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## PROLOGUE

'OSLO,' THE MAN SAID, RAISING the glass of whiskey to his lips.

'That's the place you love the most?' Lucille asked.

He stared ahead, seeming to think about his answer before he nodded. She studied him while he drank. He was tall; even sitting down on the bar stool next to her he towered above her. He had to be at least ten, maybe twenty years younger than her seventy-two; it was hard to tell with alcoholics. His face and body seemed carved from wood, lean, pure and rigid. His skin was pale, a fine mesh of blue veins visible on his nose, which together with bloodshot eyes, the irises the colour of faded denim, suggested he had lived hard. Drunk hard. Fallen hard. And loved hard too, perhaps, for during the month he had become a regular at Creatures she had glimpsed a hurt in his eyes. Like that of a beaten dog, kicked out of the pack, always on his own at the end of the bar. Next to Bronco, the mechanical bull that Ben, the bar owner, had taken from the set of the giant turkey *Urban Cowboy*, where he had worked as a propman. It served as a reminder that Los Angeles wasn't a city built on movie successes but on a garbage heap of human and financial failure. Over eighty per cent of

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all the films made bombed completely and lost money; the city had the highest homeless population in the USA, living at a density comparable to Mumbai. Traffic congestion was in the process of choking the life out of the city, though street crime, drugs and violence might get there first. But the sun was shining. Yes, that damn Californian dentist's lamp never switched off, but shone relentlessly, making all the baubles in this phoney town glitter like real diamonds, like true stories of success. If only they knew. Like she, Lucille, knew, because she had been there, on the stage. And backstage.

The man sitting next to her had definitely not been on the stage; she recognised people in the industry immediately. But neither did he look like someone who had stared in admiration, hope or envy up at the stage. He looked more like someone who couldn't care less. Someone with their own thing going on. A musician, perhaps? One of those Frank Zappa types, producing his own impenetrable stuff in a basement up here in Laurel Canyon, who had never been – and would never be – discovered?

After he had been in a few times, Lucille and the new guy had begun to exchange nods and brief words of greeting, the way morning guests at a bar for serious drinkers do, but this was the first time she had sat down next to him and bought him a drink. Or rather, she had paid for the drink he had already ordered when she saw Ben hand him back his credit card with an expression that told her it was maxed out.

'But does Oslo love you back?' she asked. 'That's the question.'

'Hardly,' he said. She noticed his middle finger was a metal prosthetic as he ran a hand through a brush of short, dirty-blond hair, tinged with grey. He was not a handsome man, and the liver-coloured scar in the shape of a J running from the corner of his mouth to his ear – as though he were a fish caught on a hook – didn't help matters. But he had something, something almost appealing and slightly dangerous about him, like some of her colleagues here in town. Christopher Walken. Nick Nolte. And he was broad-shouldered. Although that might have been down to the rest of him being so lean.

'Uh-huh, well, they're the ones we want the most,' Lucille said. 'The

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ones who don't love us back. The ones we think will love us if we just try that *little* bit more.'

'So, what do you do?' the man asked.

'Drink,' she said, raising her own whiskey. 'And feed cats.'

'Hm.'

'What you really want to know, I guess, is who I am. Well, I'm . . .' She drank from her glass while considering which version to give him. The one for parties or the truth. She put down her drink and decided on the latter. Screw it.

'An actor who played one big role. Juliet, in what remains the best film adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet*, but which nobody remembers any more. One big part doesn't sound like much, but it's more than most actors in this town get. I've been married three times, twice to well-off film-makers who I left with favourable divorce settlements, also more than most actors get. The third was the only one I loved. An actor, and an Adonis, lacking in money, discipline and conscience. He used up every penny I had then left me. I still love him, may he rot in hell.'

She finished the contents of her glass, put it on the bar and signalled to Ben for one more. 'And, because I always fall for what I can't get, I've invested money I don't have in a movie project with an enticingly big part for an older lady. A project with an intelligent script, actors who can actually act, and a director who'll give people food for thought, in short, a project that any rational individual would realise is doomed to failure. So that's me, a daydreamer, a loser, a typical Angelino.'

The man with the J-shaped scar smiled.

'OK, I'm all out of self-deprecation here,' she said. 'What's your name?'

'Harry.'

'You don't talk much, Harry.'

'Hm.'

'Swedish?'

'Norwegian.'

'You running from something?'

'That what it looks like?'

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‘Yeah. I see you’re wearing a wedding ring. You running from your wife?’

‘She’s dead.’

‘Ah. You’re running from grief.’ Lucille raised her glass in a toast. ‘You wanna know the place I love the most? Right here, Laurel Canyon. Not now, but at the end of the sixties. You should’ve been here, Harry. If you were even born then.’

‘Yeah, so I’ve heard.’

She pointed towards the framed photos on the wall behind Ben.

‘All the musicians hung out here. Crosby, Stills, Nash and . . . what was the name of that last guy?’

Harry smiled again.

‘The Mamas and the Papas,’ she continued. ‘Carole King. James Taylor. Joni Mitchell.’ She wrinkled her nose. ‘Looked and sounded like a Sunday-school girl, but she laid some of the aforementioned. Even got her claws into Leonard – he shacked up with her for a month or so. I was allowed to borrow him for one night.’

‘Leonard Cohen?’

‘The one and only. Lovely, sweet man. He taught me a little something about writing rhyming verse. Most people make the mistake of opening with their one good line, and then write some half-decent forced rhyme on the next one. The trick is to put the forced rhyme in the first sentence, then no one will notice it. Just take a look at the banal first line of “Hey, That’s No Way to Say Goodbye” and compare it with the beauty of the second line. There’s a natural elegance to both sentences. We hear it that way, because we think the writer is thinking in the same sequence as he writes. Little wonder really; after all, people are inclined to believe that what is happening is a result of what’s gone before, and not the other way around.’

‘Hm. So what happens is a result of what will happen?’

‘Exactly, Harry! You get that, right?’

‘I don’t know. Can you give me an example?’

‘Sure.’ She downed her drink. He must have heard something in her tone because she saw him raise an eyebrow and quickly scan the bar.

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‘What’s happening, at present, is that I’m telling you about how I owe money on a movie in development,’ she said, looking through the dirty window with the half-closed blinds at the dusty parking lot outside. ‘That’s no coincidence, rather a consequence of what *will* happen. There’s a white Camaro parked next to my car outside here.’

‘With two men inside,’ he said. ‘It’s been there for twenty minutes.’

She nodded. Harry had just confirmed that she was not mistaken in what she guessed to be his line of work.

‘I noticed that car outside my place up in the Canyon this morning,’ she said. ‘No big surprise, they’ve already given me a warning and told me they’d send collectors. And not the certified type. This loan wasn’t taken out at a bank, if you follow me. Now, when I walk out to my car these gentlemen are probably going to want to have words with me. I’m guessing they’ll still make do with that, warnings and threats, that is.’

‘Hm. And why tell me this?’

‘Because you’re a cop.’

Once more he raised an eyebrow. ‘Am I?’

‘My father was a cop and, clearly, you guys are recognisable the world over. The point is I want you to keep an eye out from here. If they get vocal and turn threatening, I’d like you to come out onto the porch and . . . you know, look like a cop, so they beat it. Listen, I’m pretty sure it’s not going to come to that, but I’d feel safer if you kept an eye out.’

Harry studied her for a moment. ‘OK,’ he simply said.

Lucille was surprised. Hadn’t he allowed himself to be persuaded a little too easily? At the same time there was something unwavering in his eyes that made her trust him. On the other hand, she had trusted the Adonis. And the director. And the producer.

‘I’m leaving now,’ she said.

Harry Hole held the glass in his hand. Listened to the almost inaudible hiss of ice cubes melting. Didn’t drink. He was broke, at the end of the line, and was going to drag this drink out and enjoy it. His gaze settled on one of the pictures behind the bar. It was a photograph of one of the

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favourite authors of his youth, Charles Bukowski, outside Creatures. Ben had told him it was from the seventies. Bukowski was standing with his arm around a buddy, at what looked like dawn; both were wearing Hawaiian shirts, their eyes swimming, pinpricks for pupils, and grinning triumphantly, as though they had just reached the North Pole after a gruelling journey.

Harry lowered his eyes to look at the credit card which Ben had tossed on the bar in front of him.

