to dirty Stockholm. This was the place to live.

His second great performance, perhaps the one of which he was proudest, was in prison. As an inmate. Number 112-452311. Sent to prison for indecent exposure in Vasa Park and for handling stolen goods. That production had enjoyed a long run. Fourteen months. He had been very popular in that role.

Ingmar Bergman? A seat at the table?

The old man shook his head and laughed to himself as he got dressed and walked up the small path towards the yard.

Definitely not, for obvious reasons. The idiot didn't even hang on his wall any more.

There were thirty-six pictures on the wall. All of them were genuine Swedish heroes he had met personally. Some only in his dreams, but that made no difference.

Oh bother, he was back at the door and he had quite forgotten to do his seating plan, so he had to walk back down to the lake again.

There was a fine reflection of the sun in it, orange and April yellow

in the pretty surface. Lake Lilla Köperödssjön. With 1.6 kilometres of shoreline. Nine metres at its deepest, not five point one, as they had claimed.

Thirty-six pictures on the wall. But he only had room for six at the table. Six pictures. Each would be placed on a chair because he had six chairs.

*Did I say chairs?*

Eh?

*No, places to sit, I said.*

He shook his fist in the air.

*What do you say to that, Allan? Were you worried you were about to lose your seat?*

Eh?

*Are you afraid you'll hang on the wall, friendless, while the rest of us knock back Hallands Fläder?*

I'm just joking, it's just a bit of fun. Of course, you'll get a seat at the table. You shall have the yellow chair.

He returned to the cottage and stopped deep in thought in front of the pictures on the wall.

Cornelis Vreeswijk. Yes?

Yes.

He carefully removed the drawing pin from the photograph and carried it solemnly across the floor to the table.

The red chair.

Tomas von Brömssen. Maybe.

No, what was he thinking?

Yes.

Yes, obviously.

Tomas von Brömssen.

The blue chair. Three to go, three to go . . .

Why don't we have a drink?

Allan Edwall had already opened the bottle of Hallands Fläder and was about to pour himself a couple of fingers – *it's time to get the party started* – but he managed to stop him at the last moment.

We're not drinking yet, OK?

The old man shook his head and was just putting the bottle as

high up as he could in the cupboard over the cooker when the room filled with ringing.

What on earth was that?

He was alarmed and couldn't understand where the sound was coming from before the penny dropped.

The new phone. The mobile.

*The job.*

He ran across the wooden floor and pulled open the drawer.

A text message on the display.

*Act 1. Scene 1. OK?*

He typed his reply, smiling.

*OK!*

The white-haired old man went over to the shelf under the window, pulled out the black ring binder, opened it on page one and took a deep breath.

Then he sat down in front of his other mobile.

## Chapter 7

A double-height entrance with columns. Two sliding doors of glass and grey metal opened into a foyer which looked recently renovated. Mia could see that he was trying hard not to make a big deal out of it, except he didn't quite succeed, the investigator with the reddish-blond beard and the warm smile. There was a mixture of curiosity and joy in the otherwise steady and intelligent gaze, as if he couldn't quite believe what he had just witnessed while at the same time he was wondering what to do with it.

*It's not always a good thing, Mia. Being able to see more than other people.*

Her grandmother was having one of her bad days. She had been ill for a long time but refused to see a doctor; so typical of her. Thin and almost black-eyed, curled up on a mattress on the floor. No bed for her, of course not, this elegant and headstrong woman whom Mia loved so much.

*It can make you frightened. And lonely. Other people don't understand what you understand. About life. About people. About how it's all connected. Think of me when I'm gone, promise me, Mia? If you get lonely?*

It was just like her grandmother. She might be ill, but she still wanted to be there for Mia. Fortunately, she had recovered some weeks later and would soon be turning eighty. This weekend, in fact. Mia Krüger was looking forward to it. And dreading it. Because she knew how it would be. How her mother would be. If Sigrid didn't turn up.

Which she obviously wouldn't.

*Where are you, Sigrid?*