

JO NESBO

# Knife

TRANSLATED FROM THE NORWEGIAN BY  
Neil Smith

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# 3

HARRY WOKE UP. SOMETHING WAS wrong. He knew it wouldn't take long for him to remember what, that these few blessed moments of uncertainty were all he was going to get before reality punched him in the face. He opened his eyes and regretted it at once. It was as if the daylight forcing its way through the filthy, grimy window and lighting up the empty little room carried straight on to a painful spot just behind his eyes. He sought shelter in the darkness behind his eyelids again and realised that he had been dreaming. About Rakel, obviously. And it had started with the same dream he had had so many times before, about that morning many years ago, not long after they had first met. She had been lying with her head on his chest, and he had asked if she was checking to see if what they said was true, that he didn't have a heart. And Rakel had laughed the laugh he loved; he could do the most idiotic things to coax it out of her. Then she had raised her head, looked at him with the warm brown eyes she had inherited from her Austrian mother, and replied that they were right, but that she would give him hers. And she had. And Rakel's heart was so big, it had pumped blood around his body, thawing him out, making him a

real human being again. And her husband. And a father to Oleg, the introverted, serious boy that Harry had grown to love as his own son. Harry had been happy. And terrified. Happily unaware of *what* was going to happen, but unhappily aware that *something* was bound to, that he wasn't made to be this happy. And terrified of losing Rakel. Because one half of a heart couldn't beat without the other, he was well aware of that, as was Rakel. So if he couldn't live without her, why had he been running away from her in his dream last night?

He didn't know, couldn't remember, but Rakel had come to claim her half-heart back, had listened out for his already weak heartbeat, found out where he was and rung the doorbell.

Then, at last, the blow that had been coming. Reality. That he had already lost her.

And not because he had fled from her, but because she had thrown him out.

Harry gasped for air. A sound was boring through his ears, and he realised that the pain wasn't only behind his eyes, but that his whole brain was a source of immense hurt. And that it was that noise which had triggered the dream before he woke up. There really was someone ringing the doorbell. Stupid, painful, irrepressible hope poked its head up.

Without opening his eyes, Harry reached one hand down towards the floor next to the sofa bed, feeling for the whisky bottle. He knocked it over, and realised it was empty from the sound it made as it rolled across the worn parquet floor. He forced his eyes open. Stared at the hand that was dangling above the floor like a greedy claw, at the grey, titanium prosthetic middle finger. The hand was bloody. Shit. He sniffed his fingers and tried to remember

what had happened late last night, and if it had involved women. He threw back the covers and glanced down at all 1.92 metres of his lean, naked body. Too little time had passed since he had fallen off the wagon for it to have left any physical trace, but if things followed their usual course, his muscles would start to weaken, week by week, and his already greyish-white skin would turn as white as a sheet, he would turn into a ghost and eventually vanish altogether. Which, of course, was the whole point of drinking – wasn't it?

He pushed himself up into a sitting position. Looked around. He was back where he had been before he became a human being again. Only, one rung further down now. In what could have been an ironic twist of fate, the two-room apartment, all forty square metres of it, that he had borrowed and then gone on to rent from a younger police colleague, lay just one floor below the flat he had lived in before he moved in with Rakel, to her wooden house in Holmenkollen. When he moved into the flat, Harry had bought a sofa bed at IKEA. That, together with the bookcase full of vinyl records behind the sofa, a coffee table, a mirror that was still leaning against the wall, and a wardrobe out in the hall, was the total extent of the furniture. Harry wasn't sure if it was due to a lack of initiative on his part, or if he was trying to convince himself that this was only temporary, that she was going to take him back when she had finished thinking things through.

He wondered if he was going to be sick. Well, that was probably up to him. It was as if his body had got used to the poison after a couple of weeks, had built up a tolerance to the dosage. And demanded that it increase. He stared down at the empty whisky bottle that had come to rest between his feet. Peter Dawson Special. Not that it

was particularly good. Jim Beam was good. And it came in square bottles that didn't roll across the floor. But Dawson was cheap, and a thirsty alcoholic with a fixed salary and an empty bank account couldn't afford to be fussy. He looked at the time. Ten to four. He had two hours and ten minutes until the liquor store closed.

He took a deep breath and stood up. His head felt like it was about to burst. He swayed but managed to stay upright. Looked at himself in the mirror. He was a bottom feeder that had been reeled in so quickly that his eyes and innards were trying to get out; so hard that the hook had torn his cheek and left a pink, sickle-shaped scar running from the left side of his mouth up towards his ear. He felt under the covers but couldn't find any underwear, so pulled on the jeans that were lying on the floor and went out into the hall. A dark shape was silhouetted against the patterned glass in the door. It was her, she had come back. But he had thought that the last time the doorbell rang too. And that time it had been a man who said he was from Hafslund Electricity and needed to change the meter and replace it with a modern one that meant they could monitor usage from hour to hour, down to the nearest watt, so all their customers could see exactly what time of day they turned the stove on, or when they switched their reading light off. Harry had explained that he didn't have a stove, and that if he did have one, he wouldn't want anyone to know when he switched it on or off. And with that he had shut the door.

But the silhouette he could see through the glass this time was a woman's. Her height, her outline. How had she got into the stairwell?

He opened the door.

There were two of them. A woman he had never seen

before, and a girl who was so short she didn't reach the glass in the door. And when he saw the collection box the girl was holding up in front of him he realised that they must have rung on the door down in the street and one of the neighbours had let them in.

'We're collecting for charity,' the woman said. They were both wearing orange vests with the emblem of the Red Cross on top of their coats.

'I thought that was in the autumn,' Harry said.

The woman and girl stared at him silently. At first he interpreted this as hostility, as if he had accused them of fraud. Then he realised it was derision, probably because he was half naked and stank of drink at four o'clock in the afternoon. And was evidently entirely unaware of the nationwide, door-to-door charity collection that had been getting loads of TV coverage.

Harry checked to see if he felt any shame. Actually, he did. A little bit. He stuck his hand into the trouser pocket where he usually kept his cash when he was drinking, because he had learned from experience that it wasn't wise to take bank cards with him.

He smiled at the girl, who was staring wide-eyed at his bloody hand as he pushed a folded note into the slot on the sealed collection box. He caught a glimpse of a moustache just before the money disappeared. Edvard Munch's moustache.

'Damn,' Harry said, and put his hand back in his pocket. Empty. Like his bank account.

'Sorry?' the woman said.

'I thought it was a two hundred, but I gave you a Munch. A thousand kroner.'

'Oh . . .'

'Can I . . . er, have it back?'

The girl and woman looked at him in silence. The girl cautiously lifted the box a little higher, so that he could see the plastic seal across the charity logo more clearly.

‘I see,’ Harry whispered. ‘What about change?’

The woman smiled as though he were trying to be funny, and he smiled back to assure her that she was right, while his brain searched desperately for a solution to the problem. 299 kroner and 90 øre before six o’clock. Or 169.90 for a half-bottle.

‘You’ll have to console yourself with the fact that the money will go to people who really need it,’ the woman said, guiding the girl back towards the stairs.

Harry closed the door, went into the kitchen and rinsed the blood off his hand, feeling a sting of pain as he did so. Back in the living room, he looked around and saw that there was a bloody handprint on the duvet cover. He got down on all fours and found his mobile under the sofa. No texts, just three missed calls from last night, one from Bjørn Holm, the forensics officer from Toten, and two from Alexandra from the Forensic Medical Institute lab. She and Harry had become intimately acquainted fairly recently, after he got thrown out, and going by what he knew – and remembered – about her, Alexandra wasn’t the sort to use menstruation as grounds to cancel on him. The first night, when she had helped him home and they had both searched his pockets in vain for his keys, she had picked the lock with disconcerting ease and laid him – and herself – down on the sofa bed. And when he had woken up again she was gone, leaving just a note thanking him for services rendered. It could have been her blood.