Maxed out. Emptied. Nothing left. Mission accomplished. Which had been this, to drink until there was indeed nothing left. No money, no days, no future. All that remained was to see if he had the courage – or the cowardice – to round it all off. There was an old Beretta handgun underneath the mattress in his room back at the boarding house. He had bought it for twenty-five dollars from a homeless guy living in one of the blue tents down on Skid Row. There were three bullets in it. He laid the credit card in the flat of his hand and curled his fingers around it. Turned to look out the window. Watched the old lady as she strutted out to the parking lot. She was so small. Slight, delicate and strong as a sparrow. Beige trousers and a short matching jacket. There was something 1980s about her archaic, but tasteful, clothing style. Walking the same way as how she swept into the bar every morning. Making an entrance. For an audience of between two and eight people.

‘Lucille is here!’ Ben would proclaim before, unbidden, he began mixing her usual poison, whiskey sour.

But it wasn’t the way she took a room that reminded Harry of his mother, who had died at the Radium Hospital when he was fifteen, putting the first bullet hole through his heart. It was the gentle, smiling, yet sad look in Lucille’s eyes, like that of a kind, but resigned soul. The concern she displayed for others when she asked for the latest news about their health problems, love lives, and their nearest and dearest. And the consideration she showed by letting Harry sit in peace at the far end of the bar. His mother, that taciturn woman who was the family’s control tower, its nerve centre, who pulled the strings so discreetly one could

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easily believe it was his father who called the shots. His mother, who had always offered a safe embrace, had always understood, whom he had loved above all else and who therefore had become his Achilles heel. Like that time in second grade when there had been a gentle knock on the classroom door and his mother was standing there with the lunch box he had left at home. Harry had brightened up automatically at the sight of her, before hearing some of his classmates laugh, whereupon he had marched out to her in the hall and, in a fury, had told her she was embarrassing him, she had to leave, he didn't need food. She had merely smiled sadly, given him the lunch box, stroked his cheek and left. He didn't mention it later. Of course, she had understood, the way she always did. And when he went to bed that night, he also understood. *She* was not the reason he had felt uncomfortable. It was the fact they had all seen it. His love. His vulnerability. He had thought about apologising several times over the following years, but that would probably just have felt stupid.

A cloud of dust rose up on the gravelled area outside, enveloping for a moment Lucille, who was holding her sunglasses in place. He saw the passenger door of the white Camaro open, and a man in sunglasses and a red polo shirt emerge. He walked to the front of the car, blocking Lucille's path to her own.

He expected to observe a conversation between the two. But instead the man took a step forward and grabbed hold of Lucille's arm. Began pulling her towards the Camaro. Harry saw the heels of her shoes dig into the gravel. And now he also saw that the Camaro didn't have American number plates. In that instant he was off the bar stool. Running towards the door, he burst it open with his elbow, was blinded by sunlight and almost stumbled on the two steps down from the porch. Realised he was far from sober. Then zeroed in on the two cars. His eyes gradually adjusting to the light. Beyond the parking lot, on the other side of the road winding its way up the green hillside, lay a sleepy general store, but he couldn't see any other people apart from the man and Lucille, who was being dragged towards the Camaro.

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‘Police!’ he shouted. ‘Let her go!’

‘Please stay out of this, sir,’ the man called back.

Harry surmised the man must have a similar background to his own, only policemen employed polite language in this type of situation. Harry also knew that a physical intervention was unavoidable, and that the first rule in close combat was simple: don’t wait, he who attacks first and with maximum aggression wins. So he didn’t slow down, and the other man must have realised Harry’s intention, because he let go of Lucille and reached for something he had behind him. His hand swung back around. In it he held a shiny handgun Harry recognised instantly. A Glock 17. Now pointed directly at him.

Harry slowed down but continued moving forwards. Saw the other man’s eye aiming from behind the gun. His voice was half drowned out by a passing pickup on the road.

‘Run back to where you came from, sir. Now!’

But Harry carried on walking towards him. Became aware he was still holding the credit card in his right hand. Was this how it ended? In a dusty parking lot in a foreign country, bathed in sunlight, broke and half drunk, while trying to do what he hadn’t been able to do for his mother, hadn’t been able to do for any of those he had ever cared about?

He almost closed his eyes and squeezed his fingers around the credit card, so his hand formed a chisel.

The title of the Leonard Cohen song swirled through his mind: ‘Hey, that’s no way to say goodbye.’

Fuck that, the hell it wasn’t.

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# 1

## FRIDAY

EIGHT O'CLOCK. HALF AN HOUR since the September sun had gone down over Oslo, and past bedtime for three-year-olds.

Katrine Bratt sighed and whispered into the phone: 'Can't you sleep, darling?'

'Gwanny is singing wong,' the child's voice answered, sniffing. 'Whe ah you?'

'I had to go to work, darling, but I'll be home soon. Would you like Mummy to sing a little?'

'Yeah.'

'Well, then you have to close your eyes.'

'Yeah.'

'“Blueman”?'

'Yeah.'

Katrine began singing the melancholy song in a low, deep voice. *Blueman, Blueman, my buck, think of your small boy.*

She had no idea why children had, for over a century, felt happy to be lulled to sleep by the story of an angst-ridden boy who wonders why

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Blueman, his favourite goat, hasn't returned home from grazing, and who fears it's been taken by a bear and now lies mutilated and dead somewhere in the mountains.

Still, after just one verse she could hear Gert's breathing become more regular and deep, and after the next verse she heard her mother-in-law's whispered voice on the phone.

'He's asleep now.'

'Thanks,' said Katrine, who had been squatting on her haunches so long she had to put her hand on the ground. 'I'll be back as soon as I can.'

'Take all the time you need, dear. And I'm the one who should be thanking you for wanting us here. You know, he looks so much like Bjørn when he's asleep.'

Katrine swallowed. Unable, as usual, to respond when she said that. Not because she didn't miss Bjørn, not because she wasn't happy that Bjørn's parents saw him in Gert. But because it simply wasn't true.

She concentrated on what lay in front of her.

'Intense lullaby,' said Sung-min Larsen, who had come and crouched down next to her. '“*Maybe now you lay dead*”?’

'I know, but it's the only one he wants to hear,' Katrine said.

'Well, then that's what he gets.' Her colleague smiled.

Katrine nodded. 'Have you ever thought about how as children we expect unconditional love from our parents, without giving anything in return? That we are actually parasites? But then we grow up and things change completely. When exactly do you think we stop believing that we can be loved unconditionally just for being who we are?'

'When did *she* stop, you mean?'

'Yeah.'

They looked down at the body of the young woman lying on the forest floor. Her trousers and knickers were pulled down to her ankles, but the zip on the thin down jacket was pulled up. Her face – which was turned to the starry skies above – appeared chalk-white in the glare of the Crime Scene Unit's floodlights, which were positioned among the trees. Her make-up was streaked, and looked like it had run and dried out several

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times. Her hair – bombed blonde by chemicals – was sticking to one side of her face. Her lips were stuffed with silicon, and false eyelashes protruded like the eaves of a roof over one eye, which was sunken down in its socket, staring glassily up and past them, and also over the other eye, which was not there, only an empty socket. Perhaps all the barely degradable synthetic materials were the reason the body had remained in as good condition as it had.

‘I’m guessing this is Susanne Andersen?’ Sung-min said.

‘I’m guessing the same,’ Katrine replied.

The detectives were from two different departments, she was with Crime Squad at the Oslo Police and he was with Kripos. Susanne Andersen, twenty-six years old, had been missing for seventeen days and was last spotted on a security camera at Skullerud metro station around a twenty-minute walk from where they were now. The only lead on the other missing woman, Bertine Bertilsen, twenty-seven years old, was her car, which was found abandoned in a car park in Grefsenkollen, a hiking area in another part of the city. The hair colour of the woman in front of them tallied with the security camera footage of Susanne, while Bertine was, according to family and friends, currently a brunette. Besides, the body had no tattoos on the naked lower body, while Bertine was supposed to have one – a Louis Vuitton logo – on her ankle.

