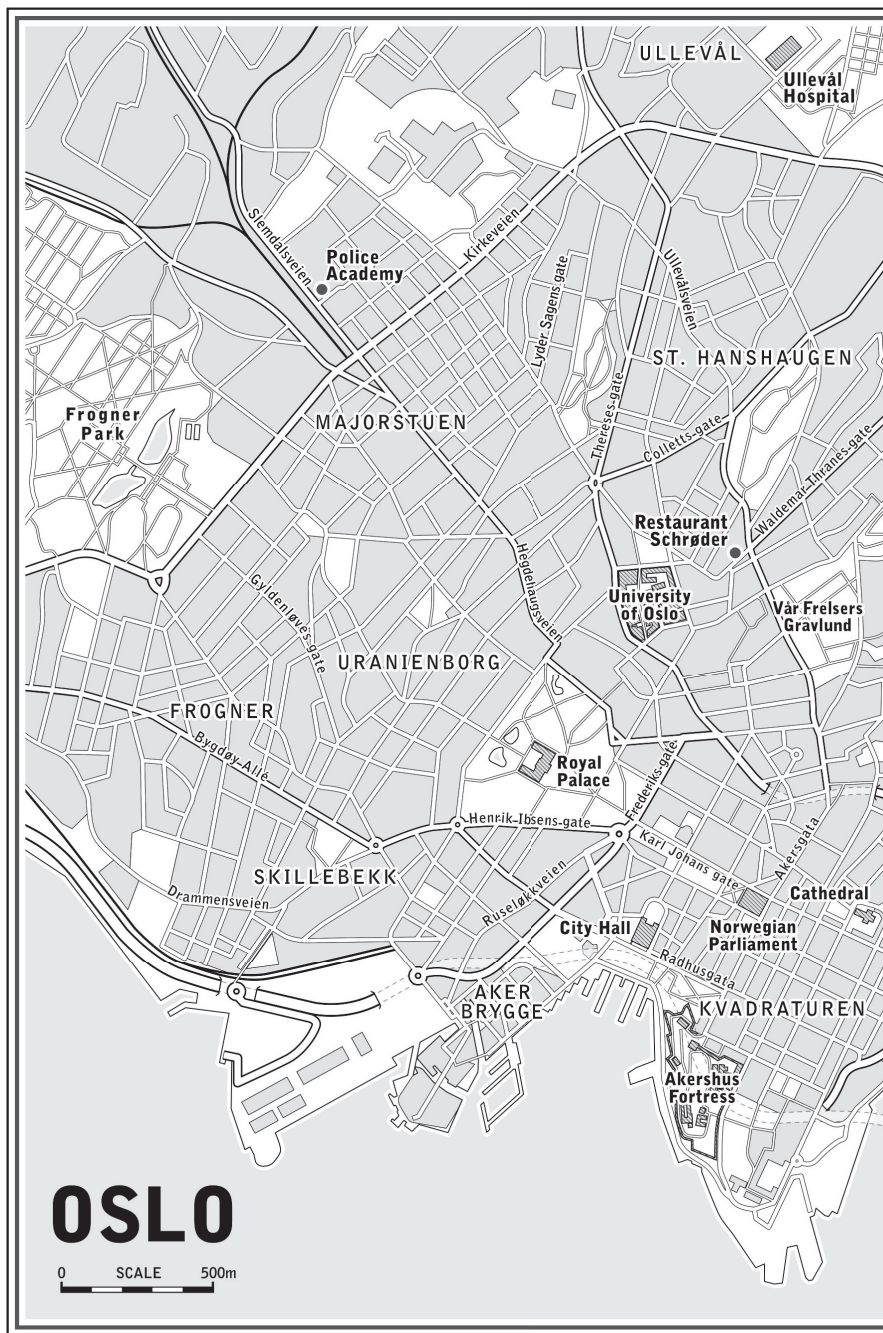
