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The Plan

I'M GOING TO DIE. AND IT MAKES NO SENSE. THAT wasn't the plan, not my plan, anyway. I may have been heading this way all the time without realising. It wasn't my plan. My plan was better. My plan made sense.

I'm staring down the muzzle of a gun and I know that's where it will come from. The messenger of death. The ferryman. Time for a last laugh. If you can see light at the end of the tunnel, it may be a spit of flame. Time for a last tear. We could have turned this life into something good, you and I. If we had followed the plan. One last thought. Everyone asks what the meaning of life is, but no one asks about the meaning of death.

The Astronaut

THE OLD MAN REMINDED HARRY OF AN ASTRONAUT. The comical short steps, the stiff movements, the dead, black eyes and the shoes shuffling along the parquet floor. As if he were frightened to lose contact with the ground and float away into space.

Harry looked at the clock on the white wall above the exit. 15.16. Outside the window, in Bogstadveien, the Friday crowds hurry past. The low October sun is reflected in the wing mirror of a car driving away in the rush hour.

Harry concentrated on the old man. Hat plus elegant grey overcoat in dire need of a clean. Beneath it: tweed

jacket, tie and worn grey trousers with a needle-sharp crease. Polished shoes, down at the heel. One of those pensioners of whom Majorstuen seems to be full. This wasn't conjecture. Harry knew that August Schulz was eighty-one years old and an ex-clothes retailer who had lived all his life in Majorstuen, apart from a period he spent in Auschwitz during the War. And the stiff knees were the result of a fall from a Ringveien footbridge which he used on his daily visits to his daughter. The impression of a mechanical doll was reinforced by the fact that his arms were bent perpendicularly at the elbow and thrust forward. A brown walking stick hung over his right forearm and his left hand gripped a bank giro he was holding out for the short-haired young man at position number 2. Harry couldn't see the face of the cashier, but he knew he was staring at the old man with a mixture of sympathy and irritation.

It was 15.17 now, and finally it was August Schulz's turn.

Stine Grette sat at position number 1, counting out 730 Norwegian kroner for a boy in a blue woollen hat who had just given her a money order. The diamond on the ring finger of her left hand glistened as she placed each note on the counter.

Harry couldn't see, but he knew that in front of position number 3 there was a woman with a pram, which she was rocking, probably to distract herself, as

the child was asleep. The woman was waiting to be served by fru Brænne, who was loudly explaining to a man on the telephone that he couldn't charge someone else's account unless the account holder had signed an agreement to that effect. She also informed him that she worked in the bank, and he didn't, so on that note perhaps they should bring the discussion to a close.

At that moment the door opened and two men, one tall, the other short, wearing the same overalls, strode into the bank. Stine Grette looked up. Harry checked his watch and began to count. The men ran over to the corner where Stine was sitting. The tall man moved as if he were stepping over puddles, while the little one had the rolling gait of someone who has acquired more muscle than he can accommodate. The boy in the blue hat turned slowly and began to walk towards the exit, so preoccupied with counting money that he didn't see the two men.

'Hello,' the tall man said to Stine, banging down a black case on the counter. The little one pushed his reflector sunglasses in place, walked forward and deposited an identical case beside it. 'Money!' he said in a high-pitched squeak. 'Open the door!'

It was like pressing the pause button: all movement in the bank froze. The only indication that time hadn't

stood still was the traffic outside the window. And the second hand on the clock, which now showed that ten seconds had passed. Stine pressed a button under her desk. There was a hum of electronics, and the little man pressed the counter door against the wall with his knee.

‘Who’s got the key?’ he asked. ‘Quick, we haven’t got all day!’

‘Helge!’ Stine shouted over her shoulder.

‘What?’ The voice came from inside the open door of the only office in the bank.

‘We’ve got visitors, Helge!’

A man with a bow tie and reading glasses appeared.

‘These gentlemen want you to open the ATM, Helge,’ Stine said.

Helge Klementsén stared vacantly at the two men dressed in overalls, who were now on his side of the counter. The tall one glanced nervously at the front door while the little one had his eyes fixed on the branch manager.

‘Oh, right. Of course,’ Helge gasped, as if he had just remembered a missed appointment, and burst into a peal of frenetic laughter.

Harry didn’t move a muscle; he simply let his eyes absorb every detail of their movements and gestures. Twenty-five seconds. He continued to look at the clock above the door, but from the corner of his eye he could see the branch manager unlocking the ATM

from the inside, taking out two oblong metal dispensers and handing them over to the two men. The whole thing took place at high speed and in silence. Fifty seconds.

‘These are for you, pop!’ The little man had taken two similar metal dispensers from his case and held them out for Helge. The branch manager swallowed, nodded, took them and slotted them into the ATM.

‘Have a good weekend!’ the little one said, straightening his back and grabbing the case. One and a half minutes.

‘Not so fast,’ Helge said.

The little one stiffened.

Harry sucked in his cheeks and tried to concentrate.

‘The receipt . . .’ Helge said.

For one protracted moment the two men stared at the small, grey-haired branch manager. Then the little one began to laugh. Loud, reedy laughter with a piercing, hysterical overtone, the way people on speed laugh. ‘You don’t think we were going to leave here without a signature, do you? Hand over two million without a receipt!’

‘Well,’ Helge said. ‘One of you almost forgot last week.’

‘There are so many new bods on deliveries at the moment,’ the little one said, as he and Helge signed and exchanged yellow and pink forms.

Harry waited for the front door to close again before looking at the clock once more. Two minutes and ten seconds.

Through the glass in the door he could see the white Nordea security van drive away.

Conversations between the people in the bank resumed. Harry didn't need to count, but he still did. Seven. Three behind the counter and four in front, including the baby and the man in overalls who had just come in and was standing by the table in the middle of the room, writing his account number on a payment slip. Harry knew it was for Sunshine Tours.

'Good afternoon,' August Schulz said and began to shuffle in the direction of the front door.

The time was exactly 15.21.10, and that was the moment the whole thing started.

When the door opened, Harry saw Stine Grette's head bob up from her papers and drop down. Then she raised her head again, slowly this time. Harry's attention moved to the front door. The man who had come in had already pulled down the zip of his boiler suit and whipped out a black-and-olive-green AG3. A navy blue balaclava completely covered his face, apart from his eyes. Harry started to count from zero.

The balaclava began to move where the mouth

would have been, like a Bigfoot doll: ‘This is a hold-up. Nobody move!’

He hadn’t raised his voice, but in the small, compact bank building it was as if a cannon had gone off. Harry studied Stine. Above the distant drone of traffic he could hear the smooth click of greased metal as the man cocked the gun. Her left shoulder sank, almost imperceptibly.

Brave girl, Harry thought. Or maybe just frightened out of her wits. Aune, the psychology lecturer at Oslo Police College, had told them that when people are frightened enough they stop thinking and act the way they have been programmed. Most bank employees press the silent robbery alarm almost in shock, Aune maintained, citing post-robbery debriefings where many could not remember whether they had activated the alarm or not. They had been on autopilot. In just the same way as a bank robber has programmed himself to shoot anyone trying to stop him, Aune said. The more frightened the bank robber is, the less chance anyone has of making him change his mind. Harry was rigid as he tried to fix on the bank robber’s eyes. Blue.

The robber unhitched a black holdall and threw it over the counter. The man in black took six paces to the counter door, perched on the top edge and swung his legs over to stand directly behind Stine, who was sitting still with a vacant expression. Good, Harry thought. She

knows her instructions; she is not provoking a reaction by staring at the robber.

The man pointed the barrel of the gun at Stine's neck, leaned forward and whispered in her ear.

She hadn't panicked yet, but Harry could see Stine's chest heaving; her fragile frame seemed to be struggling for air under the now very taut white blouse. Fifteen seconds.