Harry closed his eyes and tried to focus. The events and chronology of the past few weeks were pretty hazy, but when it came to last night his memory was blank.



Completely blank, in fact. He opened his eyes and looked down at his stinging right hand. Three bleeding knuckles, with the skin scraped off and congealed blood around the edges of the wounds. He must have punched someone. And three knuckles meant more than one punch. Then he noticed the blood on his trousers. Too much of it to have come from his knuckles alone. And it was hardly menstrual blood.

Harry pulled the cover off the duvet as he returned the missed call from Bjørn Holm. As it started to ring, he knew that somewhere out there a ringtone in the form of a particular song by Hank Williams had gone off, a song Bjørn was convinced was about a forensics officer like him.

‘How’s things?’ Bjørn asked in his cheery Toten dialect.

‘That depends,’ Harry said, going into the bathroom. ‘Can you lend me three hundred kroner?’

‘It’s Sunday, Harry. The liquor store’s closed today.’

‘Sunday?’ Harry pulled his trousers off and stuffed both them and the duvet cover into the overflowing washing basket. ‘Bloody hell.’

‘Did you want anything else?’

‘You were the one who called me, around nine o’clock.’

‘Yes, but you didn’t answer.’

‘No, looks like my phone’s been under the sofa for the past day or so. I was at the Jealousy.’

‘I thought as much, so I called Øystein and he told me you were there.’

‘And?’

‘So I went over there. You really don’t remember any of this?’

‘Shit. What happened?’

Harry heard his colleague sigh, and imagined him rolling his slightly protruding eyes, his pale moon of a

face framed by a flat cap and the bushiest, reddest beard in Police Headquarters.

‘What do you want to know?’

‘Only as much as you think I need to know,’ Harry said as he discovered something in the basket of dirty washing. The neck of a bottle, sticking up out from the dirty underpants and T-shirts. He snatched it up. Jim Beam. Empty. Or was it? He unscrewed the top, put it to his lips and tipped his head back.

‘OK, the short version,’ Bjørn said. ‘When I arrived at the Jealousy Bar at 21.15 you were drunk, and by the time I drove you home at 22.30, you had only spoken coherently about one thing. One single person. Guess who?’

Harry didn’t answer, he was squinting cross-eyed at the bottle, following the drop that was trickling down inside it.

‘Rakel,’ Bjørn said. ‘You passed out in the car and I got you up into your flat, and that was that.’

Harry could tell by the speed of the drop that he had plenty of time, and he moved the bottle away from his mouth. ‘Hm. That was that?’

‘That’s the short version.’

‘Did we fight?’

‘You and *me*?’

‘From the way you stress “me”, it sounds like I had a fight with someone. Who?’

‘The Jealousy’s new owner may have taken a bit of a knock.’

‘A knock? I woke up with three bloody knuckles and blood on my trousers.’

‘Your first punch hit him on the nose, so there was a lot of blood. But then he ducked and you punched the

wall instead. More than once. The wall's probably still got your blood on it.'

'But Ringdal didn't fight back?'

'To be honest, you were so fucked that there was no way you were going to hurt anyone, Harry. Øystein and I managed to stop you before you did yourself any more damage.'

'Shit. So I'm barred?'

'Oh, Ringdal deserved at least one punch. He'd played the whole of that *White Ladder* album and had just put it on again. Then you started yelling at him for ruining the bar's reputation, which you claimed you, Øystein and Rakel had built up.'

'But we had! That bar was a gold mine, Bjørn. He got the whole thing for next to nothing, and I only made one demand. That he should take a stand against all the crap, and only play decent music.'

'*Your* music?'

'*Our* music, Bjørn. Yours, mine, Øystein's, Mehmet's . . . Just not . . . just no fucking David Gray!'

'Maybe you should have been more specific . . . Uh-oh, the little lad's started crying, Harry.'

'Oh, right, sorry. And thanks. And sorry about last night. Shit, I sound like an idiot. Let's just hang up. Say hi to Katrine.'

'She's at work.'

The line went dead. And at that moment, in a sudden flash, Harry saw something. It happened so quickly he didn't have time to see what it was, but his heart was suddenly beating so hard that he gasped for breath.

Harry looked at the bottle that he was still holding upside down. The drop had trickled out. He looked down. A brown drop was glinting on a filthy white floor tile.

He sighed. He sank to the floor, naked, feeling the cold tiles under his knees. He stuck his tongue out, took a deep breath and leaned forward, resting his forehead on the floor, as if in prayer.

Harry was striding down Pilestredet. His Dr Martens boots left a black trail in the thin layer of snow that had fallen overnight. The low spring sun was doing its best to melt it before sinking behind the old four- and five-storey buildings of the city. He listened to the rhythmic scrape of the tarmac against the small stones that had caught in the coarse grooves on the soles of his boots as he passed the taller modern buildings on the site of the old Rikshospitalet, where he had been born almost fifty years ago. He looked at the latest street art on the facade of Blitz, the once shabby squat that had been the citadel of punk in Oslo, where Harry had attended obscure gigs in his teens despite never being a punk. He passed the Rex Pub, where he had drunk himself senseless back when it was called something different, when the beer was cheaper, the bouncers more forgiving and it was frequented by the jazz crowd. But he hadn't been one of them either. Or one of the born-again souls talking in tongues in the Pentecostal church on the other side of the street. He passed the Courthouse. How many murderers had he managed to get convicted in there? A lot. Not enough. Because it wasn't the ones you caught that haunted your nightmares, it was the ones who got away, and their victims. Still, he had caught enough to get himself a name, a reputation. For better or worse. The fact that he had been directly or indirectly responsible for the deaths of several colleagues was part of that reputation.

He reached Grønlandsleiret, where, some time back in

the 1970s, mono-ethnic Oslo finally collided with the rest of the world, or the other way round. Restaurants with Arabic names, shops selling imported vegetables and spices from Karachi, Somali women in hijabs going for Sunday walks with pushchairs, their men engaged in lively conversation three steps behind them. But Harry also recognised some of the pubs from back when Oslo still had a white working class and this was their neighbourhood. He passed Grønland Church and carried on towards the glass palace at the top of the park. Before pushing open the heavy metal door with a porthole in it, he turned round. He looked out across Oslo. Ugly and beautiful. Cold and hot. Some days he loved this city, and on others he hated it. But he could never abandon it. He could take a break, get away for a while, sure. But never abandon it for good. Not like she had abandoned him.

The guard let him in and he undid his jacket as he waited in front of the lifts. He felt himself start to sweat anyway. Then the tremble as one of the lift doors in front of him slid open. He realised that it wasn't going to happen today, and turned and took the stairs to the sixth floor.

'Working on a Sunday?' Katrine Bratt said, looking up from her computer as Harry walked into her office unannounced.

'I could say the same about you.' Harry sank heavily into the chair in front of her desk.

Their eyes met.

Harry closed his, leaned his head back and stretched out his long legs, which reached all the way to the desk. The desk had come with the job she had taken over from Gunnar Hagen. She had had the walls painted a lighter colour, and the parquet floor had been polished, but apart

from that the head of department's office was the same as before. And even if Katrine Bratt was the newly appointed head of Crime Squad as well as a mother now, Harry still saw before him the wild girl who had arrived from the Bergen Police, armed with a plan, emotional baggage, a black fringe and a black leather jacket wrapped round a body that disproved the argument that there were no women in Bergen and which made Harry's colleagues stare at her a little too long. The fact that she only had eyes for Harry had the usual paradoxical explanations. His bad reputation. The fact that he was already taken. And that he had seen her as something more than just a fellow officer.

'I could be mistaken,' Harry yawned. 'But on the phone it sounded almost as if your little Toten lad was happy on paternity leave.'

'He is,' Katrine said, tapping at her computer. 'How about you? Are you happy with—'

'Marital leave?'

'I was going to ask if you were happy being back in Crime Squad.'

