Before the Frost

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# PROLOGUE

Jamestown, November 1978

His thoughts were like a shower of red-hot glowing needles in his head, an almost unbearable pain. He did his utmost to remain calm, to think clearly. The worst thing was fear. The fear that Jim would unleash his dogs and hunt him down, like the terrified beast of prey he had become. Jim’s dogs: they were what he was most afraid of. All through that long night of November 18, when he had run until he was exhausted and had hidden among the decomposing roots of a fallen tree, he imagined that he could hear them closing in.

Jim never lets anyone escape, he thought. He seemed to me to be filled by an endless and divine source of love, but the man I have followed has turned out to be someone quite different. Unnoticed by us, he changed places with his shadow or with the Devil, whom he was always warning us about. The Devil of selfishness, who keeps us from serving God with obedience and submission. What appeared to me to be love turned into hate. I should have seen this earlier. Jim himself warned us about it time and again. He gave us the truth, but not all at once. It came slowly, a creeping realisation. But neither I nor anyone else wanted to hear it: the truth buried between the lines. It was my fault, I didn’t want to see it. In his sermons and in all his teachings he did not only talk of the spiritual preparations we needed to undergo to ready ourselves for the Day of Judgment. He was also always telling us that we had to be ready to die.

He arrested the train of his thoughts and listened. Wasn’t that the dogs barking? But no, it was only a sound inside him, generated by his fear. He went back in his confused and terrified mind to the apocalyptic events in Jamestown. He needed to understand what had happened.

Jim was their leader, shepherd, pastor. They had followed him in the exodus from California when they could no longer tolerate the persecution from the media and the state authorities. In Guyana, they were going to realise their dreams of a life of peaceful coexistence with nature and each other in God. And at first they had experienced something very close to that. But then it changed. Could they have been as threatened in Guyana as in California? Would they be safe anywhere? Perhaps only in death would they find the kind of protection they needed to construct the community they strove for. “I have seen far in my mind,” Jim said. “I have seen much further than before. The Day of Judgment is near at hand and if we are not to perish in that terrible maelstrom we have to be ready to die. Only through physical death will we survive.”

Suicide was the only answer. When Jim stood in the pulpit and mentioned it for the first time there was nothing frightening about his words. Initially parents were to give drinks laced with cyanide to their children; cyanide which Jim had stockpiled in plastic containers in a locked room at the back of his house. Then the grown-ups would take the poison. Those who were overcome with doubt in the final instance would be assisted by Jim and his closest associates. If they ran out of poison, they had guns. Jim would make sure that everybody was taken care of before he put the muzzle to his own head.

He lay under the tree, panting in the tropical heat. His ears strained to catch any sound of Jim’s dogs, those large, red-eyed monsters that had inspired fear in all of them. Jim had told them that everyone in his congregation, everyone who had chosen to follow his path and come to Guyana, had no choice but to continue on the path laid out by God. The path which James Warren Jones had decided was the right one.

It had sounded so comforting. No-one else would have been able to make words like death, suicide, cyanide and weapons sound so beautiful and soothing.

He shivered. Jim has walked around and inspected the dead, he thought. He knows I am missing and he’s going to send the dogs after me. The thought clawed its way out of his mind: the dead. Tears began to run down his face. For the first time, he took in the enormity of what had happened: Maria and the girl were dead, everyone was dead. But he did not want to believe it. Maria and he had talked about this in the small hours: Jim was no longer the same man they had once been drawn to, the one who had promised them salvation and a meaningful life if they joined the People’s Temple. It was Maria who put her finger on it. “Jim’s eyes have changed,” she said. “He doesn’t see us now. He looks past us and his eyes are cold, as if he wants nothing to do with any of us any more.”

They spoke of running away together, but every morning they agreed that they could not abandon the path they had chosen. Jim would become his old self again. He was suffering some sort of crisis and it would soon be over; he was stronger than all of them. And without him they would never have had this brief experience of what seemed to them like heaven on earth.

There was one memory which stood out. It was from that time when the drugs, alcohol and guilt about leaving his little daughter had brought him close to ending it. He wanted to throw himself in front of a truck or train and then it would be over and no-one would miss him. During one of those last meandering walks through town, when he was saying goodbye to all the people who didn’t care one way or another whether he lived or died, he happened to pass by the People’s Temple. “It was God’s plan,” Jim said later. “He had already decided that you would be among the chosen, one of the few to experience His mercy.” He didn’t know what had made him walk up those steps and go into the building that looked nothing like a church. He still didn’t know what it was, even now when he lay among the roots of a tree, waiting for Jim’s dogs to track him down and tear him limb from limb.

He knew he should be making good his escape, but he did not leave his hiding place. He had abandoned one child already; he was not going to abandon another. Maria and the girl were still back there with the others.

What had really happened? They had got up as usual in the morning and gathered outside Jim’s door. It stayed shut, as it so often had in the last days. They had therefore prayed without him, the 912 adults and the 320 children. Then they had left for their various jobs. He would never have survived had he not been one of a team given the task of finding two runaway cows. When he said goodbye to Maria and his daughter, he had no inkling of the terror to come. It was only when he and the other men reached the far side of the ravine that he understood that something was terribly wrong.

They had stopped dead in their tracks at the first sound of gunfire. And perhaps they heard human screams mingled with the chatter of the birds. They had looked at each other and then run back down towards the colony. He had become separated from the other men on the way back possibly they had decided to flee rather than return. When he emerged from the shady forest and climbed the fence to the fruit orchards, everything was silent. Too silent. No-one was there, picking fruit. No-one at all was to be seen. He ran towards the houses, sure that something disastrous had occurred. Jim must have come out of his house this day with hate, not love, blazing from his eyes.

He had a cramp in his side and slowly shifted position, straining not to make any noise. What conclusion had he come to? As he ran through the fruit orchards, he tried to do what Jim had always taught them: to put his life in God’s hands. He prayed as he ran. Please, God, whatever may have happened, let Maria and the child be safe. But God had chosen not to hear him.

In his desperation he started to believe that the shots he had heard from the ravine were the sounds of God and Jim taking aim at each other. When he came rushing into the dusty main street of Jamestown he half expected to catch the two of them at their duel. But God was nowhere to be seen. Jim Jones was there, the dogs barked like crazy in their cages and there were bodies everywhere. He could see at once that they were all dead. It was as if they had been struck down by a giant fist from the sky. Jim Jones and the six brothers who were his personal assistants and bodyguards had gone round and shot the children trying to crawl away from their parents’ corpses. He ran among the dead, looking for Maria and the child, but without success.

It was when he shouted Maria’s name out loud that he heard Jim calling him. He turned and saw his pastor aim a pistol at him. They were about 20 metres apart and between them, stretched out on the brown-burned ground, were the bodies of his friends, contorted as in their death throes. Jim pulled the trigger, but the shot missed. He ran before Jim had the chance to shoot again. He heard many shots fired and he heard Jim roar in rage, but he had not been hit and he made his stumbling way across the bodies and kept running until it was dark. He didn’t know if he was the only survivor. Where were Maria and the girl? Why was he alone safe? Could one person escape the Day of Judgment? He didn’t know, he only knew that this was no dream. This was all too real.

At dawn, heat began to rise like steam from the trees. That was when finally he realised that no dogs were coming. He crawled out from under the tree roots, shook his aching limbs and stood up. He started back towards the colony. He was dead tired and extremely thirsty. Everything was still very quiet. The dogs are dead, he thought. Jim must have meant it literally when he said no-one would escape judgment. Not even the dogs. He climbed over the fence and started running. The first of the dead he saw were those who had tried to escape. They had been shot in the back.

Then he stopped by the corpse of a familiar-looking man. Shaking, he bent and turned the body face up. It was Jim. His gaze has finally softened, he thought. And he’s looking me straight in the eyes. He had a sudden impulse to strike him, to kick him in the face. But he quelled this violent urge and stood up. He was the only living soul among all these dead, and he could not rest until he found Maria and the girl.

Maria had tried to run; she had fallen forward when they shot her in the back. The girl was in her arms. He knelt beside them and cried. Now there’s nothing left for me, he thought. Jim has turned our paradise into a hell.

He stayed with them until helicopters started circling over the area. He reminded himself of something Jim had told them shortly after they first came to Guyana, when life was still good. “The truth about a person can just as well be determined with the nose as with your eyes and ears,” he had said. “The Devil hides inside people and the

Devil smells of sulphur. Whenever you catch a whiff of sulphur, raise the Cross for protection.”

He didn’t know what the future held, if anything. He didn’t want to think about it. He wondered if he would ever be able to fill the void that God and Jim Jones had left behind.

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# PART I

## The Eel Hunt

# CHAPTER 1

The wind picked up shortly after 9.00 on the evening of August 21, 2001. In a valley to the south of the Rommele Hills, small waves were rippling across the surface of Marebo Lake. The man waiting in the shadows beside the water stretched out his hand to discover the direction of the wind. Virtually due south, he found to his satisfaction. He had chosen the right spot to put out food to attract the creatures he would soon be sacrificing.

He sat on the rock where he had spread out a sweater against the chill. It was a new moon and no light penetrated the thick layer of clouds. Dark enough for catching eels. That’s what my Swedish playmate used to say when I was growing up. The eels start their migration in August. That’s when they bump into the fishermen’s traps and wander the length of the trap. And then the trap slams shut.

His ears, always alert, picked up the sound of a car passing some distance away. Apart from that there was nothing. He took out his torch and directed the beam over the shoreline and water. He could tell that they were approaching. He spotted at least two white patches against the dark water. Soon there would be more.

He switched off the light and tested his mind exactingly trained

by thinking of the time. Three minutes past nine, he thought. Then he raised his wrist and checked the display. Three minutes past nine

he was right, of course. In another 30 minutes it would all be over. He had learned that humans were not alone in their need for regularity. Wild creatures could even be taught to respect time. It had taken him three months of patience and deliberation to prepare for tonight’s sacrifice. He had made himself their friend.

He switched on the torch again. There were more white patches, and they were coming nearer to the shore. Briefly he lit up the tempting meal of broken bread crusts that he had set out on the ground, as well as the two petrol containers. He switched off the light and waited.

When the time came, he did exactly as he had planned. The swans had reached the shore and were pecking at the pieces of bread he had put out for them, oblivious of his presence or by now simply used to him. He set the torch aside and put on his night-vision goggles. There were six swans, three couples. Two were lying down while the rest were cleaning their feathers or still searching for bread.

Now. He got up, took a can in each hand and splashed the swans with petrol. Before they had a chance to fly away, he spread what remained in each of the cans and set light to a clump of dried grass among the swans. The burning petrol caught one swan and then all of them. In their agony, their wings on fire, they tried to fly away over the lake, but one by one plunged into the water like fireballs. He tried to fix the sight and sound of them in his memory; both the burning, screeching birds in the air and the image of hissing, smoking wings as they crashed into the lake. Their dying screams sound like broken trumpets, he thought. That’s how I will remember them.

The whole thing was over in less than a minute. He was very pleased. It had gone according to plan, an auspicious beginning for what was to come.

He tossed the petrol cans into the water, tucked his jumper into the backpack and shone the torch around the place to be sure he had left nothing behind. When he was convinced he had remembered everything, he took a mobile phone from his coat pocket. He had bought the phone in Copenhagen a few days before.

When someone answered, he asked to be connected to the police. The conversation was brief. Then he threw the phone into the lake, put on his backpack and walked away into the night.

The wind was blowing from the east now and was growing stronger.

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# CHAPTER 2

It was the end of August and Linda Caroline Wallander wondered if there were any traits that she and her father had in common which yet remained to be discovered, even though she was almost 30 years old and ought to know who she was by this time. She had asked her father, had even tried to press him on it, but he seemed genuinely puzzled by her questions and brushed them aside, saying that she more resembled her grandfather. These “who-am-I-like?” conversations, as she called them, sometimes ended in fierce arguments. They kindled quickly, but they also died away almost at once. She forgot about most of them and supposed that he did too.

There had been one argument this summer which she had not been able to forget. It had been nothing really. They had been discussing their differing memories of a holiday they took to the island of Bornholm when she was little. For Linda there was more than this episode at stake; it was as if through reclaiming this memory she was on the verge of gaining access to a much larger part of her early life. She had been six, maybe seven years old, and both Mona and her father had been there. The idiotic argument had begun over whether or not it had been windy that day. Her father claimed she had been seasick and had thrown up all over his jacket, but Linda remembered the sea as blue and perfectly calm. They had only ever taken this one trip to Bornholm so it couldn’t have been a case of their having mixed up several trips. Her mother had never liked boat journeys and her father was surprised she had agreed to this one holiday to Bornholm.

That evening, after the argument had ended, Linda had had trouble falling asleep. She was due to start working at the Ystad police station in two months. She had graduated from the police training college in Stockholm and would have much rather started working right away, but here she was with nothing to do all summer and her father couldn’t keep her company since he had used up most of his holiday allowance in May. That was when he thought he had bought a house and would need extra time for moving. He had the house under contract. It was in Svarte, just south of the main road, right next to the sea. But the vendor changed her mind at the last minute. Perhaps because she couldn’t stand the thought of entrusting her carefully tended roses and rhododendron bushes to a man who talked only about where he was going to put the kennel when he finally bought a dog. She broke the contract and her father’s agent suggested he ask for compensation, but he chose not to. The whole episode was already over in his mind.

He hunted for another house that cold and windy summer, but either they were too expensive or just not the house he had been dreaming of all those years in the flat on Mariagatan. He stayed on in the flat and asked himself if he was ever really going to move. When Linda graduated from the police training college, he drove up to Stockholm and helped her move her things to Ystad. She had arranged to rent a flat starting in September. Until then she could have her old room back.

They got on each other’s nerves almost immediately. Linda was impatient to start working and accused her father of not pulling strings hard enough at the station to get her a temporary position. He said he had taken the matter up with Chief Lisa Holgersson. She would have welcomed the extra manpower, but there was nothing in the budget for additional staff. Linda would not be able to start until September 10, however much they might have wanted her to start sooner.

Linda spent the interval getting to know again two old school friends. One day she ran into Zeba, or “Zebra” as they used to call her. She had dyed her black hair red and also cut it short so Linda had not recognised her at first. Zeba’s family came from Iran, and she and Linda had been in the same class until secondary school. When they bumped into each other on the street this July, Zeba had been pushing a toddler in a push chair They had gone to a cafe and had a coffee.

Zeba told her that she had trained as a barmaid, but her pregnancy had put a stop to her work plans. The father was Marcus. Linda remembered him, Marcus who loved exotic fruit and who had started his own plant nursery in Ystad at the age of 19. The relationship had soon ended, but the child remained a fact. Zeba and Linda chatted for a long time, until the toddler started screaming so loudly and insistently that they had to leave. But they had kept in touch since that chance meeting, and Linda noticed that she felt less impatient with the hiatus in her life whenever she managed to build these bridges between her present and the past that she had known in Ystad.

As she was going home to Mariagatan after her meeting with Zeba, it started to rain. She took cover in a shopping centre and while she was waiting for the weather to clear up she looked up Anna Westin’s number in the directory. She felt a jolt inside when she found it. She and Anna had had no contact for ten years. The close friendship of their childhood had ended abruptly when they both fell in love with the same boy. Afterwards, when the feelings of infatuation were long gone, they had tried to resuscitate the friendship, but it had never been the same. Linda hadn’t even thought much about Anna the last couple of years. But seeing Zeba again reminded her of her old friend and she was happy to discover that Anna still lived in Ystad.

Linda called her that evening and a few days later they met. Over the summer they would see each other several times a week, sometimes all three of them, but more often just Anna and Linda. Anna lived on her own as best as she could on her student budget. She was studying medicine.

Linda thought she was almost more shy now than when they were growing up. Anna’s father had left home when she was five or six years old and they never once heard from him again. Anna’s mother lived out in the country in Loderup, not far from where Linda’s grandfather had lived and painted his favourite, unchanging motifs. Anna was apparently pleased that Linda had reestablished contact, but Linda soon realised that she had to tread carefully. There was something vulnerable, almost secretive about Anna and she would not let Linda come too close.

Still, being with her old friends helped to make Linda’s summer go by, even though she was counting the days until she was allowed to pick up her uniform from fru Lundberg in the stockroom.

Her father worked flat out all summer, dealing with bank and post-office robberies in the Ystad area. From time to time Linda would hear about one case, which sounded like a series of well-planned attacks. Once her father had gone to bed, Linda would often sneak a look at his notebook and the case file he brought home. But whenever she asked him about the case directly he would avoid answering. She wasn’t a police officer yet. Her questions would have to go unanswered until September.

The days went by. In the middle of one afternoon in August her father came home and said that the estate agent had called about a property near Mossbystrand. Would she like to come and see it with him? She called to postpone a rendezvous she had arranged with Zeba, then they got into her father’s Peugeot and drove west. The sea was grey. Autumn was in the offing.

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# CHAPTER 3

The windows were boarded up, one of the drainpipes stuck out at an angle from the gutter, and several roof shingles were missing. The house stood on a hill with a sweeping view of the ocean, but there was something bleak and dismal about it. This is not a place where my father could find peace, Linda thought. Here he’ll be at the mercy of his inner demons. But what are they, anyway? She began to list the chief sources of concern in his life, ordering them in her mind: first there was loneliness, then the creeping tendency to obesity and the stiffness in his joints. And beyond these? She put the question aside for the moment and joined her father as he inspected the outside of the house. The wind blew slowly, almost thoughtfully, in some nearby beech trees. The sea lay far below them. Linda squinted and spotted a ship on the horizon.

Kurt Wallander looked at his daughter.

“You look like me when you squint like that,” he said.

“Only then?”

They kept walking and behind the house came across the rotting skeleton of a leather sofa. A field vole jumped from the rusting springs. Wallander looked around and shook his head.

“Remind me why I want to move to the country.”

“I have no idea. Why do you want to move to the country?”

“I’ve always dreamed of being able to roll out of bed and walk outside to take my morning piss, if you’ll pardon my language.”

She looked at him with amusement. “Is that it?”

“Do I need a better reason than that? Come on, let’s go.”

“Let’s walk round the house one more time.”

This time she looked more closely at the place, as if she were the prospective buyer and her father the agent. She sniffed around like an animal.

“How much?”

“Four hundred thousand.”

She raised her eyebrows.

“That’s what it says,” he said.

“Do you have that much money?”

“No, but the bank has pre-approved my loan. I’m a trusted customer, a policeman who has always been as good as his word. I think I’m even disappointed I don’t like this place. An abandoned house is as depressing as a lonely person.”

They drove away. Linda read a sign by the side of the road: Mossbystrand. He glanced at her.

“Do you want to go there?”

“Yes. If you have time.”

This was where she had first told him of her decision to become a police officer. She was done with her vague plan to refinish furniture or to work in the theatre, as well as with her backpacking trips around the world. It was a long time since she had broken up with her first love, a boy from Kenya who had studied medicine in Lund. He had finally gone back to Kenya and she had stayed put. Linda had looked to her mother, Mona, to provide her with clues about how to live her own life, but all she saw in her mother was a woman who left everything half done. Mona had wanted two children and had only had one. She had thought that Kurt Wallander would be the great and only passion of her life, but she had divorced him and married a golf-playing retired banker from Malmo.

Eventually Linda had started looking more closely at her father, the detective chief inspector, the man who has always forgetting to pick her up at the airport when she came to visit. The one who never had time for her. She came to see that in spite of everything, now that her grandfather was dead, he was the one she was closest to. One morning just after she had woken up she realised that what she most wanted was to do what he did, to be a police officer. She had kept her thoughts to herself for a year and talked about it only with her boyfriend. When she was certain of it, she broke up with her boyfriend, flew down to Skane, took her father to this beach and told him her news. He asked for a minute to digest what she had told him, which had made her suddenly unsure of herself. She had been convinced he would be happy. Watching his broad back, and his thinning hair blowing in the wind she had prepared for a fight, but when he turned and smiled at her, she knew.

They walked down to the beach. Linda poked her foot into some horse prints in the sand. Wallander looked at a gull hanging almost motionless above the sea.

“What are you thinking now?” she said.

“You mean about the house?”

“I mean about the fact that I’ll soon be wearing a police uniform.”

“It’s hard for me even to imagine it. It will probably be upsetting for me, though I don’t feel that way now.”

“Why upsetting?”

“I know what lies in store for you. It’s not hard to put the uniform on, but then to walk out in public is another thing. You’ll notice that everyone looks at you. You become the police officer, the one who is supposed to jump in and take care of any trouble. I know what that feels like.”

“I’m not afraid.”

“I’m not talking about fear. I’m talking about the fact that from the first day you put on the uniform it will be, inescapably, in your life.”

“How do you think I’ll do?”

“You did well at the training college. You’ll do well here. It’s all up to you when it comes down to it.”

They strolled along the beach. She told him she was going to go to Stockholm for a few days. Her graduating class was having a final party, a cadet ball, before everyone departed across the country to their new posts.

“We never had anything like that,” Wallander said. “I didn’t get much of an education, either. I still wonder how they sorted the applicants when I was young. I think they were interested in raw strength. You had to have some intelligence, of course. I do remember that I had quite a few beers with a friend after I graduated. Not in a bar, but at his place on South Forstadsgatan in Malmo.”

He shook his head. Linda couldn’t tell whether the memory amused or pained him.

“I was still living at home,” he said. “I thought Dad was going to keel over when I came home in my uniform.”

“How come he hated it so much you becoming a police officer?”

“I think I only worked it out after he died. He tricked me.”

Linda stopped. “Tricked you?”

He looked at her, smiling.

“Well, what I think now is that it was actually fine with him that I chose to be a policeman, but instead of telling me straight out, it amused him to keep me on my toes. And he certainly managed that, as you remember.”

“You really believe that?”

“No-one knew him better than I did. I think I’m right. He was a scoundrel through and through. Wonderful, but a scoundrel. The only father I had.”

They walked back to the car. The clouds were breaking up and it was getting warmer. Wallander looked at his watch as they were leaving.

“Are you in a hurry?” he said.

“I’m in a hurry to start working, that’s all. Why do you ask?”

“There’s something I should look into. I’ll tell you about it as we go”

They turned on to the road to Trelleborg and turned off by Charlottenlund castle.

“I wanted to drive past since we were in the neighbourhood.”

“Drive past what?”

“Marebo Manor, or more precisely Marebo Lake.”

The road was narrow and windy. Wallander told her about it in a somewhat disjointed and confusing way. She wondered if his written reports were as disorganised as the summary she was getting.

Yesterday evening a man had called the Ystad police. He had given neither a name nor a location and spoke with an odd accent. He had said that burning swans were flying over Marebo Lake. When the officer on duty had asked him for more details, the man hung up. The conversation was duly logged, but no-one had followed it up because there had been a serious assault case in Svarte that evening, as well as two breakins in central Ystad. The officer in charge had decided that it was most probably a hoax call, or possibly a hallucination, but when

Wallander heard of it from Martinsson he decided it was so bizarre that there might be some truth in it.

“Setting light to swans? Who would do a thing like that?”

“A sadist. Someone who hates birds.”

“Do you honestly think it happened?”

Wallander turned on to a road signposted to Marebo Lake and took his time before answering.

“Didn’t they teach you that at the training college? That policemen don’t think anything, they only want to know. But they have to remain open to every possibility, however improbable. Which would include something like a report about swans on fire. So, yes, it could be true.”