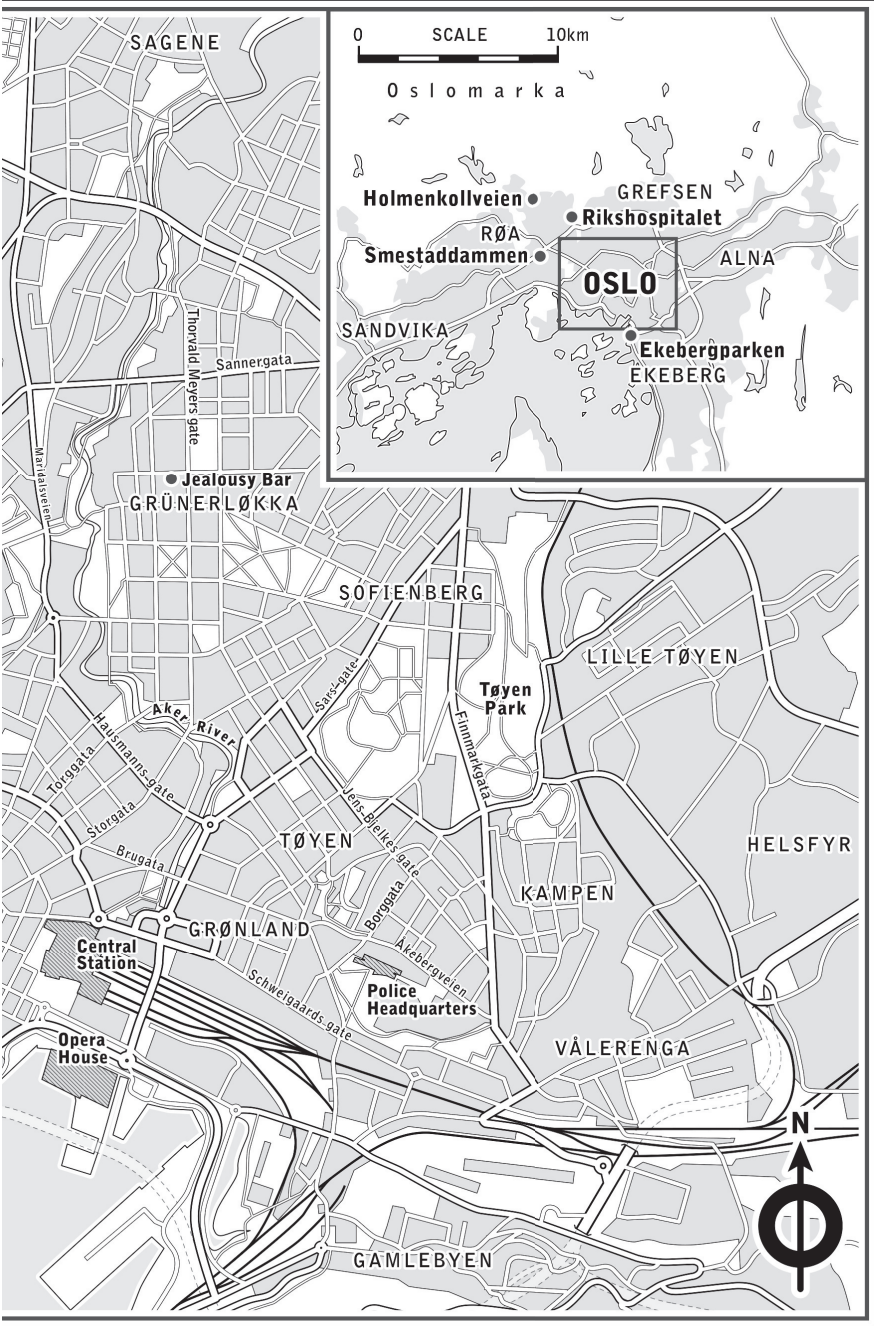