Harry opened one eye. 'Working on entry-level material?'

Katrine sighed. 'It was the best Gunnar and I could get, given the circumstances, Harry. What did you expect?'

Still with one eye closed, Harry surveyed the room as he thought about what he had expected. That Katrine's office would show more of a feminine touch? That they would give Harry the same elbow room he had had before he resigned from his post as a murder detective, started teaching at Police College, married Rakel and tried to live a peaceful, sober life? Of course they couldn't do that. But with Gunnar Hagen's blessing and Bjørn's

help, Katrine had literally picked him up from the gutter and given him this as a place to go to, something to think about other than Rakel, a reason not to drink himself to death. The fact that he had agreed to sit and sort out paperwork and go through cold cases merely proved that he had sunk lower than he had believed possible. Still, experience had taught him it was always possible to sink a bit lower. So Harry grunted:

‘Can you lend me five hundred kroner?’

‘Bloody hell, Harry.’ Katrine looked at him despairingly. ‘Is that why you’re here? Didn’t you have enough yesterday?’

‘That’s not how it works,’ Harry said. ‘Was it you who sent Bjørn out to pick me up?’

‘No.’

‘So how did he find me, then?’

‘Everyone knows where you spend your evenings, Harry. Even if plenty of people think it’s a bit weird to hang out in the bar you’ve only just sold.’

‘They don’t usually refuse to serve a former owner.’

‘Not until yesterday, maybe. According to Bjørn, the last thing the owner said to you was that you’re barred for life.’

‘Really? I don’t remember that at all.’

‘Let me see if I can help you there. You tried to persuade Bjørn to help you report the Jealousy to the police for the music they were playing, and then you wanted him to call Rakel and talk her round. From his phone, seeing as you’d left yours at home and weren’t actually sure if she’d answer if she saw it was you calling.’

‘Bloody hell,’ Harry said, covering his face with his hands as he massaged his temples.

‘I’m not saying this to humiliate you, Harry, just to show you what happens when you drink.’

‘Thanks a lot.’ Harry folded his hands over his stomach. He saw that there was a two-hundred-kroner note lying on the edge of the desk in front of him.

‘Not enough to get drunk on,’ Katrine said. ‘But enough to help you sleep. Because that’s what you need. Sleep.’

He looked at her. Her gaze had got softer over the years, she was no longer the angry young woman who wanted to take her revenge on the world. Maybe that was thanks to other people, the team in the department, and her nine-month-old son. Sure, that sort of thing could raise awareness and make people gentler. During the vampirist case one and a half years ago, when Rakel had been in hospital and he had fallen off the wagon, Katrine had picked him up and taken him home. She had let him throw up in her otherwise spotless bathroom and granted him a few hours of carefree sleep in the bed she shared with Bjørn.

‘No,’ Harry said. ‘I don’t need sleep, I need a case.’

‘You’ve got a case.’

‘I need the Finne case.’

Katrine sighed. ‘The murders you’re referring to aren’t called the Finne case, there’s nothing to suggest that it’s him. And, as I’ve already told you, I’ve got the people I need on the case.’

‘Three murders. Three unsolved murders. And you’re telling me you don’t need someone who can actually prove what you and I both know – that Finne is the man responsible?’

‘You’ve got your case, Harry. Solve that one, and leave me to run things here.’

‘My case isn’t even a case, it’s a domestic murder where the husband has confessed and we’ve got both a motive and forensic evidence.’



‘He could suddenly withdraw his confession, so we need a lot more flesh on those bones.’

‘It’s the sort of case you could have given to Wyller or Skarre or one of the juniors. Finne is a sexual predator and serial killer, and I’m the only detective you’ve got with specialist experience of that type of case, for fuck’s sake.’

‘No, Harry! And that’s my final word on the subject.’

‘But why?’

‘Why? Look at yourself! If you were running Crime Squad, would you send a drunk, unstable detective to talk to our already sceptical colleagues in Copenhagen and Stockholm who have pretty much already made up their minds that the same man *isn’t* behind the murders in their cities? You see serial killers everywhere because your brain is programmed to see serial killers.’

‘That may well be true, but it *is* Finne. It’s got all the characteristic—’

‘Enough! You’ve got to let go of this obsession, Harry.’

‘Obsession?’

‘Bjørn told me you were babbling about Finne the whole time when you were drinking, saying you have to get him before he gets you.’

‘When I was *drinking*? Say it like it is: when I was drunk. *Drunk.*’ Harry reached for the money and tucked it into his trouser pocket. ‘Have a good Sunday.’

‘Where are you going?’

‘Somewhere I can properly observe the day of rest.’

‘You’ve got stones in your shoes, so pick your feet up properly when you walk across my parquet floor.’

Harry hurried down Grønlandsleiret towards Olympen and Pigalle. Not his first choices of watering hole, but

they were nearest. There was so little traffic on the main street in Grønland that he was able to cross the road on a red light, checking his mobile at the same time. He wondered if he should return Alexandra's call but decided against it. He didn't have the nerve. He saw from the call log that he had tried to call Rakel six times between six and eight o'clock the previous evening. He shuddered. *Call rejected*, it said. Sometimes technological language could be unnecessarily precise.

As Harry reached the opposite pavement he felt a sudden pain in his chest and his heart started to race, as if it had lost the spring that checked its speed. He had time to think *heart attack*, then it was gone. It wouldn't be the worst way to go. A pain in the chest. Down on his knees. Head hitting the pavement. The End. A few more days of drinking at this rate and it really wouldn't be that unrealistic either. Harry kept walking. He had caught a tiny glimpse. He had seen more now than when it happened earlier that afternoon. But it had slipped away, like a dream once you've woken up.

Harry stopped outside Olympen and looked inside. It had once been one of the roughest bars in Oslo, but had been given such a thorough makeover that Harry hesitated to go in. He checked out the new clientele. A mix of hipsters and smartly dressed couples, as well as families with young children, time-poor but with enough money to shell out for Sunday lunch at a restaurant.

He stuck his hand tentatively into his pocket. Found the two-hundred-kroner note, as well as something else. A key. Not his, but to the scene of the domestic murder. On Borggata in Tøyen. He didn't really know why he'd asked for the key seeing as the case was as good as concluded. But at least he had the scene to himself. Entirely

to himself, seeing as the other so-called detective on the case, Truls Berntsen, wasn't going to lift a finger. Truls Berntsen's admittance to Crime Squad owed very little to merit, and a damn sight more to his childhood friendship with Mikael Bellman, one-time Chief of Police and current Minister of Justice. Truls Berntsen was utterly useless, and there was a tacit agreement between Katrine and Truls that he would steer clear of detective work and concentrate on making coffee and other basic office jobs. Which, when it came down to it, meant playing patience and Tetris. The coffee tasted no better than before, but Truls sometimes beat Harry at Tetris now. They made a pretty wretched couple, marooned at the far end of the open-plan office with a one-and-a-half-metre-tall moveable screen separating them.

Harry took another look. There was a free booth next to the families seated just inside the window. The little boy at the table suddenly noticed him, and laughed and pointed. The father, who had his back to Harry, turned round and Harry instinctively took a step back, out into the darkness. And from there he saw his own pale, lined face mirrored in the glass, while at the same time it merged with that of the boy inside. A memory floated up. His grandfather, and him as a boy. The long summer holiday, a family meal in Romsdalen. Him laughing at his grandfather. The worried look on his parents' faces. His grandfather, drunk.

Harry felt the key again. Borggata. A five- or six-minute walk away.

He got his phone out. Looked at the log. Made a call. Stared at the knuckles of his right hand as he waited. The pain was already fading, so he couldn't have punched very hard. But obviously the virginal nose of a David Gray

fan couldn't cope with much before it started to squirt blood.

'Yes, Harry?'

'Yes, Harry?'

'I'm in the middle of dinner.'

'OK, I'll be quick. Can you come and meet me after dinner?'

'No.'