So far, it had been a relatively cool and dry September, and the discoloration on the corpse’s skin – blue, purple, yellow, brown – might be consistent with it lying outdoors for close to three weeks. The same went for the smell, owing to the body’s production of gas, which gradually seeped out from all orifices. Katrine had also noted the white area of thin hair-like filaments below the nostrils: fungus. In the large wound on the throat, yellowish-white, blind maggots crawled. Katrine had seen it so often she no longer had any particular reaction. After all, blowflies were – in Harry’s words – as loyal as Liverpool fans. Turning up at a moment’s notice no matter the time or place, rain or shine, attracted by the smell of dimethyl trisulfide which the body begins to excrete from the moment of expiration. The females lay their eggs, and a few days later the larvae

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hatch and begin gorging on the rotting flesh. They pupate, turning into flies, which look for bodies to lay their own eggs in, and after a month they have lived their life to the end and die. That's their life cycle. Not so different to ours, Katrine thought. Or rather, not so different to mine.

Katrine looked around. White-clad members of Krimteknisk, the Forensics Unit, moved like soundless ghosts among the trees, casting eerie shadows every time the flashes on their cameras lit up. The forest was large. Østmarka continued on, for mile after mile, virtually all the way to Sweden. A jogger had found the body. Or rather, the jogger's dog, which had been allowed off the lead and had disappeared from the narrow gravel road and into the woods. It was already getting dark. The jogger – running with a headlamp – had followed after while calling out to the dog and had eventually found it, next to the body, wagging its tail. Well, no wagging had been mentioned, it was something Katrine had pictured.

'Susanne Andersen,' she whispered, not knowing quite to whom. Perhaps to the deceased, as comfort and assurance that she had finally been found and identified.

The cause of death appeared obvious. The cut that had been made across her throat, running like a smile over Susanne Andersen's narrow neck. The fly larvae, various forms of insects and perhaps other animals had probably helped themselves to most of the blood; however, Katrine still saw traces of blood spatter in the heather and on the trunk of one tree.

'Killed here *in situ*,' she said.

'Looks that way,' Sung-min replied. 'Do you think she was raped? Or just sexually assaulted after he killed her?'

'After,' Katrine said, shining the torch on Susanne's hands. 'No broken nails, no signs of a struggle. But I'll try and have them undertake a forensic post-mortem over the weekend and we'll see what they think.'

'And a clinical autopsy?'

'We won't get that until Monday at the earliest.'

Sung-min sighed. 'Well, I guess it's only a question of time before we

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find Bertine Bertilsen raped and with her throat slit somewhere in Grefsenkollen.’

Katrine nodded. She and Sung-min had become better acquainted over the past year, and he had confirmed his reputation as one of Kripos’s best detectives. There were many who believed he would take over as Senior Inspector the day Ole Winter stepped down, and that from then on the department would have a far better boss. Possibly. But there were also those who voiced reservations about the country’s foremost investigative body being led by an adopted South Korean and homosexual who dressed like a member of the British aristocracy. His classic tweed hunting jacket and suede-and-leather country boots stood in stark contrast to Katrine’s thin Patagonia down jacket and Gore-Tex trainers. When Bjørn was alive, he had called her style ‘gorpcore’, which, she had been given to understand, was an international term for people who went to the pub dressed as though they were headed up the mountains. She had called it adapting to life as the mother of a small child. But she had to admit that this more subdued, practical style of dress was also owing to the fact that she was no longer a young, rebellious investigative talent but the head of Crime Squad.

‘What do you think this is?’ Sung-min said.

She knew he was thinking the same as her. And that neither of them intended to say those words out loud. Not yet. Katrine cleared her throat.

‘The first thing we do is stick to what we’ve got here and find out what happened.’

‘Agreed.’

Katrine hoped ‘agreed’ was a word she would hear often from Kripos in future. But she did, of course, welcome all the help they could get. Kripos had let it be known they were ready to step up from the point Bertine Bertilsen was reported missing exactly a week after Susanne, and under strikingly similar circumstances. Both women had gone out on a Tuesday evening without telling any of those the police had spoken to where they were going or what they were doing, and had not been seen since. Besides, there were other circumstances linking the two women. When these

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came to light, the police shelved their theory of Susanne having been in an accident or having taken her own life.

‘All right, then,’ Katrine said and stood up. ‘I’d better notify the boss.’

Katrine had to remain standing for a moment before regaining the feeling in her legs. She used the light on her mobile phone to ensure she trod on more or less the same footprints they had made on their way into the crime scene. Once beyond the cordon tape, which was strung between trees, she tapped in the first letters of the name of the Chief Superintendent. Bodil Melling picked up after the third ring.

‘Bratt here. Sorry for calling so late, but it looks like we might have found one of the missing women. Murdered, her throat is cut, probable arterial spatter, likely raped or sexually assaulted. Fairly certain it’s Susanne Andersen.’

‘That’s too bad,’ Melling said, in a voice lacking any tone. And at the same time Katrine pictured the lack of expression in Bodil Melling’s face, the lack of colour in her attire, lack of emotion in her body language, guaranteed lack of conflict in her home life and lack of excitement in her sex life. The only thing that triggered a reaction in the newly appointed Chief Superintendent, she had discovered, was the soon-to-be vacated office of Chief of Police. It wasn’t that Melling wasn’t qualified, Katrine just found her unbearably boring. Defensive. Gutless.

‘Will you call a press conference?’ Melling asked.

‘OK. Do you want to . . . ?’

‘No, as long as we don’t have a positive ID on the body, you take it.’

‘Together with Kripos, then? They have people at the scene.’

‘All right, fine. If there’s nothing else, we have guests.’

In the pause that followed Katrine heard low chat in the background. It sounded like a genial exchange of views, the kind, that is, where one person confirms and elaborates on what the other has said. Social bonding. That was how Bodil Melling preferred it. She would almost certainly be annoyed if Katrine brought up the subject again. Katrine had suggested it as soon as Bertine Bertilsen was reported missing and suspicion arose that the two women might have been killed by the same man. She

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wouldn't get anywhere either, Melling had made that very clear, had, in effect, put an end to the discussion. Katrine ought to just let it go.

'Just one thing,' she said, letting the words hang in the air as she drew a breath.

Her boss beat her to it.

'The answer is no, Bratt.'

'But he's the only specialist on this we have. And he's the best.'

'And the worst. Besides, we don't *have* him any longer. Thank God.'

'The media are bound to look for him, ask why we're not—'

'Then you just tell them the truth, which is we don't know his whereabouts. Moreover, considering what happened to his wife, coupled with his unstable nature and substance abuse, I can't imagine him functioning in a murder investigation.'

'I think I know where to find him.'

'Drop it, Bratt. Resorting to old heroes as soon as you're under pressure comes across as an implicit disparagement of the people actually at your disposal in Crime Squad. What will it do to their self-esteem and motivation if you say you want to bring in a wreck without a badge? That's what we call poor leadership, Bratt.'

'OK,' Katrine said and swallowed hard.

'All right, I appreciate that you think it's OK. Was there anything else?'

Katrine thought for a moment. So Melling could actually be antagonised and bare her teeth after all. Good. She looked at the crescent moon hanging above the treetops. Last night, Arne, the young man she had been dating for almost month, told her that in two weeks there would be a total lunar eclipse, a so-called blood moon, and they should mark the occasion. Katrine had no clue what a blood moon was, but apparently it occurred every second or third year, and Arne was so eager that she hadn't had the heart to say maybe they shouldn't plan something as far in the future as two weeks, seeing as they barely knew each other. Katrine had never been afraid of conflict or of being direct, something she had probably inherited from her father, a policeman from Bergen who'd had more enemies than that city had rainy days, but she had learned to choose her

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battles and the timing of them. But now, having thought about it, she understood that unlike a confrontation with a man she didn't know whether she had any future with, this was one she had to face. Now rather than later.

'Yes, actually,' Katrine said. 'Would it also be OK to say that at the press conference if anyone asks? Or to the parents of the next girl who is killed?'

'Say what?'

'That the Oslo Police District is declining the assistance of a man who has cleared up three serial killer cases in the city and apprehended the three culprits? On the grounds we think it may impact on the self-esteem of some colleagues?'

A long silence arose, and Katrine could not hear any chat in the background now either. Finally, Bodil Melling cleared her throat.

'You know what, Katrine? You've been working hard on this case. Go ahead and hold that press conference, get some sleep at the weekend, and we'll talk on Monday.'

After they hung up, Katrine called the Forensic Medical Institute. Rather than go through the proper channels, she called the direct line of Alexandra Sturdza, the young forensic medical officer, who had neither partner nor child, and wasn't too averse to long working hours. And sure enough, Sturdza replied that she and a colleague would take a look at the body the following day.