PART ONE

1

A RAGGED DRESS WAS HANGING from one branch of a rotting pine tree. It put the old man in mind of a song from his youth, about a dress on a washing line. But this dress wasn't hanging in a southerly breeze like in the song, but in the ice-cold meltwater in a river. It was completely still down at the bottom of the river, and even though it was five o'clock in the afternoon, and it was March, and the sky above the surface of the water was clear, just as the forecast had said, there wasn't a lot of sunlight left after it had been filtered through a layer of ice and four metres of water. Which meant that the pine tree and dress lay in weird, greenish semi-darkness. It was a summer dress, he had concluded, blue with white polka dots. Maybe the dress had once been coloured, he didn't know. It probably depended on how long the dress had been hanging there, snagged on the branch. And now the dress was hanging in a current that never stopped, washing it, stroking it when the river was running slowly, tugging and pulling at it when the river was in full flow, slowly but surely tearing it to pieces. If you looked at it that way, the old man thought, the dress was a bit like him. That dress had once meant something to

someone, a girl or woman, to the eyes of another man, or a child's arms. But now, just like him, it was lost, discarded, without any purpose, trapped, constrained, voiceless. It was just a matter of time before the current tore away the last remnants of what it had once been.

'What are you watching?' he heard a voice say from behind the chair he was sitting in. Ignoring the pain in his muscles, he turned his head and looked up. And saw that it was a new customer. The old man was more forgetful than before, but he never forgot the face of someone who had visited Simensen Hunting & Fishing. This customer wasn't after guns or ammunition. With a bit of practice you could tell from the look in their eyes which ones were herbivores, the look you saw in that portion of humanity who had lost the killing instinct, the portion who didn't share the secret shared by the other group: that there's nothing that makes a man feel more alive than putting a bullet in a large, warm-blooded mammal. The old man guessed the customer was after one of the hooks or fishing rods that were hanging on the racks above and below the large television screen on the wall in front of them, or possibly one of the wildlife cameras on the other side of the shop.

'He's looking at the Haglebu river.' It was Alf who replied. The old man's son-in-law had come over to them. He stood rocking on his heels with his hands in the deep pockets of the long leather gilet he always wore at work. 'We installed an underwater camera there last year with the camera manufacturers. So now we have a twenty-four-hour live stream from just above the salmon ladder round the falls at Norafossen, so we can get a more accurate idea of when the fish start heading upstream.'

'Which is when?'

‘A few in April and May, but the big rush doesn’t start until June. The trout start to spawn before the salmon.’

The customer smiled at the old man. ‘You’re pretty early, then? Or have you seen any fish?’

The old man opened his mouth. He had the words in his mind, he hadn’t forgotten them. But nothing came out. He closed his mouth again.

‘Aphasia,’ Alf said.

‘What?’

‘A stroke, he can’t talk. Are you after fishing tackle?’

‘A wildlife camera,’ the customer said.

‘So you’re a hunter?’

‘A hunter? No, not at all. I found some droppings outside my cabin up in Sørkedalen that don’t look like anything I’ve seen before, so I took some pictures and put them on Facebook, asking what it was. Got a response from people up in the mountains straight away. Bear. A bear! In the forest just twenty minutes’ drive and a three-and-a-half-hour walk from where we are now, right in the centre of the capital of Norway.’

‘That’s fantastic.’

‘Depends what you mean by “fantastic”. Like I said, I’ve got a cabin there. I take my family there. I want someone to shoot it.’

‘I’m a hunter, so I understand exactly what you mean. But you know, even in Norway, where you don’t have to go back very far to a time when we had a *lot* of bears, there have been hardly any fatal bear attacks in the past couple of hundred years.’

Eleven, the old man thought. Eleven people since 1800. The last one in 1906. He may have lost the power of speech and movement, but he still had his memory. His mind was still OK. Mostly, anyway. Sometimes he

got a bit muddled, and noticed his son-in-law exchange a glance with his daughter Mette, and realised he'd got something wrong. When they first took over the shop he had set up and run for fifty years he had been very useful. But now, since the last stroke, he just sat there. Not that that was so terrible. No, since Olivia died he didn't have many expectations of the rest of his life. Being close to his family was enough, getting a warm meal every day, sitting in his chair in the shop watching a television screen, an endless programme with no sound, where things moved at the same pace as him, where the most dramatic thing that could happen was the first spawning fish making their way up the river.

'On the other hand, that doesn't mean it couldn't happen again.' The old man heard Alf's voice. He had gone over to the shelves of wildlife cameras with the customer. 'No matter how much it might look like a teddy bear, all carnivores kill. So yes, you should definitely get a camera so you can figure out if it's settled down somewhere near your cabin or if it was just passing through. And now's the time brown bears emerge from hibernation, and they're *starving*. Set up a camera where you found the droppings, or somewhere close to the cabin.'

'So the camera's inside that little bird box?'

'The bird box, as you call it, protects the camera from the elements and any animals that get too close. This one's a simple, reasonably priced camera. It's got a Fresnel lens that registers the infrared radiation from the heat animals, humans and everything else give off. When the level deviates from the norm, the camera automatically starts to record.'