She cleared her throat. Once. Twice. Finally her vocal cords came to life:

'Helge. Keys for the ATM.' The voice was low and hoarse, completely unrecognisable from the one which had articulated almost the same words three minutes earlier.

Harry couldn't see him, but he knew that Helge had heard what the robber had said and was already standing in the office doorway.

'Quick, or else . . .' Her voice was hardly audible and in the following pause all that could be heard in the bank were the soles of August Schulz's shoes on the parquet flooring, like a couple of brushes swishing against the drum skin in an immeasurably slow shuffle.

' . . . he'll shoot me.'

Harry looked out of the window. There was often a car outside, engine running, but he couldn't see one. Only a blur of passing cars and people.

'Helge . . .' Her voice was imploring.

Come on, Helge, Harry urged. He knew quite a bit about the ageing bank manager, too. Harry knew that he had two standard poodles, a wife and a recently jilted pregnant daughter waiting for him at home. They had packed and were ready to drive to their mountain chalet as soon as Helge returned. At precisely this moment Helge felt he was submerged in water, in the kind of dream where all your movements slow down however much you try to hurry. Then he came into Harry's field of vision. The bank robber had swung Stine's chair round so that he was behind her, but now faced Helge. Like a frightened child who has to feed a horse, Helge stood back and held out the bunch of keys, his arm stretched to the limit. The masked man whispered in Stine's ear as he turned the machine gun on Helge, who took two unsteady steps backwards.

Stine cleared her throat: 'He says open the ATM and put the money in the black holdall.'

In a daze, Helge stared at the gun pointing at him.

'You've got twenty-five seconds before he shoots. Not you. Me.'

Helge's mouth opened and closed as though he wanted to say something.

'Now, Helge,' Stine said.

Thirty seconds had passed since the hold-up began. August Schulz had almost reached the front door. The branch manager fell to his knees in front of the ATM

and contemplated the bunch of keys. There were four of them.

‘Twenty seconds left,’ Stine’s voice rang out.

Majorstuen police station, Harry thought. The patrol cars are on their way. Eight blocks away. Friday rush hour.

With trembling fingers, Helge took one key and inserted it in the lock. It got stuck halfway. He pressed harder.

‘Seventeen.’

‘But . . .’ he began.

‘Fifteen.’

Helge pulled out the key and tried one of the others. It went in, but wouldn’t turn.

‘My God . . .’

‘Thirteen. Use the one with the bit of green tape, Helge.’

Klementsens stared at the bunch of keys as though seeing them for the first time.

‘Eleven.’

The third key went in. And round. He pulled open the door and turned towards Stine and the man.

‘There is one more lock to open . . .’

‘Nine!’ Stine yelled.

Helge sobbed as he ran his fingers across the jagged edges of the keys, no longer able to see, using the edges as Braille to tell him which key was the right one.

‘Seven.’

Harry listened carefully. No police sirens yet. August Schulz grasped the handle of the front door.

There was a metallic clunk as the bunch of keys hit the floor.

‘Five,’ Stine whispered.

The door opened and the sounds from the street flooded into the bank. Harry thought he could hear the familiar dying lament in the distance. It rose again. Police sirens. Then the door closed.

‘Two, Helge!’

Harry closed his eyes and counted to two.

‘There we are!’ It was Helge shouting. He had opened the second lock and now he was half-standing, pulling at the jammed dispensers. ‘Let me just get the money out! I—’

He was interrupted by a piercing shriek. Harry peered towards the other end of the bank where a woman stood staring in horror at the motionless bank robber pressing the gun into Stine’s neck. She blinked twice and mutely nodded her head in the direction of the pram as the child’s scream rose in pitch.

Helge almost fell backwards as the first dispenser came free. He pulled over the black holdall. Within six seconds all the money was in. Klementsén zipped up the holdall as instructed and stood by the counter. Everything had been communicated via Stine; her voice sounded surprisingly steady and calm now.

One minute and three seconds. The robbery was complete. The money was in a holdall. In a few moments the first police car will arrive. In four minutes other police cars will close off the immediate escape routes around the bank. Every cell in the robber's body must have been screaming it was time to get the hell out. And then something happened which Harry didn't understand. It simply didn't make any sense. Instead of running, the robber spun Stine's chair round until she was facing him. He leaned forward and whispered something to her. Harry squinted. He would have to go and get his eyes checked one of these days. But he saw what he saw. She was focused on her faceless tormentor; her own face went through a slow, gradual transformation as the significance of the words he whispered to her appeared to sink in. Her thin, well-tended eyebrows formed two 's's above eyes which now seemed to be popping out of her head; her top lip twisted upwards and the corners of her mouth were drawn down into a grotesque grin. The child stopped crying as suddenly as it had begun. Harry inhaled sharply. Because he knew. It was a freeze-frame, a masterly image. Two people caught for a split-second as one informed the other of the death sentence; the masked face two hands' widths away from its helpless counterpart. The Expeditor and his victim. The gun is pointed at her throat and a small golden heart hanging from a thin chain. Harry cannot

see, but nevertheless he can sense her pulse pounding beneath the thin skin.

A muffled wail. Harry pricks up his ears. It is not police sirens, though, just the telephone ringing in the next room.

The masked man turns and peers up at the surveillance camera hanging from the ceiling behind the counters. He holds up one hand and shows five black gloved fingers, then closes his hand and extends his forefinger. Six fingers. Six seconds too long. He turns towards Stine again, grasps the gun with both hands, holds it at hip height and raises the muzzle towards her head, standing with his legs slightly apart to withstand the recoil. The telephone keeps ringing. One minute and twelve seconds. The diamond ring flashes as Stine half-raises her hand, as though waving goodbye to someone.

It is exactly 15.22.22 when he pulls the trigger. The report is sharp and hollow. Stine's chair is forced backwards as her head dances on her neck like a mangled rag doll. Then the chair topples backwards. There is a thud as her head hits the edge of a desk and Harry can no longer see her. Nor can he see the poster advertising Nordea's new pension scheme glued to the outside of the glass partition above the counter, which now has a red background. All he can hear is the angry, insistent ringing of the telephone. The masked robber

picks up the holdall. Harry has to make up his mind. The robber vaults the counter. Harry makes up his mind. In one quick movement he is out of the chair. Six strides. He is there. And picks up the phone:

‘Speak!’

In the pause which follows he can hear the sound of the police siren on the TV in the sitting room, a Pakistani pop song from the neighbours and heavy steps up the stairwell sounding like fru Madsen’s. Then there is a gentle laugh at the other end of the line. It is laughter from a long-distant encounter. Not in time, but just as distant. Like seventy per cent of Harry’s past, which returns to him now and again in the form of vague rumours or total fabrications. But this was a story he could confirm.

‘Do you really still use that macho line, Harry?’

‘Anna?’

‘Gosh, well done, Harry.’

Harry could feel the sweet warmth surging through his stomach, almost like whisky. Almost. In the mirror he saw a picture he had pinned up on the opposite wall. Of himself and Sis one summer holiday a long time ago in Hvitsten when they were small. They were smiling in the way that children do when they still believe nothing nasty can happen to them.

‘And what do you do of a Sunday evening then, Harry?’

‘Well.’ Harry could hear his voice automatically mimicking hers. Slightly too deep, slightly too lingering. He didn’t mean to do that. Not now. He coughed and found a more neutral pitch: ‘What people usually do.’

‘And that is?’

‘Watch videos.’

3

The House of Pain

‘SEEN THE VIDEO?’

The battered office chair screamed in protest as Police Officer Halvorsen leaned back and looked at his nine-years-senior colleague, Inspector Harry Hole, with an expression of disbelief on his innocent young face.