'Wrong answer, try again.'

'Yes?'

'That's more like it. Borggata 5. Call me when you get there and I'll come down and let you in.'

Harry heard a deep sigh from Ståle Aune, his friend of many years' standing and Crime Squad's go-to psychological expert on murder cases. 'Does that mean this isn't an invitation to go to a bar where I'll have to pay, and that you're actually sober?'

'Have I *ever* let you pay?' Harry pulled out a packet of Camels.

'You used to pick up the tab, and remember what you'd done. But alcohol is well on its way to eating up your finances as well as your memory. You do know that, don't you?'

'Yes. This is about that domestic murder. With the knife and—'

'Yes, yes, I read about it.'

Harry put a cigarette between his lips. 'Are you coming?'

He heard another deep sigh. 'If it'll keep you away from the bottle for a few hours.'

'Great,' Harry said, then ended the call and slipped his phone into his jacket pocket. He lit the cigarette. Inhaled deeply. He stood with his back to the restaurant's closed

door. He had time to have one beer in there and still be in Borggata in time to meet Aune. The music filtered out. An autotuned declaration of undying love. He held one hand up apologetically towards a car as he lurched out into the road.

The old, working-class facades of Borggata hid newly built flats with bright living rooms, open-plan kitchens, modern bathrooms, and balconies overlooking the inner courtyards. Harry took that as a sign that Tøyen was going to be tarted up as well: rents would go up, the residents moved out, the social status of that part of town adjusted upwards. The immigrants' grocery stores and little cafés would give way to gyms and hipster restaurants.

The psychologist looked uncomfortable as he sat on one of the two flimsy rib-backed chairs Harry had placed in the middle of the pale parquet floor. Harry assumed that was because of the disparity between the chair and Ståle Aune's overweight frame, as well as the fact that his small round glasses were still steamed up after he had reluctantly foregone the lift and walked up the stairs to the third floor with Harry. Or possibly the pool of blood that lay like a congealed, black wax seal between them. One summer holiday when Harry was young, his grandfather had told him that you couldn't eat money. When Harry got to his room he took out the five-kroner coin his grandfather had given him and tried. He remembered the way it had jarred his teeth, the metallic smell and sweet taste. Just like when he licked the blood after cutting himself. Or the smell of crime scenes he would later attend, even if the blood wasn't fresh. The smell of the room they were sitting in now. Money. Blood money.

'A knife,' Ståle Aune said, pushing his hands up into

his armpits as if he was afraid someone was going to hit them. ‘There’s something about the idea of a knife. Cold steel pushing through skin and into your body. It just freaks me out, as the young folk would say.’

Harry didn’t reply. He and the Crime Squad Unit had used Aune as a consultant on murder cases for so many years that Harry couldn’t actually put his finger on when he had started to think of the psychologist, who was twenty years his senior, as a friend. But he knew Aune well enough to recognise that his pretending not to know that ‘freak out’ was a phrase older than both of them was an affectation. Aune liked to present himself as an old, conservative type, unfettered by the spirit of the times his colleagues chased after so desperately in an effort to appear ‘relevant’. As Aune had once said to the press: *Psychology and religion have one thing in common: to a large extent, they both give people what they want. Out there in the darkness, where the light of science has yet to reach, psychology and religion have free rein. And if they were to stick to what we actually know, there wouldn’t be jobs for all these psychologists and priests.*

‘So this was where the husband stabbed his wife . . . how many times?’

‘Thirteen times,’ Harry said, looking around. There was a large, framed black-and-white photograph of the Manhattan skyline on the wall facing them. The Chrysler Building in the centre. Probably bought from IKEA. So what? It was a good picture. If it didn’t bother you that lots of other people had the same picture, and that some visitors would look down their noses at it, not because it wasn’t good, but because it was bought at IKEA, then why not go for it? He had used the same line on Rakel when she said she would have liked a numbered print of

a photograph by Torbjørn Rødland – a white stretch limo negotiating a hairpin bend in Hollywood – that cost eighty thousand kroner. Rakel had conceded that Harry was entirely right. He had been so happy that he had bought the stretch limo picture for her. Not that he didn't realise she had tricked him, but because deep down he'd had to admit that it really *was* a much cooler image.

'He was angry,' Aune said, undoing the top button of his shirt, where he normally wore a bow tie, usually with a pattern that balanced between serious and amusing, like the blue EU flag with gold stars.

A child started to cry in one of the neighbouring flats.

Harry tapped the ash from his cigarette. 'He says he can't remember the details of why he killed her.'

'Suppressed memories. They should have let me hypnotise him.'

'I didn't know you did that.'

'Hypnosis? How do you think I got married?'

'Well, there was no real need here. The forensic evidence shows that she was heading across the living room, away from him, and that he came after her and stabbed her from behind first. The blade penetrated low on her back and hit her kidneys. That probably explains why the neighbours didn't hear any screaming.'

'Oh?'

'It's such a painful place to be stabbed that the victim is paralysed, can't even scream, then loses consciousness almost immediately and dies. It also happens to be the favoured method among military professionals for a so-called silent kill.'

'Really? What happened to the good old method of sneaking up on someone from behind, putting one hand over their mouth and cutting their throat with the other?'

‘Outdated – it was never really that good anyway. It takes too much coordination and precision. You wouldn’t believe the number of times soldiers ended up cutting themselves in the hand that was clamped over the victim’s mouth.’

Aune grimaced. ‘I’m assuming our husband isn’t a former commando or anything like that?’

‘The fact that he stabbed her there was probably sheer coincidence. There’s nothing to suggest that he intended to conceal the murder.’

‘Intended? You’re saying it was premeditated rather than impulsive?’

Harry nodded slowly. ‘Their daughter was out jogging. He called the police before she got home, so that we were in position outside and were able to stop her before she came in and found her mother.’

‘Considerate.’

‘So they say. That he was a considerate man.’ Harry tapped more ash from his cigarette. It fell onto the pool of dried blood.

‘Shouldn’t you get an ashtray, Harry?’

‘The CSI team are done here, and everything makes sense.’

‘Yes, but even so.’

‘You haven’t asked about the motive.’

‘OK. Motive?’

‘Classic. The battery in his phone ran out, and he borrowed hers without her knowledge. He saw a text message he thought was suspicious, and checked the thread. The exchange went back six months, and was evidently between her and a lover.’

‘Did he confront the lover?’

‘No, but the report says the phone’s been checked, the



messages found and the lover contacted. A young man, mid-twenties, twenty-five years younger than her. He's confirmed that they had a relationship.'

'Anything else I should know?'

'The husband is a highly educated man with a secure job, no money worries, and had never been in trouble with the police. Family, friends, workmates and neighbours all describe him as friendly and mild-mannered, solidity personified. And, as you said, considerate. "A man prepared to sacrifice everything for his family," one of the reports said.' Harry drew hard on his cigarette.

'Are you asking me because you don't think the case has been solved?'

Harry let the smoke out through his nostrils. 'The case is a no-brainer, the evidence has all been secured, it's impossible to fuck this one up, which is why Katrine has given it to me. And Truls Berntsen.' Harry pulled the corners of his mouth into something resembling a smile. The family was well off. But they chose to live in Tøyen, a cheaper part of town with a large migrant population, and bought art from IKEA. Maybe they just liked it here. Harry himself liked Tøyen. And maybe the picture on the wall was the original, now worth a small fortune.

'So you're asking because . . .'

'Because I want to understand,' Harry said.

'You want to understand why a man kills his wife because she's been having an affair behind his back?'

'Usually a husband only kills if he thinks other people's opinion of him has been damaged. And when he was questioned, the lover said they had kept the affair strictly secret, and that it was in the process of winding down anyway.'

'Maybe she didn't have time to tell her husband that before he stabbed her, then?'

‘She did, but he says he didn’t believe her, and that she had still betrayed their family.’