Afterwards, Katrine stood looking down at the dead woman. Maybe it was the fact that in a man's world she had got where she was on her own that would not allow her to set aside her contempt for women who willingly depended on men. That Susanne and Bertine lived off men was not the only circumstance that bound them, but also that they had shared the same man, one more than thirty years their senior, the property mogul Markus Røed. Their lives and existences relied on other people, men with the money and the jobs they themselves did not have, providing for them. In exchange, they offered their bodies, youth and beauty. And – insofar as their relationship was exposed – their selected host could enjoy the envy of other men. But, unlike children, women like Susanne and Bertine

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lived with the knowledge that love was not unconditional. Sooner or later their host would ditch them, and they would have to seek out a new man to feed upon. Or allow themselves to be fed upon, depending on how you viewed it.

Was that love? Why not, simply because it was too depressing to think about?

Between the trees, in the direction of the gravel road, Katrine saw the blue light of the ambulance, which had arrived noiselessly. She thought about Harry Hole. Yes, she had received a sign of life in April, a postcard – of all things – with a picture of Venice Beach, postmarked Los Angeles. Like a sonar pip from a submarine in the depths. The message had been short. ‘*Send money.*’ A joke, she wasn’t sure. Since then there had been silence.

Complete silence.

The final verse of the lullaby, which she had not reached, played in her head.

*Blueman, Blueman, answer me, bleat with your familiar sound. Not yet, my Blueman, can you die on your boy.*

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# 2

## FRIDAY

### Value

THE PRESS CONFERENCE TOOK PLACE as usual in the Parole Hall at Police HQ. The clock on the wall showed three minutes to ten, and while Mona Daa, VG's crime reporter, and the others waited for the police representatives to take to the podium, Mona could conclude that the attendance was good. Over twenty journalists, and on a Friday evening. She'd had a brief discussion with her photographer on why double murders sold twice as well as single ones, or if it was a case of diminishing returns. The photographer believed that quality was more important than quantity, that as the victim was a young, ethnic Norwegian, of above-average attractiveness, she would generate more clicks than – for example – a drug-addicted couple in their forties with previous convictions. Or two – yes, even three – immigrant boys from a gang.

Mona Daa didn't disagree. So far only one of the missing girls was confirmed killed, but realistically it was only a matter of time before it turned out the other had suffered the same fate, and both were young, ethnic

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Norwegians and pretty. It didn't get any better. She wasn't sure what to make of that. If it was an expression of extra concern for the young, innocent and defenceless individual. Or if other factors played a part, factors pertaining to the usual things that got clicks: sex, money and a life the readers wished they themselves had.

Speaking of wanting what others had. She looked at the guy in his thirties in the row in front. He was wearing the flannel shirt all the hipsters were supposed to be wearing this year and a porkpie hat à la Gene Hackman in *The French Connection*. It was Terry Våge from *Dagbladet*, and she wished she had his sources. Ever since the story broke, he'd had his nose in front of the others. It was Våge, for instance, who had first written about Susanne Andersen and Bertine Bertilsen having been at the same party. And Våge who had quoted a source as saying both girls had had Røed as a sugar daddy. It was annoying, and for more reasons than simply that he was competition. His very presence here was annoying. As though he had heard her thoughts, he turned and looked right at her. Smiling broadly, he touched a finger to the brim of his idiotic hat.

'He likes you,' the photographer said.

'I know,' she said.

Våge's interest in Mona had begun when he made his improbable comeback to newspaper journalism as a crime reporter, and she had made the mistake of being relatively friendly towards him at a seminar on – of all things – press ethics. Since the other journalists avoided him like the plague, her attitude must have come across as inviting. He subsequently got in touch with Mona for 'tips and advice', as he termed it. As if she had any interest in acting as a mentor for a competitor – indeed, had any desire to have anything to do with someone like Terry Våge; after all, everybody knew there had to be *something* in the rumours doing the rounds on him. But the more stand-offish she was, the more intense he became. On the phone, social media channels, even popping up in bars and cafes, as though from nowhere. It had, as usual, taken a little time before she understood it was *her* he was interested in. Mona had never been the boys' first pick, stocky and broad-faced as she was, with what her

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mother had called ‘sad hair’ and a congenital hip defect which gave her a crablike gait. God knows if it was an attempt to compensate, but she had begun training with weights, grown even more stocky, but had taken one hundred and twenty kilos in the deadlift and a third place in the national bodybuilding championships. And because she’d had to learn that a person – or at least she – didn’t get anything for free, she had developed a pushy charm, a sense of humour, and a toughness which the Barbie dolls of this world could just forget about, and which had won her the unofficial throne of crime queen – and Anders. Out of the two, she valued Anders higher. Well, just about. No matter: even though the type of attention from other men which Våge displayed was unfamiliar and flattering, it was out of the question for Mona to explore it any further. And she was of the opinion that she – if not in so many words, then in tone and body language – must have made this clear to Våge. But it was as though he saw and heard what he wanted. Sometimes when she looked into those wide-open, staring eyes of his, she wondered whether he was on something or if he was all there. One night he had shown up at a bar, and when Anders went to use the men’s room, he had said something to her, in a voice so low it couldn’t be heard above the music, but still not quite low enough. ‘You’re mine.’ She had pretended not to hear, but he just stood there, calm and confident, wearing a sly smile, as if it were now a secret they shared. Fuck him. She couldn’t stand drama, so she hadn’t mentioned it to Anders. Not that Anders wouldn’t have handled it just fine, she knew he would, but still she hadn’t said anything. What was it Våge imagined? That her interest in him, the new alpha male in their little pond, would grow in proportion with his position as a crime reporter who was always one step ahead of the others? Because he was, that wasn’t open to discussion any longer. So yes, if she wanted something someone else had, it was to be leading the race again, not downgraded to one of the pack chasing behind Terry Våge.

‘Where does he get it from, do you think?’ she whispered to the photographer.

He shrugged. ‘Maybe he’s making it up again.’

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Mona shook her head. ‘No, there’re good grounds to believe what he’s writing now.’

Markus Røed and Johan Krohn, his lawyer, had not even attempted to refute any of what Våge had written, and that was confirmation enough.

But Våge had not always been the king of crime. The story lingered about him, always would. The girl’s stage name was Genie, a retro glam act à la Suzi Quatro, for those who remembered her. The matter had occurred about five or six years prior, and the worst part of it was not that Våge had manufactured pure lies about Genie and had them put in print, but the rumour he had dropped Rohypnol into her drink at an after-party in order to have sex with the teenager. At the time, he had been a music journalist for a free newspaper and had obviously become infatuated with her, but had – in spite of his eulogising her in review after review – been turned down repeatedly. Nevertheless he had continued showing up at gigs and after-parties. Right up to the night when – if the rumours were to be believed – he had spiked her drink and carried her off to his room, which he had booked at the same hotel as the band were staying at. When the boys in the band realised what was happening, they barged into the hotel room where Genie lay unconscious and in a state of half-undress on Terry Våge’s bed. They had given Terry such a beating that he suffered a skull fracture and was hospitalised for a couple of months. Genie and the band must have figured Våge had had punishment enough, or may not have wanted to risk prosecution themselves; in any case, the matter was not reported to the police by any of the parties involved. But it was the end of the glowing reviews. In addition to panning her every new release, Terry Våge wrote about Genie’s infidelity, drug abuse, plagiarism, underpayment of band members, and false information on applications for grants for tour support. When a dozen or so stories were referred to the Press Complaints Commission, and it turned out that Våge had simply made half of them up, he was sacked and became *persona non grata* in the Norwegian media for the next five years. How he had managed to make it back in was a mystery. Or maybe not. He had realised he was finished as a music journalist, but had been behind a crime blog that gathered

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more and more readers, and eventually *Dagbladet* said that one could not exclude a young journalist from their field just because he had made some mistakes early in his career, and had taken him on as a freelancer – a freelancer who currently got more column inches than any of the newspaper’s permanent reporters.

Våge finally turned away from Mona when the police made their entrance and took their places on the podium. Two from Oslo Police, Katrine Bratt – the inspector from Crime Squad – and Head of Information Kedzierski, a man with a Dylanesque mane of curly hair; and two from Kripos, the terrier-like Ole Winter and the always well-dressed Sung-min Larsen, sporting a fresh haircut. So Mona assumed they had already decided that the investigation would be a joint effort on behalf of the Crime Squad, in this case the Volvo, and Kripos, the Ferrari.