Linda didn’t ask any more questions. They left the car park and headed down to the lake. Linda trailed behind her father and felt as if she was already wearing a uniform.

They walked round the lake but found no trace of a dead swan. Nor did they see that their progress was all the way observed through the lens of a telescope.

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# CHAPTER 4

A few days later Linda flew to Stockholm. Zeba had helped her make a dress for the ball. It was light blue and cut low across her chest and back. The class organisers had hired a big room on Hornsgatan. All 68 of them were there, even the prodigal son of the year, who had not managed to hide his drinking problem. No-one knew who had blown the whistle on him, so in a way they all felt responsible. Linda thought he was like their ghost; he would always be out there in the autumn darkness with a deep-seated longing to be forgiven and welcomed into their circle again.

On this occasion, their last chance to take their leave of each other and their teachers, Linda drank far too much wine. She wasn’t a novice drinker by any means, but she could usually pace herself. This evening she knew she was drinking too much. She felt more impatient than ever to start working as she talked with student colleagues who had already been able to take the plunge. Her best friend from the training college, Mattias Olsson, had chosen not to go home to Sundsvall but to take a job in Norrkoping. He had already distinguished himself by felling a weight-lifting idiot who had run amok from the effects of all the steroids in his body.

There was dancing, and speeches, and occasionally a comic song sat irising the teachers. Linda’s dress received many compliments. It would have been an altogether enjoyable evening had there not been a television set in the kitchen.

Someone heard on the late-night news that a police officer had been shot on the outskirts of Enkoping. This news quickly spread among the dancing, intoxicated cadets and their teachers. The music was turned off and the television set brought out from the kitchen. Afterwards, Linda thought it was as if everyone had been kicked in the stomach. The party was over. They sat there in their long gowns and dark suits and watched footage of the crime scene as well as images of the officer who had been murdered. It had been a cold-blooded killing as he and his partner tried to question the driver of a stolen vehicle. Two men had jumped from the vehicle and opened fire on the policemen with automatic weapons. No warning shot had been fired. Their intention had clearly been to kill.

Linda was on her way to her Aunt Kristina’s flat when she stopped at Mariatorget and called her father. It was after 3.00 and she could tell that he was barely awake. For some reason that made her furious. How could he sleep when a colleague had just been killed? That was also what she said to him.

“My not sleeping won’t help anybody. Where are you?”

“On my way to Kristina’s.”

“The party went on until now? What time is it?”

“Three. It ended when we heard the news.”

She heard him breathing heavily, as if his body had still not decided to become fully awake.

“What’s that noise in the background?”

“Traffic. I’m looking for a taxi.”

“Who’s with you?”

“No-one.”

“Are you crazy? You can’t run around alone in Stockholm at this hour!”

“I’m fine, I’m not a child. Sorry I woke you.” She hung up on him. This happens way too often, she thought. He has no idea how infuriating he is.

She flagged down a taxi and was driven to Gardet where Kristina, her husband and 18-year-old son lived. Kristina had made up the sofa bed in the living room for her. Light from the street lamps penetrated the curtains. There was a photograph of Linda with her father and mother on the bookcase. She remembered when the picture was taken; she was 14, it was sometime in the spring and they had driven out to her grandfather’s house in Loderup. Her father had won the camera in some office raffle and then, when they were about to take a family picture, her grandfather had suddenly baulked and locked himself in his studio. Her father had been extremely put out and Mona had sulked. Linda was the one who tried to convince her grandfather to come out and be in the picture.

“I won’t have my picture taken with those two people and their fake smiles when I know they’re about to leave each other,” he said.

She could remember to this day how that had hurt. She knew how insensitive he could sometimes be, and the words still felt like a slap in the face. When she had collected herself she asked him if it was true what he had said, if he knew something she didn’t.

“It won’t help matters if you keep turning a blind eye,” he said. “Go on. You’re supposed to be in that picture. Maybe I’m wrong about all this.”

Her grandfather was often wrong, but not in this case. And he had refused to be in that picture, which they took with the self-timer on the camera. The following year the last year her parents lived together the tensions in their home only grew.

That was the year she had tried to commit suicide. Twice. The first time, when she had slit her wrists, it was her father who found her. She remembered how frightened he had looked. But the doctors must have reassured him, since he and her mother said very little about it. Most of what they communicated was through looks and eloquent silences. But it propelled her parents into the last series of violent disputes which finally persuaded Mona to pack her bags and leave.

Linda had often thought it remarkable that she hadn’t felt responsible for the break-up, but in fact she felt she had done them a favour, helping to catapult them out of a marriage that had ended in all but name a long time ago.

He didn’t even know about the second time.

That was the biggest secret she kept from her father. Sometimes she supposed he must have heard about it, but in the end she was sure that he had never found out. The second time she tried to kill herself, it was for real.

She was 16, and had gone to stay with her mother in Malmo. It was a time of crushing defeats, the kind only a teenager can experience. She hated herself and her body, shunning the image she saw in the mirror while strangely enough also welcoming the changes she was undergoing. The depression hit her out of nowhere, beginning as a set of symptoms too vague to take seriously. Suddenly it was a fact and her mother had had absolutely no inkling of what was going on. What had most shaken Linda was that Mona had said no when she pleaded to be allowed to move to Malmo. It wasn’t that there was anything wrong with her father, just that she wanted to get out of Ystad. But Mona had been unusually cool.

Linda had left the flat in a rage. It had been a day in early spring when there was still snow lying here and there. The wind blowing in from the sound had a sharp bite. She wandered along the city streets, not noticing where she was going. When she looked up she was on a bridge over the highway. Without really knowing why, she had climbed on to the railing and stood there, swaying. She looked down at the cars rushing past below, their sharp lights slicing the gloom. She wasn’t aware of how long she stood there. She felt no fear or self-pity, she simply waited for the cold and the fatigue spreading in her limbs to get her finally to step out into the void.

Suddenly there was someone by her side, speaking in careful, soothing tones. It was a woman with a round, childish face, perhaps not so much older than Linda. She was wearing a police uniform and behind her there were two patrol cars with flashing lights. Only the officer with the childish face approached her. Linda sensed the presence of others further back, but they had clearly delegated the responsibility of talking that crazy teenager out of jumping to this one woman. She told Linda her name was Annika, that she wanted her to come down, that jumping wouldn’t solve anything. Linda started defending herself how could Annika possibly understand anything about her problems? But Annika hadn’t backed down, she had stayed calm, as if she had infinite patience. When Linda finally did climb down from the railing and start crying, from a sense of disappointment that was actually relief, Annika had started crying too. They hugged each other and stood there for a long time. Linda told her that she didn’t want her father to hear about it. Nor her mother for that matter, but especially not her father. Annika had promised to keep it under wraps and she had been true to her word. Linda had many times thought of calling the Malmo police station to thank her, but she never got further than lifting the receiver; she had never dialled the number.

She put the photograph back on the bookcase, thought briefly about the police officer who had been killed, and got ready for bed. She was woken in the morning by Kristina, who was getting ready for work. Kristina was her brother’s opposite in almost every particular: tall, thin, with a pointed face and a shrill voice that Linda’s father made fun of behind her back. But Linda loved her aunt: there was something refreshingly uncomplicated about her, and in this way too she was her brother’s opposite. From his perspective, life was nothing but a heap of dense problems, the ones in his private life, unsolvable, all to be addressed with the force and fury of a ravenous bear in his work.

Linda took the bus to the airport shortly before 9.00 in the hope of getting a flight to Malmo. All the papers’ headlines were of the murdered officer. She finally got a plane at noon for Sturup. Her father came to pick her up.

“Did you have a good time?” he said.

“What do you think?”

“How could I know? I wasn’t there.”

“But we talked last night remember?”

“Obviously I remember. You were very unpleasant.”

“I was tired and upset. A policeman was murdered. It destroyed the whole party atmosphere. No-one was in the mood after that.”

He grunted, but he didn’t say anything. He let her off when they got to Mariagatan.

“Have you found out anything more about this sadist?” she said.

He didn’t understand what she was referring to.

“The bird hater. The burning swans.”

“Probably just a hoax call. Quite a few people live by the lake. Someone would have seen something if it had been true.”

Wallander drove back to the station and Linda went up to the flat. Her father had left a note by the phone. It was a message from Anna: Important. Call soon. Then her father had scribbled something she couldn’t read. She called him at work.

“Why didn’t you tell me Anna called?”

“I forgot.”

“What have you written here? I can’t read your writing.”

“She sounded worried about something.”

“How do you mean?”

“Just that. She sounded worried. You’d better call her.”

Linda called, but Anna’s line was busy. When she tried again there was no answer. At 7.00, after she and her father had eaten, she put on her coat and walked over to Anna’s place. As soon as Anna opened the door, Linda could see what her father had meant. Anna’s expression was changed; her eyes darted anxiously; she pulled Linda into the flat and closed the door. It was as if she were in a hurry to keep the outside world at bay.

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# CHAPTER 5

Linda was reminded of Anna’s mother, Henrietta. She was a thin woman with a bird-like, nervous way of moving and Linda had always been a little afraid of her.

Linda remembered the first time she had played at Anna’s house. She may have been eight. Anna was in another class at school and they had never been sure what had drawn them to each other. It’s as though there’s an unseeable force that brings people together, she thought. At least, that’s the way it was with us. We were inseparable, until we fell in love with the same boy.

Anna’s father had only ever been present in pale photographs. Henrietta had carefully wiped away all traces of him, as if she were telling her daughter that there was no possibility of his return. The few photographs Anna had were hidden away in a drawer, under some socks and underwear. In the pictures he had long hair, glasses and a reluctant stance, as if he hadn’t really wanted to pose for the camera. Anna had shown her the pictures as a mark of deepest confidence. When they became friends her father had already been gone for two years. Anna quietly rebelled against her mother’s determination to keep the flat free of every trace of him. One time Henrietta had gathered up what remained of his clothes and stuffed them in a rubbish bag in the basement. Anna had gone down at night and rescued a shirt and some shoes, which she hid under her bed. For Linda this mysterious father had been a figure of adventure. She had often wished that she and Anna could trade places, that she could exchange her quarrelling parents for this man who had vanished one day like a grey wisp of smoke against a blue sky.

They sat on the sofa and Anna leaned back so that half of her face was in shadow.

“How was the ball?”

I know what she’s doing, Linda thought. Whenever Anna has anything important to talk about she never comes out and says it. It takes time.

“We heard about the murdered police officer in the middle of it and that pretty much ended it right there. But my dress was a success. How is Henrietta?”

“Fine.” Anna shook her head at her own words. “Fine -I don’t know why I always say that. She’s actually worse than ever. For the past two years she’s been composing a requiem for herself. She calls it “The Unnamed Mass’ and she’s thrown the thing into the fire at least twice. She managed to salvage most of the papers both times, but her self-esteem is about as low as it would be for a person with only one tooth left.”

“What kind of music does she write?”

“I hardly know. She’s tried to hum it for me the few times she’s been convinced that what she was working on had any merit. But it doesn’t sound anything like a melody to me. It’s the sort of music that sounds more like screams, that pokes and hits you. I can’t imagine why anyone would ever listen to something like that. At the same time, I can’t help but admire that she hasn’t given up. I’ve tried to persuade her to do other things in life. She’s not fifty yet. But each time she’s reacted like a scalded cat. I wonder if she isn’t a little mad.”

Anna interrupted herself at this point as if she were afraid of having said too much. Linda waited for her to go on.

“Have you ever had the feeling you were going crazy?”

“Every day of the year.”

Anna frowned. “No, not like that. I’m serious.”

Linda was ashamed of her light-hearted comment.

“It happened to me once. You know all about that.”

“When you slit your wrists .. . and when you tried to jump off the overpass. That’s despair, Linda, it’s not the same thing. Everyone has to face up to despair at least once in their life. It’s a rite of passage. If you never find yourself raging at the sea or the moon or your parents you never really have the opportunity to grow up. The King and Queen of Contentment are damned in their own way. They have let their souls become numbed. Those of us who want to stay alive have to stay in touch with our sorrow and grief.”

Linda had always envied Anna’s fanciful way of expressing herself. I would have had to sit and write it all down if I was to come up with anything like that, she thought. The King and Queen of Contentment, forsooth.

“In that case, I suppose I’ve never really been afraid of losing my mind,” she said lightly.

Anna got up and walked to the window. After a while she returned to the sofa. We’re much more like our parents than we realise, Linda thought. I’ve seen Henrietta move in just that way when she’s anxious: get up, walk around and then sit down again.

“I thought I saw my father yesterday,” Anna said. “On a street in Malmo.”

Linda raised her eyebrows. “Your father? You saw him on a street?”

“Yes.”

Linda thought about it. “But you’ve never even seen him not really, I mean. You were so young when he left.”

“I have pictures of him.”

Linda did the calculation. “It’s been twenty-five years since he left.”

“Twenty-four.”

“OK, twenty-four. How much do you think a person changes in that many years? You can’t know.”

“It was him. My mother told me about his gaze. I’m sure it was him. It must have been him.”

“I didn’t even know you were in Malmo yesterday. I thought you were going to Lund, to study or whatever it is you do there.”

Anna looked at her appraisingly. “You don’t believe me.”

“You don’t believe it yourself.”

“It was my dad.” She took a deep breath. “You’re right. I had been in Lund. When I got to Malmo, I had to change trains, there was a problem on the line. The train was cancelled and I had two hours to kill until the next one. It put me in a foul mood, since I hate waiting. I walked into town without any clear idea of what I was going to do, just to use up some of the unwanted, irritating time. Somewhere along the way I walked into a shop and bought a pair of socks I didn’t even need. As I was walking past the St. Jorgen Hotel a woman had fallen in the street. I didn’t walk up close I can’t stand the sight of blood. Her skirt was bunched up and I remember thinking, why had no-one pulled it down for her? I was sure she was dead. A knot of onlookers had gathered, as if she were some creature washed up on the beach. I walked away, through the Triangle and into the big hotel there, to take their glass lift up to the roof. That’s something I always do when I’m in Malmo. It’s like taking a glass balloon up into the sky. But I wasn’t allowed now you can only operate the lift with your room key. That was a blow. It felt as if someone had taken away a toy. I sat in one of the plush armchairs in the lobby and looked out of the window. I was planning to stay there until it was time to walk back to the station.

“That’s when I saw him. He was in the street. Gusts of wind were making the window pane rattle. I looked up and there he was on the pavement, looking at me. Our eyes met and we stared at each other for about five seconds. Then he looked away and walked. I was so shocked it didn’t even cross my mind to follow him. To be perfectly honest, I didn’t believe I really had seen him. Maybe I was hallucinating or it was a trick of the light. Sometimes you see someone and you think it’s a person from your past, but it’s just a stranger. When at last I did run out and look for him, he was gone. I felt a bit like an animal stalking its prey as I walked back to the train station I tried to sniff out where he could be. I was so excited upset, actually that I hunted through the inner city and missed my train. He was nowhere to be found. But I was sure that it was him. He looked just as he did in the picture I have. And my mother once said he had a habit of first looking up before he said anything. I saw him make that exact gesture when he was standing on the other side of the window. When he left all those years ago he had long hair and thick, black-rimmed glasses; he doesn’t look like that now. His hair is much shorter and his glasses are the kind without a frame round the lenses.

“I called you because I needed to talk to someone about it. I thought I would go nuts otherwise. It was him, it was my father. And it wasn’t just that I recognised him; he had stopped on the pavement outside because he had recognised me.”

Anna spoke with total conviction. Linda tried to remember what she had learned about eyewitness accounts about the rate of accuracy in their reconstruction of events and the potential for embellishment. She also thought about what they had been taught about giving descriptions at the training college, and the computer exercises they had done. One assignment consisted of aging their own face by 20 years. Linda had seen how she started looking more and more like her father, even a little like her grandfather. Our ancestors survive somewhere in our faces, she thought. If you look like your mother as a child, you end up as your father when you age. When you no longer recognise your face, it’s because an unknown ancestor has taken up residence for a while.

Linda found it hard to accept that Anna had indeed seen her father. He would hardly have recognised the grown woman his little girl had become, unless he had been discreetly following her development all these years. Linda ransacked her memory for what she knew about the mysterious Erik Westin. Anna’s parents had both been young when she was born. They had both grown up in big cities but been beguiled by the green wave and had ended up in a collective in the isolated countryside of Smaland. Linda had a vague memory that Westin was a handyman, that he specialised in making orthopaedic sandals. She had also heard Henrietta describe him as an impossible, hashish-smoking loser whose sole object in life was to do as little as possible and who had no sense what it meant to take responsibility for a child. And what had made him leave? He had left no letter, nor any signs of extensive preparation. The police had looked for him at first, but there had never been any indication of a crime and eventually they shelved the case.

Westin’s disappearance must, nonetheless, have been carefully choreographed. He had taken his passport and what little money he had -most of it left over from selling their car, which had actually belonged to Henrietta. She was the only one with an income at the time, working as a night warden at a hospital.

Westin was there one day and gone the next. He had left without warning on trips before, so Henrietta waited two weeks before contacting the police. Linda recalled that her father had been involved in the investigation. Westin had no record no previous arrests or convictions, nor any history of mental illness. A few months before he disappeared, he had had a complete physical check-up and been given a clean bill of health, apart from a mild anaemia.

Linda knew from her studies of police statistics that most missing persons turned up again. Of those who didn’t, the majority were suicides. Only a few were the victims of crime, buried in unknown places, or decomposing at the bottom of a lake with weights attached to them.

“Have you told your mother?”

“Not yet.”

“Why not?”

“I don’t know. I think I’m still in shock.”

“I’d say that you’re not a hundred per cent convinced it was him.”

Anna looked at her with pleading eyes. “I know it was him. If it wasn’t, my brain has suffered a major short-circuit. That’s why I asked you if you’ve ever been afraid you were going crazy.”

“But why would he come back now, after twenty-four years? Why would he turn up in Malmo and look at you through a hotel window how did he know you were there?”

“I’ve no idea.”

Anna got up, made the same journey to the window and back.

“Sometimes I wonder if he really disappeared at all. Maybe he just chose to make himself invisible.”

“But why would he have done that?”

“Because he wasn’t up to it, to life. I don’t mean just his responsibilities for me or my mum. He was probably looking for something more. That search drove him away from us. Or perhaps he was only trying to get away from himself. There are people who dream about being like a snake; about shedding their outer skin from time to time. But maybe he’s been here all along, much closer than I realised.”

“You wanted me to listen to you and then tell you what I thought. You say you’re sure it was him, but I can’t accept it. It’s too much like a childhood fantasy, that he would suddenly reappear in your life. I’m sorry, but twenty-four years is too long.”

“I know it was him. It was my dad. I’m not wrong about this.”

They had reached an impasse. Linda sensed that Anna wanted to be left alone now, just as earlier she had craved company.

“At the same, I think you should tell your mum,” Linda said, as she got up to leave. “Tell her that you saw him, or someone you thought was him.”

“You’re not going to believe me.”

“What I believe is neither here nor there. You’re the only one who knows what you saw. But you have to admit it sounds far-fetched. I’m not saying that I think you’re making it up, obviously, you have no reason to. I’m just saying it’s way against the odds for someone who’s been gone for as long as your dad has to turn up again, that’s all. Sleep on it and we’ll talk about it tomorrow. I can come around five. Does that work for you?”

“I know it was him.”

Linda frowned. There was something in Anna’s voice that sounded shrill and hollow. Is she making it up after all? Linda thought. There’s something that doesn’t ring true in this. But why would she lie to me?

Linda walked home through the deserted streets. Outside the cinema on Stora Ostergatan some teenagers were standing, chatting in a group. She wondered if they could see her invisible uniform.

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# CHAPTER 6

The next day Anna Westin disappeared without trace. Linda knew that something was wrong the moment she rang her doorbell at 5.00 and no-one answered. She rang a few more times and shouted Anna’s name through the letter box, but she wasn’t there. After 30 minutes, Linda took out a set of pass keys that one of her fellow students had given her. He had bought a collection of them on a trip to the United States and given them out to all his friends. In secret they had then spent a number of hours learning to use them. Linda was by now adept at opening any standard lock.

She picked Anna’s lock without difficulty and walked in. She went quietly through the empty, well-kept rooms. Nothing looked amiss, the washing-up was done and the dish towels hanging neatly on the rack. Anna was orderly by nature. The fact that she wasn’t here meant that something had happened. But what? Linda sat down on the sofa in the same spot as the previous night. Anna believes she saw her father, she thought. And now she disappears herself. These two events are obviously connected but how? Linda sat for a long time, ostensibly trying to think it through, but in reality she was simply waiting for Anna to come back.

The day had started early for Linda. She had left for the police station at 7.30 to meet Martinsson, one of Inspector Wallander’s oldest colleagues, who had been assigned to be her supervisor. They were not going to be working together as Linda along with the other recruits would be assigned to a patrol car with experienced colleagues. But Martinsson was the senior officer she would turn to with questions should the need arise. Linda remembered him from when she was little. Martinsson had been a young man then. According to her father,

Martinsson had often thought of quitting. Wallander had managed to talk him out of it on at least three separate occasions over the last ten years.

Linda had asked her father if he had had anything to do with Lisa Holgersson’s decision to assign Martinsson as her mentor, but he vehemently denied any involvement. His intention was to stay as far removed from matters concerning her work as possible, he said. Linda had accepted this declaration with a pinch of salt. If there was one thing she feared, it was precisely that he would interfere with her work. That was the reason she had hesitated so long before deciding to apply for work in Ystad. She had thought about working in other areas of the country, but this was where she had ended up. In retrospect, it seemed fated.

Martinsson met her at reception and took her to his office. He had a picture of his smiling wife and their two children on his desk. Linda wondered whose picture she was going to have on hers. That decision was part of the everyday reality waiting for her. Martinsson started by talking about the two officers she was to be working with.

“They’re both fine officers,” he said. “Ekman can give the impression of being a bit tired and worn out, but no-one has a better grasp of police work than he does. Sundin is his polar opposite and focuses on the little things. He still tickets people for jumping a red light. But he knows what it means to be a policeman. You’ll be in good hands.”

“What do they say about working with a woman?”

“If they have anything to say about that, ignore them. It’s not how it was even ten years ago.”

“And my father?”

“What about him?”

“What do they say about my being his daughter?”

Martinsson waited a moment before answering. “There are probably one or two people in the station who would be happy to see you fall on your face. But you must have known that.”

Then they talked at length about the state of affairs in the Ystad police district. The “state of affairs” was something Linda had heard about at home from early childhood, as she played under the table with the sounds of clinking glass above and the voice of her father and a colleague discussing the latest difficulties. She had never heard of a positive “state of affairs”, there was invariably something to lament. A shipment of sub-standard uniforms, detrimental changes in patrol cars or radio systems, a rise in crime statistics, poor recruitment levels and so on. In fact, this continuing discussion of the “state of affairs”, of how this era was different from the era before, seemed to be central to life on the force. But it’s not an art they taught us at the training college, Linda thought. I know a lot about how to break up a fight in the main square and very little about pronouncing judgment on the general “state of affairs”.

They went to the canteen for a cup of coffee. Martinsson’s assessment of the present situation was concise: there were too few officers working in the field.

“Crime has never paid as well as it does today, it seems. I’ve been researching this. To find an equivalent level of what we may call successful crime you have to look as far back as the fifteenth century, before Gustav Vasa pulled the nation together. In that time, the time of small city states, there was widespread lawlessness and criminality just as there is today. We’re not upholding law and order now, we’re only in the business of trying to keep the growth of lawlessness from getting any more rapid.”