‘There you go. And to a man who has always put his family above everything else, that betrayal would feel even worse. He’s a humiliated man, and when that humiliation cuts deeply enough it can make anyone capable of killing.’

‘Anyone?’

Aune squinted at the bookcases next to the picture of Manhattan. ‘Fiction.’

‘Yes, so I saw,’ Harry said. Aune had a theory that killers didn’t read, or, if they did, only non-fiction.

‘Have you ever heard of Paul Mattiuzzi?’ Aune asked.

‘Hmm.’

‘Psychologist, an expert in violence and murder. He divides murderers into eight main groups. You and I aren’t in any of the first seven. But there’s room for all of us in the eighth group, which he calls the “traumatised”. We become murderers as a reaction to a simple but massive assault on our identity. We experience the attack as insulting, literally unbearable. It renders us helpless, impotent, and we would be left without any right to exist, emasculated, if we didn’t respond. And obviously being betrayed by your wife can feel like that.’

‘*Anyone*, though?’

‘A traumatised murderer doesn’t have defined personality traits like the other seven groups. And it’s there – and only there – that you find murderers who read Dickens and Balzac.’ Aune took a deep breath and tugged at the sleeves of his tweed jacket. ‘What are you really wondering about, Harry?’

‘Really?’

‘You know more about murderers than anyone I know.’

None of what I'm saying about humiliation and categories is new to you.'

Harry shrugged. 'Maybe I just need to hear someone say it out loud one more time to make me believe it.'

'What is it you don't believe?'

Harry scratched his short, stubbornly unruly hair – there were now streaks of grey among the blond. Rakel had said he was starting to look like a hedgehog. 'I don't know.'

'Maybe it's just your ego, Harry.'

'What do you mean?'

'Isn't it obvious? You were given the case after someone else had already solved it. So you want to find something that throws doubt on it. Something that proves Harry Hole can see things no one else has spotted.'

'What if I am?' Harry said, studying the glowing tip of his cigarette. 'What if I was born with a magnificent talent for detective work and have developed instincts that not even *I'm* capable of analysing?'

'I hope you're joking.'

'Barely. I've read the interviews. The husband certainly seemed pretty traumatised from what he said. But then I listened to the recordings.' Harry was staring in front of him.

'And?'

'He sounded more frightened than resigned. A confession is a form of resignation. There shouldn't be anything to be frightened of after that.'

'Punishment, of course.'

'He's already had his punishment. Humiliation. Pain. Seeing his beloved wife dead. Prison is isolation. Calm. Routine. Peace. That can't be anything but a relief. Maybe it's the daughter, him worrying about what's going to happen to her.'

‘And then there’s the fact that he’s going to burn in hell.’

‘He’s already there.’

Aune sighed. ‘So, let me repeat, what do you really want?’

‘I want you to call Rakel and tell her to take me back.’

Ståle Aune’s eyes widened.

‘*That* was a joke,’ Harry said. ‘I’ve been having palpitations. Anxiety attacks. No, that’s not quite right. I’ve been dreaming . . . something. Something I can’t quite see, but it keeps coming back to me.’

‘Finally, an easy question,’ Aune said. ‘Intoxication. Psychology is a science without a lot of solid facts to lean on, but the correlation between the consumption of intoxicants and mental distress is one of the few firm facts. How long has this been going on?’

Harry looked at his watch. ‘Two and a half hours.’

Ståle Aune let out a hollow laugh. ‘And you wanted to talk to me so you can at least tell yourself that you sought external medical help before you go back to self-medication?’

‘It’s not the usual stuff,’ Harry said. ‘It isn’t the ghosts.’

‘Because they come at night?’

‘Yes. And they don’t hide. I see them and I recognise them. Victims, dead colleagues. Killers. This was something else.’

‘Any idea what?’

Harry shook his head. ‘Someone who’s been locked up. He reminded me of . . .’ Harry leaned forward and stubbed his cigarette out on the pool of blood.

‘Of Svein Finne, “the Fiancé”,’ Aune said.

Harry looked up with one eyebrow raised. ‘Why do you think that?’

‘It’s obvious that you think he’s out to get you.’

'You've spoken to Katrine.'

'She's worried about you. She wanted an evaluation.'

'And you agreed?'

'I said that as a psychologist I don't have the necessary detachment from you. But that paranoia can also be one aspect of alcohol abuse.'

'I'm the one who finally got him locked away, Ståle. He was my first case. He got twenty years for sexual assault and murder.'

'You were just doing your job. There's no reason why Finne would take it personally.'

'He confessed to the assaults but denied the murder charges, claimed we'd planted evidence. I went to see him in prison the year before last to see if he could help us with the vampirist case, if he knew anything about Valentin Gjertsen. The last thing he did before I left was tell me exactly when he was due to be released, and to ask if my family and I felt safe.'

'Did Rakel know about this?'

'Yes. At New Year I found boot prints in the patch of woodland outside the kitchen window, so I set up a camera.'

'That could have been anyone, Harry. Someone who just got lost.'

'On private property, past a gate and up a steep, icy, fifty-metre driveway?'

'Hang on – didn't you move out at Christmas?'

'More or less.' Harry wafted the smoke away.

'But you went back after that, to the patch of trees? Did Rakel know?'

'No, but come on, I haven't turned into a stalker. Rakel was frightened enough as it is, and I just wanted to check that everything was OK. And, as it turns out, it wasn't.'

‘So she didn’t know about the camera either?’

Harry shrugged his shoulders.

‘Harry?’

‘Hmm?’

‘You’re *quite* sure that you set that camera up because of Finne?’

‘You mean, did I want to find out if my ex was seeing anyone else?’

‘Did you?’

‘No,’ Harry said firmly. ‘If Raket doesn’t want me, she’s welcome to try someone else.’

‘Do you really believe that?’

Harry sighed.

‘OK,’ Aune said. ‘You said you caught a glimpse of someone who looked like Finne, locked up?’

‘No, that’s what you said. It wasn’t Finne.’

‘No?’

‘No, it was . . . me.’

Ståle Aune ran his hand through his thinning hair. ‘And now you want a diagnosis?’

‘Come on. Anxiety?’

‘I think your brain is looking for reasons why Raket would need you. For instance, to protect her from external threats. But you’re not locked up, Harry – you’ve been locked out. Accept it and move on.’

‘Apart from the “accept it” stuff, any medication you can prescribe?’

‘Sleep. Exercise. And maybe you could try meeting someone who could take your mind off Raket.’

Harry stuck a cigarette in the corner of his mouth and held up his clenched fist with his thumb sticking out. ‘Sleep. I drink myself senseless every night. Check.’ His index finger shot up. ‘Exercise. I get into fights with

people in bars I used to own. Check.’ The grey, titanium finger. ‘Meet someone. I fuck women, nice ones, nasty ones, and afterwards I have meaningful conversations with some of them. Check.’

Aune looked at Harry. Then he let out a deep sigh, stood up and fastened his tweed jacket. ‘Well, you should be fine, then.’

Harry sat there staring out of the window after Aune had gone. Then he got up and walked through the rooms in the flat. The married couple’s bedroom was tidy, clean, the bed neatly made. He looked in the cupboards. The wife’s wardrobe was spread across four spacious cupboards, while the husband’s clothes were squeezed into one. A considerate husband. There were rectangles on the wallpaper in the daughter’s room where the colours were brighter. Harry guessed they had been made by teenage posters she had taken down now she was nineteen. There was still one small picture, a young guy with a Rickenbacker electric guitar slung round his neck.

Harry looked through the little collection of records on the shelf by the mirror. Propagandhi. Into It. Over It. My Heart To Joy. Panic! at the Disco. Emo stuff.