Most of the journalists held their mobiles up in the air to record sound and pictures, but Mona Daa took notes by hand and left the photographs to her colleague.

As expected, they didn’t learn much other than a body had been found in Østmarka, in the hiking area around Skullerud, and that the deceased had been identified as the missing woman Susanne Andersen. The case would be treated as a possible murder, but they had, as yet, no details to make public about the cause of death, sequence of events, suspects and so on.

The usual dance ensued, with the journalists peppering those on the podium with questions while they, Katrine Bratt in the main, repeated ‘no comment’ and ‘we can’t answer that’.

Mona Daa yawned. She and Anders were supposed to have a late dinner as a pleasant start to the weekend, but that wasn’t going to happen. She noted down what was said, but had the distinct feeling of writing a summary she had written before. Maybe Terry Våge felt the same. He was neither taking notes nor recording anything. Just sitting back in his chair, observing it all with a slight, almost triumphant, smile. Not asking any questions, as though he already had the answers he was interested in. It seemed the others had also run dry, and when Head of Information

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Kedzierski looked like he was drawing breath to bring things to a close, Mona raised her biro in the air.

‘Yes, VG?’ The head of Information had an expression that said this better be short, it’s the weekend.

‘Do you feel that you have the requisite competence should this turn out to be the type of person who kills again, that is to say if he’s—’

Katrine Bratt leaned forward in her chair and interrupted her: ‘As we said, we don’t have any sound basis to allow us to state that there’s any connection between this death and any other possible criminal acts. With regard to the combined expertise of the Crime Squad and Kriplos, I dare say it’s adequate given what we know about the case so far.’

Mona noted the inspector’s caveat of *what we know*. And that Sung-min Larsen seated in the chair next to her had neither nodded at what Bratt said nor given any indication of his view on this expertise.

The press conference drew to a close, and Mona and the others made their way out into a mild autumn night.

‘What do you think?’ the photographer asked.

‘I think they’re happy they have a body,’ Mona said.

‘Did you say *happy*?’

‘Yeah. Susanne Andersen and Bertine Bertilsen have both been dead for weeks, the police know that, but they haven’t had a single lead to go on apart from that party at Røed’s. So, yeah, I think they’re happy they’re starting the weekend with at least one corpse that might give them something.’

‘Bloody hell, you’re a cold fish, Daa.’

Mona looked up at him in surprise. Considered it for a moment.

‘Thanks,’ she said.

It was a quarter past eleven by the time Johan Krohn had finally found a parking spot for his Lexus UX 300e in Thomas Heftyes gate, then located the number of the building where his client Markus Røed had asked him to come. The fifty-year-old defence lawyer was regarded among colleagues as one of the top three or four best defence lawyers in Oslo. Due to his

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high media profile, the man in the street regarded Krohn as unquestionably the best. Since he was, with a few exceptions, a bigger star than his clients, he did not make house visits, the client came to him, preferably to the offices of the law firm of Krohn and Simonsen in Rosenkrantz' gate during normal working hours. Still, there were house calls and there were house calls. This address was not Røed's primary residence; he officially resided at a 260-square-metre penthouse on the top of one of the new buildings in Oslobukta.

As he had been instructed on the phone half an hour ago, Krohn pressed the call button bearing the name of Røed's company, Barbell Properties.

'Johan?' Markus Røed's out-of-breath voice sounded. 'Fifth floor.'

There was a buzz from the top of the door, and Krohn pushed it open.

The lift looked sufficiently suspect for Krohn to take the stairs. Wide oak steps and cast-iron banisters with a form more reminiscent of Gaudí than a venerable, exclusive Norwegian town house. The door on the fifth floor was ajar. It sounded like a war was taking place within, which he understood to be the case when he stepped inside, saw bluish light coming from the living room and peered in. In front of a large TV screen – it had to be at least a hundred inches – three men were standing with their backs to him. The biggest of them, the man in the middle, was wearing VR goggles and had a game controller in each hand. The other two, young men in perhaps their twenties, were apparently spectators, using the TV as a monitor to look at what the man in the VR goggles was seeing. The war scene on the TV was from a trench, in the First World War, if Krohn was to judge by the helmets on the German soldiers rushing towards them, and whom the large man with the game controllers was blasting away at.

'Yeah!' one of the younger men shouted, as the head of the last German exploded inside his helmet and he fell to the ground.

The larger man removed the VR goggles and turned to Krohn.

'That's *that* taken care of, at least,' he said with a grin of satisfaction. Markus Røed was a handsome man, his age taken into consideration. He

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had a broad face, a playful look, his permanently tanned complexion was smooth, and his swept-back, shiny black hair as thick as a twenty-year-old's. Granted, some weight had spread to his waist, but he was tall, so tall that the stomach could pass as dignified. But it was the intense liveliness in his eyes that first caught your attention, a liveliness indicating the energy which meant most people were initially charmed, then flattened, and eventually exhausted by Markus Røed. Within that time he had probably got what he wanted, and you were left to your own devices. But Røed's energy levels could fluctuate, as could his mood. Krohn assumed both had something to do with the white powder he now saw traces of under one of Røed's nostrils. Johan Krohn was aware of all this, but he put up with it. Not just because Røed had insisted on paying half of Krohn's hourly rate up front to – as he had put it – guarantee Krohn's undivided attention, loyalty and desire to achieve a result. But mostly because Røed was Krohn's dream client: a man with a high profile, a millionaire with such an odious image that Krohn, paradoxically, appeared as more courageous and principled than opportunistic by taking him on as a client. So he would – as long as the case went on – just have to accept being summoned on a Friday night.

The two younger men left the room at a signal from Røed.

'Have you seen *War Remains*, Johan? No? Fucking great VR game, but you can't shoot anyone in it. This here is a sort of copy the developer wants me to invest in . . .' Røed nodded in the direction of the TV screen while he lifted a carafe and poured whiskey into two crystal rocks glasses. 'They're trying to retain the magic of *War Remains*, but make it so you can – what would you say? – influence the course of history. After all, that's what we want, right?'

'I'm driving,' Krohn said, raising a palm to the glass Røed was holding out to him.

Røed looked at Krohn for a moment as if he didn't understand the objection. Then he sneezed powerfully, sank down onto a leather Barcelona chair, and placed both glasses on the table in front of him.

'Whose apartment is this?' Krohn asked, as he settled into one of the

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other chairs. And immediately regretted the question. As a lawyer it was often safest not knowing more than you needed to.

‘Mine,’ Røed replied. ‘I use it as . . . you know, a retreat.’

Markus Røed’s shrug and scampish smile told Krohn the rest. He’d had other clients with similar apartments. And during an extramarital liaison, which had fortunately come to an end when he realised what he was in danger of losing, he had himself considered buying what a colleague called a bachelor pad for non-bachelors.

‘So what happens now?’ Røed asked.

‘Now Susanne has been identified, and murder has been established as the cause, the investigation will enter a new phase. You need to be prepared to be called in for fresh interviews.’

‘In other words, there’ll be even more focus on me.’

‘Unless the police find something at the crime scene that rules you out. We can always hope for that.’

‘I thought you might say something like that. But I can’t just sit here hoping any longer, Johan. You do know Barbell Properties has lost three big contracts in the last fortnight? They offered some flimsy excuses, about waiting for higher bids and so on – no one dares say right out that it’s down to these articles in *Dagbladet* about me and the girls, that they don’t want to be associated with a possible murder, or are afraid I’ll be put away and Barbell Properties will go under. If I sit idly by hoping that a gang of public-sector, underpaid knucklehead cops will get the job done, then Barbell Properties might go bust long before they’ve turned up something that gets me off the hook. We need to be proactive, Johan. We need to show the public that I’m innocent. Or at least that I believe it serves my interest for the truth to come out.’

‘So?’

‘We need to hire our own investigators. First-rate ones. In the best-case scenario they find the killer. But failing that, it still shows the public that I’m actually trying to uncover the truth.’

Johan Krohn nodded. ‘Let me play devil’s advocate here, no pun intended.’

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‘Go on,’ Røed said, and sneezed.