Martinsson escorted her to the reception area.

“I hope all this talk hasn’t depressed you. We certainly don’t need more demoralised police officers in order to be a good police officer you’ll need all the courage and faith you can muster. A cheerful disposition also helps.”

“Like my dad?”

Martinsson smiled.

“Kurt Wallander is very good at his job,” he said. “You know that. But he’s not renowned for being the life of the party around here, as I’m sure you’ve already worked out.”

Before she left, he asked her about her reaction to the murdered officer. She told him about the cadet ball, the television in the kitchen and its effect on the festivities.

“It’s always a blow,” Martinsson said. “It affects all of us, as if we’re suddenly surrounded by invisible guns out there, all aimed at our heads. Whenever a colleague is killed, many of us think about leaving the force, but in the end most people choose to stay. I’m one of them.”

Linda left the station and walked to the apartment building in the eastern part of Ystad where Zeba lived. She thought about what Martinsson had told her and what he had left out. That was something her father had drilled into her: always listen for what is not being said. It could prove to be the most important thing. But she didn’t find anything like that in her conversation with Martinsson. He strikes me as the simple and straightforward type, she thought. Not someone who tries to read people’s invisible signals.

She stayed with Zeba only briefly because her son had a stomach ache and cried the whole time. They decided to meet over the weekend when they would be able to have some peace and quiet to discuss the cadet ball and the success of Zeba’s handiwork.

But August 27 did not go down in Linda’s memory as the day on which she had her meeting with Martinsson, her mentor. It was filed away as the day that Anna vanished. After Linda had let herself into the flat by picking the lock, she sat on the sofa and tried to recall Anna’s voice telling her about the man who had met her gaze through the hotel window and who bore a striking resemblance to her father. Anna had insisted that it was her father, but what was it she had really been trying to say? That was like Anna she sounded convincing even when she was claiming as facts things that were imagined or invented. But she was never late for an appointment nor would she forget a date with a friend.

Linda walked once more through the flat, stopping in front of the bookcase by Anna’s desk in the dining room. The books were mostly novels, she determined as she read the titles, and one or two travel guides. Not a single medical textbook. Linda frowned. The only thing even close to a course book was a volume on common ailments, the kind of encyclopedia a lay person would have. There’s something missing, she thought. This doesn’t look like the bookcase of a medical student.

She proceeded to the kitchen and took note of the contents of the refrigerator. There were the usual food items, a sense of future use suggested by an unopened carton of milk with a sell-by date of September 2. Linda went back to the living room and pondered the question of why a medical student would have no textbooks in her bookcase. Did she keep them elsewhere? That made no sense, she lived in Ystad, and she had often told Linda she did most of her studying here.

Linda waited. At 7 p.m. she called her father, who answered with his mouth full.

“I thought you were coming home for dinner tonight,” he grumbled.

Linda hesitated before replying. She was torn between wanting to tell him about Anna, and saying nothing.

“Something came up.”

“What is it?”

“Something personal.”

Her father growled on the other end.

“I had a meeting with Martinsson today.”

“I know.”

“How do you know?”

“He told me only that you met, nothing else. Don’t worry.”

Linda went back to the sofa. At 8.00 she called Zeba and asked if she knew where Anna could be, but Zeba hadn’t heard from her in several days. At 9.00, after she had helped herself to food from Anna’s small pantry and fridge, she dialled Henrietta’s number. The phone rang several times before she answered. Linda approached the subject as carefully as possible so as not to alarm the already fragile woman. Did she know if Anna was in Lund? Had she planned a trip to Malmo or Copenhagen? Linda asked the most harmless questions she could think of.

“I haven’t talked to her since Thursday.”

That’s four days ago, Linda thought. That means Anna never told her about the man she saw through the window.

“Why do you need to know where she is?”

“I called her and there was no answer.”

She sensed a tinge of anxiety on the other end.

“But you don’t call me every time Anna doesn’t answer her phone.”

Linda was prepared for this question. “I had a sudden impulse to ask her over for dinner tonight. That was all.” Linda steered the conversation to her own life. “Have you heard I’m going to start working here in Ystad?”

“Yes, Anna told me. But neither of us understands why you would want to be a policewoman.”

“If I’d gone on learning how to refinish furniture as planned, I’d always have tacks in my mouth. A life in law enforcement just seemed more entertaining.”

A clock struck somewhere in Anna’s flat and Linda quickly ended the conversation. Then she thought it all through again. Anna wasn’t a risk-taker. In contrast to Zeba and herself, Anna hated roller coasters was suspicious of strangers, and would never get into a taxi without looking the driver in the eye first. The simplest explanation was that she was still disconcerted by what she thought she had seen. She must have gone back to Malmo to look for the man she believed to be her father. This is the first time she’s ever stood me up, Linda thought. But this is also the first time she’s been convinced she saw her father.

Linda stayed in the flat until midnight.

There was no innocent explanation for Anna’s absence. Something must have happened. But what?

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# CHAPTER 7

When Linda came back home shortly after midnight her father was asleep on the sofa. He woke at the sound of the closing door. Linda eyed the curve of his belly with disapproval.

“You’re getting fatter,” she said. “One day you’re just going to go pop. Not like an old troll who wanders out into the sunshine, but like a balloon when it gets too full.”

He pulled his dressing gown protectively across his chest.

“I do the best I can.”

“No, you don’t.”

He sat up heavily. “I’m too tired to have this conversation,” he said. “When you walked in I was in the middle of a beautiful dream. Do you remember Baiba?”

“The one from Latvia? Are you still in touch with each other?”

“About once a year, no more. She’s found someone else, a German engineer who works at the municipal waterworks in Riga. She sounds very much in love when she talks about him, the wonderful Herman from Lubeck. I’m surprised it doesn’t drive me insane with jealousy.”

“You were dreaming about her?”

He smiled. “We had a child in the dream,” he said. “A little boy building castles in the sand. An orchestra was playing in the distance and Baiba and I just stood there watching him. In my dream I thought, “This is no dream, this is real’, and I was incredibly happy.”

“And you complain about having too many nightmares.”

He wasn’t listening.

“The door opened that was you, of course a car door. It was summer and very warm. The whole world was full of light like an overexposed picture. Everyone’s face was white and without shadows. It was beautiful. We were about to drive away when I woke up.”

“I’m sorry.”

He shrugged. “It was just a dream.”

Linda wanted to tell him about Anna but her father lumbered out into the kitchen and drank some water from the tap. Linda followed him and when he was done he stood up and looked at her, smoothing his hair down at the back.

“You were out late. It’s none of my business, I know, but I have an idea that you want me to ask you about it.”

So Linda told him. He leaned against the refrigerator with his arms crossed. This is how I remember him from my childhood, she thought. This is how he always listened to me, like a giant. I used to think my father was as big as a mountain. Daddy Mountain.

He shook his head when she had finished. “That’s not how it happens, not how people disappear.”

“It’s not like her. I’ve known her since I was seven. She’s never been late for anything.”

“However idiotic it sounds, sometime has to be the first. Let’s say she was preoccupied by the fact that she thought she had seen her father. It’s not unlikely as you suggested yourself-that she went back to look for him.”

Linda nodded. He was right. There was no reason to assume anything had happened.

Wallander sat down on the sofa.

“You’ll learn that all events have their own logic. People kill each other, lie, break into houses, commit robberies, and sometimes they simply disappear. If you winch yourself far enough down the well -that’s how I often think of my investigations you’ll find the explanation. It turns out that it was highly probable that such and such a person disappeared, that another robbed a bank. I’m not saying the unexpected never happens, but people are invariably wrong when they say, “I never would have believed that about her’. Think it over and scrape the outermost layer of paint away, you’ll find other colours underneath, other answers.”

He yawned and let his hands fall to the table.

“Time for bed.”

“No, let’s stay here a few more minutes.”

He looked at her intently. “You still think something has happened to your friend?”

“No, I’m sure you’re right.”

They sat quietly at the kitchen table. A gust of wind set a branch scraping against the window.

“I’ve been dreaming a lot recently,” he said. “Maybe because you’re always waking me up in the middle of the night. That means I remember my dreams. Yesterday I had the strangest dream. I was walking around a cemetery. Suddenly I found myself in front of a row of headstones where I started recognising the names. Stefan Fredman’s name was among them.”

Linda shivered. “I remember that case. Didn’t he break into this flat?”

“I think so, but we were never able to prove it. He never told us.”

“You went to his funeral. What happened?”

“He was sent to a psychiatric institution. One day he put on his war paint, climbed up to the roof and threw himself off.”

“How old was he?”

“Eighteen or nineteen.”

The branch scratched the window again.

“Who were the others? I mean on the headstones.”

“A woman called Yvonne Ander. I even think the date on the stone was right, though it happened a long time ago.”

“What did she do?”

“Do you remember the time when Ann-Britt Hoglund was shot?”

“How could I forget? You left for Denmark after that happened and almost drank yourself to death.”

“That’s an extreme way of putting it.”

“On the contrary, I think that’s hitting the nail on the head. Anyway, I don’t remember Yvonne Ander.”

“She specialised in killing rapists, wife-beaters, men who had been abusive to women.”

“That rings a bell.”

“We found her in the end. Everyone thought she was a monster. But I thought she was one of the sanest people I had ever met.”

“Is that one of the dangers of the profession?”

“What?”

“Do policemen fall in love with the female criminals they’re hunting?”

He waved her insinuations away.

“Don’t be stupid. I talked to her after she was brought in. She wrote me a letter before she committed suicide. What she told me was that she thought the justice system was like a fish net where the holes were too big. We don’t catch, or choose not to catch, the killers who really deserve to be caught.”

“Who was she referring to specifically? The police?”

He shook his head.

“I don’t know. Everyone. The laws we live by are supposed to reflect the opinions of society at large. But Yvonne Ander had a point. I’ll never forget her.”

“How long ago was that?”

“Five, six years.”

The phone rang.

Wallander jumped and he and Linda exchanged glances. It was 2 a.m. Wallander stretched his hand out for the kitchen phone. Linda worried for a moment that it was one of her friends, someone who didn’t know she was staying with her father. She tried to interpret who it could be from her father’s terse questions. She decided it had to be from the station. Perhaps Martinsson, or even Hoglund. Something had happened near Rydsgard. Wallander signalled for her to get him something to write with and she handed him the pencil and pad of paper lying on the windowsill. He made some notes with the phone tucked into the crook of his neck. She peered over his shoulder. Rydsgard, t. off > Charlottenlund Vik’s farm. That was close to the house they had looked at on the hill, the one her father wasn’t going to buy. He wrote something else: burned calf. Akerblom. Then a phone number. He hung up. Linda sat back down across from him.

“A burned calf? What’s happened?”

“That’s what I want to know.”

He got up.

“I have to go out there.”

“What about me?”

He hesitated. “You can come along if you like.”

“You were there for the start of this thing,” he said as they got in the car. “You might as well come along for the rest.”

“The start of what?”

“The report about burning swans.”

“It’s happened again?”

“Yes and no. Some bastard let a calf out of the barn, sprayed it with petrol and set light to it. The farmer was the one who called the station. A patrol car was dispatched, but I’d left instructions to be contacted if anything along these lines happened again. It sounds like a sadistic pervert.”

Linda knew there was more. “You’re not telling me what you really think.”

“No, I’m not.”

He broke off the conversation. Linda wondered why he had let her come along.

They turned off the highway and drove through the deserted village of Rydsgard, then south towards the sea. A patrol car was waiting at the entrance of the farm. Together the two cars made their way towards the main buildings at Vik’s farm.

“Who am I?” Linda asked quickly.

“My daughter. No-one will care. As long as you don’t start pretending to be anything else like a police officer, for instance.”

They got out. The two officers from the other car came over and said hello. One was called Wahlberg, the other Ekman. Wahlberg had a heavy cold and Linda wished she didn’t have to shake his hand. Ekman smiled and leaned towards her as if he were shortsighted.

“I thought you were starting in a couple of weeks.”

“She’s just keeping me company,” Wallander said. “What’s happened out here?”

They walked down behind the farmhouse to a new-looking barn. The farmer was kneeling next to the burned animal. He was a young man close to Linda’s age. Farmers should be old, she thought. In my world there’s no place for a farmer my own age.

Wallander stretched out his hand and introduced himself.

“Tomas Akerblom,” the farmer said.

“This is my daughter. She happened to be with me.”

As Akerblom looked over at Linda, a light from the barn illuminated his face. She saw that his eyes were wet with tears.

“Who would do a thing like this?” he said in a shaky voice.

He stepped aside to let them see, as if displaying a macabre installation. Linda had already picked up the smell of burned flesh. Now she saw the blackened body of the calf lying on its side in front of her. The eye socket nearer to her was completely charred. Smoke was still rising from the singed skin. The fumes were starting to make her nauseated and she took a step back. Wallander looked at her. She shook her head to indicate that she wasn’t about to faint. He nodded and looked around at the others.

“Tell me what happened,” he said.

Akerblom started talking. He still sounded on the verge of tears.

“I had just gone to bed when I heard a sound. At first I thought I must have cried out in my sleep that happens sometimes when I have a bad dream. Then I realised it came from the barn. The animals were braying and one of them sounded bad. I pulled the curtains away and saw fire. It was Apple I couldn’t identify him immediately of course, just that it was one of the calves. He ran straight into the wall of the barn. His whole body and head were in flames. I couldn’t really take it in. I pulled on a pair of old boots and ran down. He had collapsed by the time I reached him; his legs were twitching. I grabbed an old piece of tarp and tried to put out the rest of the fire, but he was dead already. It was horrible. I remember thinking, “This isn’t happening, this isn’t happening.” Who would do a thing like this?”

“Did you see anything else?” Wallander said.

“No, just what I told you.”

“You said, “Who would do a thing like this?” why? Is there no way it could have been an accident?”

“You think a calf poured petrol over his own head and struck a match? How likely is that?”

“Let’s assume it was a deliberate attack. Did you see anyone when you pulled the curtain away from the window?”

Akerblom thought hard before answering. Linda tried to anticipate her father’s next question.

“I only saw the burning animal.”

“What kind of person do you imagine did this?”

“An insane … a fucking lunatic.”

Wallander nodded. “That’s all for now,” he said. “Leave the animal as it is. Someone will be sent in the morning to take pictures, and of the area.”

They walked to their cars.

“What kind of crazy bastard lunatic … ?” Akerblom was muttering.

Wallander didn’t answer him. Linda saw how tired he was. His forehead was deeply furrowed and he looked old. He’s worried, she realised. First, the report about the swans, and then a calf named Apple is burned alive.

It was as if he read her mind. Wallander let his hand rest on the car door handle and turned to Akerblom.

“Apple,” he said. “That’s an unusual name for an animal.”

“I played table tennis when I was younger. I often name my animals after great Swedish champions. I have an ox called Waldner.”

Linda could see that her father was smiling. She knew he appreciated originality.

They drove back to Ystad.

“What do you think this is about?” Linda asked.

“The best-case scenario is a pervert who gets a kick out of hurting animals.”

“That’s the best case?”

He hesitated. “The worst case would be someone who won’t stop at animals,” he said.

# 

# CHAPTER 8

When Linda woke up, she was alone in the flat. It was 7.30. The sound of her father shutting the front door must have woken her. He does that on purpose, she thought, and stretched out in bed. He doesn’t like me sleeping in.

She got up and opened the window. It was a clear day and the weather seemed to be set fair. She thought about the events of the night; the still-smoking carcass and her father looking suddenly old and worn out. It’s the anxiety, she thought. He can hide a lot from me, but not his anxiety.

She ate breakfast and put on her clothes from yesterday, then tried two other outfits before she could make up her mind. She called Anna. The answering machine cut in after five rings and she asked Anna to pick up if she was there. No reply. Linda walked into the hall and looked at herself in the mirror. Was she still worried about Anna? No, she said to herself, I’m not worried. Anna has her reasons. She’s most likely chasing down that man she saw on the street, a man she thinks is her long-lost father.

Linda went out for a walk and picked up a newspaper from a bench. She turned to the motoring section and looked at the ads for used cars. There was a Saab for 19,000 kronor. Her father had already promised to chip in 10,000 and she knew she needed a car. But a Saab for 19,000? How long would it last?

She tucked the newspaper into her pocket and walked to Anna’s flat. No-one answered the door. After letting herself in she was at once struck by the feeling that someone had been there since she left the place the night before. She froze and looked all around the hall the coats hanging in their place, the shoes all in a row. Was anything different? She couldn’t put her finger on it, but she was convinced there was something.

She continued into the living room and sat on the sofa. Dad would tell me to look for the impressions people have left behind in this room, she thought, of themselves and their dramatic interactions. But I see nothing, only that Anna isn’t here.

After combing through the flat twice she convinced herself that Anna had not been home during the night. Nor anyone else. All she recognised were tiny, near-invisible traces she herself had left behind.

She went into Anna’s bedroom and sat at the little desk. She hesitated at first, but her curiosity got the better of her. She knew that Anna kept a journal, had done so since she was a child. Linda remembered an incident from school where Anna had been sitting in a corner writing in her journal. A boy pulled it out of her hands as a joke, but she had been so furious she bit him on the shoulder and everyone had known to leave the journal well alone after that.

Linda pulled out the desk drawers. They were full of old diaries, well thumbed, crammed with writing. The dates were written on the spines. Up until Anna was 16 they were all red. Thereafter they were black.

Linda closed the drawers and riffled through some papers lying on the desk. She found the journal Anna was currently keeping. I’m only going to look at the last entry, she thought, telling herself it was justified since she was motivated only by concern for Anna’s well-being. She opened the book at the last entry, for the day they were supposed to have met. She bent over the page; Anna’s handwriting was cramped, as if she were trying to hide the words. Linda read the short text twice, first without understanding it, then with a sense of bafflement. What Anna had written was nonsense: myth, fear, myth, fear. Was it code?

Linda immediately broke her promise only to look at the last entry. She turned over the page and there she found a regular entry. Anna had written: TheSaxhausen textbook is a pedagogical disaster. Completely impossible to read or understand. How can textbooks like this be allowed? Future doctors will be scared off and turn to research, where there is also more money. Further on: Had low fever this morning. Weather clear but windy that much was true. Linda flipped the page to the last line and read it again. She tried to imagine that she was Anna writing the words.

There were never changes in the text, no scratchings-out, no hesitations that she could see. The handwriting looked even and firm. Myth, fear, myth, fear. I see that I have signed up for 19 washing days so far this year. My dream to the extent I even have one right now would be to work as an anonymous suburban general practitioner. Do northern towns have suburbs?

That was where the text ended. Not a word about the man she saw through the hotel window. Not a word or a hint. Nothing. But isn’t that exactly the kind of thing diaries are for?

She looked further back in the book. From time to time her own name appeared. Linda is a true friend, she had written on July 20, in the middle of an entry about her mother. She and her mother had argued over nothing and later that evening she was planning to go to Malmo to see a Russian movie.

Linda sat with the journal for almost an hour, struggling with her conscience. She looked for entries about herself. Linda can be so demanding, she found on August 4. What did we do that day? she wondered. She couldn’t remember. It was a day like any other. Linda didn’t even have an organiser right now. She scribbled appointments on scraps of paper, and wrote phone numbers on the back of her hand.

Finally, she closed the journal. There was nothing there, just the strange nonsense words at the end. It’s not like her, Linda thought. The rest of the entries are the work of a balanced mind. She has no more problems than most people. But the last day, the day she thinks she just saw her father in Malmo for the first time in 24 years, she three times writes the phrase, myth, fear. Why doesn’t she write something about seeing her father? Why write something that doesn’t make any sense?

Linda felt her anxiety revive. Had there perhaps been something serious behind Anna’s talk about losing her mind? Linda walked to the window where Anna often stood during their conversations. The sun was reflected from a window in the building opposite and she had to squint to see anything. Could Anna have been overcome by a temporary derangement? She thought she had seen her long-lost father could this have disconcerted her so she lost her bearings and began behaving in an erratic manner?

Linda gave a start. There, in the car park behind the building, was Anna’s car, the red VW Golf. If she had left for a few days the car would be gone too. Linda hurried down to the car park and checked the car doors: locked. The car was clean and shiny, and this surprised her. Anna’s car is generally dirty, she thought. Every time we go out her car is covered in dust. Now it’s squeaky clean even the wheel trims have been polished.

She went back up to the flat, sat in the kitchen and tried to come up with a plausible explanation. The only thing she knew for certain was that Anna had not been at home to meet Linda as they had arranged. It wasn’t a misunderstanding; there was nothing wrong with her memory. She had chosen not to stay at home that day. Something else had come up that was more important, something for which she didn’t need her car. Linda turned on the answering machine and listened to the messages but heard only her own bellowing of Anna’s name. She let her gaze wander to the front door. Someone rang the bell, she thought. Not me, not Zeba, not Henrietta. Who else then? Anna had broken up with her boyfriend in April, someone Linda had never met called Mans Persson. He too was a student in Lund, studying electromagnetics, and he had turned out to be less faithful than Anna would have liked. She had been deeply hurt by the breach in their relationship and she had told Linda on several occasions that she was going to take her time before letting herself get that close to a man again.

Linda had also recently had a Mans Persson experience, a man she had kicked out of her life in March. His name had been Ludwig and he had seemed uniquely suited to that name. His personality was part emperor and part impresario. He and Linda had met at a pub when Linda had been out drinking with some student colleagues. Ludwig had been with another group and they had simply ended up squeezed next to each other in a crowded booth. Ludwig was in the sanitation business; he operated a rubbish truck and made his pride in his work seem like the most natural thing in the world. Linda had been attracted by his huge laugh, his happy eyes and the fact that he never interrupted her when she talked, actually straining to catch every word although the noise around them had been deafening.

They had started seeing each other and for a while Linda dared to think that at last she had found a real man. But then, purely by accident, she had heard from a friend of a friend that when Ludwig wasn’t working or spending time with Linda, he was spending time with a young woman who ran a catering business in Vallentuna. They had had a heated confrontation. Ludwig pleaded with her, but Linda sent him packing and wept for a whole week. She hadn’t thought about it in those terms, but perhaps she too was waiting to recover from the pain of this break-up before she let herself look for someone new. She knew that the rapid succession of boyfriends in her life worried her father, though he never asked her about it.

Before leaving Anna’s flat, Linda went to the kitchen, where she had spotted the spare keys to the car in a drawer. She had borrowed the car on a few occasions. It won’t matter if I do it again, she thought, I’m just going to take the car to visit her mother. She left a note saying what she had done and that she would be back in a couple of hours. She didn’t write anything about being worried.

First Linda stopped on Mariagatan to change into cooler clothing, since it was getting very warm. Then she drove out of town, took the turn to Kaseberga and parked at the harbour. The surface of the water was like a mirror, the only disturbance a dog swimming around next to the boats. An old man sitting on a bench outside the smoked-fish shop nodded kindly to her. Linda smiled in return, but she had no idea who he was. A retired colleague of her father, perhaps?

She got back in the car and continued on her way. Henrietta Westin lived in a house that seemed to crouch among the tall stands of trees posted on all sides like sentries. Linda had to turn back several times before she found the right driveway. Finally she drew up next to a rusty harvester. The heat outside reminded her of the holiday she and Ludwig had taken in Greece before they broke up. She shook off those thoughts and made her way through the massive trees. She stopped to listen to an unusual noise, a furious hammering. Then she saw a woodpecker high on her right. Maybe he has a part in her music, she thought. Anna has said her mother doesn’t shy away from using any kind of noise. His input might very well be crucial to the percussion section.