So he was surprised when he switched on the record player to listen to the album already on it and heard the gentle, soothing tones of something that sounded like early Byrds. But despite the Roger McGuinn-style twelve-string guitar, he quickly recognised that it was a far more recent production. It didn’t matter how many valve amps and old Neumann microphones they used, retro production never fooled anyone. Besides, the vocalist had a distinct Norwegian accent, and you could tell he’d listened to more 1995-vintage Thom Yorke and Radiohead

than Gene Clark and David Crosby from 1965. He glanced at the album sleeve lying upside down next to the record player and, sure enough, the names all looked Norwegian. Harry's eyes moved on to a pair of Adidas trainers in front of the wardrobe. They were the same sort as his, he'd tried to buy a new pair a couple of years ago but they had already stopped making them then. He thought back to the interview transcripts, in which both father and daughter had said she left the flat at 20.15 and returned thirty minutes later after a run to the top of the sculpture park in Ekeberg, coming back via the Ekeberg Restaurant. Her running gear was on the bed, and in his mind's eye he could see the police letting the poor girl in and watching as she got changed and packed a bag of clothes. Harry crouched down and picked up the trainers. The leather was soft, the soles clean and shiny, the shoes hadn't been used much at all. Nineteen years. An unused life. His own pair had split. He could buy new ones, obviously, a different type. But he didn't want to, he'd found the only design he wanted from now on. The only design. Maybe they could still be repaired.

Harry went back into the living room. He wiped the cigarette ash from the floor. Checked his phone. No messages. He put his hand in his pocket. Two hundred kroner.



# 4

‘LAST ORDERS, THEN WE’RE CLOSING.’

Harry stared down at his drink. He had managed to drag it out. Usually he necked them because it wasn’t the taste he liked, but the effect. ‘Liked’ wasn’t really the right word, though. *Needed*. No, not *needed* either. *Had to have*. *Couldn’t live without*. Artificial respiration when half your heart had stopped beating.

Those running shoes would just have to be repaired.

He took out his phone again. Harry only had seven people in his contacts, and because they all had names starting with different letters, the list consisted of single letters, not first and last names. He tapped on R and saw her profile picture. That soft, brown gaze that asked to be met. Warm, glowing skin that asked to be stroked. Red lips that asked to be kissed. The women he had got undressed and slept with in the past few months – had there been a single second when he *hadn’t* been thinking about Rakel while he was with them, *hadn’t* imagined that they were her? Had they realised, had he even told them, that he was being unfaithful to them with his wife even as he fucked them? Had he been that cruel? Almost certainly. Because his half-heart was beating weaker and

weaker with each passing day, and he had returned from his temporary life as a real person.

He stared at the phone.

And he thought the same thing he had thought every day as he passed the phone box in Hong Kong so many years ago. That she *was* there. Right then, her and Oleg. Inside the phone. Twelve tapped digits away.

But even that was long after Rakel and Harry met for the first time.

That happened fifteen years ago. Harry had driven up the steep, winding road to her wooden house in Holmenkollen. His car had breathed a sigh of relief when he arrived, and a woman emerged from the house. Harry asked after Sindre Fauke as she locked the front door, and it wasn't until she turned round and came closer that he noticed how pretty she was. Brown hair; pronounced, almost wild eyebrows above brown eyes; high, aristocratic cheekbones. Dressed in a simple, elegant coat. In a voice that was deeper than her appearance suggested, she told him that was her father, that she had inherited the house and he no longer lived there. Rakel Fauke had a confident, relaxed way of speaking, with exaggerated, almost theatrical diction, and she looked him right in the eye. When she walked off, she walked in an absolutely straight line, like a ballet dancer. He had stopped her, asked for help jump-starting his car. Afterwards he gave her a lift. They discovered that they had studied law at the same time. That they had attended the same Raga Rockers concert. He liked the sound of her laughter; it wasn't as deep as her voice, but bright and light, like a trickling stream. She was going to Majorstua.

'It's by no means certain this car's going to make it that far,' he had said. And she agreed with him. As if they

already had an idea of what hadn't yet begun, what really couldn't happen. When she was about to get out, he had to shove the broken passenger door open for her, breathing in her scent. Only thirty minutes had passed since they'd met, and he wondered what the hell was going on. All he wanted to do was kiss her.

'Maybe see you around,' she said.

'Maybe,' he replied, then watched as she disappeared down Sporveisgata with a ballerina's steps.

The next time they met was at a party in Police Headquarters. It turned out that Rakel Fauke worked in the foreign section of POT, the Police Surveillance Agency. She was wearing a red dress. They stood talking together, laughing. Then they talked some more. He about his upbringing, his sister Sis who had what she herself described as 'a touch of Down's Syndrome', about his mother who died when Harry was young, and that he had had to look after his father. Rakel had told him about studying Russian in the Armed Forces, her time at the Norwegian Embassy in Moscow, and the Russian man she had met, who ended up becoming the father of her son, Oleg. And that when she left Moscow, she had also left her husband, who had alcohol problems. And Harry had told her that he was an alcoholic, something she might already have guessed when she saw him drinking Coke at a staff party. He didn't mention the fact that his intoxicant that evening was her laughter – clear, spontaneous, bright – and that he was willing to say the most revealing, idiotic things about himself just to hear it. And then, towards the end of the evening, they had danced. Harry had *danced*. To a turgid version of 'Let It Be' played on panpipes. That was the proof: he was hopelessly in love.

A few days later he went on a Sunday outing with Oleg and Rakel. At one point, Harry had held Rakel's hand, because it felt natural. After a while she pulled her hand away. And when Oleg was playing Tetris with his mum's new friend, Harry had felt Rakel staring darkly at him and knew what she was thinking. That an alcoholic, possibly similar to the one she had walked away from, was now sitting in her house with her son. And Harry had realised he was going to have to prove himself worthy.

He had done it. Who knows, maybe Rakel and Oleg saved him from drinking himself to death. Obviously things hadn't been one unbroken triumphal march after that, he had fallen flat on his face several times, there had been breaks and separations, but they had always found their way back to each other. Because they had found laughter in each other. Love, with a capital L. Love so exclusive that you should count yourself bloody lucky if you ever get to experience it – and have it reciprocated – just once in your life. And for the past few years they had woken up each morning to a harmony and happiness that was simultaneously so strong and so fragile that it had frightened the life out of him. It made him creep about as if he were walking on thin ice. So why had it cracked anyway? Because he was the man he was, of course. Harry fucking Hole. Or 'the demolition man', as Øystein called him.

Could he follow that path again? Drive up the steep, winding, difficult road to Rakel and introduce himself again. Be the man she had never met before. Of course he could try. Yes, he could do that. And now was as good a time as ever. The perfect time, in fact. There were just two problems. Firstly, he didn't have the money for a taxi. But that was easily fixed, it would take him ten minutes

to walk home, where his Ford Escort, his third one, was sitting covered in snow in the car park in the backyard.

Secondly, the voice inside him telling him it was a terrible idea.

But that could be stopped. Harry downed his drink. Just like that. He stood up and walked towards the door.

‘See you, mate!’ the bartender called after him.

Ten minutes later Harry was standing in the backyard on Sofies gate, looking dubiously at the car, which was parked in eternal shadow between the snowboards covering the basement windows. It wasn’t as badly covered with snow as he had expected, so he just had to go upstairs, fetch the keys, start it up and put his foot on the gas. He could be at hers in fifteen minutes. Open the front door to the big, open room that served as hall, living room and kitchen, covering most of the ground floor. He would see her standing at the worktop by the window looking out over the terrace. She would give him a wry smile, nod towards the kettle and ask if he still preferred instant coffee over espresso.

Harry gasped at the thought of it. And there it was again, the claw in his chest.