‘Absolutely,’ Harry said, running thumb and first finger down the bridge of his nose to show the bags under his bloodshot eyes.

‘The whole weekend?’

‘From Saturday morning to Sunday evening.’

‘Well, at least you had a good time on Friday night,’ Halvorsen said.

‘Yes.’ Harry took a blue folder out of his coat pocket and placed it on the desk facing Halvorsen’s. ‘I read the transcripts of the interviews.’

From the other pocket Harry took a grey packet of French Colonial coffee. He and Halvorsen shared an office at almost the furthest end of the corridor in the red zone on the sixth floor of Police Headquarters in Grønland. Two months ago they had gone to buy a Rancilio Silvia espresso coffee machine, which had taken pride of place on the filing cabinet beneath a framed photograph of a girl sitting with her legs up on a desk. Her freckled face seemed to be grimacing, but in fact she was helpless with laughter. The background was the same office wall on which the picture was hanging.

‘Did you know that three out of four policemen can’t spell “uninteresting” properly?’ Harry said, hanging his coat on the stand. ‘They either leave out the “e” between the “t” and the “r”, or—’

‘Interesting.’

‘What did you do at the weekend?’

‘On Friday, thanks to some anonymous nutter’s phone call warning us about a car bomb, I sat in a car outside the American ambassador’s residence. False alarm, of course, but things are so sensitive right now that we had to sit there all evening. On Saturday, I made another attempt to find the woman of my life. On Sunday, I concluded that she doesn’t exist. What did

you get on the robber from the interviews?’ Halvorsen measured the coffee into a double-cup filter.

‘*Nada*,’ Harry said, taking off his sweater. Underneath, he was wearing a charcoal-grey T-shirt – it had once been black and now bore the faded letters *Violent Femmes*. He collapsed into the office chair with a groan. ‘No one has reported seeing the wanted man near the bank before the robbery. Someone came out of a 7-Eleven on the other side of Bogstadveien and saw the man running up Industrigata. It was the balaclava that caught his attention. The surveillance camera outside the bank shows both of them as the robber passes the witness in front of a skip outside the 7-Eleven. The only interesting thing he could tell us which wasn’t on the video was that the robber crossed the road twice further up Industrigata.’

‘Someone who can’t make up his mind which pavement to walk on. That sounds pretty uninteresting to me.’ Halvorsen put the double-cup filter in the portafilter handle. ‘With two “e”s, one “r” and one “s”.’

‘You don’t know much about bank robberies, do you, Halvorsen.’

‘Why should I? We’re supposed to catch murderers. The guys from Hedmark can take care of the robbers.’

‘Hedmark?’

‘Haven’t you noticed as you walk around the Robberies Unit? The rural dialect, the knitted cardigans. But what’s the point you’re making?’

‘The point is Victor.’

‘The dog handler?’

‘As a rule, the dogs are the first on the scene, and an experienced bank robber knows that. A good dog can follow a robber on foot, but if he crosses the street and cars pass, the dog loses the scent.’

‘So?’ Halvorsen compressed the coffee with the tamper and finished off by smoothing the surface with a twist, which he maintained was what distinguished the professionals from the amateurs.

‘It corroborates the suspicion that we are dealing with an experienced bank robber. And that fact alone means we can concentrate on a dramatically smaller number of people than we might otherwise have done. The Head of Robberies told me—’

‘Ivarsson? Thought you weren’t exactly on speaking terms?’

‘We aren’t. He was talking to the whole of the investigation team. He said there are under a hundred bank robbers in Oslo. Fifty of them are so stupid, doped up or mental that we nail them almost every time. Half of *them* are in prison, so we can ignore them. Forty are skilled craftsmen who manage to slip through so long as someone helps them with the planning. And then there are ten pros, the ones who attack security vans and cash-processing centres. To get them we need a lucky break, and we try to keep tabs on them at all times.

They're being asked to give alibis right now.' Harry cast a glance at Silvia, who was gurgling away on the filing cabinet. 'And I had a word with Weber from Forensics on Saturday.'

'Thought Weber was retiring this month.'

'Someone slipped up. He won't be stopping until the summer.'

Halvorsen chuckled. 'He must be even grumpier than usual then.'

'He is, but that's not the reason,' Harry said. 'His lot found sod all.'

'Nothing?'

'Not one fingerprint. Not one strand of hair. Not even clothing fibres. And, of course, you could see from the footprint that he was wearing brand new shoes.'

'So they can't check the patterns of wear against other shoes?'

'Cor-rect,' Harry said, with a long 'o'.

'And the bank robber's weapon?' said Halvorsen, taking one of the cups of coffee over to Harry's desk. On looking up, he noticed that Harry's left eyebrow was almost into his cropped blond hair. 'Sorry. The murder weapon.'

'Thank you. It wasn't found.'

Halvorsen sat on his side of the two desks sipping at his coffee. 'So, in a nutshell, a man walked into a crowded bank in broad daylight, took two million

kroner, murdered a woman, strolled out, up a relatively unpopulated but heavily trafficked street in the centre of the capital of Norway, a few hundred metres from a police station and we, the salaried police professionals, do not have a thing to go on?’

Harry nodded slowly. ‘Almost nothing. We have the video.’

‘Which you can visualise every second of, if I know you.’

‘No, every tenth of a second, I would say.’

‘And you can quote the witnesses’ statements verbatim?’

‘Only August Schulz’s. He told me a lot of interesting things about the War. Reeled off the names of competitors in the clothing industry; so-called good Norwegians who had supported the confiscation of his family’s property during the War. He knew precisely what these people are doing nowadays. Yet he didn’t realise that a bank robbery had been committed.’

They drank their coffee in silence. The rain beat against the window.

‘You like this life, don’t you,’ Halvorsen said suddenly. ‘Sitting alone all weekend chasing ghosts.’

Harry smiled, but didn’t answer.

‘I thought that now you had family obligations you’d given up the solitary lifestyle.’

Harry sent his younger colleague an admonitory

grimace. 'Don't know if I see it like that,' he said slowly. 'We don't even live together, you know.'

'No, but Rakel has a little boy and that makes things different, doesn't it?'

'Oleg,' Harry said, edging his way towards the filing cabinet. 'They flew to Moscow on Friday.'

'Oh?'

'Court case. Father wants custody.'

'Ah, that's right. What's he like?'

'Hm.' Harry straightened the crooked picture above the coffee machine. 'He's a professor Rakel met and married while she was working there. He comes from a wealthy, traditional family with loads of political influence, Rakel says.'

'So they know a few judges, eh?'

'Bound to, but we think it'll be alright. The father's a wacko, and everyone knows that. Bright alcoholic with poor self-control, you know the type.'

'I think I do.'

Harry looked up smartly, just in time to see Halvorsen wipe away a smile.

At Police HQ it was fairly well known that Harry had alcohol problems. Nowadays, alcoholism is not in itself grounds for dismissing a civil servant, but to be drunk during working hours is. The last time Harry had had a relapse, there were people higher up in the building who had advocated having him removed from the

force, but *Politiavdelingssjef*, PAS for short, Bjarne Møller, head of Crime Squad, had spread a protective wing over Harry pleading extenuating circumstances. The circumstances had been the woman in the picture above the espresso machine – Ellen Gjeltén, Harry’s partner and close friend – who had been beaten to death with a baseball bat on a path down by the river Akerselva. Harry had struggled to his feet again, but the wound still stung. Particularly because, in Harry’s opinion, the case had never been cleared up satisfactorily. When Harry and Halvorsen had found forensic evidence incriminating the neo-Nazi Sverre Olsen, Inspector Tom Waaler had wasted no time in going to Olsen’s home to arrest him. Olsen had apparently fired a shot at Waaler, who had returned fire in self-defence and killed him. According to Waaler’s report, that is. Neither the investigations at the scene of the shooting, nor the inquiry by SEFO, the independent police authority, suggested otherwise. On the other hand, Olsen’s motive for killing Ellen had never been explained, beyond indications that he had been involved in the illegal arms trafficking which had caused Oslo to be flooded with handguns over recent years, and Ellen had stumbled onto his trail. Olsen was just an errand boy, though; the police still didn’t have any leads on those behind the liquidation.