She left the woodpecker and walked past a run-down old vegetable garden. It had clearly not been tended for many years. What do I know about her? Linda thought. And what am I doing here? She stopped again and listened. At that particular moment, in the shade of the high trees, she was no longer worried about Anna. There was surely a sensible explanation for her staying away. Linda turned and started walking back to the car.

The woodpecker was gone, or had finished his work. Everything changes, she thought. People and woodpeckers, my dreams and all the time I thought I had, that keeps slipping away through my fingers, despite my best efforts to keep it dammed up. She pulled on her invisible reins and came to a halt. Why was she walking away? Now that she had come this far in Anna’s car, the least she could do was say hello to Henrietta. Without betraying her own anxiety, without making pressing enquiries about Anna’s whereabouts. She might just be in Lund and I don’t have her number there. I’ll ask Henrietta for it.

She followed the path through the trees again and came at last to a half-timbered whitewashed house covered in wild roses. A cat lay on the stone steps and studied her movements warily as Linda approached. A window was open, and just as she bent down to stroke the cat she heard noises from inside. Henrietta’s music, she thought.

Then she stood up and caught her breath. What she had heard wasn’t music. It was the sound of a woman sobbing.

“I borrowed her car. My grandfather used to live in these parts and I thought I would take a drive. I get a little bored these days.”

“Until you get to put on your uniform?”

“Yes.”

Henrietta set out a thermos and some cups on the table.

“I don’t understand why an attractive girl like you would choose to become a police officer. Breaking up fights on the street, that’s what I imagine it to be. I know there must be other aspects to the job, but that’s what always comes to mind.” She poured the coffee. “But perhaps you’re going to sit behind a desk,” she added.

“No, I’ve been assigned to a patrol car and will probably be doing a lot of the work you would expect. Someone has to be prepared to jump into the fray.”

Henrietta leaned to the side with her hand tucked under her chin.

“And that’s what you’re going to dedicate your life to?”

Her comments put Linda on the defensive, as if she was in danger of being contaminated by Henrietta’s bitterness.

“I don’t know what looks have got to do with it. I’m almost thirty and on good days I’m generally happy with how I look, but I’ve never dreamed of being Miss Sweden. But, more to the point, what would happen to our society if there were no police? My father is a policeman and I’ve never had cause to be ashamed of him.”

Henrietta shook her head. “I didn’t mean to hurt your feelings.”

Linda still felt angry. She felt a need to strike back, though she wasn’t really sure why.

“I thought I heard the sound of someone crying in here when I walked up to your house.”

Henrietta smiled. “It’s a recording I have. I’m working on a requiem and I mix my music with the sound of someone crying.”

“I don’t even know what a requiem is.”

“A funeral mass. That’s almost all I write these days.”

Henrietta got up and walked to the grand piano by the window, which overlooked fields and then the rolling hills leading down to the sea. Next to the piano there was a table with a tape recorder as well as a synthesiser and other electronic equipment. Henrietta turned on the tape player. A woman’s voice came on, wailing and sobbing. It was the one Linda had heard through the window. Her curiosity about this strange woman increased.

“Where did you get that recording?”

“It’s from an American film. I often record the sound of crying from films, or from programmes on the radio. I have a collection of forty-four crying voices so far, everything from a baby to a very old woman ? I recorded secretly at a rest home. Would you like to donate a sample to the archive sometime?”

“No thanks.”

Henrietta sat at the piano and played a few haunting chords. Linda went and stood next to her, while Henrietta continued to play. The room was filled with a powerful surge of music which then faded into silence. Henrietta gestured for Linda to sit next to her on the piano stool.

“Tell me again why you came here. Seriously. I’ve never even felt you really liked me.”

“When I was little, I was afraid of you.”

“Of me? No-one is afraid of me!”

That’s where you’re wrong, Linda thought. Anna was afraid of you too, sometimes she had nightmares about you.

“It was pure impulse, nothing more. I wonder where Anna is, but I’m not as worried as I was last night. You’re probably right that she’s in Lund .. .”

Linda broke off.

“What is it you aren’t saying? Should I be worried about her too?”

“Anna thought she saw her father on a street in Malmo a couple of days ago. I shouldn’t be telling you this. You should hear it from her.”

“Is that all?”

“Isn’t that enough?”

Henrietta touched the keys as if sketching out a few more bars of music.

“Anna is forever catching glimpses of her father. She’s told me stories like this since she was a little girl.”

Linda raised her eyebrows. Anna had never mentioned one of these sightings before and Linda was certain she would have. When they were younger they told each other everything. Anna was one of the few people Linda had told about standing on the railing of the bridge. What Henrietta said didn’t match this picture.

“Anna is never going to relinquish her hope,” Henrietta said. “The hope that Erik will one day come back. Even that he is still alive.”

“Why did he leave?”

“He left because he was disappointed. He had such marvelous ambitions when he was younger. He seduced me with those dreams, if you must know. I had never met a man who had the same wonderful visions as Erik. He was going to make a difference to the world, to our generation. He knew without a doubt that he had been put on this earth to do something on a grand scale. We met when he was sixteen and I was fifteen. Young as I was, I knew I had never met anyone like him: he radiated dreams and life force. At that time he was still looking for his niche was it art, sports, politics or another arena in which he would leave his mark? He had decided to give himself until he was twenty to work it out. I remember no self-doubt in him until then. But when he turned twenty he started to worry. There was a restlessness in him. Until then he had had all the time in the world. When I started making demands of him, that he help to support the family after Anna was born, he would get impatient and scream at me. He had never done that before. That was when he began making his sandals, he was good with his hands. He called them ‘sandals of lattja’ as a kind of protest, I think, for the fact that they were taking up his valuable time. It was probably then that he started planning his disappearance, or should I say, escape. He wasn’t running away from me or Anna, he was running away from himself, from his disappointment in life. I wonder if he managed it I’ve never been able to ask him, of course. One day he was just gone. It took me by surprise. It was only with hindsight that I realised how carefully he must have planned it. I can forgive him the fact that he sold my car. What I’ll never understand or accept is that he left Anna. They were so close. I know he loved her. I was never as important to him, or at least not after the first couple of years while I was still a part of his dreams. How could he leave her how can a person’s disappointment stemming as it did from an unattainable dream conceivably weigh more heavily than the most important person in his life? I think that must be a contributing factor to his death, at least to the fact that he never returned.”

“I didn’t think anyone knew what happened to him.”

“He has to be dead. He’s been missing for all of these years. Where could he otherwise be?”

“Anna’s convinced she saw him.”

“She sees him on every street corner. I’ve tried to talk her out of it and make her face the truth. No-one knows what happened, but he has to be dead by now.”

Henrietta paused. The greyhound sighed.

“What do you suppose happened?” Linda said.

“I think he gave up when he realised the dream was nothing more than that. And that the Anna he left behind was real. At that point it was too late. He would always have been plagued by his conscience.” Henrietta closed the lid over the piano keys with a thud and stood up. “More coffee?”

“No thanks. I have to get going.”

Henrietta seemed anxious and Linda watched her closely. She grabbed Linda’s arm and started to hum a melody that Linda recognised. Her voice alternated between high, shrill tones and softer, cleaner ones.

“Do you know that song?” she asked when she had finished.

“I recognise it, but I don’t know what it is.”

““BuonaSera’.”

“Is it Spanish?”

“Italian. It means “Good Night’. It was popular in the fifties. So many people today borrow or steal or vandalise old music. They make pop songs out of Bach. I do the reverse. I take songs like “Buona Sera’ and turn them into classical music.”

“How do you do that?”

“I break down the structure, change the rhythm, replace the guitar sound with a flood of violins. I turn a banal song about three minutes long into a symphony. When it’s ready, I’ll play it for you. Then people will finally understand what I’ve been trying to do all these years.”

Henrietta followed her out. “Come back sometime.”

Linda promised she would, then drove away. She saw storm clouds heaped up in the distance out over the sea in the direction of Bornholm. She pulled over after a while and got out of the car. She had a sudden desire to smoke. She had stopped smoking three years ago, but the need still sucked at her from time to time.

There are some things mothers don’t know about their daughters, she thought. Henrietta doesn’t know that Anna and I used to tell each other everything. If she had known that, she would never have told me about Anna forever seeing her father on the street. There are a lot of things I’m not sure of, but I know Anna would have told me that.

There was only one possible explanation. Henrietta had not been telling her the truth about Anna and her missing father.

# 

# CHAPTER 10

She opened the curtains a little after 5 a.m. and looked at the thermometer. It was 9 C, the sky clear with little or no wind. What a wonderful day for an expedition, she thought. She had prepared everything the night before and it didn’t take her long to leave her flat across from the old railway station in Skurup. Her 40-year-old Vespa was waiting in the yard under a custom-made cover. She was the first and only owner, and since she had taken such good care of it, it was in mint condition. In fact, word of it had spread to the factory in Italy and she had received several solicitations over the years asking her if she would consider letting them put it in their museum. In return, the company would supply her with a new Vespa every year.

Year after year she had declined the offer, meaning to keep this

Vespa, which she had bought when she was 22, for as long as she lived.

She didn’t care what happened to it after that. One of her four grand children might want it, but she wasn’t about to write a will for the sake of an ancient Vespa.

Adjusting her backpack, she strapped on the helmet and kick-started the old machine. It roared into instant life. Half an hour later she arrived at the small car park by Led Lake. She walked the Vespa in behind some bushes beside a large oak tree. A car drove past on the main road, then silence returned.

As she prepared to walk into the forest and become invisible to the outside world, she wondered if this wasn’t the most satisfying way of expressing one’s independence; by daring to abandon the well-trodden path. To step into the underbrush and vanish from the eyes of the world.

Her brother Hakan was the person who had taught her that there were two kinds of people in the world: the ones who always chose the shortest distance between two points, and the ones who sought out the scenic route where the curves, slopes and vistas were to be found. They had played in the forests around Almhult when they were growing up. After her father was severely injured by a fall from a telegraph pole while repairing a phone line, they moved to Skane. Her mother got a job at the Ystad hospital. That was where she spent her adolescence and forgot all about exploring, until the day she stood outside the gates to Lund University and realised she had no idea what to do with her life. She turned to her childhood memories for inspiration.

It was a day during that first difficult autumn term, when she had enrolled as a law student for lack of a more interesting alternative. She had cycled out on the road to Staffanstorp and found a small unpaved road quite by chance. She left her bike there and continued on foot until she came to the ruins of a mill. That was when the idea had come to her or rather, went through her mind like a bolt of lightning. What was a path? Why does a path go this side of a tree and not the other? Who was the first person to walk here?

She straight away knew that it would become her life’s mission to chart old trails. She would become the protector and historian of old Swedish paths and walkways. She ran back to her bike, and the same day resigned from the law faculty and started instead to study history and cultural geography. She had the good fortune to meet a sympathetic professor who appreciated the originality of her interests and supported her in her cause.

She started along the path which curved gracefully around Led Lake. The tall trees shaded her from the sun. She had mapped this particular path quite a while ago. It was a standard walking path that could be traced back to the 1930s, when Rannesholm Manor was owned by the Haverman family. One of the counts, Gustav Haverman, had been an enthusiastic runner and had cleared bushes and undergrowth away from the edge of the lake to establish this trail. But a little further on, she thought, up ahead in this old forest where no-one else sees anything but moss and stone, I am going to turn off from this trail and follow the path I found just a few days ago. I have no idea where it leads, but nothing is as tempting, as magical, as following an unknown path. I still hope that one day I’ll find a path that is a work of art. A path that has been created without a destination in mind, just for its own sake.

She paused at the top of a hill to catch her breath, looking down between the trees at the glassy surface of the lake. She was 62 now, and according to her own calculations she needed five more years to complete her life’s work: The History of Swedish Walkways. In this book she would reveal that paths were among the most important clues to ancient settlements and their way of life. Paths were not laid out only for the simplest way of getting from A to B. She had ample evidence for the numerous religious and cultural factors that determined where and how paths made their way across the landscape. Over the years she had published regional studies and maps, but the conclusions of her many years of research had yet to be set down in a final form.

She slowed down when she found the spot. Where the untrained eye saw nothing but grass and moss growing at the edge of the path, she spotted the clear outline of a path that had been out of use for many years. She began to climb up the side of the hill, careful where she put her feet. Last year she had broken a leg when she was exploring a trail to the south of Brosarp. The accident had forced her to take a long rest, which stood out in her mind as a particularly difficult time. Even though it had given her more opportunity to write, she had become restless and irritated, especially without her husband to care for her. He had died shortly before the accident occurred, and he had always been the one to look after things in the home. She had sold the house in Rydsgard after that and moved to the small flat in Skurup.

She pushed aside some branches and moved in under the trees. She had once read about a meadow in the forest that could only be found by someone who had lost their way. To her mind this captured some of the mystical dimension of human existence. If one only dared to get lost, one could find the unexpected. There was a whole other world beyond the highways and byways if you dared to take the road less travelled. And I’m the caretaker of these old forgotten paths, she thought. Sleeping beauties waiting for someone to wake them from their slumber. If paths remain unused for too long, they die.

She was deep in the forest now, a long way from the main trail. She stopped and listened. A branch broke some distance away, then all was quiet. A bird flapped noisily and flew away. She walked on, hunched over, moving very slowly. The path was almost indecipherable. She had to search for its contours under the moss, the grass and the fallen branches.

Soon she started to feel disappointed: this wasn’t an old path after all. When she first saw it she had been hoping it was a section of the ancient pilgrims’ trail that was thought to have passed close to Led Lake. On the north side of the Rommele Hills it was still visible. It disappeared around Led Lake only to pop up again north-west of Sturup. Sometimes she was tempted to think the pilgrims had used a tunnel, but she knew that was not their custom. They used trails and one day she hoped to find this one. It would not be today, unfortunately. After a mere 100 metres she was convinced that the path was recently established, no more than 10 or 20 years old. She would expect to be able to say why it had been abandoned once she discovered where it led. By now the trees and the undergrowth stood so thick and close together that it was all but impossible to make her way through.

Suddenly she stopped and squatted. She saw something that confused her. She picked at the moss with her finger. She had seen something white lying there: a feather. A dove, she supposed. But were there white forest doves? They were usually brown or blue. She stood up and studied the feather. Finally she recognised it as a swan’s feather. But how odd that it should have fallen here, so deep in the forest. Swans came ashore from time to time but never this far inland, not in thick woodland.

A few more steps and she stopped again, this time because the ground in front of her was surprisingly flattened. Someone must have walked here only days before. But where did the prints begin? She examined the area for ten minutes and decided that someone had walked through the forest and joined the path at this point. She continued slowly. She was no longer so curious about the path as when she had thought it might be the pilgrim trail. This path was no doubt simply an extension of the paths Count Haverman had put in to satisfy his outdoor tastes, but one that had fallen out of use since his time. The prints she was following probably belonged to a hunter.

After another 100 metres she arrived at a shallow ravine, a crack in the earth covered over by bushes and undergrowth. The path ran straight down into it. She removed her backpack, tucked a torch into her pocket and scooted gingerly down into the ravine. She started lifting branches to get past them and saw to her astonishment that several of them had been cut and placed here in order to conceal the entrance to the hollow. Boys, she thought. Hakan and I often made forts in the forest. She pressed on past the undergrowth and sure enough, there was a small hut. It was unusually large to be the work of children. She was reminded of a news item Hakan had showed her from a magazine, with pictures of a shack in a forest that served as the hide-out for a wanted criminal by the wonderful name of “Beautiful Bengtsson”. He had lived in his hide-out for a long time and had been found out only when someone stumbled upon it by sheer chance.

She walked up for a closer look. The hut had been built of planks of wood, with a sturdy aluminium roof. To the rear it bordered a steep part of the ravine. She checked the handle of the door it wasn’t locked. She knocked and felt an idiot. If someone was there they would have heard her by now. She was feeling more and more confused. Could someone be hiding here?

Warning bells started going off inside her head. At first she dismissed these, for she was never one to get scared easily. She had run across unpleasant men in remote areas before now, and although it had sometimes frightened her she had always managed to control her fear and put up a tough front. Nothing had ever happened, and nothing was going to happen today. Even so, she could not help feeling that she was ignoring common sense by investigating this hut on her own. Only someone with a powerful motive to hide from prying eyes would have chosen a place like this. On the other hand, she did not want to turn back without finding out what was in here. Her path had indeed had a destination. No-one without her trained eyes would have spotted it. But the person who used the hut had not used the old path. That was strange. Was the old path she had found simply a back-up, the way fox holes had more than one exit? Her curiosity got the better of her.

She opened the door of the hut and looked in. There were two small windows on either side, but they let in only a little light. She turned on the torch. There was a bed on one side, and on the other, a small table with a chair, two gas lamps and a camp stove. Who lived here? And how long had it been empty? She leaned over and felt the blanket on the bed. It wasn’t damp. Someone has been here recently, she thought. In the last couple of days. Again she felt she had better leave. A person who made his home here was not the kind to welcome visitors.

She was about to turn and leave when the light of her torch fell on a book lying by the bed. She bent down. It was a Bible. She opened it and saw a name had been written on the inside then scratched out. The book was well used and in places the pages were torn. Some verses had been underlined and annotated. Carefully she put the book back where she had found it. She turned off the torch and realised at once that something had changed. There was more light now. Someone must have opened the door behind her. She turned, but it was too late. The blow to her face came with the force of a charging predator. She was plunged into a deep and bottomless darkness.

# 

# CHAPTER 11

After her visit to Henrietta, Linda sat up waiting for her father to come home, but by the time he softly pushed the front door open at 2 a.m.” she had fallen asleep on the sofa with a blanket pulled up to her ears. When she woke it was from a nightmare. She couldn’t remember what she had dreamed just that she felt as if she were being suffocated. Low snores rolled through the flat, sounding like breakers on the shore. Her father’s bedside light was still on, and he lay on his back, wrapped in a sheet, not unlike a walrus comfortably stretched out on a rock. She leaned over him and checked his breath between snores. Definitely alcohol.

She wondered who he could have been drinking with. The trousers which lay beside the bed were dirty, as if he had walked through mud.

He’s been in the country, she thought. That means a night of drinking with Sten Widen. They’ve sat out in the stables and shared a bottle of vodka.

Widen was one of her father’s oldest friends and now he was seriously ill. Her dad had a habit of talking about himself in the third

‘ person when it came to expressing something emotional, and he had taken to saying: “When Sten dies Kurt Wallander will be a lonely man.”

Widen had lung cancer. Linda was familiar with the story of how he raised fine racehorses at the stable by the ruins of Stjarnsund Castle. A few years ago he had sold the ranch, but just as the buyer was about to close on the deal, Widen changed his mind and backed out, using a clause in the contract that allowed this. He had bought more horses and then, shortly afterwards, received his diagnosis. It had been a year since then, a period of grace given the severity of his condition. Now he was once more selling his horses and his stable. He had arranged for himself a bed at a hospice in Malmo. This time there was no backing out of the deal.

Linda went to her room, put on her pyjamas and climbed into bed. She lay staring at the ceiling and reproached herself for being so hard on her father. Why shouldn’t he be allowed to enjoy a night of drinking with his old friend, especially since he is dying? I’ve always thought of Dad as a good friend to the few he has. It’s only right that he stay up late drinking in the stables. She felt like waking him and apologising for her disapproval. But he wouldn’t appreciate being woken. It’s his day off tomorrow, she remembered. Maybe we’ll do something fun.

As she lay there, she was thinking about Henrietta and the fact that she hadn’t been telling the truth. What was she hiding? Did she know where Anna was, or was there some other reason? Linda curled up on her side. Soon she was going to miss not having a boyfriend to cuddle up to. But where am I going to find one in this town? She pushed her thoughts aside and fell asleep.

Wallander shook her awake at 9.00. Linda jumped out of bed. Her father didn’t seem hung-over. He was dressed and had even combed his hair.

“Breakfast,” he said. “Time is ticking, life is fleeting.”

Linda showered and dressed. Her father was playing patience at the kitchen table when she came in and sat down.

“You were with Sten last night, were you not?”

“Right.”

“And you drank too much.”

“Wrong. We drank far, far too much.”

“How did you get home?” laxi.

“How is he doing?”

“I wish I could be sure of being able to face the end with the same equanimity. He simply says, “You only have so many races in your life. You have to try to win as many of them as you can.””

“Do you think he’s in pain?”

“I’m sure he is, but he doesn’t say anything. He’s like Rydberg.”

“I don’t really remember him.”

“He was an old policeman with a mole on his cheek. He was the one who made a policeman out of me when I was young and didn’t understand anything. He died much too early, but never a single word of complaint. He had also run his races and accepted the fact that his time was up.”

“Who’s going to be that kind of mentor to me?” “I thought you had been assigned to Martinsson.” “Is he any good?” “He’s an excellent policeman.”

“You know, I have memories of Martinsson from when I was a kid. I don’t know how many times you came home angry about something he had said or done.”

Wallander gathered up his cards.

“I was the one who trained Martinsson, just as Rydberg trained me. Of course, I am sure I did come home and complain about him. He can be damned thick-headed. But once he gets something into his head he never forgets it.”

“So that makes you my mentor indirectly.”

Wallander got up. “I don’t even know what that word means. Come on, we’re leaving.”

She looked at him with surprise. “Did I forget something?”

“We decided we would go out not where. It’s going to be a beautiful day and before you know it the fog will be here to stay. I hate the fog in Skane. It creeps right into one’s head. I can’t think straight when it’s grey and misty everywhere. But you’re right: we do have a goal today.”

He sat down again and filled his cup with the last of the coffee before continuing. “Hansson. Do you remember him?” Linda shook her head.

: “I didn’t think you would. He’s one of my colleagues. Now he’s about to sell his parents’ house outside Tomelilla. His mother has been dead a long time, but his father turned a hundred and one before he went. According to Hansson he was clear-headed and mean-spirited to the end. But the house is up for sale and I want to take a look at it. If Hansson hasn’t been exaggerating, it may just be what I’m looking for.” There was a breeze, but it was warm. When they drove past a long caravan of well-polished vintage cars Linda surprised her father by recognising most of the models.

“Since when do you know about cars?”

“Since my latest boyfriend, Magnus.”

“I thought his name was Ludwig?”

“You have to keep up, Dad. Anyway, isn’t Tomelilla all wrong for you? I thought you wanted to sit on a bench with your faithful dog, looking out over the sea.”

“I don’t have that kind of money. I’ll have to settle for the next best thing.”

“You could get a loan from Mum. Her golf-playing banker is pretty loaded.”

“Never in a million years.”

“I could borrow it for you.”

“Never.”

“No view of the ocean for you, then.”

Linda glanced at her father. Was he angry? She couldn’t decide. But she realised this was also something they had in common, flare-ups of irritation, a tendency to be hurt by almost nothing. Sometimes we are so close and other times it’s like a crevasse has opened up between us. And then we have to build the rickety bridges that usually manage to connect us again.

He took a piece of folded paper from his pocket.

“Map,” he said. “Give me the directions. We’re going to get to the roundabout soon that is at the head of the page. I know we go in the direction of Kristianstad, but you’ll have to guide me from there.”