Harry was running. After midnight on a Sunday in Oslo, that meant you had the streets to yourself. His cracked trainers were held together with gaffer tape around the ankles. He was taking the same route the daughter on Borggata had said she had run, according to the report. Along illuminated paths and tracks through the hillside sculpture park – a gift to the city from property tycoon Christian Ringnes, and an homage to women. It was perfectly still, the only sounds were Harry’s own breathing and the crunch of the grit beneath his shoes. He ran up

to where the park flattened out towards Ekebergsletta, then down again. He stopped at Damien Hirst's *Anatomy of an Angel*, a sculpture in white stone that Rakel had told him was Carrera marble. The graceful, seated figure had made Harry think of the Little Mermaid in Copenhagen, but Rakel – who as usual had read up on what they were going to see – had explained that the inspiration was Alfred Boucher's *L'Hirondelle* from 1920. Maybe, but the difference was that Hirst's angel had been cut open by knives and scalpels so that her innards, muscles, bones and brain were visible. Was that what the sculptor wanted to show, that angels were also people inside? Or that some people are actually angels? Harry tilted his head. He could agree on the latter point. Even after all these years and everything he and Rakel had been through together, and even if he had dissected her as much as she had dissected him, he had found nothing but an angel. Angel and human, all the way through. Her capacity for forgiveness – which had obviously been a precondition for being with someone like Harry – was almost limitless. Almost. But obviously he had managed to find that limit. And then crossed it.

Harry looked at his watch and ran on. Sped up. Felt his heart work harder. He increased his speed a little more. Felt the lactic acid. A bit more. Felt the blood pumping round his body, tugging at the rubbish. Ironing out the past few bad days. Rinsing away the shit. Why did he imagine that running was the opposite of drinking, that it was the antidote, when it merely gave him a different type of rush? But so what? It was a better rush.

He emerged from the forest in front of the Ekeberg Restaurant, the once-run-down modernist structure where Harry, Øystein and Tresko had drunk their first beers in

their youth, and where the seventeen-year-old Harry was picked up by a woman he remembered as being really old, but who was probably only in her thirties. Either way, she had given him an uncomplicated initiation under her experienced direction, and he probably hadn't been the only one. Occasionally he wondered if the investor who had refurbished the restaurant might have been one of them, and had done it as a gesture of gratitude. Harry could no longer remember what she looked like, just the cooing whisper in his ear afterwards: *Not bad at all, lad. You'll see, you're going to make some women happy. And others unhappy.*

And one woman, both.

Harry stopped on the steps of the closed, dark restaurant.

Hands on his knees, head hanging down. He could feel his gag reflex tickling deep in his throat, and heard his own rasping breath. He counted to twenty as he whispered her name. *Rakel, Rakel.* Then he straightened up and looked down at the city beneath him. Oslo, an autumn city. Now, in spring, she looked like she had woken up reluctantly. But Harry wasn't bothered about the centre of the city, he was looking towards the ridge, towards her house, on the far side of what, in spite of all the lights and febrile human activity, was really nothing but the crater of a dead volcano, cold stone and solidified clay. He cast another glance at the timer on his watch and started to run.

He didn't stop until he was back in Borggata.

There, he stopped his watch and studied the numbers.

He jogged the rest of the way home at an easy pace. As he unlocked the door to his flat he heard the rough sound of grit against wood under his trainers and remembered what Katrine had said about picking his feet up.

He used his phone to play more of his Spotify list. The sound of The Hellacopters streamed from the Sonos Playbar that Oleg had got him for his birthday, which had overnight reduced the record collection on the shelves behind him to a dead monument to thirty years of laborious collecting, where anything that hadn't stood the test of time had been pulled out like weeds and thrown away. As the chaotic guitar and drum intro to 'Carry Me Home' made the speakers vibrate and he picked the grit from the sculpture park from the soles of his shoes, he thought about how the nineteen-year-old had willingly retreated into the past with vinyl records, whereas Harry was unwillingly backing into the future. He put his shoes down, looked for The Byrds, who weren't on any of his playlists – sixties and early seventies music were more Bjørn Holm's thing, and his attempts to convert Harry with Glen Campbell had been futile. He found 'Turn! Turn! Turn!', and moments later Roger McGuinn's Rickenbacker guitar was echoing round the room. But *she* had been converted. She had fallen in love with it even though it wasn't her music. There was something about guitars and girls. Four strings were enough, and this guy had twelve.

Harry considered the possibility that he might be the one who was wrong. But the hairs on the back of his neck were rarely wrong, and they had stood up when he recognised one of the names from the record sleeve in the interview transcript. And connected it to the picture of the guy with the Rickenbacker guitar. Harry lit a cigarette and listened to the double guitar solo at the end of 'Rainy Days Revisited'. He wondered how long it would be before he fell asleep. How long he would manage to leave his phone alone before checking to see if Rakel had replied.



# 5

‘WE KNOW YOU’VE ANSWERED THESE questions before, Sara,’ Harry said, looking at the nineteen-year-old girl sitting opposite him in the cramped interview room that felt a bit like a doll’s house. Truls Berntsen was sitting in the control room with his arms folded, yawning. It was ten o’clock, they had been going for an hour and Sara was showing signs of impatience as they went through the sequence of events, but no emotion beyond that. Not even when Harry read out loud from the report about the injuries her mother had suffered from the thirteen knife-wounds. ‘But, as I said, Officer Berntsen and I have taken over the investigation, and we’d like to understand everything as clearly as possible. So – did your father usually help with the cooking? I’m asking because he must have been very quick to find the sharpest kitchen knife, and must have known exactly which drawer it was in, and where.’

‘No, he didn’t *help*,’ Sara said, her displeasure even more apparent now. ‘He *did* the cooking. And the only person who helped was me. Mum was always out.’

‘Out?’

‘Meeting friends. At the gym. So she said.’

‘I’ve seen pictures of her, it looks like she kept herself in shape. Kept herself young.’

‘Whatever. She died young.’

Harry waited. Let the answer hang in the air. Then Sara pulled a face. Harry had seen it in other cases, the way that someone left behind struggled with grief as if it were an enemy, an irritating nuisance that needed to be cajoled and tricked. And one way of doing that was to downplay the loss, to discredit the dead. But he suspected that wasn’t actually the case this time. When Harry had suggested Sara might like to bring a lawyer she had dismissed the offer. She just wanted to get it over with, she said, she had other plans. Understandable enough, she was nineteen, alone, but she was adaptable, and life went on. And the case had been solved, which was presumably why she had relaxed. And was showing her true feelings. Or rather her lack of feelings.

‘You don’t get as much exercise as your mother,’ Harry said. ‘Not running, anyway.’

‘Don’t I?’ she replied with a half-smile and looked up at Harry. It was the self-assured smile of a young person from a generation in which you were one of the thin ones if you had a body Harry’s generation would have thought of as average.

‘I’ve seen your running shoes,’ Harry said. ‘They’ve barely been used. And that isn’t because they’re new, because they stopped making that sort two years ago. I’ve got the same ones.’

Sara shrugged. ‘I’ve got more time to go running now.’

‘Yes, your father’s going to be in prison for twelve years, so you won’t have to help him with the cooking for a while.’

Harry looked at her and saw that he had hit home.

Her mouth was hanging open and her black-painted eyelashes were fluttering up and down as she blinked hard.

‘Why are you lying?’ Harry asked.

‘Wh . . . What?’

‘You said you ran from home to the top of the sculpture park, down to the Ekeberg Restaurant, then back home again in thirty minutes. I ran the same distance last night. It took me almost forty-five minutes, and I’m a pretty good runner. I’ve also spoken to the police officer who stopped you when you got back. He said you weren’t sweating or particularly out of breath.’

Sara was sitting up straight now on the other side of the little doll’s-house table, staring unconsciously at the red light on the microphones that indicated they were recording, when she replied.

‘OK, I didn’t run all the way to the top.’

‘How far?’

‘To the Marilyn Monroe statue.’

‘So you must have run along those gritted paths, like me. When I got home I had to pick small stones out of the soles of my shoes, Sara. Eight in total. But the soles of your shoes were completely clean.’

Harry had no idea if there had been eight stones or only three. But the more precise he was, the more incontestable his reasoning would seem. And he could see from Sara’s face that it was working.