‘Firstly, the best detectives are already working for Kripos, as they pay better than the Crime Squad. And even if they were to say yes to quitting a secure career to take on a short-term assignment like this, they’d still have to give three months’ notice, plus they’d have an obligation of confidentiality covering what they know about these missing persons cases. Which in effect renders them useless to us. Secondly, the optics would be pretty bad. An investigation being bankrolled by a millionaire? You’d be doing yourself a disservice. Should your investigators uncover so-called facts that clear you, this information would automatically be questioned, something which would not have happened if the police had uncovered the same facts.’

‘Ah.’ Røed smiled, wiping his nose with a tissue. ‘I love value for money. You’re good, you’ve pointed out the problems. And now you’re going to show me that you’re the best and tell me how we solve those problems.’

Johan Krohn straightened up in his chair. ‘Thank you for the vote of confidence, but there’s the rub.’

‘Meaning?’

‘You mentioned finding the best, and there is one person who is perhaps the best. His previous results certainly point to it.’

‘But?’

‘But he’s no longer on the force.’

‘From what you’ve told me that ought to be an advantage.’

‘What I mean is that he’s no longer in the police for the wrong reasons.’

‘Which are?’

‘Where do I begin? Disloyalty. Gross negligence in the line of duty. Intoxicated on the job, clearly an alcoholic. Several cases of violence. Substance abuse. He’s responsible, although not convicted, for the death of at least one colleague. In short, he’s probably got more crimes on his conscience than most of the criminals he’s hauled in. Plus, he’s supposed to be a nightmare to work with.’

‘That’s a lot. So why are you bringing him up if he’s so impossible?’

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‘Because he’s the best. And because he could be useful with regard to the second part of what you were saying, about showing the public you’re trying to unearth the truth.’

‘OK . . . ?’

‘The cases he’s solved have made him one of the few detectives with a public profile of sorts. And an image as uncompromising, someone with don’t-give-a-damn integrity. Overblown, of course, but people like those kind of myths. And for our purposes that image could allay suspicions of his investigation being bought and paid for.’

‘You’re worth every penny, Johan Krohn.’ Røed grinned. ‘He’s the man we want!’

‘The problem—’

‘No! Just up the offer until he says yes.’

‘—is that no one seems to know exactly where he is.’

Røed raised his whiskey glass without drinking, just frowned down at it. ‘What do you mean by “exactly”?’

‘Sometimes in an official capacity I run into Katrine Bratt, the head of Crime Squad where he worked, and when I asked, she said the last time he gave a sign of life was from a big city, but she didn’t know where he was in that city or what he was doing there. She didn’t sound too optimistic on his behalf, let’s put it that way.’

‘Hey! Don’t back out now that you’ve sold me on the guy, Johan! It’s him we want, I can feel it. So find him.’

Krohn sighed. Again regretted opening his mouth. Being the show-off he was he had of course walked right into the classic prove-you’re-the-best trap that Markus Røed probably used every single day. But with his leg stuck in the trap it was too late to turn. Some calls would need to be made. He worked out the time difference. OK, he may as well get right on it.

# 3

## SATURDAY

ALEXANDRA STURDZA STUDIED HER FACE in the mirror above the sink while routinely and thoroughly washing her hands, as though it were a living person and not a corpse she would soon touch. Her face was hard, pockmarked. Her hair – pulled back and tied in a tight bun – was jet black, but she knew the first grey hairs were in store – her Romanian mother had already got them in her early thirties. Norwegian men said her brown eyes ‘flashed’, especially when any of them tried to imitate her almost imperceptible accent. Or when they joked about her homeland, a place some of them clearly thought was a big joke, and she told them she came from Timișoara, the first city in Europe to install electric street lighting, in 1884, two generations before Oslo. When she came to Norway as a twenty-year-old, she had learned Norwegian in six months while working three jobs, which she had reduced to two while studying chemistry at NTNU, and now just one, at the Forensic Medical Institute while also concentrating on what would be her doctoral thesis on DNA analysis. She had at times – although not that often – wondered what it was that made her so obviously attractive to men. It couldn’t be her face and

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direct – at times harsh – manner. Nor her intellect and CV, which men seemed to perceive as more threatening than stimulating. She sighed. A man had once told her that her body was a cross between a tiger and a Lamborghini. Odd how so cheesy a comment could sound totally wrong or completely acceptable, yes, wonderful even, depending on who said it. She turned off the tap and went into the autopsy room.

Helge was already there. The technician, two years her junior, was quick-minded and laughed easily, both qualities Alexandra viewed as assets when one worked with the dead and was tasked with extracting secrets from a corpse about how death occurred. Helge was a bioengineer and Alexandra a chemical engineer, and both were qualified to carry out forensic post-mortems, if not full clinical autopsies. Nevertheless, certain pathologists attempted to pull rank by calling post-mortem technicians *Diener* – servants – a hangover from German pathologists of the old school. Helge didn't care but Alexandra had to admit it got to her now and again. And especially on days like today, when she came in and did everything a pathologist would do in a preliminary post-mortem – and equally well. Helge was her favourite at the institute, he always showed up when she asked, not something every Norwegian would on a Saturday. Or after four o'clock on a weekday. Sometimes she wondered where on the index of living standards this work-shy country would have been placed if the Americans hadn't discovered oil on their continental shelf.

She turned up the light on the lamp hanging above the naked body of the young woman on the table. The smell of a corpse was dependent on many factors: age, cause of death, if medication was being taken, what food had been eaten and – of course – how far along the process of decay had come. Alexandra had no problems with the stench of rotting flesh, of excrement, or urine. She could even tackle the gases created by the process of decomposition that the body expelled in long hisses. It was the stomach fluids that got her. The smell of vomit, bile and the various acids. In that sense, Susanne Andersen was not too bad, even after three weeks outdoors.

'No larvae?' Alexandra asked.

'I removed them,' Helge said, holding up the vinegar bottle they used.

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‘But kept them?’

‘Yeah,’ he said, pointing to a glass box containing a dozen white maggots. They were saved because their length could be indicative of how long they had fed on the corpse, in other words, how long it had been since they hatched, and therefore, something about the time of death. Not in hours, but in days and weeks.

‘This won’t take long,’ Alexandra said. ‘Crime Squad just want the probable cause of death and an external examination. Blood test, urine, bodily fluid. The pathologist will perform a complete post-mortem on Monday. Any plans for tonight? Here . . .’

Helge took a photograph of where she was pointing.

‘Thought I might watch a movie,’ he said.

‘What about joining me at a gay club for a dance?’ She made notes on the form and pointed again. ‘Here.’

‘I can’t dance.’

‘Rubbish. All gays can dance. See this cut on the throat? Starts on the left side, gets deeper further along, then shallower towards the right. It indicates a right-handed killer who was standing behind and holding her head back. One of the pathologists was telling me about a similar wound that they thought was murder, and it turned out the man had cut his own throat. Pretty determined, in other words. What do you say, want to go dance with some gays tonight?’

‘What if I’m not gay?’

‘In that case . . .’ Alexandra said, taking notes, ‘. . . I wouldn’t actually want to go out anywhere with you again, Helge.’

He laughed out loud and snapped a picture. ‘Because?’

‘Because then you’ll block other men. A good wingman needs to be gay.’

‘I can pretend to be gay.’

‘Doesn’t work. Men notice the smell of testosterone and back off. What do you think this is?’

She held a magnifying glass just below one of Susanne Andersen’s nipples.

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Helge leaned closer. 'Dried saliva, maybe. Or snot. Not semen, in any case.'

'Take a photo, then I'll take a scrape sample and check it at the lab on Monday. If we're lucky, it's DNA material.'

Helge took a picture while Alexandra examined the mouth, ears, nostrils and eyes.

'What do you think has happened here?' She raised a penlight and shone it in the empty eye socket.

'Animals?'

'No, I don't think so.' Alexandra shone the light around the edges of the eye socket. 'There's nothing remaining of the eyeball inside and no wounds around the eye from the claws of birds or rodents. And if it was an animal, why not take the other eye as well? Take a photo here . . .' She illuminated the eye socket. 'See how the nerve fibres look like they've been cut at one place, as though with a knife?'

'Jesus,' Helge said. 'Who does something like that?'

'Angry men,' Alexandra said, shaking her head. 'Very angry and very damaged men. And they're on the loose out there. Maybe I should stay in and watch a movie tonight as well.'

'Yeah, right.'

'OK. Let's see if he's assaulted her sexually too.'