“I’m going to trick you into Smaland,” she said and unfolded the paper. “Tingsryd? Does that sound good? We’ll never find our way back from there.”

The house was attractively situated on a little hill, surrounded by a strip of forest, beyond which there were open fields and marshes. A bird a kite, by the look of it hung in the air currents above the house, and in the distance there was the rising and falling sound of a tractor at work. Linda sat down on an old stone bench between some red-currant bushes. Her father squinted at the roof, tugged at the drainpipes and tried to peer into the house. Then he disappeared to the other side.

The moment he was gone, Linda started thinking about Henrietta.

Now that some time had passed since the visit, her intuition had solidified into certainty: Henrietta had been lying. She was hiding something about Anna. Linda dialled Anna’s number on her mobile phone and got the answering machine. She didn’t leave a message. She put the phone away and walked round the house to find her father. He was pulling at an old water pump that squeaked and sprayed brown water into a bucket. He shook his head.

“If I could move this house down to the sea I’d take it in a minute,” he said. “Here there’s just too much forest for my taste.”

“What about living in a trailer?” Linda suggested. “Then you could camp on the beach. Lots of people would be happy to let you stay on their land.”

“And why is that?”

“Who wouldn’t want police protection for free?”

He grimaced and walked back to the car. Linda followed. He’s not going to turn around, she thought. He’s already put this place behind him.

Linda watched the kite swoop over the fields and disappear on the horizon.

“What now?” he asked her.

Linda immediately thought of Anna. She realised she wanted most of all to talk to her father about it, about the worry she felt.

“I’d like to talk,” she said. “But not here.”

“I know just the place.”

“Where?”

“You’ll see.”

They drove south, turning left towards Malmo and leaving the main road at a turn-off for Kade Lake. The forest around the lake was one of the most beautiful Linda had ever seen. She had had a feeling her father was going to bring her to this place. They had taken many walks here when she was younger, especially when she was about ten or eleven. She also had a vague memory of being here with her mum, but could not recall the whole family coming here together.

They left the car by a stack of timber. The huge logs gave off a fresh scent, as if they had been felled recently. They walked through the forest, on a path leading to the strange metal statue erected to the memory of a visit the warrior King Charles XII was rumoured to have made to Kade Lake. Linda was about to start talking about Anna when her father raised his hand. They had stopped in a narrow glen surrounded by tall trees.

“This is my cemetery,” he said.

“Your what7.”

“It’s one of my secrets, maybe the most secret, and I’ll probably regret telling you this tomorrow. I’ve assigned all the trees you see here to the friends I’ve had who’ve died. Your grandfather is here, my mother and my old relatives.”

He pointed to a young oak.

“This tree I’ve given to Stefan Fredman, the desperate Indian. Even he belongs in my collection of the dead.”

“What about the other one you were talking about?”

“Yvonne Ander? Yes, she’s over there.” He pointed to another oak, one with an extensive network of branches.

“I came here a week or so after your grandfather died. I felt as if I had completely lost my footing in life. You were much stronger than I was. I was sitting at the station, trying to sort out a case involving a brutal assault. Ironically it was a young man who had damn near killed his father with a sledgehammer. The boy lied about everything and suddenly I couldn’t take it any more. I stopped the interrogation and came here and that’s when I felt that these trees had become headstones for everyone I knew who had died. That I should come to visit them here, not where they are actually buried. Whenever I’m here I feel a calm I don’t feel anywhere else. I can hug the dead here without them seeing me.”

“I won’t tell anyone,” she said. “Thanks for sharing it with me.”

They lingered a while longer. Linda wanted to ask about the identity of a few more of the trees, but she said nothing. The sun was shining through the leaves, but the wind picked up and it immediately became colder. Linda took a deep breath and launched into the topic of Anna’s disappearance.

“It’ll drive me up the wall if you shake your head and tell me I’m imagining things. But if you can explain to me exactly why I’m wrong, I promise I’ll pay attention.”

“There’s something you’ll find out when you become a police officer,”

he said. “The unexplainable almost never happens. Even someone disappearing into thin air turns out to have a perfectly reasonable explanation. You will learn to differentiate between the unexplained and the merely unexpected. The unexpected can look baffling until you have the necessary background information. This is generally the case with disappearances. You don’t know what’s happened to Anna and it’s only natural that it would worry you, but my intuition tells me you should draw on the highest virtue of our profession.”

“Patience?”

“Exactly.”

“For how long?”

“A few more days. She’ll have turned up by then, or at least been in touch.”

“All the same, I’m certain her mother was lying to me.”

“I am not sure your mother and I always stuck to the truth when we were asked about you.”

“I’ll try to be patient, but I do feel that there’s more to this. It’s just not right.”

They returned to the car, It was past 1.00 and Linda suggested they stop for lunch. They chose a roadside restaurant with a funny name, My Father’s Hat. Wallander had a fleeting recollection of having lunched there with his father and their ending up in a heated argument, but what the argument had been about he couldn’t remember.

They were drinking their coffee when a phone rang. Linda fumbled for hers, but it turned out to be Wallander’s. He answered, listened and made a few notes on the back of the bill.

“What was that?” Linda asked.

“Someone reported missing.”

He put money on the table, tucking the bill into his pocket.

“What do you have to do now? Who’s disappeared?”

“We’ll go back by way of Skurup. A widow by the name of Birgitta Medberg her daughter is worried.”

“What were the circumstances of her disappearing?”

“The caller wasn’t sure. Apparently the woman is a historian who maps old walkways and often does extensive fieldwork, sometimes in dense forest. An unusual occupation.”

“So she may simply be lost.”

“My first thought. We’ll soon find out.” Wallander called the daughter of Birgitta Medberg to tell her he was on his way, and then they drove to Skurup. The wind was now blustering. It was 3.08 on Wednesday, August 29.

# 

# CHAPTER 12

They stopped in front of a two-storey brick building quintessentially Swedish, Linda thought. Wherever you go in this country the houses all look the same. The central square in Vasteras could be replaced with the one in Orebro, this Skurup apartment building could as easily be in Sollentuna.

“Where have you ever seen a building like this before?” she asked her father as they got out of the car and he was fumbling with the lock. He looked up at the brick facade.

“Looks like the place you had in Sollentuna, before you moved to the dorms at the police training college.”

“Well remembered. So what do I do now?”

“Come with me. You can treat this as a warming-up exercise to real police work.”

“Aren’t you breaking some rules by doing this? No-one should be present at an interrogation without relevant cause something like that?”

“This isn’t an interrogation session, it’s a conversation. Let’s hope it will serve to put someone’s mind at rest.”

“But still.”

“No buts. I’ve been breaking rules since I first started work. According to Martinsson’s calculations I should have been locked up for a minimum of four years for all the things I’ve done. But who cares, if you’re doing a good job? That’s one of the few points Nyberg and I can agree on.”

“Nyberg? The head of forensics?”

“The only Nyberg I know. He’s retiring soon and in one sense no-one will be sorry to see the back of him. On the other hand, despite his terrible temper, maybe all of us will miss him.”

They crossed the street. A bicycle missing its back wheel was propped up by the front door. The frame was bent as if it had been the victim of a violent assault. They walked into the entrance and read the names of the people who lived there.

“Birgitta Medberg. Her daughter’s name is Vanya. From the phone call, I gather that she has a tendency to hysteria. She also has a very shrill voice.”

“I am not hysterical!” a woman yelled from above. She was leaning over the railing of the staircase, watching them.

“Remind me to keep my voice down in stairwells,” Wallander muttered.

They walked up to her landing.

“Just as I thought,” Wallander said in a friendly voice to the hostile woman waiting for them. “The boys at the station are too young to know the difference between hysteria and a normal level of concern.”

The woman, Vanya, was in her forties, heavy, with yellow stains around the neck and wrists of her blouse. Linda thought it was probably a long time since she had washed her hair. They walked into the flat and Linda immediately recognised the strong scent that hung in the air. Mum’s perfume, she thought. The one she wears when she’s upset or angry. She had another she preferred when she was happy.

They were shown into the living room. Vanya dropped into an armchair and pointed her finger at Linda. “Who’s that?”

“An assistant,” Wallander said in a firm voice. “Please tell us what happened, starting at the beginning.”

Vanya told them in a nervous, jerky style. She seemed to have trouble finding the right words even though it was clear that she was not the kind of person who spoke in long sentences. Linda immediately understood her concern was genuine, and compared it to the way she felt about Anna.

Vanya told them that her mother was a cultural geographer whose principal work was tracing and mapping old roads and walkways in southern Sweden. She had been widowed for a year and had four grandchildren, two of whom were Vanya’s daughters. On this particular day Vanya and her daughters were supposed to have visited her at noon. Birgitta had arranged to be out on one of her short excursions before then. But when Vanya arrived, Birgitta had not yet returned. Vanya waited for two hours, then called the police. Her mother would never have disappointed her grandchildren like this, she said. Something must have happened.

When Vanya had finished her story, Linda tried to guess what question her father would ask first. Perhaps something along the lines of: Where was she going?

“Do you know where she was going this morning?” he said.

“No.”

“She has a car, I take it.”

“Actually she has a red Vespa. Forty years old.”

“Really?”

“All Vespas used to be red, my mother tells me. She belongs to an association for owners of vintage mopeds and Vespas. The office is in Staffanstorp, I think. I don’t know why why she wants to be with those people, I mean. But she seems to like them.”

“You said she became a widow about a year ago. Did she show any signs of depression?”

“No. And if you think she’s committed suicide you’re wrong.”

“I’m not saying she did. But sometimes even the people closest to us can be very good at hiding their feelings.”

Linda stared at her father. He glanced briefly in her direction. We have to talk, she thought. It was wrong of me not to tell him about the time I stood on the bridge and was going to jump. He thinks the only time was when I slashed my wrists.

“She would never hurt herself. She would never do that to us.”

“Is there anyone she may have gone to visit?”

Vanya had lit a cigarette. She had managed already to spill ash on her blouse and the floor.

“My mother is the old-fashioned type. She never drops in on someone without calling.”

“My colleagues have confirmed that she hasn’t been admitted to a hospital in the area, and there are no reports of an accident. Does she have a medical condition we should know about? Does she have a mobile phone?”

“My mother is a very healthy woman. She takes care of herself not like me, though it’s hard to get enough exercise when you’re in the grocery business.” Vanya made a gesture of disgust at her body.

“A mobile phone?”

“She has one, but she keeps it turned off. My sister and I are always on at her about it.”

There was a lull in the conversation. They heard the low sound of a radio or television coming from the flat next door.

“So, let’s get this straight. You have no idea where she may have gone. Is there anyone who could have more specific information regarding her research? Is there a journal or working papers of some kind we could look at?”

“Not that I know of, and my mother works alone.”

“Has this happened before?”

“That she’s disappeared? Never.”

Wallander took a notebook and a pen out of his jacket pocket and asked Vanya for her full name, home address and telephone number. Linda noticed that he reacted to her last name, Jorner. He stopped writing and looked up.

“Your mother’s surname is Medberg. Is Jorner your husband’s name?”

“Yes, Hans Jorner. My mother’s maiden name was Lundgren. Is this important?”

“Hans Jorner any connection to the gravel company in Limhamn?”

“Yes, he’s the youngest son of the company director. Why do you ask?”

“I’m curious, that’s all.”

Wallander stood up and Linda followed suit.

“Would you mind showing us the flat? Does she have a study?”

Vanya pointed to a door and then put her hand to her mouth to smother an attack of smoker’s cough. They walked into a study in which the walls were covered with maps. Stacks of papers and folders were neatly arranged on the desk.

“What was all that about Jorner?” Linda asked in a low voice.

“I’ll tell you later. It’s an unpleasant story.”

“And what was it she said? She’s a grocer?”

“Yes.”

Linda leafed through a few papers. He stopped her immediately.

“You can come along, listen and look to your heart’s content. But don’t touch anything.”

Linda left the room in a huff. He was right, of course, but his tone was objectionable. She nodded politely to Vanya, who was still coughing, and left the flat. As soon as she was down on the street, she regretted her childish reaction.

Her father emerged ten minutes later.

“What did I do? Is there something wrong?”

Linda made an apologetic gesture. “It’s nothing. I’ve forgotten already.”

He unlocked the car while the wind pulled and tugged at their clothing. They got into the car, but he didn’t start the engine right away.

“You noticed my reaction when she said her name was Jorner,” Wallander said and squeezed the steering wheel angrily. “When Kristina and I were little there were times when no art buyers had come to my father’s studio in their fancy cars for a while. So we had no money. At those times Mother had to go to work. She had no education, so the only available occupations were on the assembly line or housekeeper. She chose the latter and landed a position with the Jorners, though she came home each night. Old man Jorner Hugo was his name -and his wife Tyra were terrible people. As far as they were concerned, there had been no social change over the past fifty years. In their eyes the world was upper class and lower class and nothing in between. He was the worst.

“One time Mother came home completely devastated. Even your grandfather, who never talked to her much, wondered what had happened. I hid behind the sofa and will never forget what I overheard. There had been a dinner party at the Jorners’, perhaps eight people. My mother served the food, and when the guests were ready for coffee, Hugo asked her to bring in a stool from the kitchen. They were all a bit tipsy by this point, and when she came in with it he asked her to climb up on it. She did as he asked and then he said that from her present vantage point she should be able to see that she had forgotten to lay a coffee spoon for one of the guests. Then he dismissed her, and she heard how everyone laughed as she left the room.

“I still remember it word for word. When she had finished she started crying, and said she would never go back. My dad was so upset he was ready to grab the axe from the woodshed and smash Jorner’s head. But she managed to calm him. I’ll never forget it. I was ten, maybe twelve, at the time. And now I meet one of his daughters-in-law.”

He started the car, still angry.

“I often wonder about my grandmother,” Linda said. “I think what I wonder about most was how anyone could stand to be married to my grandfather.”

Wallander laughed. “She always used to say that if she just rubbed him with a little salt he did what she told him. I never really understood that I remember thinking: how do you rub a person with salt? The secret was her patience. She had an infinite fund of patience.”

Wallander stepped on the brake and swerved as a dashing convertible overtook them on a blind bend. He swore.

“I should pull them over.”

“Why don’t you?”

“My mind’s on other things.”

Linda looked over at her father, who did appear tense.

“There’s something about this missing woman that bothers me,” he said. “I think Vanya Jorner was telling us the truth, and I think her anxiety is genuine. My feeling is that Birgitta Medberg became sick or temporarily confused, either that or something has happened to her.”

“Something criminal?”

“I don’t know. But I think my day off is over. I’ll take you home.”

“I’ll come with you to the station. I’ll walk from there.”

Wallander parked in the police-station garage and Linda started walking home in the wind that had become surprisingly cold. It was 4.30. She started in the direction of Mariagatan, but she changed her mind and went to Anna’s building instead. She waited a minute after ringing the doorbell, then let herself in.

It took her only a few seconds to recognise that something was different. Certainly someone had been in the flat since she was here last. But by what evidence did she know this? Was something missing? She scrutinised the living-room walls and the bookcase. Nothing apparently changed there.

She sat in the chair that Anna preferred. Something had changed. But what? She got up and stood by the window to see the room from a different angle. That was when she saw it. There used to be a large blue butterfly in a frame hanging on the wall between a Berlin exhibition poster and an old barometer. The butterfly was gone. Linda shook her head. Was she imagining things? No, she was sure she remembered it being here last time. Could Henrietta have come and picked it up? On the face of it, it didn’t make sense. She took off her coat and methodically went through the flat.

When she opened Anna’s wardrobe she knew immediately that someone had been there too. Several items of clothing were gone, as well as a carrier bag. Linda could tell because Anna often left the wardrobe doors open. She sat on the bed and tried to think. Her gaze fell on Anna’s journal lying on the desk. She must have left it behind, she thought and then corrected herself: Anna would never have left it behind. She might have taken the clothes, perhaps even the butterfly. But she would never have left her journal, not in a million years. Whoever it was who had been here, it wasn’t Anna.

# 

# CHAPTER 13

Walking into an empty room was like dipping below the mirror-like surface of a still lake and sinking into the silent and alien underwater landscape. She tried to remember everything she had been taught. Rooms always bore the traces of what had happened in them. But had anything of note happened here? There were no blood stains, indeed, no sign of a struggle, nothing. A framed butterfly was missing, as well as a bag and some clothes. That was all. But even if it had been Anna who had stopped by to pick them up, she would have left the same number of traces as an intruder. All Linda had to do was find them. She walked through the flat again, but didn’t see anything else.

Finally she stopped at the answering machine and played the messages. Anna’s dentist had called to ask her to reschedule her annual check-up, Mirre had called from Lund to ask if Anna was going to go to Bastad or not, and finally there was Linda’s own booming voice, urging Anna to pick up.

Linda took the address book from the telephone table and looked up the number of the dentist, Sivertsson.

“Dr. Sivertsson’s office.”

“My name is Linda Wallander. I’m returning Anna Westin’s calls as she’s out of town for the next few days. Would you mind telling me the exact day and time of her appointment?”

The receptionist put her on hold for a few moments, then came back on the line.

“September the tenth at nine a.m.”

“Thank you. She probably has it written down somewhere.”

“I don’t remember Anna ever missing an appointment.”

Linda hung up and tried to find a phone number for Mirre. She thought about her own over-stuffed address book which she was forever patching with tape. Somehow she could never bring herself to buy a new one, it stored too many memories. All the crossed-out numbers were for her markers in a private graveyard. That led her thoughts away from Anna and to the moment in the forest with her father. A tenderness for him welled up inside her. She sensed what he had been like as a boy. A small kid with big ideas, maybe too big for his own good. There’s so much I don’t know about him, she thought. What I think I know often turns out to be wrong. I used to look on him only as a big friendly man who was not too sharp, but stubborn and with a pretty good intuition about the world. I’ve always thought he was a good policeman. But now I suspect he’s much more sentimental than he appears, that he takes pleasure in the little romantic coincidences of everyday life and hates the incomprehensible and brutal reality he confronts through his work.

Linda pulled up a chair and turned the pages of a book about Alexander Fleming and the discovery of penicillin. Anna had obviously been reading it. It was in English and it surprised her that Anna was up to the challenge. They had talked about doing a language programme in England when they were younger. Had Anna gone and done it on her own? She put the book back and took up Anna’s address book again. Every page was covered in numbers, like a blackboard during a lecture on advanced mathematics. There were numbers scratched out and changes on every page. Linda smiled nostalgically at a couple of her own old numbers, as well as the names and numbers of two of her ex-boyfriends. What am I looking for? I guess I’m trying to find traces of Anna that would explain what’s happened. But why would they be here?

She kept going through the address book, still feeling that she was trespassing on Anna’s most private self. I’ve climbed her fence, she thought. I’m doing it for her sake, but it still feels wrong.

Then the word “Dad” caught her eye, written boldly in red. The phone number was 19 digits long, all ones and threes. A number that doesn’t exist, Linda thought. A secret number to the unknown city where all missing persons go.

She wanted to put the book away, but forced herself to look all the way to the end. The only other entry of any interest was a number to

“My Room in Lund”. Linda hesitated, then dialled the number. Almost at once, a man answered.

“Peter here.”

“I’d like to speak to Anna. Is she in?”

“I’ll check.”

Linda waited. She heard music in the background, but she. couldn’t put a name to the singer.

“No, she’s not in. Can I take a message?”

“Do you know when she’ll be back?”

“I don’t even know if she’s around. I haven’t seen her for a while. But I can ask the others.”

She waited again.

“No-one’s seen her here for a couple of days.”

Before Linda had a chance to get the address he cut the connection. She was left holding the receiver to her ear. No Anna, she thought. The man called Peter had clearly not been worried and Linda was starting to feel foolish. She thought about herself and of her own readiness to take off without leaving a note of where she was going. Her father had many times been on the verge of reporting her missing when she was younger. But I always sense when I’m gone too long and I always call in, she thought. Why wouldn’t Anna do the same?

Linda rang Zeba and asked if she had heard from Anna. Zeba said no, there had been no news, no call. They agreed to meet for coffee the following day.

As she put the phone down, Linda thought: I’m staging this as a disappearance so as to have something to do. As soon as I can put my uniform on and actually start working, she’ll turn up. It’s like a game.

She went into the kitchen and made herself a cup of tea, then took it with her to Anna’s bedroom. She sat on the side of the bed away from where Anna normally slept. Putting her tea down on the bedside table, she stretched out just for a moment but in the twinkling of an eye she had fallen asleep.

She didn’t know where she was at first, when she awoke. She looked at the time she had been asleep for an hour. The tea was cold. She drank it anyway because her mouth was dry, then stood up and straightened the bedspread. That was when she saw it.

On Anna’s side. There was an indentation still visible: someone had lain there and not smoothed the bed afterwards. That couldn’t have been Anna. She was the kind of person who never left crumbs on the table.

Linda lifted the bedspread on impulse and found a T-shirt, size XXL, dark blue, with the Virgin Airlines logo. She sniffed carefully and confirmed that it didn’t smell like Anna it had the masculine scent of aftershave or perhaps very strong deodorant. She laid the T-shirt on the bed. Anna preferred nightgowns, and classy ones at that. Linda was willing to bet that she would not have used a Virgin Airlines T-shirt even for one night.

The phone in the living room rang. Linda flinched, but walked into the living room and looked at the answering machine. Should she answer it? She stretched out her hand, then pulled it back. The machine answered after the fifth ring. Hi, it’s Mum. Your friend Linda the one who wants to become a policewoman for some strange reason came out here today looking for you. Just wanted to let you know. Call me when you get back. Bye.

Linda ran the message again. Henrietta’s voice sounded calm. There seemed to be no unvoiced anxiety, nothing hidden between the words. She picked up the implicit criticism of her choice of career. That bothered her. Did Anna share her mother’s dismissive attitude? To hell with them, Linda thought. Anna can carry on her disappearance act without me. She walked around one last time, watering the plants, then left the flat.

By the time Wallander came home, around 7 p.m.” she had cooked and eaten dinner. She heated up the food she had kept for him while he changed. She sat in the kitchen while he ate.

“What happened with the missing woman?”

“Svartman and Gronkvist are in charge of it. Nyberg is examining her flat. We decided to take her disappearance seriously. Now we can only wait.”

“And what do you think?”

Wallander pushed his plate away.

“Something about it still worries me, but I could be wrong.”

“What worries you?”

“Certain people ought not to go missing, that’s all. It’s not something they do if it happens, it means something is wrong. I guess that’s been my experience.”

He got up and put on a pot of coffee.

“We had an estate agent once who went missing, about ten years ago. Maybe you remember it? She was religious, something evangelical. They had small children. The moment the husband came in to notify us she was missing I knew something bad had happened. And I was right. She had been murdered.”

“But Birgitta Medberg is a widow and she doesn’t have small children. She’s probably not even religious I certainly can’t imagine that stout daughter of hers being religious, can you?”

“Her waistline’s got nothing to do with it. You can’t tell just by looking at someone. But I’m talking about something else, something unexpected.”

Linda told him about her latest discovery in Anna’s flat. She watched her father’s face take on a strong look of disapproval.

“You shouldn’t be getting yourself mixed up in this,” he said. “If anything’s happened to Anna it’s a case for the police.”

“I’m almost police.”

“You’re still a rookie, and the appropriate line of work for you is breaking up drunken brawls in town.”

“I just think it’s strange she’s gone, that’s all.”