After a brief guest appearance with *Politiet*

Overvåkningstjeneste, or POT, the Security Service, on the top floor, Harry had applied to rejoin Crime Squad to work on the Ellen Gjeltén case. They had been all too happy to get rid of him. Møller was pleased to have him back on the sixth floor.

‘I’ll just nip upstairs to give Ivarsson this,’ Harry muttered, waving the VHS cassette. ‘He wanted to take a look with a new wunderkind they have up there.’

‘Oh? Who’s that?’

‘Someone who left Police College this summer and has apparently solved three robberies simply by studying the videos.’

‘Wow. Good-looking?’

Harry sighed. ‘You young ones are so boringly predictable. I hope she’s competent. I don’t care about the rest.’

‘Sure it’s a woman?’

‘Herr and fru Lønn might have called their son Beate for a joke, I suppose.’

‘I have an inkling she’s good-looking.’

‘Hope not,’ Harry said, ducking, out of ingrained habit, to allow his 192 centimetres to pass under the door frame.

‘Oh?’

The answer was shouted from the corridor: ‘Good police officers are ugly.’

★

At first sight, Beate Lønn's appearance didn't give any firm indicators either way. She wasn't ugly; some would even call her doll-like. But that might have been mostly because she was small: her face, nose, ears – and her body. Her most prominent feature was her pallor. Her skin and hair were so colourless that she reminded Harry of a corpse Ellen and he had once fished out of Bunnefjord. Unlike with the woman's body, however, Harry had a feeling that if he just turned away for a second he would forget what Beate Lønn looked like. Which, it seemed, she wouldn't have minded as she mumbled her name and allowed Harry to shake her small, moist hand before she quickly retrieved it.

'Inspector Hole is a kind of legend here in the building, you know,' PAS Rune Ivarsson said, standing with his back to them and fiddling with a bunch of keys. At the top of the grey iron door in front of them a sign said, in Gothic letters: THE HOUSE OF PAIN. And underneath: CONFERENCE ROOM 508. 'Isn't that right, Hole?'

Harry didn't answer. He had absolutely no doubt about the kind of legendary status Ivarsson had in mind; he had never made the slightest attempt to hide his view that Harry was a blot on the force and should have been removed years ago.

Ivarsson finally unlocked the door and they went in. The House of Pain was the Robberies Unit's dedicated

room for studying, editing and copying video recordings. There was a large table in the middle with three workplaces; no windows. The walls were covered with shelving packed with video tapes, a dozen posters of wanted robbers, a large screen on one wall, a map of Oslo and various trophies from successful arrests: for example beside the door, where two cut-off woollen sleeves with holes for eyes and mouth hung from the wall. Otherwise the room contained grey PCs, black TV monitors, video and DVD players as well as a number of other machines which Harry could not have identified.

‘What has Crime Squad got out of the video?’ Ivarsson asked, flopping down onto one of the chairs. He drawled the diphthong in an exaggerated fashion.

‘Something,’ Harry said, walking over to a shelf of video cassettes.

‘Something?’

‘Not very much.’

‘Shame you lot didn’t come to the lecture I gave in the canteen last September. All the units were represented except yours, if I’m not very much mistaken.’

Ivarsson was tall, long-limbed, with a fringe of undulating blond hair above two blue eyes. His face had those masculine characteristics which models for German brands like Boss tend to have, and was still

tanned after many summer afternoons on the tennis court and perhaps the odd solarium session in a fitness centre. In short, Rune Ivarsson was what most would regard as a good-looking man, and as such he underpinned Harry's theory about the link between looks and competence in police work. However, what Rune Ivarsson lacked in investigative talent, he made up for with a nose for politics and the ability to form alliances within the Police HQ hierarchy. Furthermore, Ivarsson had the natural self-confidence that many misinterpret as a leadership quality. In his case, this confidence was based solely on being blessed with a total blindness to his own shortcomings, a quality which would inevitably take him to the top and one day make him – in one way or another – Harry's superior. Initially, Harry saw no reason to complain about mediocrity being kicked upwards, out of the way of investigations, but the danger with people like Ivarsson was that they could easily get it into their heads that they should intervene and dictate to those who really understood detection work.

‘Did we miss anything?’ Harry asked, running a finger along the small handwritten labels on the videos.

‘Maybe not,’ Ivarsson said. ‘Unless you’re interested in those minute details which solve crime cases.’

Harry successfully resisted the temptation to say he hadn't gone to the lecture because he had been told by

others, who had attended earlier talks, that the sole purpose of his grandstanding was to announce to all and sundry that after he had taken over as Head of the Robberies Unit the clear-up rate for bank robberies rose from thirty-five per cent to fifty per cent. Not a word about the fact that his appointment coincided with a doubling of manpower in his unit, a general extension of their investigative powers and the simultaneous departure of their worst investigator – Rune Ivarsson.

‘I regard myself as reasonably interested,’ Harry said. ‘So, tell me how you solved this one.’ He took out one of the cassettes and read aloud what was written on the label: ‘20.11.94, NOR Savings Bank, Manglerud.’

Ivarsson laughed. ‘Gladly. We caught them the old-fashioned way. They switched getaway cars at a waste site in Alnabru and set fire to the one they dumped. But it didn’t burn out. We found the gloves of one of the robbers and traces of DNA. We matched them with those of known robbers our investigators had highlighted as potential suspects after having seen the video, and one of them fitted the bill. The idiot had fired a shot into a ceiling and got four years. Anything else you were wondering about, Hole?’

‘Mm.’ Harry fidgeted with the cassette. ‘What sort of DNA was it?’

‘I told you, DNA that matched.’ The corner of Ivarsson’s left eye began to twitch.

‘Right, but what was it? Dead skin? A nail? Blood?’

‘Is that important?’ Ivarsson’s voice had become sharp and impatient.

Harry told himself he should keep his mouth shut. He should give up these Don Quixote-like offensives. People like Ivarsson would never learn, anyway.

‘Maybe not,’ Harry heard himself say. ‘Unless you’re interested in those minute details which solve crime cases.’

Ivarsson looked daggers at Harry. In the specially insulated room the silence felt like physical pressure on everyone’s ears. Ivarsson opened his mouth to speak.

‘Knuckle hair.’

Both men in the room turned to Beate Lønn. Harry had almost forgotten she was there. She looked from one to the other and repeated in a near-whisper: ‘Knuckle hair. The hair on your fingers . . . isn’t that what it’s called . . .?’

Ivarsson cleared his throat. ‘You’re right, it was a hair. But I think it was – although we don’t need to go into this any deeper – a hair from the back of the hand. Isn’t that right, Beate?’ Without waiting for an answer he tapped on the glass of his large wristwatch. ‘Have to be off. Enjoy the video.’

As the door slammed behind Ivarsson, Beate took the video cassette out of Harry’s hand and the next moment the video player sucked it in with a hum.

‘Two hairs,’ she said. ‘In the left-hand glove. From the knuckle. And the rubbish tip was in Karihaugen, not Alnabru. But the bit about four years is right.’

Harry gave her an astonished look. ‘Wasn’t that a little before your time?’

She shrugged as she pressed **PLAY** on the remote control. ‘It’s only a matter of reading reports.’