The old man was half listening to the conversation, but something else had caught his attention. Something that

was happening on the television screen. He couldn't see what it was, but the green darkness had taken on a lighter shimmer.

'Recordings are stored on a memory card inside the camera – you can play it back on your PC afterwards.'

'Now *that's* fantastic.'

'Yes, but you do have to physically go and check the camera to see if it's recorded anything. If you go for this slightly more expensive model, you'll get a text message every time it's recorded anything. Or there's this one, the most advanced model, which still has a memory card but will also send any recordings directly to your phone or email. You can sit inside your cabin and only have to go back to the camera to change the battery every so often.'

'What if the bear comes at night?'

'The camera has black-light LEDs as well as white. Invisible light that means the animal doesn't get frightened off.'

Light. The old man could see it now. A beam of light coming from upriver, off to the right. It pushed through the green water, found the dress, and for a chilling moment it made him think of a girl coming back to life at last and dancing with joy.

'That's proper science fiction, that is!'

The old man opened his mouth when he saw a spaceship come into the picture. It was lit up from within and was hovering a metre and a half off the riverbed. The current knocked it against a large rock, and, almost in slow motion, it spun round until the light from the front of it swept across the riverbed and for a moment blinded the old man when it hit the camera lens. Then the hovering spaceship was caught by the thick branches of the pine tree and stopped moving. The old man felt his heart

thudding in his chest. It was a car. The interior light was on, and he could see that the inside was full of water, almost up to the roof. There was someone in there. Someone half sitting, half standing on the driver's seat as he desperately pressed his head up to the roof, obviously trying to get air. One of the rotten branches holding the car snapped and drifted off in the current.

'You don't get the same clarity and focus as daylight, and it's black and white. But as long as there's no condensation on the lens or anything in the way, you should certainly be able to see your bear.'

The old man stamped on the floor in an attempt to attract Alf's attention. The man in the car looked like he was taking a deep breath before ducking under again. His short, bristly hair was swaying, and his cheeks were puffed out. He hit both hands against the side window facing the camera, but the water inside the car leached the force from the blows. The old man had put his hands on the armrests and was trying to get up from his chair, but his muscles wouldn't do what he told them to. He noticed that the middle finger on one of the man's hands was a greyish colour. The man stopped banging and butted the glass with his head. It looked like he was giving up. Another branch snapped and the current tugged and strained to pull the car free, but the pine wasn't ready to let go just yet. The old man stared at the anguished face pressed against the inside of the car window. Bulging blue eyes. A scar in a liver-coloured arc from one corner of his mouth up towards his ear. The old man had managed to get out of his chair and took two unsteady steps towards the shelves of cameras.

'Excuse me,' Alf said quietly to the customer. 'What is it, Dad?'

The old man gesticulated at the screen behind him.

‘Really?’ Alf said dubiously, and hurried past the old man towards the screen. ‘Fish?’

The old man shook his head and turned back to the screen. The car. It was gone. And everything looked the same as before. The riverbed, the dead pine tree, the dress, the green light through the ice. As if nothing had happened. The old man stamped the floor again and pointed at the screen.

‘Easy now, Dad,’ Alf said, giving him a friendly pat on the shoulder. ‘It is very early for spawning, you know.’ He went back to the customer and the wildlife cameras.

The old man looked at the two men standing with their backs to him, and felt despair and rage wash over him. How was he going to explain what he had just seen? His doctor had told him that when a stroke hits both the front and back parts of the left side of the brain, it wasn’t only your speech that was lost, but often the ability to communicate in general, even by writing or through gestures. He tottered back to the chair and sat down again. Looked at the river, which just went on flowing. Imperturbable. Undeterred. Unchanging. And after a couple of minutes he felt his heart start to beat more calmly again. Who knows, maybe it hadn’t actually happened after all? Maybe it had just been a glimpse of the next step towards the absolute darkness of old age. Or, in this case, its colourful world of hallucinations. He looked at the dress. For a moment, when he had thought it was lit up by car headlights, it had seemed to him as if Olivia was dancing in it. And behind the windscreen, inside the illuminated car, he had glimpsed a face he had seen before. A face he remembered. And the only faces he still remembered were the ones he saw here, in the shop. And he had seen

that man in here on two occasions. Those blue eyes, that liver-coloured scar. On both occasions he had bought a wildlife camera. The police had been in asking about him fairly recently. The old man could have told them he was a tall man. And that he had that look in his eyes. The look that said he knew the secret. The look that said he wasn't a herbivore.