Wallander carried his plate and his coffee cup to the sink.

“If you’re genuinely concerned you should go to the police.”

He left the kitchen. Linda stayed behind. His ironic tone irritated her, not least because he was right.

She sulked in the kitchen until she felt ready to see her father again. He was in the living room, fast asleep in a chair. Linda shook his arm when he started to snore. He jerked awake and raised his arms as if to ward off an attack. Just like me, she thought. That’s another thing we have in common. He went to the bathroom, then got ready for bed. Linda watched a film on television without really concentrating. By midnight she too was in bed. She dreamed about her former boyfriend, Herman Mboya, who was back in Kenya.

The buzzing of her mobile phone woke her. It vibrated next to the bedside lamp. She answered it at the same time as she checked her watch. Three fifteen. There was no voice on the other end, only breathing. Then the line went dead. Linda knew it had something to do with Anna. It was some sort of message, even if it only consisted of a few breaths. It had to mean something.

Linda never managed to fall back to sleep. Her father got up at 6.15. She let him shower and change in peace, but when he started making noise in the kitchen she joined him. He was surprised to see her up and dressed at that hour.

“I’m coming with you.”

“Why?”

“I thought about what you said, that if I was worried about Anna I should raise the matter with the police. Well, I am worried, and I’m going to report her disappearance. I do think something is badly wrong.”

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# CHAPTER 14

Linda had never learned to predict when her father would fall into one of his rages. She remembered with painful clarity how she and her mother would cringe when he got like this. Her grandfather was the only one who simply shrugged it off or gave as good as he got.

By now she had learned to look for certain signs; the tell-tale red patch on the forehead, the nervous pacing. But this morning she was once more taken by surprise at the vehemence of his reaction to her decision to report Anna’s disappearance. He started by throwing a pack of paper napkins to the floor. There was a comical element to this gesture since the anticipated violence of the crash never came, and the white papers fluttered softly across the kitchen. Yet it was enough to reawaken Linda’s childhood fear. She recalled what Mona had said after the divorce: “He can’t see it himself. He doesn’t know how intimidating it is to be met with a raging temper when you least expect it. Others probably think of him as a friendly, slightly eccentric perhaps, but capable policeman, which is probably a fair assessment of him in the workplace. But at home he let his temper run loose like a wild animal. He became a terrorist in my eyes. I feared him, and I also grew to hate him.”

Linda thought of her mother’s words as she sat across from her giant of a father, still furious, now kicking at the napkins.

“Why don’t you listen to me?” he was saying. “How are you ever going to be a respected police officer if you think a crime has been committed every time one of your friends doesn’t pick up the phone?”

“Dad, it’s not like that.”

He swept the rest of the napkins off the table. A child, Linda thought. A big child chucking all his toys to the ground.

“Don’t interrupt me! Didn’t they teach you anything at the training college?”

“I learned to take things seriously.”

“You’re going to be laughed out of the force.”

“So be it, but Anna has disappeared.”

His rage subsided as suddenly as it had started. There were still a few drops of sweat on his cheek. That was short, Linda thought. And not as volcanic as I remember. Maybe he’s more afraid of me now, or else he’s getting old. I bet he even apologises this time.

“I’m sorry,” he said.

Linda didn’t answer. She picked up a few napkins from the floor and put them in the bin. Her heart was still pounding with fear. I’ll always feel this way when he’s angry, she thought.

“I don’t know what gets into me.”

Linda stared at him, waiting to speak until he actually looked at her.

“You just need to do a bit more exercise.”

He flinched as if she had struck him, then he blushed.

“You know I’m right,” she said. “Anyway, you should get going. I’ll walk so you don’t have to be embarrassed.”

“I was planning to walk myself, as it happens.”

“Do it tomorrow. I need some space. I don’t like it when you scream like that.”

Wallander set off, meekly, as instructed. Linda was drenched in sweat so she changed her top. By the time she left the flat she had still not made up her mind whether she was going to report Anna’s disappearance.

The sun was shining and there was a brisk breeze. Linda paused out on the street, unsure of what to do next. She prided herself on being as a rule a decisive person, but being around her father sometimes sapped her will power. She could hardly wait until she was able to move into her flat behind Mariakyrkan. She couldn’t stand living with him much longer.

Finally she did steer her course to the police station. If something really had happened to Anna, she would never forgive herself for not reporting it. Her career as a police officer would be over before it had begun.

She walked past the People’s Park and thought about a magician she had seen there as a child when she had been out with her father. The magician had taken gold coins out of children’s ears. This memory gave rise to another, one that had to do with a fight between her parents. She had woken up in her room to the sound of their angry voices. They had been arguing about money, some money that should have been in the account, that was gone, that had been frittered away. When Linda had carefully tiptoed to her door and peered into the living room she had seen her mother with blood running from her nose. Her father had been looking out of the window, his face sweaty and flushed. She immediately realised that he had hit her mother, on account of the money that wasn’t there.

Linda stopped walking and squinted up at the sun. The back of her throat was starting to constrict. She remembered looking at her parents, thinking that she was the only one who could solve their problems. She didn’t want Mona to have a bloody nose. She had gone back into her bedroom and taken out her piggy bank. She walked into the living room and put it on the table. The room fell silent.

She kept squinting up at the sun, but the tears came anyway. She rubbed her eyes and changed direction, as if this would force her mind to change track. She turned on to Industrigatan and decided to postpone reporting Anna’s disappearance. Instead she would drop into the flat one last time. If anyone’s been there since last night, I’ll know, she thought. She rang the doorbell no answer. When she opened the front door her whole body was tense, every antenna alert. But there was nothing.

She walked around in the flat, looking at the bed where she had lain the night before. She sat down in the living room and went through what had happened. Anna had now been gone for three days.

Linda shook her head angrily and went back into the bedroom. She apologised to the air and started looking through the journal again. She flipped back about 30 days. Nothing. The most notable entry was an aching tooth on August 7 and 8 and a resulting appointment with Dr. Sivertsson. Linda remembered those days and furrowed her brow.

On August 8 she, Zeba and Anna had taken a long walk out at Kaseberga. They had taken Anna’s car. Zeba’s boy was cooperative for once and they had taken turns carrying him when he was too tired to walk.

But a toothache?

Linda had the feeling again that there was some kind of double language in Anna’s journal, perhaps a code. But why? And what could an entry about toothache possibly signify?

She kept reading and looked closely at the handwriting itself. Anna frequently changed her pen, even in the middle of a sentence. Perhaps she was interrupted by the phone and couldn’t find the same pen when she came back. Linda put the journal down and went to get a glass of water from the kitchen.

When she turned the next page she drew a breath. At first she was sure she was getting it confused. But no, there it was: on August 13 Anna had written Letter from Birgitta Medberg.

Linda read it again, this time by the window with the sun on the page. Birgitta Medberg was not a common name. She put the book down on the windowsill and picked up the directory. It took her just a few minutes to confirm that there was only one Birgitta Medberg in this whole area of southern Sweden. She called enquiries and asked about Birgitta Medbergs in the rest of the country; there were only four others with that name. Of the five, one was listed as a cultural geographer in Skane.

Linda returned to the journal and read impatiently through the text until she reached the odd message at the end: myth, fear, myth, fear. But there was no other reference to Birgitta Medberg.

Anna disappears, she thought. A few weeks earlier she received a letter from Birgitta Medberg who has now also gone missing. In the middle of all this is Anna’s father whom she thinks has just reappeared on a street in Malmo after a 24-year absence.

Linda began to search the flat for Birgitta Medberg’s letter. She no longer felt guilty for violating Anna’s privacy. She found a number of letters over the next three hours. Unfortunately, the letter from Medberg was not one of them.

Linda took Anna’s car keys and left the flat. She drove down to the Harbour Cafe and had a sandwich and a cup of tea. A man her own age in oil-spattered overalls smiled at her as she was getting ready to leave. It took her a while to recognise him as a contemporary from school. She stopped and they said hello. Linda struggled in vain to remember his name. He stretched out his hand after first wiping it clean.

“I’m sailing,” he said. “I have an old boat with a dud motor. That’s why I’m covered in grease.”

“I’ve only just moved back to town,” Linda said.

“What do you do?”

Linda hesitated. “I’ve just graduated from the police training college.”

His name suddenly came back to her: Torbjorn. He smiled at her again.

“I thought you were into old furniture.”

“I was, but I changed my mind.”

He stretched out his hand again. “Ystad is pretty small. I’m sure I’ll see you around.”

Linda hurried to the car, which was parked behind the old theatre. I wonder what they’ll think, she thought. I wonder if they’ll be surprised that Linda became a policewoman.

She drove to Skurup, parked on the main square and then walked to the house where Birgitta Medberg lived. There was a strong smell of cooking in the stairwell. She rang the doorbell, there was no answer. She listened, then called through the letter box. When she was sure no-one was there, she took out her pass keys and opened the door. I’m starting my police career by breaking and entering, she thought. She was sweating and her heart was thumping. Alert for any noise, she searched through the flat. She was all the time afraid someone was going to come in. She didn’t know exactly what it was she was hoping to discover here, just that it would be something to confirm the connection between Anna and Birgitta Medberg.

She was about to give up when she found a paper under the green writing pad on the desk. It was a photocopy of an old surveyor’s map on which the lines and words were hard to make out.

Linda turned on the desk lamp and was able to make out the writing on the bottom of the page: Rannesholm Estate. She recognised the name, but where was it exactly? She had seen a map of southern

Sweden in the bookcase. She took it out and found Rannesholm. It was a few miles north of Skurup. Linda looked at the older map again. Even though it was a poor copy she thought she could see the outlines of some notes and arrows. She tucked both maps into her coat, turned off the light and checked for noise through the letter box before letting herself out of the flat.

It was 4.00 by the time she reached a public car park in the nature reserve at Rannesholm. What am I doing here? she asked herself. Am I just playing a game to pass the time? She locked the car and walked down to the lake. A pair of swans was out in the middle where the wind sent ripples across the surface of the water. Rain clouds were moving in from the west. She zipped up her jacket. It was still summer, but there was an unmistakable feeling of autumn in the air. She looked back at the car park. It was empty except for Anna’s car. She tossed a few pebbles into the lake. There is a connection between Medberg and Anna, she thought. But what could they have in common? She threw another stone into the water. The only thing I can think of that links them is the fact that both of them have disappeared. The police are investigating one case, but not the other.

The rain came sooner than she had expected. Linda ducked under a tall oak tree next to the car park. Raindrops fell all around and the whole situation seemed completely idiotic. She was about to brace herself for a run through the rain to the car when she saw something glittering between the wet branches of a bush nearby. At first she thought it was a discarded beer can. She pulled one of the branches aside and saw a black tyre. She started pulling the branches away with both hands and her heart beat faster. Then she ran back to the car to get her phone. For once her father had his mobile phone with him and turned on.

“Where are you?” he said.

His voice was unusually gentle. She could tell that he was still trying to make up for the morning.

“I’m at Rannesholm Manor,” she said. “In the car park.”

“What are you doing there?”

“Dad, there’s something you need to see.”

“I can’t. We’re about to have a meeting about crazy new directives from Stockholm.”

“Skip it. Just get over here I’ve found Birgitta Medberg’s Vespa.”

She heard her father’s sharp intake of breath on the other end.

“Are you sure?”

“Yes.”

“And how did this happen?”

“I’ll tell you when you get here.”

There was a noise on the line and the connection was broken, but Linda didn’t bother calling him again. She knew he was on his way.

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# CHAPTER 15

It was raining even harder now. Linda saw something flashing through the windscreen and turned on the wipers. It was her father’s car. He parked, ducked out and jumped into the passenger seat. He was impatient, clearly in a hurry.

“Tell me.”

Linda told him about the journal. His impatience made her nervous.

“Do you have it with you?” he interrupted.

“No. Why? I’ve given you what it says word for word.”

He said no more and she continued her account. When she had finished, he sat and stared out at the rain.

“A strange story,” he said.

“You always say to watch for the unexpected.”

He nodded, then looked her over.

“Did you bring a waterproof?”

“No.”

“I have one you can borrow.”

He pushed the door open and ran back to his car. Linda was amazed to see her large, heavy-set father move so quickly, with such agility. She got out into the rain.

He was at the back of his car, putting on his gear. When he saw her, he handed her a waterproof coat that came all the way down to her ankles. Then he fished out a baseball cap with the logo of a local car-repair shop and planted it on her head. He looked up at the sky. The rain poured down his face.

“It’s Noah and the flood all over again,” he said. “I don’t remember rain like this since I was a child.”

“It rained a lot when I was young,” Linda said.

He nudged her on and she led the way over to the oak tree and pushed the bushes away so he could see. Wallander took out his mobile phone and she heard him call the police station. He grumbled when they didn’t pick up right away. Wallander read out the number plate and waited for confirmation. It was her Vespa. Wallander put the phone back in his pocket.

The rain stopped at that exact moment. It happened so fast it took them a while to register what had happened. It was like rain on a film set being turned off after the take.

“God has decided to take pity on us,” Wallander said. “You’ve found Birgitta Medberg’s Vespa.”

He looked around.

“But no Birgitta Medberg.”

Linda hesitated, then pulled out the Xerox copy of the old map that she had found in Birgitta Medberg’s flat. She regretted it as soon as she had taken it out, but it was too late.

“What’s that?”

“A map of the area.”

“Where did you find it?”

“Here on the ground.”

He took the dry piece of paper from her and gave her a searching look. Here comes the question I won’t be able to answer, she thought.

But he didn’t ask her. Instead he studied the map, looked down to the lake and the road, at the car park and the various paths that branched out from it.

“She was here,” he said. “But this is a big park.”

He studied the area right around the Vespa. Linda watched him, trying to read his mind.

Suddenly he looked at her. “What’s the first question we should be asking?”

“Whether she hid the Vespa for the long term, or was she only trying to protect it from being vandalised while she was doing her work?”

He nodded. “There’s a third alternative, of course.”

Linda understood what he was getting at. She should have thought of it right away.

“That someone else hid it.”

“Exactly.”

A dog came running out from one of the paths. It was white with little black spots. Linda couldn’t remember what that breed was called. Then another and finally a third appeared out of the forest, followed by a woman in rain gear from head to toe. She was walking briskly and put all three dogs on leads when she caught sight of Linda and Wallander. She was in her forties, tall, blonde and attractive. Linda saw her father react instinctively to the presence of a good-looking woman: he stood up straight, pulled up his head to make his throat appear less wrinkled and held in his stomach.

“Excuse me,” he said. “My name is Wallander and I’m with the Ystad police.”

The woman looked at him sceptic ally “May I see your identification?”

Wallander dug out his wallet and presented his ID card, which she studied closely.

“Has anything happened?”

“No. Do you often walk your dogs in this area?”

“Twice a day, actually.”

“You must know these paths very well.”

“Yes, I would say I do. Why?”

He ignored her last question. “Do you meet many people in the forest?”

“Not during the autumn. Spring and summer there are a fair number of people in the park, but soon it will only be dog owners who make the effort. That’s always a relief. Then I can let the dogs off the lead.”

“But aren’t they supposed to stay on the lead all year round? That’s what the sign says.”

He pointed at a sign a few feet away. She raised her eyebrows.

“Is that why you’re here? To catch people who let their dogs run loose?”

“No. There’s something I’d like to show you.”

The dogs strained on their leads while Wallander drew away some branches to reveal the Vespa.

“Have you ever seen this scooter before? It belongs to a woman in her mid-sixties by the name of Birgitta Medberg.”

The dogs wanted to pull forward and sniff it, but were firmly restrained by their owner. Her voice was steady and without hesitation.

“Yes,” she said. “I’ve seen both the Vespa and the woman. Quite a few times.”

“When did you see her last?”

She thought about it.

“Yesterday.”

Wallander threw a quick glance at Linda, who was standing to one side, listening intently.

“Are you sure?”

“No, not completely. But I think it was yesterday.”

“Why can’t you be sure?”

“I’ve seen her so often over the last few weeks.”

“The last few weeks can you be more precise?”

She thought again before answering.

“I suppose all through July, perhaps the last week of June. That was when I first saw her. She was walking on a path on the other side of the lake and we stopped and chatted for a bit. She told me she was mapping old walking trails around Rannesholm. I saw her again from time to time after that. She had many interesting things to tell. Neither I nor my husband had any idea that there were pilgrim trails on our property. We live in the manor,” she said. “My husband manages an investment fund. My name is Anita Tademan.”

She looked at the Vespa again and her expression became anxious.

“Is something wrong?”

“We don’t know. I have one more question for you. When last you saw her, which path was she on?”

Anita Tademan pointed over her shoulder.

“That one I was just on. It’s a good one when it rains because the canopy is so thick. She found a completely overgrown path in there which starts about five hundred metres into the forest next to a fallen beech. That was where I last saw her. Can’t you tell me what this is all about?”

“She may have disappeared. We’re not sure.”

“How awful .. . That nice woman.”

“Was she always on her own?” Linda said.

Wallander looked at her with surprise, but did not look angry.

“I never saw her with anyone,” Anita Tademan said. “And if that’s all your questions, I must be on my way.”

She let the dogs off their leads and started up the road to the castle. Linda and her father stood watching her for a while.

“A beauty.”

“Snobby and rich,” Linda said. “Hardly your type.”

“Never say never,” he said. “I know how to behave in polite society. Both your mother and your aunt have taught me well.”

He looked down at his watch and then up at the sky.

“We’ll go the five hundred metres and see if we find anything.”

He started down the path at a rapid pace. She followed him and had to half run to keep up. A strong scent of wet earth rose from the forest floor. The path wound around boulders and the exposed roots of old trees. They heard a pigeon fly off from a branch, and then another.

Linda was the one who spotted it. Wallander was walking so fast he hadn’t seen where a thin path forked off. She called out to him and he backtracked.

“I was counting,” she said. “This is about four hundred and fifty metres in.”

“The woman said five hundred.”

“If you don’t count every step, five hundred can feel like four or six hundred metres, depending.”

“I know how to judge distances,” he said, irritated.

They started following the new path, that was only barely visible. But both of them noted soft imprints. One pair of boots, Linda thought. One person.

The path led them deep into a part of the forest that looked untouched. They stopped at the edge of a shallow ravine that cut through the forest. Wallander crouched down and picked at the moss with his finger. They made their way carefully into the ravine. At one point Linda’s foot caught in some roots and she fell. A branch broke and sounded like a gunshot. They heard birds fly up all around them, although they couldn’t see them.

“Are you all right?”

Linda brushed the damp dirt from her clothes. “I’m fine.”

Wallander made his way through the brush and Linda followed closely. He parted a few of the branches in front of them and she saw a small hut. It was like something out of a fairy tale, the house of a witch. The shack leaned up against the rock face. A pail lay half buried in the earth outside the door. Both of them listened attentively for sounds, but there were none. Only raindrops tapping leaves.

“You wait here,” Wallander said, and walked up to the hut.

Wallander opened the door and looked in and flinched, at the same time stepping back. Linda caught up with him and pushed past him, peering into the interior. At first she didn’t know what she was looking at. Then she realised that they had found Birgitta Medberg. Or, more precisely, what remained of her.

# 

# PART 2

## The Void

# CHAPTER 16

What Linda saw through the open door, what had caused her father to flinch and stumble backwards, resembled something she had once seen as a child. The image flickered to life in her mind. She had seen it in a book Mona had inherited from her mother, the other grandmother Linda had never met. It was a large book with old-fashioned type, a book of Bible stories. She remembered the full-page illustrations, protected by a translucent sheet of tissue paper. One of the pictures depicted the scene she was now witnessing at first hand, with only one difference: in the book the picture had shown a man’s head with eyes closed, placed on a gleaming tray, a woman dancing in the background. Salome with her veils. That picture had made an almost unbearably strong impression on her.

Perhaps it was only now, when the picture had escaped from the page, her memory resurrected in the guise of a woman, that the moment of childhood horror was fully replaced. Linda stared at Birgitta Medberg’s severed head on the earth floor. Her clasped hands lay close by, but that was all. The rest of her body was missing. Linda heard her father groan in the background, then she felt his hands on her back as he dragged her away.

“Don’t look!” he shouted. “You shouldn’t see this. Turn back.”

He slammed the door shut. Linda was so scared she was shaking. She scuttled back up the side of the ravine, ripping her trousers in the process. Her father was at her heels. They ran until they reached the main path.

“What is going on?” she heard him mutter under his breath. “What’s happened?”

He called the station and raised the alarm, using code words that she knew were designed to slip under the noses of journalists and inquisitive amateurs listening in on police radio frequencies. Then they returned to the car park and waited. Fourteen minutes went by until they heard the first siren in the distance. They had said nothing to each other during their wait. Linda was shaken and wanted to be with her father, but he turned his back and walked a few steps away. Linda had trouble making sense of what she had seen. At the same time another fear was mounting, a fear that this was somehow connected with Anna. What if there is a connection? she thought despairingly. And now one of them is dead, butchered. She interrupted her train of thought and crouched down, suddenly faint. Her father looked over at her and started towards her. She forced herself to stand and shook her head at him as if to say it was nothing, a momentary weakness.

Now she was the one who turned her back. She tried to think clearly slowly, deliberately, but above all clearly. An officer who can’t think clearly cannot do her job. She had written this statement out and pinned it to the wall next to her bed. She knew she always had to keep her cool, but how was she supposed to do that when right now she felt like bursting into tears? There was no trace of calm in her mind, only terrible flashes of the severed head and the clasped hands. And even worse, the question of what had happened to Anna. She couldn’t keep new images from forming in her mind: Anna’s head, Anna’s hands. John the Baptist’s head on a platter and Anna’s hands, her head and Birgitta Medberg’s hands.

The rain had started again. Linda ran over to her father and showered his chest with blows.

“Now do you believe me? Don’t you realise something must have happened to Anna?”

Wallander grabbed her shoulders, trying to keep her at arm’s length.

“Calm down. That was the Medberg woman back there, not Anna.”

“But Anna wrote in her journal that she knew her. And now Anna is gone. Don’t you get it?”

“You have to calm down. That’s all.”

Linda slowly regained control of herself, or rather, felt a paralysis settle over her. Three, then four police cars came slipping and sliding into the muddy car park. The police officers got out and gathered around Wallander after quickly having thrown on the rain gear that they all seemed to keep stashed in the back of their cars. Linda stood outside the circle, but no-one tried to stop her when she eventually joined them. Martinsson was the only one who acknowledged her, with a nod, but even he never asked her what she was doing there. At that moment, in the rainy car park by Rannesholm Manor, Linda cut the cord to her life at the police training college. She fell in line behind the others and followed them in their long train into the forest. When a crime technician dropped a lamp stand she picked it up and carried it for him.

She stayed there while day turned into dusk and finally evening. Rain clouds came and went, the ground was saturated with moisture, the lights erected around the site casting strong shadows. The crime technicians painstakingly marked out a working path to the hut. Linda took care not to get in their way and she never put her foot down without placing it in someone else’s footprint. Sometimes her father met her gaze, but it was as if he could not really see her. Ann-Britt Hoglund was always at his side. Linda had bumped into her from time to time since coming back to Ystad, but she had never liked her. In fact she felt her father would do as well to stay away from her. Hoglund had barely greeted her today, and Linda sensed she would not be an easy person to work with, if that ever became the case. Hoglund was a detective inspector, and Linda was a rookie who hadn’t even started working as yet and who would be busy breaking up street fights until she might one day earn the opportunity to apply for a more specialised line of work.