‘Mm,’ Harry said and studied her profile. Then he made himself comfortable in the chair. ‘Let’s see if this one left behind a few knuckle hairs.’

The video player groaned and Beate switched off the light. In the moments that followed, while the blue lead-in picture illuminated them, another film unravelled in Harry’s head. It was short, lasting barely a couple of seconds, a scene bathed in the blue strobe light from Waterfront, a long-defunct club in Aker Brygge. He didn’t know her name, the woman with the smiling brown eyes who was trying to shout something to him above the music. They were playing cow-punk. Green on Red. Jason and the Scorchers. He poured Jim Beam into his Coke and didn’t give a stuff what her name was. The next night, though, he knew. When they were in the bed adorned with a ship’s figurehead, a headless horse, had cast off all the moorings and set out on their maiden voyage. Harry felt the warmth in his belly from the evening before when he had heard her voice on the telephone.

Then the other film took over.

The old man had begun his trek across the floor towards the counter, filmed from a different camera every five seconds.

‘Thorkildsen at TV2,’ Beate Lønn said.

‘No, it’s August Schulz,’ Harry said.

‘I mean the editing,’ she said. ‘It looks like Thorkildsen’s handiwork at TV2. There are a few tenths missing here and there . . .’

‘Missing? How can you see . . .?’

‘Number of things. Follow the background. The red Mazda you can make out in the street outside was in the centre of the picture on two cameras when the picture shifted. An object can’t be in two places at the same time.’

‘Do you mean someone has bodged the recording?’

‘Not at all. Everything on the six cameras inside and the one outside is recorded on the same tape. On the original tape the picture jumps quickly from one camera to another and all you see is a flicker. So the film has to be edited to get longer coherent sequences. Occasionally we call in people from the TV stations when we don’t have the capacity. TV editors like Thorkildsen fiddle with the time code to improve the quality of the recording, not as jagged. Professional neurosis, I guess.’

‘Professional neurosis,’ Harry repeated. It struck him

that was a strangely middle-aged thing for a young girl to say. Or perhaps she wasn't as young as he had first thought? Something had happened to her as soon as the lights were off. The silhouetted body language was more relaxed, her voice firmer.

The robber entered the bank and shouted in English. His voice sounded distant and muffled, it seemed to be wrapped in a duvet.

'What do you think about this?' Harry asked.

'Norwegian. He speaks English so that we won't recognise his dialect, accent or any characteristic words we might be able to link to earlier robberies. He's wearing smooth clothes which don't leave fibres we might be able to trace in getaway cars, bolt-holes or his house.'

'Mm. Any more?'

'All the openings in his clothes are taped over so he won't leave any traces of DNA. Like hair or sweat. You can see his trouser legs are taped round his boots, and the sleeves round his gloves. I would guess he has tape round his head and wax on his eyebrows.'

'A pro then?'

She shrugged. 'Eighty per cent of bank raids are planned less than a week in advance and are carried out by people under the influence of alcohol or drugs. This one was thought through and the robber doesn't appear to be on anything.'

'How can you make that out?'

‘If we’d had better light and cameras, we’d have been able to magnify the pictures and see his pupils. But we don’t, so I go by his body language. Calm, considered movements, can you see that? If he was on anything, it wasn’t speed or any kind of amphetamine. Rohypnol, perhaps. That’s the popular one.’

‘Why’s that?’

‘Robbing a bank is an extreme experience. You don’t need speed, just the opposite. Last year someone went into Den norske Bank in Solli plass with an automatic weapon, peppered the ceiling and walls and ran out again without any money. He told the judge that he’d popped so much amphetamine that he just had to get it out of his system. I prefer criminals who take Rohypnol, if I may put it like that.’

Harry motioned with his head to the screen. ‘Look at Stine Grette’s shoulder at position number 1; she’s pressing the alarm. And the sound on the recording is suddenly much better. Why?’

‘The alarm is connected to the recording device, and when it is activated the film begins to run much faster. That gives us better pictures and better sound. Good enough for us to analyse the robber’s voice. And, then, speaking English doesn’t help him.’

‘Is it really as reliable as they say?’

‘The sound of our vocal cords is like a fingerprint. If we can give our voice analyst, at the university in

Trondheim, ten words on tape, he can match two voices with ninety-five per cent reliability.'

'Mm. But not with the sound quality we had before the alarm went, I take it?'

'It's less reliable.'

'So that's why he shouts in English first, and then when he reckons the alarm has been activated, he uses Stine Grette as his mouthpiece.'

'Exactly.'

In silence they observed the black-clad man manoeuvring himself over the counter, putting the gun barrel to Stine Grette's neck and whispering into her ear.

'What do you think about her reaction?' Harry asked.

'What do you mean?'

'Her facial expression. She seems relatively calm, don't you think?'

'I don't think anything. Generally, you can't get much information from a facial expression. I would think her pulse is close on 180.'

They watched Helge Klementsén floundering on the floor in front of the cash dispenser.

'Hope he gets proper post-trauma treatment,' Beate said sotto voce and shook her head. 'I've seen people become psychological wrecks after being exposed to robberies like this one.'

Harry said nothing, but thought that statement had to be something she had picked up from older colleagues.

The robber turned and displayed six fingers.

‘Interesting,’ Beate mumbled and, without looking down, made a note on the pad in front of her. Harry followed the young policewoman out of the corner of his eye and watched her jump when the shot was fired. While the robber on the screen swept up the holdall, sprang over the counter, and ran out of the door, Beate’s little chin rose and her pen fell out of her hand.

‘We haven’t put the last part on the Net, or passed it on to any of the TV stations,’ Harry said. ‘Look, now he’s on the camera outside the bank.’

They watched the robber walk across the pedestrian crossing – on green – in Bogstadveien before making his way up Industrigata. Then he was outside the frame.

‘And the police?’ Beate asked.

‘The closest police station is in Sørkedalsveien just after the toll station, only eight hundred metres from the bank. Nevertheless, it took just over three minutes from the time the alarm went off until they arrived. So the robber had less than two minutes to make his escape.’

Beate looked at the screen thoughtfully, at the people and cars passing by as though nothing had happened.

‘The escape was as meticulously planned as the hold-up. The getaway car was probably parked around the corner so that it wouldn’t be caught by the cameras outside the bank. He’s been lucky.’

‘Perhaps,’ Harry said. ‘On the other hand, he doesn’t strike you as someone who relies on good fortune, does he?’

Beate shrugged. ‘Most bank robberies seem well planned if they’re successful.’

‘OK, but here it was odds on that the police would be delayed. On Friday at this time all the patrol cars in the area were busy somewhere else, at—’

‘—the American ambassador’s residence!’ Beate exclaimed, slapping her forehead. ‘The anonymous phone call about the car bomb. I had Friday off, but I saw it on the TV news. And if you think how hysterical people are nowadays, it’s obvious everyone there would have been.’

‘There was no bomb.’

‘Of course not. It’s the classic ruse to keep the police busy somewhere else before a hold-up.’

They sat watching the last part of the recording in thoughtful silence. August Schulz standing waiting at the pedestrian crossing. Green changes to red and back again without him moving. What’s he waiting for? Harry wondered. An irregularity? An extra-long sequence on green? A kind of hundred-year green

wave? Alright. Should come soon. In the distance he heard the police sirens.

‘There’s something not quite right.’

Beate Lønn answered with the weary sigh of an old man: ‘There’s always something not quite right.’

Then the film was over and the snowstorm swept across the screen.

4

The Echo

‘SNOW?’

Harry shouted into his mobile phone as he hurried along the pavement.

‘Yes, really,’ Rakel said over a bad line from Moscow. This was followed by a hissy echo: ‘. . . eally.’

‘Hello?’