They took a cigarette break on the roof after determining there were no obvious signs of injury to the exterior or interior of the genitalia nor any traces of semen on the outside of the vagina. If semen had been present within the vagina, it would have been drawn into the rest of the body long ago. The pathologist would go over the same ground as them on Monday but she was pretty certain they would not arrive at a different conclusion.

Alexandra was not a regular smoker, but had a vague belief in cigarettes smoking out any potential demons from the dead that had taken up residence within. She inhaled and looked out over Oslo. Over the fjord, glittering like silver beneath a pale, cloudless sky. Over the low hills, where the colours of autumn burned in red and yellow.

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'Fuck, it's nice here,' she said with a sigh.

'You make it sound like you wish it wasn't,' Helge said, taking over the cigarette from her.

'I hate getting attached to things.'

'Things?'

'Places. People.'

'Men?'

'Especially men. They take away your freedom. Or rather, they don't take it, you bloody well give it away like a wuss, as if you're programmed to. And freedom is worth more than men.'

'You sure?'

She snatched the cigarette back and took a long, angry drag. Blew the smoke out just as hard and gave a harsh, rasping laugh.

'Worth more than the men I fall for anyway.'

'What about that cop you mentioned?'

'Oh, him.' She chuckled. 'Yeah, I liked him. But he was a mess. His wife had kicked him out and he drank all the time.'

'Where is he now?'

'His wife died and he skipped the country. Tragic business.' Alexandra stood up abruptly. 'Right, we better finish up and get the body back in the refrigerator. I want to party!'

They returned to the autopsy room, collected the last samples, filled out the rest of the fields on the form and tidied up.

'Speaking of parties,' Alexandra said. 'You know the party this girl and the other one were at? That was the same party I was invited to, the one I then invited you to.'

'You're kidding?'

'Don't you remember? A friend of one of Røed's neighbours asked me. She said the party was taking place on *the* best rooftop terrace in Oslobukta. Told me it would be crawling with the well-heeled, with celebrities and party people. Said they'd prefer women came in skirts. *Short* skirts.'

'Ugh,' Helge said. 'Don't blame you for not going.'

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‘Fuck that, course I would’ve gone! If I hadn’t had so much work on here that day. And you would have come with.’

‘Would I?’ Helge smiled.

‘Of course.’ Alexandra laughed. ‘I’m your fag hag. Can’t you picture it, you, me and the beautiful people?’

‘Yes.’

‘You see, you are gay.’

‘What? Because?’

‘Tell me truthfully, Helge. Have you ever slept with a man?’

‘Let me see . . .’ Helge wheeled the table with the corpse towards one of the cold lockers. ‘Yes.’

‘More than once?’

‘Doesn’t mean I’m gay,’ he said, opening the large metal drawer.

‘No, that’s only circumstantial evidence. The proof, Watson, is that you tie your sweater over one shoulder and under the other arm.’

Helge chuckled, grabbed one of the white cloths on the instrument table and flicked it at her. Alexandra smiled as she ducked down behind the top end of the table. She remained like that, stooped over, her eyes fixed on the body.

‘Helge,’ she said in a low voice.

‘Yeah.’

‘I think we’ve missed something.’

‘What?’

Alexandra reached out towards Susanne Andersen’s head, lifted the hair and pulled it to the side.

‘What is it?’ Helge asked.

‘Stitches,’ Alexandra replied. ‘Fresh stitches.’

He came round the other side of the trolley. ‘Hm. Guess she must have hurt herself then?’

Alexandra lifted away more hair, followed the stitches. ‘These weren’t carried out by a trained doctor, Helge, no one uses thread this thick or stitches this loosely. This was just done in a hurry. And look, the stitches continue all the way round the head.’

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‘As though she’s . . .’

‘As though she’s been scalped,’ Alexandra said, feeling a cold shudder go through her. ‘And then the scalp has been sewn back on.’

She looked up at Helge, saw his Adam’s apple rise and fall. ‘Will we . . .’ he began. ‘Will we check what’s . . . underneath?’

‘No,’ Alexandra said firmly, straightening up. She had taken home enough nightmares from this job, and the pathologists earned two hundred thousand kroner a year more than her, they could earn it.

‘This is outside our field of competence,’ she said. ‘So it’s the kind of thing *Dieners* like you and me leave to the grown-ups.’

‘OK. And OK to partying tonight too, by the way.’

‘Good,’ Alexandra said. ‘But we need to finish the report and send it along with the photos to Bratt at Crime Squad. Oh fuck!’

‘What is it?’

‘I just realised that Bratt is bound to ask me to run an express DNA analysis when she reads about that saliva or whatever it is. In which case I won’t make it out on the town tonight.’

‘Come on, you can say no, everyone needs time off, even you.’

Alexandra put her hands on her hips, tilted her head to one side and looked sternly at Helge.

‘Right.’ He sighed. ‘Where would we be if everyone just took time off?’

# 4

## SATURDAY

### Rabbit hole

HARRY HOLE WOKE UP. THE bungalow lay in semi-darkness, but a white strip of sunlight, coming from under the bamboo blind, stretched across the coarse wooden floor, via the stone slab serving as a coffee table, and over to the kitchen worktop.

A cat was sitting there. One of Lucille's cats; she had so many of them up in the main house that Harry couldn't tell one from the other. The cat looked like it was smiling. Its tail was waving slowly as it calmly observed a mouse scuttling along the wall, stopping now and then to stick its snout in the air to sniff, before continuing. Towards the cat. Was the mouse blind? Did it lack a sense of smell? Had it eaten some of Harry's marijuana? Or did it believe, like so many others seeking happiness in this city, that it was different, special? Or that this *cat* was different, that it meant well and wouldn't just eat him?

Harry reached for the joint on the nightstand while keeping his eyes on the mouse, who was headed straight towards the cat. The cat struck,

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sinking its teeth into the mouse and lifting it up. It writhed a few moments in the predator's jaws before going limp. The cat laid its prey on the floor, then viewed it with its head cocked slightly to one side, as though undecided on whether to eat the mouse or not.

Harry lit up the joint. He had come to the conclusion that joints didn't count with regard to the new drinking regimen he had embarked upon. Inhaled. Watched the smoke curl upward to the ceiling. He had dreamt about the man behind the wheel of the Camaro again. And the number plate that read Baja California Mexico. The dream was the same, he was chasing them. So not exactly hard to interpret. Three weeks had passed since Harry had stood in the parking lot outside Creatures with a Glock 17 aimed at him, fairly certain his imminent demise was a second or two away. Which had been just fine by him. So it was strange that the only thing that had been in his head after those two seconds had elapsed, and every day since, was *not* to die. It had begun with the hesitation on the part of the man in the polo shirt; perhaps he was considering the possibility that Harry was a mental case, a manageable obstacle to be overcome, who didn't need shooting. He would hardly have had more time to think before Harry's chisel punch struck him in the throat and put him down for the count. Harry had physically felt the man's larynx give way. He had lain squirming on the gravel like a worm, his hands to his throat and eyes bulging while he gasped desperately for air. Harry had picked the Glock up off the ground and stared at the man in the car. Due to the tinted windows he hadn't seen much, only the outline of a face, and that the man looked to be wearing a white shirt buttoned right up to the neck. And that he was smoking a cigarette or a cigarillo. The man made no move, just looked calmly out at Harry, as though evaluating him, committing him to memory. Harry heard someone shout 'Get in!' and noticed Lucille had started her own car and pushed open the door on the passenger side.

Then he had jumped in. Down the rabbit hole.

The first thing he asked as she turned down towards lower ground and Sunset Boulevard, was who she owed money to and how much.

The first answer – 'The Esposito family' – didn't mean much to him,

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but the next – ‘Nine hundred and sixty thousand dollars’ – confirmed what the Glock had already told him. That she wasn’t in a little trouble but a lot. And that from now on that trouble included him.

He explained that under no circumstances could she go back home, and asked if there was anyone whose place she could lay low at. She said, yes, she had a lot of friends in Los Angeles. But after thinking about it for a minute, she said none of them would be willing to run the risk for her. They stopped at a petrol station, and Lucille called her first husband, whom she knew had a house he hadn’t used in several years.