She watched her future colleagues go about their business, noting the order and discipline that seemed always to be on the verge of giving way to sheer chaos. From time to time someone raised their voice, especially the irritable Nyberg, who often swore at his team for not watching where they put their feet. Three hours after they had arrived, the human remains were removed from the scene, enclosed in thick plastic. Everyone stopped working as they were carried away. Linda could see the contours of Birgitta Medberg’s head and hands through the plastic casing.

Then everyone resumed their work. Nyberg and his men crawled around on hands and knees; someone was sawing off branches and clearing away the underbrush, others were setting up lamps or repairing generators. People came and went, phones rang, and in the middle of all this her father stood rooted to one spot as if restrained by invisible cords. Linda felt sorry for him, he looked so lonely standing there, always available to answer a steady stream of questions, making snap decisions so that the investigation could proceed. He’s walking a tightrope, Linda thought. That’s how I see him. A nervous tightrope walker who should go on a diet and address the issue of his loneliness once and for all.

He only realised much later that she was still there. He finished talking to someone on his phone, then turned to Nyberg, who was holding out an object for him to look at. He held it in the beam of one of the strong lights that attracted insects and burned them to death. Linda took a step closer to see what it was. Nyberg handed Wallander a pair of rubber gloves that he pulled on to his big hands with some difficulty.

“What’s this?”

“If you weren’t completely blind you would see it was a Bible.”

Wallander didn’t seem to take any notice of Nyberg’s tone.

“A Bible,” Nyberg repeated. “It was on the ground next to the hands. There are bloody fingerprints. But they could belong to someone else, of course.”

“The murderer?”

“Possibly. The whole hut is spattered with blood. It was quite a gory scene. Whoever did this must have been drenched in it.”

“No weapons?”

“Nothing at this point. But this Bible is worth a closer look, even apart from the fingerprints.”

Linda drew nearer as her father put on his glasses.

“Open it to the Book of Revelations,” Nyberg said.

“I don’t know my way around this thing. Just tell me what’s in there.”

But Nyberg would not let himself be hurried.

“Who knows their Bible any more? But the Book of Revelations is an important chapter, or whatever the parts are called.”

He turned to Linda. “Do you know? In the Bible, is it called a chapter?”

Linda gave a start. “No idea.”

“You see, the young are no better than we. Whatever. The thing is that someone has written comments between the lines. See?”

Nyberg pointed to a page. Wallander held it closer to his eyes.

“I see some grey smudges. Is that what you mean?”

Nyberg called out to someone named Rosen. A man with mud up to his chest came clomping over with a magnifying glass. Wallander tried again.

“Yes, someone has been writing between the lines. What does it say?”

“I’ve made out two of the lines,” Nyberg said. “It seems as if whoever wrote in here wasn’t happy with the original. Someone has taken it upon themselves to improve on the word of God.”

Wallander removed his glasses. “What does that mean, ‘the word of God’? Can you try to be more specific?”

“I thought the Bible was the word of God. How much more specific do I have to get? I just think it’s interesting that someone should rewrite passages in the Bible. Is that something a normal person does? A person in basic possession of his or her senses?”

“A lunatic, then. But what is this hut? A place someone is living in or just hiding in?”

Nyberg shook his head. “Too early to say. But can’t they be the same thing for someone who wants to stay out of the public eye?” Nyberg gestured out to the forest, impenetrably dark beyond the spotlights. “We’ve had dogs searching the area and I think they’re still out. The units claim the terrain is all but impassable. If you needed a hide-out you couldn’t pick a better place.”

“Any clues as to who might have been using it?”

Nyberg shook his head. “There are no personal effects, no clothes. We can’t even be sure if it was a man or a woman.”

A dog started barking somewhere in the darkness as a light rain began to fall. Hoglund, Martinsson and Svartman emerged from various directions and gathered around Wallander. Linda hovered in the background, part participant, part spectator.

“Give me a scenario,” Wallander said. “What happened here? We know a repulsive murder took place but why? Who did it? Why did Medberg come here? Did she plan to meet someone? Was she even killed here? Where is the rest of the body? Tell me.”

The rain continued to fall. Nyberg sneezed. One of the spotlights went out. Nyberg kicked the light over then helped set it up again.

“A picture of what happened,” Wallander said.

“I have seen a lot of things that qualify as repulsive,” Martinsson said. “But nothing like this. Whoever did this was truly fucked up. But where the rest of the body is, or who used this hut, we don’t know yet.”

“Nyberg found a Bible,” Wallander said. “We’ll run prints on everything, of course, but it turns out someone’s written new text between the lines in the book. What does that tell us? We have to see if the Tademans ever visited this place. We may have to go door-to-door for answers. We’ll maintain an investigation with a broad front, working round the clock.”

No-one spoke.

“We have to get this lunatic,” Wallander said. “The sooner the better. I don’t know what this is, but I’m scared.”

Linda stepped into the light. It was like stepping on to the stage without having learned your lines.

“I’m scared too.”

Wet, tired faces turned to her. Only her father looked tense. He’s going to explode, she thought. But she had to do this.

“I’m scared too,” she repeated. And then she told them about Anna. She made a point of not looking at her father as she spoke. She tried to remember all the details omitting the parts about her intuitive fears and to present all the facts.

“We’ll look into it,” her father said when she had finished. His voice was ice cold.

Linda instantly regretted what she had done. I didn’t want to, she thought. I did it for Anna’s sake, not to get back at you.

“I know,” she said. “I’m going home now. There’s no reason for me to be here.”

“You found the Vespa, didn’t you?” Martinsson asked. “Isn’t that right?”

Wallander nodded and turned to Nyberg.

“Can you spare someone who can escort Linda to her car?”

“I’ll do it,” Nyberg said. “I have to use the toilet up there anyway. Can’t do my business in the forest the dogs’ noses are far too sensitive.”

Linda clambered up out of the ravine, only now realising how tired and hungry she was. Nyberg’s strong torch lit up the path for her. They ran into a dog unit on the way, the dog’s tail drooping behind him. Other lights glimmered among the trees. Night orienteering, Linda thought. Police officers hunting for clues in the dark. Nyberg muttered something unintelligible when they reached the car park, then he was gone. Linda got into her car, someone lifted the yellow tape to let her past, and she was out on the road. There were onlookers all along the road to the main road, people in parked cars waiting for something to happen, to see something. She felt as if her invisible uniform was back on. Go home! she thought. There’s a brutal murder to be solved and you’re getting in the way of our work. But then she shook the thoughts away. She wasn’t a policewoman, not quite yet.

After a while she noticed she was driving too fast and slowed down. A hare sprang out on to the road. For a brief moment his eye was frozen in her headlights. She slammed on the brakes. Her heart was beating hard. She took a few deep breaths. Lights from other cars came at her and she decided to turn into a car park. She turned off the lights first, then the engine. Darkness settled in all around her. She got out her mobile phone, but it rang before she had a chance to dial the number. It was her father. He was furious.

“Do you know what you did back there? You were telling me I didn’t know how to do my job.”

“I didn’t say anything about you,” she said. “I’m just afraid that something’s happened to Anna.”

“Don’t ever do anything like that again. Ever. If you do, I’ll make sure your stint in Ystad is over before you know it.”

She didn’t have a chance to answer. He hung up. He’s right, she thought. I didn’t think, I just started to talk. She was about to dial his number to apologise or at least explain herself, but she realised there was no point. He was still angry and it would take a couple of hours before he’d be ready to hear her out.

Linda needed to talk to someone, and she dialled Zeba’s number. The line was busy. She counted slowly to 50 and dialled again. Still busy. Then without knowing why, she dialled Anna’s number. Busy. Linda was startled and tried again. Still busy. She breathed a sigh of relief. Anna’s back, she thought. She started the engine, turned on the headlights and swung out on to the road. Good God, she thought. I’ll have to tell her everything that happened just because she didn’t turn up that night.

# 

# CHAPTER 17

Linda got out of the car and stared up at the windows of Anna’s flat. They were dark. Her fear returned; the phone had been busy. Linda called Zeba again. She answered right away, as if she had been waiting by the phone. Linda talked in a hurry, stumbling over her words.

“It’s me. Were you talking to Anna just now?”

“No.”

“Are you sure?”

“Of course I’m sure! Have you been trying to call? I was explaining to my brother why I’m not going to lend him any money. He’s a spendthrift. I have four thousand kronor in the bank and that’s the extent of my fortune. He wants to borrow the whole lot to buy a share in a trucking venture involving cargo transports to Bulgaria .. .”

“To hell with him,” Linda interrupted. “Anna’s vanished. She’s never stood me up before.”

“Well, there has to be a first time.”

“That’s what my father says, but Anna’s been gone for three days.”

“Maybe she’s in Lund.”

“No. It doesn’t even matter where she is. It’s just not like her to be gone like this. Has she ever done this to you not been on time for a date or not been at home when she had invited you over?”

Zeba thought it over. “Actually, no.” See.

“Why are you so worked up over this?”

Linda almost told her about the severed head and hands. But that would mean breaking her professional code.

“I don’t know. You’re right I’m worked up over nothing.”

“Come over.”

“I don’t have time.”

“I think you’re going crazy with all this free time on your hands. But I have something for you, a mystery that needs solving.” “What is it?”

“A door I can’t get to open.” “Can’t do it, sorry. Call the property manager.” “You need to slow down.” “I will. See you.”

Linda rang the doorbell in the hope that the windows were dark because Anna was asleep. But the flat was empty still and the bed untouched. Linda looked at the phone. The receiver was in place and the message light wasn’t blinking. She sat down and turned over in her mind everything that had happened in the last three days. Every time an image of the severed head flashed through her mind she felt ill. Or were the hands worse? What kind of a maniac cut off a person’s hand? Cutting off a person’s head was a way to kill them, but their hands … She wondered if the medical people would be able to determine if Birgitta Medberg’s hands had been cut off before or after she died. And where was the rest of the body? Suddenly her nausea got the better of her. She only just made it to the lavatory before she has sick. Afterwards she lay on the bathroom floor. A little yellow rubber duck was stuck under the bathtub. Linda stretched out her hand to touch it, remembering when Anna had got the duck.

It had been a long time ago. They had been maybe twelve. She couldn’t remember whose idea it was, but between them they had decided to go to Copenhagen together. It was spring and they were bored and restless at school. They covered for each other when one of them cut class, which happened more and more frequently. Mona had given her permission, but her father wouldn’t hear of it. She heard him describe Copenhagen as a den of sin and iniquity, a beast waiting to consume two very young girls who knew nothing about life. In the end Anna and Linda had gone anyway. Linda knew there would be trouble waiting for her when she returned, so as a kind of advance revenge she lifted 100 kronor from her father’s wallet before she left. They took the train to Malmo and the ferry to Copenhagen. To Linda it seemed like their first serious excursion into the adult world.

It had been breezy but sunny, a happy, giggly day. Anna won the rubber duck at an amusement stand at the Tivoli and at first all of their experiences were transparent, joyous ones. They had their freedom and their adventure. Invisible walls fell down around them wherever they went. Then the image darkened. Something happened that day that was the first real blow to their friendship. We were sitting on a green bench, Linda remembered. Anna had been borrowing money from me all day because she was broke. She had to go to the toilet and asked me to hold her handbag. Somewhere in the background a Tivoli orchestra was playing. The trumpet was out of tune.

Linda was thinking of all this lying on the bathroom floor. The warmth from the heating system under the tiled floor felt good against her back.

It was a green bench and a black bag. After all these years she couldn’t say what had made her open the handbag. There had been two crisp 100-kronor notes inside, not even crumpled or hidden within a secret compartment. She had stared at the money and felt a stab of betrayal. She closed the bag and decided she wouldn’t say anything, but when Anna came back and asked if Linda would buy her a Coke, something exploded inside her. They stood there shouting at each other. Linda had forgotten what Anna had said in her defence, but they had gone their separate ways and had sat apart on the return ferry to Malmo. It took them a long time to start speaking to each other again. They never talked about what had happened in Copenhagen, but they did eventually manage to resume their friendship.

Linda sat up. There are lies at the heart of this, she thought. I’m sure Henrietta concealed something from me when I was there, and I know Anna is capable of lying. I discovered that in Copenhagen and I’ve found her out on later occasions as well. But with her at least I know her so well that I can tell when she is telling the truth. The story she told me about seeing her father or a doppelganger in Malmo is true. But what’s behind all this? What didn’t she tell me? Sometimes the part that’s left out is the biggest part of the lie.

Her mobile phone rang. She knew it was her father. She got to her feet to be well balanced in case he was still angry, but his voice only told her that he was tense and tired. Her father had more voices than other people had, it seemed to her.

“Where are you?” he said.

“In Anna’s flat.”

She could hear that he was still in the forest. There were voices of people walking past, the scrape of walkie-talkies and a dog barking sharply.

“What are you doing there?” he said after a while.

“I’m more afraid now than I was before.”

To her surprise he said: “I know. That’s why I’m calling. I’m on my way over. I need to hear about this in more detail. There’s no reason for you to worry, of course, but I’m taking this matter seriously now.”

“How could I not worry? It’s not natural for her to be gone like this, that’s what I’ve been trying to tell you all along. If you don’t understand that, then you can’t possibly know why I’m afraid. Also, her phone line was busy, but then when I got here she wasn’t in. Someone was here, I’m sure of it.”

“I’ll get the whole story when I get there. What’s the address?”

Linda gave it to him.

“How’s it going there?” she said.

“I’ve never seen anything like this.”

“Have you found the body?”

“Not yet. We haven’t found anything at all, least of all a clue to what happened here. I’ll sound the horn when I arrive.”

Linda stood over the sink and rinsed her mouth. To get rid of the taste, she brushed her teeth with one of Anna’s toothbrushes. She was about to leave the bathroom when, on a whim, she opened the cabinet above the sink. What she saw surprised her. This is just like leaving the journal behind, she thought.

Anna from time to time suffered from eczema on her throat. She had spoken of it only a few weeks earlier when they were at Zeba’s place, talking about their dream holidays. Anna had said that the first thing she would pack was the prescription-strength cream that kept her eczema under control. Linda remembered her saying that she bought this cream only one tube at a time so as to have it as fresh as possible. And yet here it was, among the bottles and toothbrushes on the shelf. Anna had a thing about toothbrushes. Linda counted 19 in the cabinet, eleven of them unused. She looked at the cream again. Anna would not have left this behind, Linda thought. Not willingly. Neither this cream nor her journal. She closed the cabinet and went into the living room. So what could have happened? There was no indication that Anna had been removed by force, at least not in the flat itself. Perhaps something had happened on the street. She could have been knocked over or forced into a car.

Linda stood at the window and waited for her father. She was tired and she felt cheated. She had had no preparation for this day’s discoveries during her time at the college. She had not dreamed that she would ever find herself confronting a severed grey-haired, female head, or a pair of clasped hands cut off at the wrists.

Not simply clasped, she thought. Hands knitted together in prayer before they were cut. She shook her head. What was going on in those last moments, in the dramatic pause while the axe was raised above those hands? What was Birgitta Medberg seeing? Had she looked into another’s eyes and understood what would happen? Or had she been spared that hideous knowledge? Linda stared at a street lamp swaying in the wind. She sensed what must have happened: the hands were clasped together pleading for mercy. The executioner denies the plea. She must have known, Linda thought. She knew what was coming and she pleaded for her life.

Headlights lit up the facade of the building. Her father parked the car, then got out and looked around for the right entrance until he saw Linda in the window gesturing to him. She threw the keys down to the street and heard him come up the stairs. He’s going to wake up every last neighbour, she thought. I have a father who thunders through life like an infantry platoon. He was sweat-stained and tired, his clothes wet through.

“Is there anything to eat?” “I think so.”

“And a towel?”

“The bathroom is over there. There are towels on the bottom shelf.”

When he came back to the kitchen he had taken off all his clothes except his vest and pants. The wet clothes were hanging on the hot pipes in the bathroom. Linda had set the table with all the food she could find in the refrigerator. She knew he wanted to eat in peace. When she had been growing up, it had been forbidden to talk or make noise around the table at breakfast. His silence had driven Mona up the wall she always waited until after he had left for work before she had her breakfast. But Linda had often sat there sharing the silence with him. Sometimes he lowered the paper, usually the Ystad Allehanda, and winked at her. Silence at breakfast was sacred.

“I should never have brought you along,” he said suddenly, a sandwich halfway to his mouth. “There’s no excuse for it. You should never have had to see what was in that hut.”

“How is it going?”

“It isn’t going anywhere. We have no clues, no explanation for what happened.”

“But what about the rest of the body?”

“There’s no sign of it. The dogs can’t pick up a scent. We know that Birgitta Medberg was mapping trails in that part of the forest, so it seems reasonable to assume she came up on the hut by accident. But who was hiding there? Why this murder, why mutilate the body and dispose of it in this way?”

Wallander finished the sandwich, made a new one and left it half eaten.

“So tell me. Anna Westin, this friend of yours, what does she do? She’s a student but of what exactly?”

“Medicine. You know that.”

“I never rely on my memory. You had arranged to meet her, you said. Was that here?”

“Yes.”

“And she wasn’t here when you arrived?”

“Correct.”

“Is there any possibility of a misunderstanding?”

“No.”

“Tell me the part about her father again. He’s been gone for twenty four years and has never once in any way communicated with her. And then she’s in a hotel in Malmo and she sees him through a window,

right?”

Linda told him everything again in as much detail as she could muster. He was quiet when she finished.

have one person who turns up after having been missing,” he said finally. “And the following day the person who saw that person goes missing herself. One appears, the other one disappears.”

He shook his head. Linda told him about the journal and the eczema cream. And about her visit to Henrietta. He listened attentively to everything.

“What makes you think she was lying?” “If Anna thought she regularly saw her father, she would have told me long before now.”

“How can you be so sure?”

“I know her.”

“People change. You can never know everything about people, even friends.”

“Is that true of me too?”

“Of me, of you, your mother, Anna, everyone. Then, of course, there are people who are totally incomprehensible. My father was an outstanding example of the latter.” “I knew him.” “You think you did.”

“Just because the two of you didn’t get along doesn’t mean I felt the same way. And we were talking about Anna.” “I gather you didn’t report her missing.” “I followed your advice.” “For once.”

“Oh shit, give me a break.” “Show me the journal.”

Linda went to get it, and opened it to the page where Anna wrote about the letter from Birgitta Medberg.

“Did she ever mention her name to you?” Wallander said. “Not that I can remember.”

“Did you ask her mother if she had any connection to Birgitta Medberg?”

“I saw Henrietta before I knew about this.”

Wallander went to the bathroom to get his notepad from his jacket.

“I’ll have someone talk to her again tomorrow.”

“I can do it.”

Wallander sat down. “No,” he said sternly. “You can’t do it. You’re not a police officer yet. I’ll get Svartman or someone else to do it. You aren’t going to be doing any more investigating on your own.”

“Do you always have to sound so pissed off?”

“I’m not pissed off, I’m tired. And worried. I don’t know why what happened in that hut happened, only that it was horrifying. And I don’t know if it marks an end or a beginning.” He looked at his watch and got up again.

“I have to go back there,” he said.

Then he stopped in the middle of the kitchen, undecided.

“I find it hard to believe it was a coincidence,” he said. “That the Medberg woman by pure misfortune ran into the wicked witch who lives in the gingerbread house. I can’t see that you’d get murdered for knocking on the wrong door. There are no monsters in Swedish forests. No trolls even. She should have stuck to butterflies.”

Wallander walked back to the bathroom and put on his clothes. Linda tagged along. What was it he had said? The door to the bathroom was slightly ajar.

“What did you just say?”

“That no monsters live in Swedish forests?”

“After that.”

“I didn’t.”

“You did. After the monsters and trolls, the last thing?”

“She should have stuck to butterflies and not started in on mapping ancient trails.”

“Why butterflies?”

“Hoglund talked to the daughter someone had to inform the relatives. The daughter said Medberg had had a large butterfly collection. She sold it a few years ago to help Vanya and her children buy a flat. Vanya always felt guilty about it because she thought her mother missed the butterflies. People often have these kinds of reactions when someone dies. I was the same way when Dad died. I could start crying at the thought of how he wore unmatching socks.”

Linda held her breath. He noticed something was up.

“What is it?”

“Come with me.”

They went into the living room. Linda turned on a lamp and pointed to the wall.

“I’ve tried to keep an eye out for things that are different, I’ve already told you that. But I forgot to say that something was taken.”

“What?”

“A butterfly case. You know, a butterfly in a frame. It disappeared the day after Anna went missing.”

Wallander frowned. “Can you be sure?”

“Yes,” she said. “And that the butterfly was blue.”

# 

# CHAPTER 18

It seemed to Linda that it took a blue butterfly to convince her father to take her seriously. She wasn’t just a kid any more, not just an officer-in-training with potential, but a fully-grown adult with judgment and keen powers of observation.

She was sure of herself. The butterfly in a frame had been removed at the same time as or shortly after Anna’s disappearance. That settled it. Wallander called his team in the field and asked Hoglund to come to the flat. He asked how things were going at the crime scene. Linda heard Nyberg’s irritated voice in the background, then Martinsson, who was sneezing violently, and finally Lisa Holgersson, the Chief of Police. Wallander put the phone down.

“I want Ann-Britt to be here,” he said. “I’m so tired I’m not sure I can trust my own judgment any more. Are you positive you have told me all the relevant facts?”

“I think so.”

Wallander shook his head.

“It seems too much of a coincidence.”

“A day or so ago you said one always has to be prepared for the unexpected.”

“I talk a lot of crap,” he said. “Is there any coffee in the house?”

The water had just boiled when Hoglund sounded her horn on the street below.

“She drives much too fast,” Wallander said. “She has two young children what is she thinking of? Throw her the keys, will you?”

Hoglund caught the keys in one hand and walked briskly up the stairs. Linda noted that she had a hole in her sock but that her face was made up heavily made up. When did she have time to do that? Did she sleep with her make-up on?

“Would you like some coffee?”

“Please.”

Linda thought her father would be the one to talk, but when she came in with the coffee cup and put it on the table in front of Hoglund, Wallander nodded at her to begin.

“It’s better for her to hear it from the horse’s mouth,” he said. “Don’t leave out any details, you can count on Hoglund to be a good listener.”

Linda picked up her story with both hands and unfolded it as carefully as she was able; all in the right order. Then she showed Hoglund the journal with the page that mentioned Medberg. Wallander broke in only when she started talking about the butterfly. Then he took over, changing her story to something that would perhaps form the basis of an investigative narrative. He got up from the sofa and tapped the wall where the butterfly had been.

“This is where the lines meet,” he said. “Two points, perhaps three. Medberg’s name is in Anna’s journal, and she wrote Anna at least one letter, although we haven’t found it. Butterflies figure in both of their lives, although we don’t yet know what the significance of this is. And then there is the most important point in common: they have both been missing.”

Someone cried out down on the street, a drunk man who was speaking Polish or Russian.

“It’s certainly a strange coincidence,” Hoglund said. “Who knows Anna best?”

“Difficult to say.”

“Does she have a boyfriend?”

“Not right now.”

“But she’s had one?”

“Doesn’t everyone? I think probably her mother knows her best.”

Hoglund yawned and ruffled her hair.

“What about all this business with her father? Why did he leave home? Had he done something?”

“Anna’s mother seems to think he was running away.”

“From what?”

“Responsibility.”