‘It’s freezing here . . . ere. Inside and outside . . . ide.’

‘And in the court?’

‘Well below freezing there, too. When we lived here, his mother even said I should take Oleg away. Now she’s sitting with the others and sending me such hateful scowls . . . owls.’

‘How’s the case going?’

‘How should I know?’

‘Well. First of all, you studied law. Secondly, you speak Russian.’

‘Harry. In common with 150 million Russians I don’t understand a thing about the legal system here, OK? . . . kay?’

‘OK. How’s Oleg taking it?’

Harry repeated his question without getting an answer and held up the display to see if he had lost the connection, but the seconds on the conversation timer were ticking away. He put the phone to his ear again.

‘Hello?’

‘Hello, Harry, I can hear you . . . oooh. I miss you so . . . ohh. What’s with the ha ha? . . . aah.’

‘There’s an echo on the line. Lots of oohs, ohs and aahs.’

Harry had reached the main door, pulled out a key and unlocked the hall entrance.

‘Do you think I’m too pushy, Harry?’

‘Of course not.’

Harry nodded to Ali, who was trying to manoeuvre a kicksled through the cellar door. ‘I love you. Are you there? I love you! Hello?’

Harry looked up from the dead phone in bewilderment and noticed his Pakistani neighbour’s beaming smile.

‘Yes, yes, you, too, Ali,’ he mumbled as he laboriously tapped in Rakel’s number again.

‘Call register,’ Ali said.

‘Hey?’

‘Nothing. Tell me if you want to let your cellar room. You don’t use it much, do you?’

‘Have I got a storeroom in the cellar?’

Ali rolled his eyes. ‘How long have you lived here, Harry?’

‘I said . . . I love you.’

Ali gave Harry a searching look. Harry waved goodbye to Ali and gestured that he had got through. He jogged upstairs with the key in front of him like a divining rod.

‘That’s it, we can talk now,’ Harry said as he went through the doorway into his sparsely furnished yet tidy two-room flat, bought for a song some time in the nineties when the housing market was rock bottom. Every so often he thought the flat had used up his share of luck for the rest of his life.

‘I wish you were here with us, Harry. Oleg misses you, too.’

‘Did he say that?’

‘He doesn’t need to say it. In that respect, you’re very similar.’

‘You, I’ve just told you I love you. Three times. With the neighbour listening. Do you know what that sort of thing does to a man?’

Rakel laughed. Harry loved her laugh, had done so from the very first moment he heard it. Instinctively, he knew he would do anything to hear it more often. Every day for preference.

He kicked off his shoes and smiled when he saw the answerphone in the corridor blinking to tell him there was a message. He didn’t need to be psychic to know it was from Rakel earlier in the day. No one else phoned Harry Hole at home.

‘How do you know you love me then?’ Rakel cooed. The echo was gone.

‘I can feel myself getting hot in the . . . what’s it called?’

‘Heart?’

‘No, it’s back a bit and under the heart. Kidneys? Liver? Spleen? Yes, that’s the one. I can feel my spleen heating up.’

Harry wasn’t sure if it was sobbing or laughing he could hear at the other end. He pressed *PLAY* on the answerphone.

‘I hope to be home in two weeks,’ Rakel said on the mobile before being drowned out by the answerphone:

‘Hi, it’s me again . . .’

Harry felt his heart skip a beat and he reacted before

thinking. He pressed STOP. But it was as if the echo of the words spoken in the charming, slightly husky woman's voice continued to wash back and forth between the walls.

'What was that?' Rakel asked.

Harry took a deep breath. One thought struggled to reach him before he answered, but it arrived too late: 'Just the radio.' He cleared his throat. 'When you're sure, let me know which flight you'll be on and I'll pick you up.'

'Of course I will,' she said with surprise in her voice.

There was a strained pause.

'I have to hang up now,' Rakel said. 'Shall we talk at eight tonight?'

'Yes. I mean, no. I'll be busy then.'

'Oh? I hope it's something nice for a change.'

'Well,' Harry said with a sharp intake of breath. 'I'm going out with a woman anyway.'

'Who's the lucky person?'

'Beate Lønn. New officer in the Robberies Unit.'

'And what is the occasion?'

'A chat with Stine Grette's husband. She was shot during the Bogstadveien hold-up I told you about. And with the branch manager.'

'Enjoy yourself. We'll talk tomorrow. Oleg wants to say goodnight first.'

Harry heard small feet running and then excited breathing on the line.

After they had finished speaking, Harry stood in the hall staring at the mirror above the telephone table. If his theory held true, he was now looking at a competent policeman. Two bloodshot eyes, one on each side of a large nose with a network of fine blue veins in a pale, bony face with deep pores. His wrinkles looked like random knife slashes across a wooden beam. How had it happened? In the mirror he saw behind him the wall with the photograph of the suntanned, smiling face of the boy with his sister. But it wasn't lost good looks or lost youth Harry's mind was occupied with, because the thought had finally made its way through now. He was searching his own features for the deceit, the evasion, the cowardice which had just made him break one of the few promises he had made to himself: that he would never, ever, come what may, lie to Rakel. Of all the skerries in the sea for their relationship to founder on, and there were many, lies would not be one. So why had he told a lie? It was true he and Beate were going to meet Stine Grette's husband, but why had he not told her he was going to meet Anna afterwards? An old flame, but so what? It had been a brief stormy affair which had left scars, though no lasting injuries. They were only going

to chat over a cup of coffee and tell each other the what-they-did-afterwards stories. And then each go their separate ways.

Harry pressed **PLAY** on the answerphone to hear the rest of the message. Anna's voice filled the hall: '... look forward to seeing you at M this evening. Just two things. Could you pop into the locksmith's in Vibes gate on the way and pick up the keys I ordered? They're open till seven and I've told them to keep them in your name. And would you mind wearing the jeans you know I like so much?'

Deep, husky laugh. The room seemed to vibrate to the same rhythm. No doubt about it, she had not changed.

5

Nemesis

THE RAIN WAS MAKING SPEED LINES AGAINST THE prematurely darkened October sky in the light from the outside lamp. From the ceramic sign beneath, Harry read that Espen, Stine and Trond Grette lived here, 'here' being a yellow terraced house in Disengrenda. He pressed the bell and surveyed the locality. Disengrenda was four long rows of terraced houses at the centre of a large flat field encircled by blocks of flats, which reminded Harry of pioneers on the prairie taking up a defensive position against Indian attacks. Perhaps that was how it was. The terraced houses were built in the sixties for the burgeoning

middle classes and perhaps the dwindling local population of workers in the blocks in Disenveien and Traverveien already knew that these were the new conquerors; that they would have hegemony over the new country.

‘Doesn’t seem to be at home,’ Harry said, pressing the button once more. ‘Are you sure he understood we were coming this afternoon?’

‘No.’

‘No?’ Harry turned and looked down at Beate Lønn shivering under the umbrella. She was wearing a skirt and high-heeled shoes, and when she picked him up outside Schrøder’s it had crossed his mind that she seemed to be dressed for a coffee morning.

‘Grette confirmed the meeting twice when I rang,’ she said. ‘But he seemed completely . . . out of it.’

Harry leaned across the step and flattened his nose against the kitchen window. It was dark inside and all he could see was a white Nordea Bank calendar on the wall.

‘Let’s go back,’ he said.

At that moment the neighbour’s kitchen window opened with a bang. ‘Are you looking for Trond?’

The words were articulated in *bokmål*, standard Norwegian, but in a Bergen accent with such strong trilled ‘r’s that it sounded like a medium-sized train being derailed. Harry turned round and gazed into a

woman's brown, wrinkled face caught in an attempt to smile and appear grave at the same time.

'We are,' Harry confirmed.

'Family?'