And that was how they had ended up on this property, with its dilapidated house, overgrown garden and guest bungalow. Harry had installed himself in the bungalow with his newly acquired Glock 17 because from there he had a view of both gates, and because it was fitted with an alarm that went off should anyone break into the main house. Any prospective intruders wouldn’t hear that alarm, meaning hopefully he could take them from the rear, given that he would be coming from the outside. Up until now, he and Lucille had hardly left the property, just short trips for the absolute essentials: alcohol, food, clothes and cosmetics – in that order. Lucille had taken up residence on the first floor of the main house, which after just a week was full of cats.

‘Aw, in this town they’re all homeless,’ Lucille told him. ‘You put some food out on the stoop a few days in a row, leave the front door open, some more food in the kitchen, and before you know it you’ve got enough pet friends for an entire lifetime.’

Yet not quite enough it seemed, because three days previously Lucille decided she couldn’t endure the isolation any longer. She had taken Harry to a former Savile Row tailor she knew, to an elderly hairdresser in Rosewood Avenue and then – most important of all – to John Lobb’s shoe store in Beverly Hills. Yesterday, Harry had picked up the suit while Lucille got ready, and a few hours later they had gone to eat at Dan Tana’s, the legendary Italian restaurant where the chairs were as worn out as the clientele, but where Lucille seemed to know everybody and had beamed all evening.

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It was seven o'clock. Harry inhaled and stared at the ceiling. Listened for sounds that shouldn't be there. But all he heard was the first cars on Doheny Drive, which was not the widest street, but popular because it had fewer traffic lights than the roads running parallel. It reminded him of lying in bed in his apartment in Oslo, listening to the sounds of the city waking outside the open window. He missed it, even the ill-tempered ringing and the shrill screech of a braking tram. *Particularly* the shrill screech.

But Oslo was behind him now. Following Rakel's death he had sat at the airport, looked at the departure board, and rolled a dice that determined his destination would be Los Angeles. He had figured it was as good as anywhere. He had lived in Chicago for a year while attending the FBI's course for serial homicides, and thought he was familiar with American culture and their way of life. But not long after arrival, he realised that Chicago and LA were two different planets. One of Lucille's movie friends, a German director, had described Los Angeles with bluster in a broad accent at Dan Tana's the night before.

'You land at LAX, the sun is shining and you're picked up by a limousine which drives you to a place where you lie down by a swimming pool, get a cocktail, fall asleep and wake up to discover that twenty years of your life have gone by.'

That was the director's LA.

Harry's introduction to LA had been four nights at a dirty, cockroach-infested motel room without air con in La Cienega, prior to his renting an even cheaper room in Laurel Canyon, also without air con, but with larger cockroaches. But he had settled in somewhat after discovering Creatures, the neighbourhood bar, where the liquor was cheap enough for him to deem it possible to drink himself to death.

But after staring down the barrel of a Glock 17 this desire to die had ceased. As had the drinking. That type of drinking at any rate. If he was to be capable of keeping watch and looking out for Lucille, he would have to be somewhat sober. He had, therefore, decided to test out the drinking regimen his childhood friend and drinking partner Øystein Eikeland had recommended, although frankly it sounded like bullshit. The method

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was called Moderation Management, and was supposed to turn you into a substance user, meaning a substance abuser who exercises moderation. The first time he had told Harry about it, the two of them had been sitting in Øystein's taxi at a rank in Oslo. His enthusiasm had been such that he had hammered on the steering wheel while proclaiming its virtues.

'People have always derided the alcoholic who swears that from now on he's only going to have a drink in social settings, right? Because they don't think that's possible, they're sure it isn't, almost as if you'd be defying the law of gravity for, like, alcoholism, yeah? But you know what? It is possible to drink to just the right level of drunkenness even for a full-blown alkie like you. And me. It's possible to programme yourself to drink to a certain point and stop. All you have to do is decide beforehand where to draw the line, how many units. But, it goes without saying, you have to work at it.'

'You have to drink a lot before you get the hang of it, you mean?'

'Yeah. You're smirking, Harry, but I'm serious. It's about that sense of achievement, of knowing that you can. And then it's possible. I'm not kidding, I can offer the world's best substance abuser as living proof.'

'Hm. I presume we're talking about that overrated guitarist you like so much.'

'Hey, have some respect for Keith Richards! Read his biography. He gives you the formula right there. Survival is about two things. Only the purest, best dope, it's the stuff mixed in with it that kills you. And moderation, in both drugs and alcohol. You know exactly how much you need to get sufficiently drunk, which in your case means pain-free. More liquor after doesn't help soothe the pain more, now does it?'

'Suppose not.'

'Exactly. Being drunk isn't the same as being an idiot or weak-willed. After all, you manage not to drink when you're sober, so why shouldn't you manage to stop when you're at just the right level. It's all in your head, brother!'

The rules – in addition to setting a limit – were to count the number of

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units and decide on set days where you abstained completely. As well as take a naltrexone an hour before your first drink. Putting off drinking for an hour when the thirst suddenly hit actually helped. He had kept to the regimen for three weeks now and had yet to crack. That was something in itself.

Harry swung his legs out of bed and stood up. He didn't need to open the fridge, he knew it was empty of beer. The Moderation Management rules specified a maximum of three units per day. That meant a six-pack from the 7-Eleven down the street. He looked in the mirror. He had actually put a little more meat on his lean bones in the three weeks since the escape from Creatures. As well as a grey, almost white, beard. It hid his most conspicuous feature, the liver-coloured scar. Whether that would be enough for the man in the Camaro not to recognise him again was doubtful, however. Harry peered out of the window towards the garden and the main house while he pulled on a ragged pair of jeans and a T-shirt starting to tear at the neckline reading 'Let Me Do One More illuminati hotties' on it. Put the old, non-wireless earphones in his ears, his feet in a pair of flip-flops and noted that nail fungus had created a grotesque artwork of sorts on the big toe of his right foot. He walked out into a tangle of grass, bushes and jacaranda trees. Stopped by the gate and looked up and down Doheny Drive. Everything seemed fine. He turned on the music, 'Pool Hopping' by illuminati hotties, a song that had lifted his spirits ever since he had heard it for the first time live at Zebulon Café. But after walking a few metres down the pavement, he caught sight of a car pulling away from the kerb in the wing mirror of one of the parked cars. Harry continued on, turning his head ever so slightly to check. The car was moving slowly behind at the same speed about ten metres back. While living in Laurel Canyon, he had been stopped twice by police cars simply because he was on foot and therefore deemed a suspicious individual. But this wasn't a police cruiser. It was an old Lincoln, and as far as Harry could make out only one person was in the car. A broad bulldog face, double chin, small moustache. Fuck, he should have taken the Glock! But Harry couldn't envision the attack happening in the middle of the street in broad

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daylight, so he continued walking. Turned off the music discreetly. Crossed the street just before Santa Monica Boulevard and entered the 7-Eleven. Stood and waited while scanning the street. But he didn't see the Lincoln anywhere. Maybe it had been a prospective house buyer cruising slowly along while checking out the properties on Doheny.

He made his way between the aisles towards the refrigerators with beer at the back of the premises. Heard the door open. Remained standing with one hand on the handle of the glass door, but without opening, so he could see the reflection. And there he was. In a cheap, check suit and a body to match his bulldog face: small, compact and fat. But fat in the way that might mask speed, strength and – Harry felt his heart beat faster – danger. Harry could see the man behind him hadn't drawn any weapon, not yet. He kept the earphones in, figuring he might have a chance if the man believed he had the element of surprise on his side.

'Mister . . .'

Harry pretended not to hear and watched the man approach and stop directly behind him. He was almost two heads shorter than Harry, and was now reaching out, maybe to tap Harry on the shoulder, maybe for something else entirely. Harry wasn't planning on waiting to find out what it was. He turned halfway towards the man, quickly threw an arm around his neck at the same time as he opened the glass door with his other hand. He twisted back while simultaneously kicking the man's feet from under him, causing him to fall into the shelves of beer. Harry released his hold on the man's neck and drove his own bodyweight against the glass door, squeezing the man's head against the shelves. The bottles toppled over, and the man's arms were pinned between the door and the jamb. The eyes in his bulldog face widened and he called out something from behind the door, his breath misting the cold glass on the inside. Harry eased up slightly so the man's head slipped down to the shelves below, then he pushed again. The edge of the refrigerator door pressed right against the man's throat and his eyes bulged. The man had stopped shouting. His eyes had stopped bulging. And the glass was no longer misting in front of his mouth.

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