‘You didn’t go running at all, Sara. You left the flat at the time you told the police, at 20.15, while your father called the police claiming that he’d murdered your mother. Maybe you ran around the block, just long enough for the police to arrive, then you jogged back. Like your father told you to. Isn’t that right?’

Sara didn't answer, just went on blinking. Harry noted that her pupils had expanded.

'I've spoken to your mother's lover. Andreas. Professional name Bom-Bom. He may not sing quite as well as he plays his twelve-string guitar.'

'Andreas sings . . .' The anger in her eyes faded and she stopped herself.

'He admitted that you and he had met a few times, and said that was how he met your mother.' Harry looked down at his notepad. Not because he couldn't remember what was written in it – nothing – but to lower the intensity, to give her a bit of breathing room.

'Andreas and I were in love.' There was a faint tremor in Sara's voice.

'Not according to him. He said you'd had a couple of . . .' – Harry pulled his head back slightly to read what wasn't written in his notebook – “groupie fucks”.'

Sara twitched.

'But you wouldn't leave him alone, apparently. He said there's a fine line between groupie and stalker, in his experience. That things were simpler with a mature, married woman who accepted things for what they were. A bit of excitement to liven up the daily routine, spice things up a bit. That's how he put it. A way to spice things up.'

Harry looked up at her.

'It was you who borrowed your mother's phone, not your father. And discovered that she and Andreas had been having an affair.'

Harry checked to see how his conscience was doing. Bulldozing a nineteen-year-old with no lawyer, a lovesick teenager who had been betrayed by her mother and a guy she had managed to convince herself belonged to her.

'Your father isn't just self-sacrificing, Sara, he's smart

too. He knows that the best lie is one that's as close to the truth as possible. The lie is that your father was at the local shop picking up some things for dinner before going home, borrowing your mother's phone, finding the messages and killing her. The truth is that while he was at the shop, you found the messages, and from that point on I'm guessing that if we swap your and your father's roles in the report, we'd get a fairly accurate description of what happened in the kitchen. You argued, she turned her back on you to walk out, you knew where the knife was, and the rest played out more or less of its own accord. And when your father got home and discovered what had happened, you came up with this plan together.'

Harry saw no reaction in her eyes. Just an even, intense, black hatred. And realised that his conscience felt just fine. The authorities gave guns to nineteen-year-olds and ordered them to kill. And this one had killed her mother and was prepared to let her innocent father throw himself under the bus for her. Sara wasn't going to be one of the figures who visited Harry in his nightmares.

'Andreas loves me,' she whispered. It sounded like her mouth was full of sand. 'But Mum lured him away from me. She seduced him just so I couldn't have him. I hate her. I . . .' She was close to tears. Harry held his breath. They were almost there, the race was on, he just needed a few more words on tape, but crying would cause a delay, and in the delay the avalanche might grind to a halt. Sara raised her voice. 'I hate that fucking bitch! I should have stabbed her even more, I should have cut off that smug face she was so fucking proud of!'

'Mm.' Harry leaned back in his chair. 'You wish you'd killed her more slowly, is that what you're saying?'

'Yes!'

Confession to murder. Touchdown. Harry cast a quick glance through the doll's house window and saw that Truls Berntsen had woken up and was giving him the thumbs up. But Harry felt no joy. On the contrary, the excitement he had felt just a few seconds before had been replaced by a weary sadness, almost disappointment. It wasn't an unfamiliar feeling, it often arose after a long chase where anticipation of solving the case had built up, anticipation of the arrest as a cathartic climax, a hope that it might change something, make the world a slightly better place. Instead, what followed was often a sort of post-case depression with associated alcoholic elements and days or weeks on the bottle. Harry imagined that it resembled a serial killer's frustration when the murder didn't provide any prolonged sense of satisfaction, just a feeling of anti-climax that drove him back out into the chase again. Maybe that's why Harry – for a fleeting moment – felt bitter disappointment, as if he had briefly swapped places with her and was sitting on the other side of the table.

'We sorted that out very nicely,' Truls Berntsen said in the lift on the way up to the Crime Squad Unit on the sixth floor.

'We?' Harry said drily.

'I pressed the Record button, didn't I?'

'I certainly hope so. Did you check the recording?'

'Did I check it?' Truls Berntsen raised one eyebrow questioningly. Then he grinned. 'Relax.'

Harry took his eyes off the glowing floor numbers and looked down at Berntsen. And felt that he envied his colleague with the weak chin, protruding brow and the grunting laughter that had earned him the nickname

Beavis, which no one dared say out loud, probably because there was something about Truls Berntsen's passive-aggressive demeanour that meant you didn't want to be in his line of fire during a critical situation. Truls was even less popular than Harry Hole in Crime Squad, but that wasn't why Harry envied him. He envied Truls's ability to not give a damn. Mind you, Harry didn't give a damn what his colleagues thought of him either. No, it was Berntsen's ability to shrug off any sense of responsibility, practical as well as moral, for the job he was supposed to do as a police officer. You could say a lot of things about Harry, and he was well aware that plenty of people did, but no one could take away the fact that he was a real police officer. That was one of his few blessings, and probably his greatest curse. Even when Harry was on the skids in his private life, like he had been since Rakel kicked him out, the policeman in him couldn't just give up and tumble headlong into anarchy and nihilism the way Truls Berntsen had. No one would thank Harry for not giving up, but that was fine, he wasn't after gratitude, and he wasn't seeking salvation through good deeds. His tireless, almost compulsive search for the worst offenders in society had been his only reason for getting up each morning until he met Rakel. So he was grateful for that herd instinct or whatever it was, for providing him with an anchor. But part of him longed for total, destructive freedom, cutting the anchor chain and getting crushed by the breakers, or simply disappearing into the deep, dark ocean.

They got out of the lift and walked along the corridor with its red-painted walls that confirmed they had got off at the right floor, past the separate offices towards the open-plan space.

'Hey, Hole!' Skarre called from an open door. He had

recently been appointed an inspector and had been given Harry's old office. 'The dragon's looking for you.'

'Your wife?' Harry asked, not bothering to slow down to wait for Skarre's presumably furious and failed attempt at a retort.

'Nice,' Berntsen said with a grin. 'Skarre's an idiot.'

Harry didn't know if that was meant as an outstretched hand, but he didn't answer. He had no intention of acquiring any more ill-advised friendships.

He turned off left without any word of goodbye and stepped in through the open door to the head of department's office. A man was standing with his back to him, leaning over Katrine Bratt's desk, but it wasn't hard to recognise the shiny bald head with its oddly profuse wreath of black hair.

'Hope I'm not disturbing, but I heard I was wanted?'

Katrine Bratt looked up, and the Chief of Police Gunnar Hagen spun round as if he had been caught doing something. They looked at Harry in silence.

He raised an eyebrow. 'What? You've already heard?'

Katrine and Hagen exchanged a look. Hagen grinned. 'Have *you*?'

'What do you mean?' Harry said. 'I was the one who questioned her.'

Harry's brain searched and came up with a suggestion that the police lawyer Harry had called after the interview to discuss the father's release must have called Katrine Bratt in turn. But what was the Chief of Police doing here?

'I advised the daughter to bring a lawyer, but she declined,' Harry said. 'And I repeated the offer before the start of the interview, but she declined again. We've got that on tape. Well, not tape, but on the hard drive.'



Neither of them smiled, and Harry could tell that something was wrong. Very wrong.

‘Is it the father?’ Harry asked. ‘Has he . . . done something?’

‘No,’ Katrine said. ‘It’s not the father, Harry.’

Harry’s brain unconsciously noted the details: the fact that Hagen had let Katrine, the one of them who was closer to him, take over. And that she had used his first name when she didn’t have to. To soften the blow. In the silence that followed, he felt the clawing at his chest again. And even if Harry didn’t have any great belief in telepathy and foresight, it felt as if what was coming was what the claw, the little glimpses, had been trying to tell him all along.

‘It’s Rakel,’ Katrine said.

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