'Police.'

'Right,' the woman said and dropped the funereal expression. 'I thought you had come to express your sympathy. He's on the tennis court, poor thing.'

'Tennis court?'

She pointed. 'On the other side of the field. He's been there since four o'clock.'

'But it's dark,' Beate said. 'And it's raining.'

The woman rolled her shoulders. 'Must be the grief, I suppose.' She trilled her 'r's so much that Harry began to think about when he was growing up in Oppsal and about the bits of cardboard they used to insert in cycle wheels so they flapped against the spokes.

'You grew up in East Oslo, too, I can hear,' Harry said as he and Beate walked towards where the woman had indicated. 'Or am I mistaken?'

'No,' Beate said, unwilling to expatiate.

The tennis court was positioned halfway between the blocks and the terraced houses. They could hear the dull thud of racquet strings on wet tennis ball. Inside the high wire-mesh fence they could make out a figure standing and serving in the quickly gathering autumn gloom.

‘Hello!’ Harry shouted when they reached the fence, but the man didn’t answer. It was only now that they saw he was wearing a jacket, shirt and tie.

‘Trond Grette?’

A ball hit a black puddle of water, bounced up, hit the fence and sprayed them with a fine shower of rainwater, which Beate fended off with her umbrella.

Beate pulled at the gate. ‘He’s locked himself in,’ she whispered.

‘Police! Officers Hole and Lønn!’ Harry yelled. ‘We were due to meet. Can we . . . Christ!’ Harry hadn’t seen the ball until it lodged itself in the wire fence with a smack a few centimetres from his face. He wiped the water from his eyes and looked down: he had been spray-painted with dirty, reddish-brown water. Harry automatically turned his back when he saw the man toss up the next ball.

‘Trond Grette!’ Harry’s shout echoed between the blocks. They watched a tennis ball curve in an arc towards the lights in the blocks before being swallowed by the dark and landing somewhere in the field. Harry faced the tennis court again, only to hear a wild roar and see a figure rushing towards him out of the dark. The metal fence squealed as it checked the charging tennis player. He fell onto the shale on all fours, picked himself up, took a run-up and charged the fence again. Fell, got up and charged.

‘My God, he’s gone nuts,’ Harry mumbled. He instinctively took a step back as a white face with staring eyes loomed up in front of him. Beate had managed to switch on a torch and shone it at Grette, who was hanging on the fence. With wet, black hair stuck to his white forehead, he seemed to be searching for something to focus on as he slid down the fence like sleet on a car windscreen, until he lay lifeless on the ground.

‘What do we do now?’ Beate breathed.

Harry felt his teeth crunching and spat into his hand. From the light of the torch he saw red grit.

‘You ring for an ambulance while I get the wire-cutters from the car,’ he said.

‘Then he was given sedatives, was he?’ Anna asked.

Harry nodded and sipped his Coke.

The young West End clientele perched on bar stools around them drinking wine, shiny drinks and Diet Coke. M was like most cafés in Oslo – urban in a provincial and naive but, as far as it went, pleasant way, which made Harry think about Kebab, the bright, well-behaved boy in his class at school who, they discovered, kept a book of all the slang expressions the ‘in’ kids used.

‘They took the poor guy to hospital. Then we chatted

to the neighbour again and she told us he had been out there hitting tennis balls every evening since his wife had been killed.'

'Goodness. Why?'

Harry hunched his shoulders. 'It's not so unusual for people to become psychotic when they lose someone in those circumstances. Some repress it and act as if the deceased were still alive. The neighbour said Stine and Trond Grette were a fantastic mixed-doubles pair, that they practised on the court almost every afternoon in the summer.'

'So he was kind of expecting his wife to return the serve?'

'Maybe.'

'Jeesus! Will you get me a beer while I go to the loo?'

Anna swung her legs off the stool and wiggled her way across the room. Harry tried not to follow her movements. He didn't need to, he had seen as much as he wanted. She had a few wrinkles around the eyes, a couple of grey strands in her raven-black hair; otherwise she was exactly the same. The same black eyes with the slightly hunted expression under the fused eyebrows, the same high, narrow nose above the indecently full lips and the hollow cheeks which tended to give her a hungry look. She might not have qualified for the epithet 'beautiful' – for that her features were too hard and stark – but her slim body was curvaceous enough

for Harry to spot at least two men at tables in the dining area lose their thread as she passed.

Harry lit another cigarette. After Grette, they had paid a visit to Helge Klementsens, the branch manager, but that hadn't given them much to work on, either. He was still in a state of shock, sitting in a chair in his duplex in Kjelsåsveien and staring alternately at the poodle scurrying between his legs and his wife scurrying between kitchen and sitting room with coffee and the driest cream horn Harry had ever tasted. Beate's choice of clothes had suited the Klementsens family's bourgeois home better than Harry's faded Levi's and Doc Martens. Nevertheless, it was mostly Harry who maintained conversation with the nervously tripping fru Klementsens about the unusually high precipitation this autumn and the art of making cream horns, to the interruptions above of stamping feet and loud sobbing. Fru Klementsens explained that her daughter Ina, the poor thing, was seven months pregnant to a man who had just given her the heave-ho. Well, in fact, he *was* a sailor and had set sail for the Mediterranean. Harry had almost spattered the cream horn across the table. It was then that Beate took charge and asked Helge, who had given up pursuing the dog with his eyes as it had padded out through the living-room door, 'How tall would you say the robber was?'

Helge had observed her, then picked up the coffee

cup and lifted it to his mouth where, of necessity, it had to wait because he couldn't drink and talk at the same time: 'Tall? Two metres perhaps. She was always so accurate, Stine was.'

'He wasn't that tall, herr Klementsén.'

'Alright, one ninety. And always so well turned out.'

'What was he wearing?'

'Something black, like rubber. This summer she took a proper holiday for the first time. In Greece.'

Fru Klementsén sniffled.

'Like rubber?' Beate asked.

'Yes. And a balaclava.'

'What colour, herr Klementsén?'

'Red.'

At this point Beate had stopped taking notes and soon after they were in the car on their way back to town.

'If judges and juries only knew how little of what witnesses said about bank robberies was reliable, they would refuse to let us use it as evidence,' Beate had said. 'What people's brains recreate is almost fascinatingly wrong. As if fear gives them glasses which make all robbers grow in stature and blackness, makes guns proliferate and seconds become longer. The robber took a little over one minute, but fru Brønne, the cashier nearest the entrance, said he had been there for close on five minutes. And he isn't two metres tall, but

1.79. Unless he wore insoles, which is not so unusual for professionals.'

'How can you be so precise about his height?'

'The video. You measure the height against the door frame where the robber enters. I was in the bank this morning chalking up, taking new photos and measuring.'

'Mm. In Crime Squad we leave that kind of measuring job to the Crime Scene Unit.'

'Measuring height from a video is a bit more complicated than it sounds. The Crime Scene Unit's measurements were out by three centimetres, for example, in the case of the Den norske Bank robber in Kaldbakken in 1989. So I prefer to use my own.'

Harry had squinted at her and wondered whether he should ask her why she had joined the police. Instead, he had asked her if she could drop him off outside the locksmith's in Vibes gate. Before getting out, he had also asked her if she had noticed that Helge hadn't spilt a drop of coffee from the brimming cup he had been holding during their questioning. She hadn't.

'Do you like this place?' Anna asked, sinking back on her stool.

'Well.' Harry cast his eyes around. 'It's not my taste.'

'Not mine, either,' Anna said, grabbing her bag and standing up. 'Let's go to my flat.'

'I've just bought you a beer.' Harry nodded towards the frothy glass.

‘It’s so boring drinking alone,’ she said and pulled a face. ‘Relax, Harry. Come on.’