2

SVEIN FINNE LEANED OVER THE woman and felt her forehead with one hand. It was wet with sweat. The eyes staring up at him were wide with pain. Or fear. Mostly fear, he guessed.

‘Are you afraid of me?’ he whispered.

She nodded and swallowed. He had always thought her beautiful. When he saw her walk to and from her home, when she was at the gym, when he was sitting on the metro just a few seats away from her, letting her see him. Just so she would know. But he had never seen her look more beautiful than she did right now, lying there helpless, so completely in his power.

‘I promise it will be quick, darling,’ he whispered.

She gulped. So frightened. He wondered if he should kiss her.

‘A knife in the stomach,’ he whispered. ‘Then it’s over.’

She screwed her eyes shut, and two glistening tears squeezed through her eyelashes.

Svein Finne laughed quietly. ‘You knew I’d come. You knew I couldn’t let you go. It was a promise, after all.’

He ran one finger through the mix of sweat and tears on her cheek. He could see one of her eyes through the

big, gaping hole in his hand, in the eagle's wing. The hole was the result of a bullet fired by a policeman, a young officer at the time. They had sentenced Svein Finne to twenty years in prison for eighteen charges of sexual assault, and he hadn't denied the charges in and of themselves, just the description of them as 'assault', and the idea that those acts were something that a man like him should be punished for. But the judge and jury evidently believed that Norway's laws were above nature's. Fine, that was their opinion.

Her eye stared at him through the hole.

'Are you ready, darling?'

'Don't call me that,' she whimpered. More pleading than commanding. 'And stop talking about knives . . .'

Svein Finne sighed. Why were people so frightened of the knife? It was humanity's first tool, they'd had two and a half million years to get used to it, yet some people still didn't appreciate the beauty of what had made it possible for them to descend from the trees. Hunting, shelter, agriculture, food, defence. Just as much as the knife took life, it created it. You couldn't have one without the other. Only those who appreciated that, and accepted the consequences of their humanity, their origins, could love the knife. Fear and love. Again, two sides of the same thing.

Svein Finne looked up. At the knives on the bench beside them, ready for use. Ready to be chosen. The choice of the right knife for the right job was important. These ones were good, purpose-made, top quality. Sure, they lacked what Svein Finne looked for in a knife. Personality. Spirit. Magic. Before that tall young policeman with the short, messy hair had ruined everything, Svein Finne had had a fine collection of twenty-six knives.

The finest of them had been Javanese. Long, thin,

asymmetrical, like a curved snake with a handle. Sheer beauty, feminine. Possibly not the most effective to use, but it had the hypnotic qualities of both a snake and a beautiful woman, it made people do exactly what you told them. The most efficient knife in the collection, on the other hand, was a *Rampuri*, the favourite of the Indian mafia. It emanated a sort of chill, as if it were made of ice; it was so ugly that it was mesmerising. The *karambit*, which was shaped like a tiger's claw, combined beauty and efficiency. But it was perhaps a little too calculated, like a whore wearing too much make-up and a dress that was too tight, too low-cut. Svein Finne had never liked it. He preferred them innocent. Virginal. And, ideally, simple. Like his favourite knife in the collection. A Finnish *puukko* knife. It had a worn, brown wooden handle, without any real relation to the blade, which was short with a groove, and the sharp edge curved up to form a point. He had bought the *puukko* in Turku, and two days later he had used it to clarify the situation to a plump eighteen-year-old girl who had been working all alone in a Neste petrol station on the outskirts of Helsinki. Even back then he had – as always when he felt a rush of sexual anticipation – started to stammer slightly. It wasn't a sign that he wasn't in control, but rather the opposite, it was just the dopamine. And confirmation that at the age of almost eighty his urges were undiminished. It had taken him precisely two and a half minutes from the moment he walked through the door – when he pinned her down on the counter, cut her trousers off, inseminated her, took out her ID card, noted Maalin's name and address – until he was out again. Two and a half minutes. How many seconds had the actual insemination taken? Chimpanzees spent an average of eight seconds having intercourse,

eight seconds in which both monkeys were defenceless in a world full of predators. A gorilla – who had fewer natural enemies – could stretch out the pleasure to a minute. But a disciplined man in enemy territory often had to sacrifice pleasure for the greater goal: reproduction. So, just as a bank robbery should never take more than four minutes, an act of insemination in a public place should never take more than two and a half minutes. Evolution would prove him right, it was just a matter of time.