It had stopped raining outside and the cold, freshly washed air tasted good.

‘Do you remember the day, one autumn, we drove to Maridalen?’ Anna asked, slipping her hand inside his arm and starting to walk.

‘No,’ Harry said.

‘Of course you do! In that dreadful Ford Escort of yours, with the seats that don’t fold down.’

Harry smiled wryly.

‘You’re blushing,’ she exclaimed with glee. ‘Well, I’m sure you also remember that we parked and went for a walk in the forest. With all the yellow leaves it was like . . .’ She squeezed his arm. ‘Like a bed, an enormous bed of gold.’ She laughed and nudged him. ‘And afterwards I had to help you push-start that wreck of a car. I hope you’ve got rid of it by now?’

‘Well,’ Harry said, ‘it’s at the garage. We’ll have to see.’

‘Dear, oh dear. Now you make it sound like an old friend who’s been taken to hospital with a tumour or something.’ And she added – softly: ‘You shouldn’t have been so quick to let go, Harry.’

He didn’t answer.

‘Here it is,’ she said. ‘You can’t have forgotten that, anyway, can you?’ They had stopped outside a blue door in Sorgenfrigata.

Harry gently detached himself. ‘Listen, Anna,’ he began and tried to ignore her warning stare. ‘I’ve got a meeting with Crime Squad investigators at the crack of dawn tomorrow.’

‘I didn’t say a word,’ she said, opening the door.

Harry suddenly remembered something. He put his hand inside his coat and passed her a yellow envelope. ‘From the locksmith.’

‘Ah, the key. Was everything alright?’

‘The person behind the counter scrutinised my ID very closely. And I had to sign. Odd person.’ Harry glanced at his watch and yawned.

‘They’re strict about handing out system keys,’ Anna said hastily. ‘It fits the whole block, the main entrance, the cellar, flat, everything.’ She gave a nervous, perfunctory laugh. ‘They have to have a written application from our housing co-op just to make this one spare key.’

‘I understand,’ Harry said, rocking on his heels. He drew breath to say goodnight.

She beat him to it. Her voice was almost imploring: ‘Just a cup of coffee, Harry.’

There was the same chandelier hanging from the ceiling high above the same table and chairs in the large sitting room. Harry thought the walls had been light – white or

maybe yellow – but he wasn't sure. Now they were blue and the room seemed smaller. Perhaps Anna had wanted to reduce the space. It is not easy for one person living alone to fill a flat with three reception rooms, two big bedrooms and a ceiling height of three and a half metres. Harry remembered that Anna had told him her grandmother had also lived in the flat on her own, but she hadn't spent so much time here, as she had been a famous soprano and had travelled the world for as long as she was able to sing.

Anna disappeared into the kitchen and Harry looked around the sitting room. It was bare, empty, apart from a vaulting horse the size of an Icelandic pony, which stood in the middle on four splayed wooden legs with two rings protruding from its back. Harry went over and stroked the smooth, brown leather.

'Have you taken up gymnastics?' Harry called out.

'You mean the horse?' Anna shouted back from the kitchen.

'It's for men, isn't it?'

'Yes. Sure you won't have a beer, Harry?'

'Quite sure,' he shouted. 'Seriously, though, why have you got it here?'

Harry jumped when he heard her voice behind his back: 'Because I like to do things that men do.'

Harry turned. She had taken off her sweater and was standing in the doorway. One hand resting on her hip,

the other up against the door frame. At the very last minute Harry resisted the temptation to let his eyes wander from top to toe.

‘I bought it from Oslo Gym Club. It’s going to be a work of art. An installation. Much like “Contact”, which I am sure you haven’t forgotten.’

‘You mean the box on the table with the curtain you could stick your hand in? And inside there were loads of false hands you could shake?’

‘Or stroke. Or flirt with. Or reject. They had heating elements in so they could maintain body temperature and were such a great hit, weren’t they. People thought there was someone hiding under the table. Come with me and I’ll show you something else.’

He followed her to the furthest room, where she opened sliding doors. Then she took his hand and pulled him into the dark with her. When the light was switched on, at first Harry stood staring at the lamp. It was a gilt standard lamp formed into the shape of a woman holding scales in one hand and a sword in the other. Three bulbs were located on the outside edge of the sword, the scales and the woman’s head, and when Harry turned, he could see each illuminated its own oil painting. Two of them were hanging on the wall while the third, which clearly wasn’t finished yet, was on an easel with a yellow-and-brown-stained palette fastened to the left-hand corner.

‘What sort of pictures are they?’ Harry asked.

‘They’re portraits. Can’t you see that?’

‘Right. Those are eyes?’ He pointed. ‘And that’s a mouth?’

Anna tilted her head. ‘If you like. There are three men.’

‘Anyone I know?’

Anna gazed at Harry pensively for a long time before answering. ‘No. I don’t think you know any of them, Harry, but you could get to know them if you really wanted.’

Harry studied the pictures more closely.

‘Tell me what you can see.’

‘I can see my neighbour with a kicksled. I can see a man coming out of the backroom at the locksmith’s as I’m leaving. And I can see the waiter in M. And that TV celeb, Per Ståle Lønning.’

She laughed. ‘Did you know that the retina reverses everything so your brain receives a mirror image first? If you want to see things as they really are, you have to see them in a mirror. Then you would have seen some quite different people in the pictures.’ Her eyes were radiant and Harry couldn’t bring himself to object that the retina didn’t reverse images, it turned them upside down. ‘This will be my final masterpiece, Harry. This is what I will be remembered for.’

‘These portraits?’

‘No, they’re merely a part of the whole work of art. It’s not finished yet. Just wait.’

‘Mm, has it got a name?’

‘“Nemesis”,’ she said in a low voice.

He gazed enquiringly at her and their eyes locked.

‘After the goddess, you know.’

The shadow fell over one side of her face. Harry looked away. He had seen enough. The curve of her back begging for a dancing partner, one foot in front of the other as if unsure whether to move forwards or backwards, her heaving bosom and the slim neck with the veins he imagined he could see throbbing. He felt hot and a tiny bit faint. What was it she said? ‘You shouldn’t have been so quick to let go.’ Had he been?

‘Harry . . .’

‘I have to go,’ he said.

He pulled her dress over her head, and she fell back laughing against the white sheet. She loosened his belt as the turquoise light, which shone through the swaying palm trees of the laptop’s screensaver, flickered over the imps and open-mouthed demons snarling from the carvings on the bedhead. Anna had told him it was her grandmother’s bed and it had been there for almost eighty years. She nibbled at his ear and whispered sweet nothings in an unfamiliar language. Then she stopped

whispering and rode him as she yelled, laughed, entreated and invoked external forces and he just wished it would go on and on. He was about to come when she suddenly held back, took his face between her hands and whispered: ‘Mine for ever?’

‘Not bloody likely,’ he laughed and turned her so that he was on top. The wooden demons grinned at him.

‘Mine for ever?’

‘Yes,’ he groaned and came.

When the laughter had died down and they lay there sweating, but still tightly entwined on the bedcovers, Anna told him that the bed had been given to her grandmother by a Spanish nobleman.

‘After a concert she gave in Seville in 1911,’ she said, raising her head slightly so that Harry could place the lit cigarette between her lips.

The bed arrived in Oslo three months later on SS *Elenora*. Chance, among other things, would have it that the Danish captain, Jesper something-or-other, would be her grandmother’s first lover – though not her first ever – in this bed. Jesper had obviously been a passionate man, and according to the grandmother, that was why the horse adorning the bed had lost its head. Captain Jesper, in his ecstasy, bit it off.

Anna laughed and Harry smiled. Then the cigarette was finished and they made love to the creaking and groaning of the Spanish Manila wood, which made