But now, here, they were in a safe environment. Besides, there wasn't going to be any insemination. Not that he didn't want to – he did. But this time she was going to be penetrated by a knife instead; there was no point trying to impregnate a woman when there was no chance of it resulting in offspring. So the disciplined man saved his seed.

'I have to be allowed to call you darling, seeing as we're engaged,' Svein Finne whispered.

She stared at him with eyes that were black with shock. Black, as if they had already gone out. As if there were no longer any light to shut out.

'Yes, we *are* engaged.' He laughed quietly, and pressed his thick lips to hers. He automatically wiped her lips with the sleeve of his flannel shirt so there wouldn't be any traces of saliva. 'And this is what I've been promising you . . .' he said, running his hand down between her breasts towards her stomach.

3

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

He opened the door.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

'Sorry?' the woman said.

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

'Oh . . .'

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

‘Did you want anything else?’

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

‘Yes, but you didn’t answer.’

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

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

‘And?’

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

‘Shit. What happened?’

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

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

‘What do you want to know?’

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

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

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

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

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

‘That’s the short version.’

‘Did we fight?’

‘You and *me*?’

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

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

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

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

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

'But Ringdal didn't fight back?'

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

'Shit. So I'm barred?'

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

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

'Your music?'

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

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

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

'She's at work.'

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

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

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

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

He reached Grønlandsleiret, where, some time back in

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

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

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

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

Their eyes met.

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

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

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

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

'Marital leave?'

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

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

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

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

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

‘Can you lend me five hundred kroner?’

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

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

‘No.’

‘So how did he find me, then?’

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

‘You’ve got a case.’

‘I need the Finne case.’

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

‘But why?’

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

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

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

‘Obsession?’

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

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

‘Where are you going?’

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

'Yes, Harry?'

'*Yes, Harry?*'

'I'm in the middle of dinner.'

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

'No.'

'Wrong answer, try again.'

'*Yes?*'

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

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

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

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

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

'Yes, yes, I read about it.'

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

'I didn't know you did that.'

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

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

'Oh?'

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

‘Considerate.’

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

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

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

‘Yes, but even so.’

‘You haven’t asked about the motive.’

‘OK. Motive?’

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

‘Did he confront the lover?’

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

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

'Anything else I should know?'

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

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

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

'So you're asking because . . .'

'Because I want to understand,' Harry said.

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

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

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

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

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

‘Anyone?’

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

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

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

‘Hmm.’

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

‘*Anyone*, though?’

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

‘Really?’

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

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

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

'What is it you don't believe?'

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

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

'What do you mean?'

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

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

'I hope you're joking.'

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

'And?'

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

'Punishment, of course.'

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

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

‘He’s already there.’

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

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

Ståle Aune’s eyes widened.

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

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

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

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

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

‘Because they come at night?’

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

‘Any idea what?’

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

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

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

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

‘You’ve spoken to Katrine.’

‘She’s worried about you. She wanted an evaluation.’

‘And you agreed?’

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

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

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

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

‘Did Rakel know about this?’

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

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

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

‘Hang on – didn’t you move out at Christmas?’

‘More or less.’ Harry wafted the smoke away.

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

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

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

Harry shrugged his shoulders.

‘Harry?’

‘Hmm?’

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

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

‘Did you?’

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

‘Do you really believe that?’

Harry sighed.

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

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

‘No?’

‘No, it was . . . me.’

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

‘Come on. Anxiety?’

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

‘LAST ORDERS, THEN WE’RE CLOSING.’

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

Those running shoes would just have to be repaired.

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

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

He stared at the phone.

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

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

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

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

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

'Maybe see you around,' she said.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

And one woman, both.

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

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

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

There, he stopped his watch and studied the numbers.

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

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

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

5

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

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

‘Out?’

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

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

‘Whatever. She died young.’

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

‘Why are you lying?’ Harry asked.

‘Wh . . . What?’

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

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

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

‘How far?’

‘To the Marilyn Monroe statue.’

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

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

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