“And now he’s back and Anna disappears. And Medberg is murdered.”

“No,” Wallander broke in, “not murdered. That isn’t an adequate description of it. She was slaughtered, butchered. Hands clasped as in prayer, head severed, torso and limbs missing. Martinsson has found his way to the Tademans, by the way. Herr Tademan was very intoxicated, according to Martinsson, which is interesting. Fru Tademan -whom Linda and I met seems to have been much easier to talk to. They haven’t seen any unusual persons in the area, apparently no-one knew about the hide-out in the forest. She called someone she knows who rough-shoots around there, but he hadn’t seen any hut or even the ravine, strangely enough. Whoever used the place knew how to keep a low profile while still relatively close to people.”

“Close to what or whom?”

“We don’t know.”

“We’ll have to start with the mother,” Hoglund said. “Should we call her right now or wait until morning?”

“Wait until morning,” Wallander said after hesitating. “We have our hands full right now as it is.”

Linda felt her face flush. “What if anything happens to Anna in the meantime?”

“What if her mother forgets to tell us something important because we get her out of bed in the middle of the night? We’ll scare her half to death.”

He walked to the door.

“That’s how it’s going to be. Go home and get some sleep. But you’ll be coming with us to see Anna’s mother tomorrow morning.”

Hoglund and Wallander put on their boots and rain gear and left. Linda watched them from the window. The wind was blowing harder, coming in strong gusts from the east and south. She washed the cups and thought about the fact that she needed to sleep. But how was she supposed to do that? Anna was gone, Henrietta had lied, Birgitta Medberg’s name was inscribed in the journal. Linda started to look through the flat again. Why couldn’t she find Medberg’s letter?

She searched more energetically this time, pulling bookshelves away from the wall and backings from paintings to make sure nothing was hidden inside them. She continued with this until the doorbell rang. Linda stopped. It was after 1.00. Who rang a doorbell in the middle of the night? She opened the door and found a man outside, in thick glasses, brown dressing gown and pink, worn slippers on his feet. He said his name was August Brogren.

“There’s a great deal of noise coming from this flat,” he said angrily. “Be so kind, Miss Westin, as to keep it down.”

“I’m sorry,” Linda said. “I’ll be quiet from now on.”

August Brogren took a step closer.

“You don’t sound like Miss Westin,” he said. “In fact you aren’t Miss Westin at all. Who are you?”

“A friend.”

“When one has bad eyesight one learns to differentiate people’s voices,” Brogren explained sternly. “Miss Westin has a gentle voice, but yours is hard and rasping. It is like the difference between soft white bread and hard tack.”

Brogren fumbled his way back to the handrail of the staircase and started back down. Linda thought about Anna’s voice and understood Brogren’s description. She closed the door and got ready to leave. Suddenly she was close to tears. Anna is dead, she thought. But then she shook her head. She didn’t want to believe that, didn’t want to imagine a world without Anna. She laid the car keys on the kitchen table, locked the door and walked home through the deserted streets. When she got home she wrapped herself in a blanket and curled up on her bed.

Linda woke with a start. The hands on the alarm clock glowed in the dark and showed 2.45 a.m. She had hardly been asleep an hour. What had caused her to wake up? She had dreamed something, sensed a danger approaching from afar like an invisible bird diving soundlessly towards her head. A bird with a beak as sharp as a razor. The bird had woken her.

Even though she had slept so briefly she felt clear-headed. She thought about the investigators still out at the crime scene, people moving back and forth in the strong spotlights, insects swarming in the light beams and burning themselves on the bulbs. It seemed to her that she had woken up because she didn’t have time to sleep. Was Anna calling out to her? She listened, but the voice was gone. Had it been there in her dreams? She looked at the time. It was now 2.57. Anna called out to me, she thought again. And she knew what she was going to do. She put on her shoes, took her coat and ran down the stairs.

The car keys were still lying on Anna’s kitchen table. In order to avoid having to pick the lock every time, she had pocketed a spare set of keys to the flat usually stored in a box in the hallway. As she drove out of town it was 3.20. She swung north and ended up parking on a small overgrown track that lay out of sight of Henrietta’s house. Stepping out of the car she listened for any noise, then gently closed the door. It was chilly. She pulled her coat tightly around her body and chastised herself for not having brought a torch.

She started along the track, taking care not to trip. She didn’t know exactly what she was planning to do, but Anna had called out to her and she felt compelled to respond. She followed the dirt track until she came to the path leading to the back of Henrietta’s house. Three windows were lit. The living room, she thought. Henrietta is still up although she could have gone to bed and left the lights on.

Linda walked towards the light, cutting a wide swath around a rusty harrow, and getting closer to the garden. She stopped and listened. Was Henrietta in the middle of composing? She made it to the fence and climbed over it. The dog, she thought. Henrietta’s dog. What am I going to do if it starts barking? And what am I doing out here in the first place? Dad, Hoglund and I are coming back here in a few hours. What do I think I can find out on my own now? But it wasn’t really about that. It was about waking up from a nightmare that seemed like a cry for help from a friend.

She approached the lighted windows pace by watchful pace, then stopped short. Voices. At first she could not determine where they were coming from, then she saw that one of the windows was pushed open. Anna’s neighbour had said that her voice was gentle. But this wasn’t Anna’s voice, it was Henrietta’s. Henrietta and a man. Linda listened, trying to will her ears to send out invisible antennae. She walked even closer and was now able to see in through the glass. Henrietta sat in profile, the man was on the sofa with his back to the window. Linda couldn’t hear what the man was saying. Henrietta was talking about a composition, something about twelve violins and a lone cello, something about a last communion and apostolic music. Linda didn’t understand what she meant. She tried to be absolutely quiet. The dog was in there somewhere. She tried to work out who Henrietta was talking to, and why they were talking in the middle of the night.

Suddenly, very slowly, Henrietta turned her head and looked straight at the window. Linda jumped. It seemed like Henrietta was looking directly into her eyes. She can’t have seen me, Linda thought. It’s impossible. But there was something about her gaze that frightened her. She turned and ran, accidentally stepping on the edge of the water pump, causing a clang from within the pump structure. The dog started to bark.

Linda ran back the way she had come. She tripped and fell, got up and stumbled on. She heard a door open somewhere behind her as she threw herself over the fence and ran down the path, aiming to make her way back to the car. At some point she made a wrong turn. She was lost. She stopped, gasping for air, and listened. Henrietta had not set the dog loose. It would have found her by now. She listened. There was no sound of pursuit, but she was still so frightened she was shaking. After a while she began making her way cautiously back to the path, but she couldn’t see where she was going because it was so dark. The darkness alarmed her, making shadows into trees and trees into shadows. She stumbled and fell.

When she stood up, she felt a searing pain in her left leg. She felt she had been stabbed with a knife. She screamed and tried to get away from the pain, but she couldn’t move. It was as if an animal had sunk its teeth into her, except that this animal didn’t breathe or make any noise. Linda groped down her leg until her hand hit something cold and metallic connected to a chain. Then she understood. She was caught in a hunter’s trap.

Her hand was wet with blood. She continued to cry out, but no-one heard her, no-one came.

# 

# CHAPTER 19

Linda tried to free herself from the trap. She didn’t remotely like the idea of calling her father, but the trap was impossible to budge. She took out her mobile and dialled his number. She explained that she needed help and where she was.

“What’s happened?”

“I’m caught in a trap.”

“What on earth are you talking about?”

“I have a steel trap cutting into my leg.”

“I’m on my way.”

Linda waited, shivering. It seemed an eternity before she saw the headlights from a car in the distance. She heard the car stop. Linda called out. And then the sounds of doors opening and the dog barking. She called and called. They walked over in the first light of morning, a torch lighting their way. Her father, Henrietta and the dog. There was a third person with them, but he hung back.

“You’re caught in an old fox trap. Who is responsible for putting this here?”

“Not me,” Henrietta said. “It must be the man who owns the land around here.”

“We’ll have a word with him.” Wallander forced the trap open. “We’d better get you to the hospital,” he said.

Linda tried to put some weight on the foot. It hurt, but she was able to steady herself with it. The man in the shadows now came closer.

“This is a colleague you haven’t met yet,” Wallander said. “Stefan Lindman. He started with us a couple of weeks ago.”

Linda looked at him. His face was partly lit by the torch and she liked what she saw.

“What are you doing here?” Henrietta asked.

“I can explain,” Lindman said.

He spoke with some kind of dialect. But which was it? She asked her father later when they were driving back to Ystad.

“He’s from western Gotaland,” Wallander said. “A strange language. They have trouble commanding respect, as do people from eastern Gotaland and the island of Gotland. The ones who command the most respect are northerners, apparently. I don’t know why.”

“How is he going to account for me being out there tonight?”

“He’ll think of something. But maybe you can tell me yourself what you thought you were doing.”

“I had a dream about Anna.”

“What sort of dream?”

“She called out to me. I woke up and came here. I didn’t know what I was planning to do. I saw Henrietta inside talking to a man. Then she looked over in my direction and I ran and then I got caught in that trap.”

“At least I know you’re not sneaking out for private assignations.”

“This is serious, don’t you understand?” she screamed. “Anna is missing!”

“Of course I take it seriously. I take her disappearance seriously. I take my whole life and yours seriously. The butterfly was the clincher.”

“What are you doing about it?”

“Everything that can and should be done. We’re turning every stone, chasing every lead. And now we’re not going to discuss this further until we’ve had your leg checked out at the hospital.”

It was an hour before anyone could deal with her. Wallander dozed in an uncomfortable chair. And the process of cleaning the wound and bandaging it seemed to take for ever. As they were leaving at last, Lindman walked in. Linda saw now that he had closely cropped hair and blue eyes.

“I said that you had terrible night vision,” he said cheerfully. “It doesn’t make a lot of sense, but it will have to do as an explanation for what you were doing out there.”

“I saw a man in the house with her,” Linda said.

“Fru Westin told me she had a visit from a man who wants her to set music to his dramatic verse. It was late, to be sure, but it didn’t sound a suspicious or unsatisfactory explanation.”

Linda put her jacket on against the morning cold. She regretted having yelled at her father in the car. It was a sign of weakness. Never scream, always keep your cool. But she had done something stupid and had needed to turn the attention to someone else’s shortcomings. She also felt a huge wave of relief. Anna’s being missing was no longer a figment of her imagination. A blue butterfly made all the difference. The price was a painful ache in her leg.

“Stefan will take you home. I have to get back to the station.”

Linda went into the ladies’ room and combed her hair. Lindman was waiting for her in the corridor. He was wearing a black leather jacket and was sloppily shaven on one side of his face. She chose to walk on his good side.

“How does it feel?”

“What do you think?”

“It must hurt. I know something about that.”

“What do you mean?”

“Pain.”

“You have had your leg caught in a bear trap?”

“A fox trap. No, I haven’t.”

“Then you don’t know how it feels.”

He held the door open for her. She was still put off by his unshaven cheek and didn’t say anything else. They came out into a car park at the back of the hospital. It was broad daylight. He pointed to a rusty Ford. As he was unlocking the door an ambulance driver came over and demanded to know what he meant by blocking the emergency entrance.

“I came to pick up a wounded police officer,” Lindman said, nodding in Linda’s direction.

The ambulance driver accepted this and left. Linda manoeuvred herself into the passenger seat.

“Your dad said you live on Mariagatan. Where is that?”

Linda explained, and wondered about the strong smell in the car.

“It’s paint,” Lindman said. “I’m renovating a house in Knickarp.”

They turned on to Mariagatan and Linda pointed out her doorway. He opened the pass anger door for her.

“It was nice to meet you,” he said. “By the way, how I know what it’s like to be in pain is that I’ve had cancer. Steel trap or a tumour -it’s much the same thing.”

Linda watched his car drive off. She had forgotten his last name.

She let herself into the flat and felt fatigue set in. She was about to collapse on to the sofa when the phone rang.

“I heard you made it home.” It was her father.

“Who was the man who drove me home?”

“Stefan.”

“No his last name.”

“Lindman. He’s from Boras, I think. Or else it was Skovde. It’s time you were resting.”

“I want to know what Henrietta said to you.”

“I don’t have time to go into that right now.”

“You have to. Just tell me the important bits.”

“Wait a minute.”

He broke off. Linda guessed he was on his way out of the station. She heard doors closing, phones ringing, and then the sound of an engine starting up.

He came back on the line, his voice tense. “Are you there?”

“I’m here.”

“OK, I’ll make this quick. She doesn’t know where Anna is. She hasn’t heard from her recently. Knows nothing to suggest that Anna is depressed. Anna has apparently not said anything about seeing her father. On the other hand, Henrietta claims that this happened all the time during Anna’s childhood. So it’s the mother’s word against yours. She can’t give us any leads, nor does she know anything of Medberg. So, as you see, not very productive.”

“Did you notice that she was lying?”

“How would I have noticed that?”

“You always say that all you have to do is breathe on someone to know if they’re telling the truth or not.”

“I didn’t have the impression that she was lying.”

“She was lying.”

“I have to go now. But Lindman the one who gave you the lift -is working on the connection between Medberg and Anna. We’ve sent out missing-persons reports on her. That’s all we can do for the moment.”

He hung up. Linda didn’t feel like being alone so she called Zeba. She was in luck: Zeba’s son was at her cousin Titchka’s house and she was free to come over.

“Buy some breakfast on the way,” Linda said. “I’m starving. The Chinese restaurant by Runnerstromstorg, for example. I know it’s out of your way, but I’ll make it up to you the next time you find yourself caught in a fox trap.”

Linda told Zeba what had happened. Zeba had heard the news on the radio about the head which had been found, but she did not believe that anything bad had happened to Anna.

“Even if I were a professional villain I’d think twice before picking on Anna. Don’t you know she did martial-arts courses? I don’t remember which kind, but I think it’s the one where everything is allowed short of killing someone, of course. No-one messes with Anna and gets away with it.”

Linda regretted having said anything to Zeba, but she was glad that she had come. Zeba stayed another hour before it was time to pick up her son.

Linda woke up when the doorbell rang. At first she was going to ignore it, but then she changed her mind and limped out into the hallway. Stefan Lindman was standing outside the door.

“I’m sorry if I woke you.”

“I wasn’t sleeping.”

Then she looked at herself in the hall mirror. Her hair was standing on end.

“Actually I was sleeping,” she said. “I don’t know why I said that. My leg hurts.”

“I need the keys to Anna Westin’s flat,” he said. “I heard you tell your father you had a spare set.”

“I’ll come along.”

He seemed surprised by this. “I thought you were in pain?”

“I thought that too. What are you going to do over there?”

“Try to create a picture for myself.”

“If it’s a picture of Anna, then I’m the person you should be talking to.”

“I’d like to have a look by myself first. Then we can talk.”

Linda pointed to a set of keys on a table. The key ring had a profile of an Egyptian pharaoh.

“What was that you said about your having cancer?” she asked.

“I had cancer of the tongue, if you can believe it. Things looked bad for a while, but I survived and there’s been no recurrence.”

He looked her in the eye for the first time.

“I still have my tongue. I wouldn’t be able to speak without it! But my hair has never recovered. Soon it’ll all be gone.”

He walked away down the stairs and Linda returned to bed. Cancer of the tongue. She shuddered at the thought. Her fear of death came and went, though right now her life force was strong. But she had never forgotten what went through her mind when she balanced on the railing of the bridge. Life wasn’t just something that took care of itself. There were big black holes you could fall into with long, sharp spikes at the bottom, monstrous traps.

She turned over on her side and tried to sleep. Right now she didn’t have the energy to think about black holes. Then she was startled out of her half-awake state. It was something to do with Lindman. She sat up. She had finally caught hold of the thought that had been bugging her. She dialled a number on her mobile phone. Busy. On the third try her father answered.

“It’s me.”

“How do you feel?”

“Better. There was something I wanted to ask about the man who was at Henrietta’s house tonight. The one who was said to be commissioning a composition. Did she say what he looked like?”

“Why would I have asked her that? She only gave me his name. I made a note of the address. Why?”

“Do me a favour. Call her and ask about his hair.”

“Why would I do that?”

“Because that’s what I saw.”

“I will, but I really don’t have the time for this. We’re up to our knees in rain over here.”

“Will you call back?”

“If I reach her.”

Twenty minutes later her phone rang.

“Peter Stigstrom the man who wants Henrietta to set his verse to music has shoulder-length dark hair with a few grey streaks. Will that do?”

“That will do just fine.”

“Are you going to explain yourself now or when I get home?”

“That depends on when you were planning to come home.”

“Pretty soon. I have to get out of these clothes.”

“Do you want something to eat?”

“No, we’ve been catered for out here in fact. There are some enterprising types from Kosovo who make a living putting up food stands around crime scenes and fires. I have no idea how they hear about our work, but there’s probably a mole at the station who gets a commission. I’ll be home in an hour.”

When the conversation was over, Linda sat looking down at the phone for a few minutes. The man she had seen through the window had not had shoulder-length dark hair with a few grey streaks. His hair had been short, neatly trimmed.

# 

# CHAPTER 20

Wallander came bounding in, his clothes again soaked, his boots filthy with mud, but with the cheerful news that the weather would very soon clear up. Nyberg had called air-traffic-control at Sturup, he said, and received the report that the next 48 hours would be free of rain. Wallander changed, declined Linda’s offers of food and made himself an omelette.

Linda waited for the right moment to tell him about the conflicting descriptions of Henrietta’s visitor. She didn’t know exactly why she was waiting. Was it a lingering childhood fear of his temper? She didn’t know, she just waited. And then, when he pushed away his plate and she plopped into the chair across from him and was about to launch into her story, he started talking.

“I’ve been thinking about your grandfather,” he said.

“What about him?”

“What he was like, what he wasn’t like. I think you and I knew him in different ways. That’s as it should be. I was always looking for bits of myself in him, worried about what I would find. I’ve grown more like him the older I get. If I live as long as he did, maybe I’ll find myself a ramshackle, leaky house and start painting pictures of grouse and sunsets.”

“It’ll never happen.”

“Don’t be too sure.”

Linda broke in and told him about the man she had seen whose close-cropped head didn’t match Henrietta’s description. He didn’t ask her if she was sure of what she had seen. He had known from the start that she was sure. He reached for the phone and dialled a number from memory first incorrectly, then getting it right. Lindman answered. Wallander told him succinctly that in the light of what Linda had observed, they had to make another visit to Henrietta Westin.

“We have no time for lies,” he said. “No lies, no half-truths, no incomplete answers.”

Then he put the phone down and said to Linda: “This is unorthodox at best. Not even necessary, strictly speaking, but I’m still going to ask you to come along. If you feel up to it, that is.”

Linda felt a surge of pleasure.

“I’ll do it.”

“How’s the leg?”

“It’s fine.”

She saw that he didn’t believe her.

“Does Henrietta know why I was there last night?” she asked. “She can hardly have believed what Stefan told her.”

“All we want to know is who was there with her. We have a witness, we don’t have to tell her it’s you.”

They walked down to the street and waited for Lindman. The air-traffic controllers had been right, the weather was changing. Drier winds were blowing in from the south.

“When will it snow?” Linda asked.

He looked at her in amusement.

“Not for a while, I hope. Why do you ask?”

“Though I was born and raised here, I can’t remember when it comes.”

Stefan Lindman pulled up in his car. Linda climbed into the back seat, her father sat in the front. His seat belt was snagged on something and he had trouble getting it on.

They drove towards Malmo and Linda saw the sea shimmering on her left. I don’t want to die here, she thought. The thought came out of nowhere. I don’t only want to exist here. Or be like Zeba. Or be a single mother like her, or thousands of others whose lives become one long damned struggle to pay the rent and the babysitters and to get there on time. I don’t want to be like Dad, who can never find the right house and the right dog and the wife he needs.

“What was that?” Wallander said.

“Nothing.”

“That’s funny. I could have sworn you were swearing.”

“I didn’t say anything.”

“I have a strange daughter,” Wallander said to Lindman. “She curses without even knowing it.”

They turned on to the road to Henrietta’s house. The memory of being caught in the trap made Linda’s leg throb. She asked what would happen to the man who had set the trap.

“He went a little pale when I told him he had snared a police cadet. I assume he’ll have a hefty fine to pay.”

“I have a good friend in Ostersund,” Lindman said. “A policeman. Giuseppe Larsson is his name .. .”

“He sounds Italian.”

“He’s from Ostersund, but he has a connection of sorts with an Italian lounge singer.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?” Linda leaned forward between the seats. She had a sudden urge to touch Lindman’s face.

“His mother had a dream that his father was not her husband but an Italian singer she had heard perform at an outdoor concert. It’s not just us men who have these fantasies.”

“I wonder if Mona has ever had the same thoughts,” Wallander said. “In your case it would be a black dream-father, Linda, since she worshipped Hosh White.”

“Josh,” Lindman said. “Not Hosh.”

Linda wondered vaguely what it might have been like to have a black father.

“Anyway,” Lindman said. “This Larsson has an old bear trap on the wall at his place. It looks like an instrument of torture from the Middle Ages. He says that if a human got caught in one the steel teeth would cut all the way through the bone. Animals that get trapped in them have been known to gnaw their own legs off in desperation.”

Lindman stopped the car and they climbed out. The wind was gusty. They walked up to the house, in which several of the windows were lit up. When they entered the front garden all three of them wondered why the dog hadn’t started to bark. Lindman knocked on the door, but no-one answered. Wallander peeked in through a window. Lindman felt the door. It was unlocked.

“We can say we thought we heard someone call “Come in!”” he said tentatively.

They walked in. Linda’s view was blocked by the broad backs of the two men. She tried standing on tiptoe to see past them but winced with the pain.

“Anybody home?” Wallander called out.

“Doesn’t look like it,” Lindman said.

They proceeded through the house. It looked much as it had when Linda was there last: papers, sheet music, newspapers and coffee cups scattered all about. But she recognised that this superficial impression of disarray only disguised a home comfortably arranged to meet Henrietta’s every need.

“The door was unlocked,” Lindman said, “and her dog is gone. She must be out on an evening walk. Let’s give her a quarter of an hour. If we leave the door open she’ll know someone’s inside.”

“She may call the police if she thinks the house is being burgled,” Linda said.

“Burglars don’t leave the front door wide open for everyone to see,” her father said.

He sat in the most comfortable armchair, folded his hands over his chest and closed his eyes. Lindman put his boot in the front door to keep it open. Linda picked up a photo album that Henrietta had left lying on the piano. The first pictures were from the early ’70s. The colours were starting to fade. Anna sat on the ground surrounded by chickens and a yawning cat. Anna had told her about the commune near Markaryd where she had spent the first years of her life. In another picture Henrietta was holding her, in baggy clothes, clogs and a Palestinian shawl around her neck. Who is behind the camera? Linda wondered. Probably Erik Westin, the man who was about to vanish.

Lindman walked over to her and she pointed to the pictures, explaining what she knew about them: the commune, the green wave, the sandal maker who vanished into thin air.

“It sounds like something out of a story,” he said. “Like A Thousand and One Nights. I mean the part about “The Sandal Maker Who Vanished into Thin Air’.”

They kept turning the pages.

“Is there a picture of the husband?”

“I’ve seen a few at Anna’s place, but that was a long time ago. I’ve no idea where they’d be.”

Pictures of life in the commune gave way to images of an Ystad flat. Grey concrete, a wintry playground.

“By this time he had been gone for some years,” Linda said. “The person taking the pictures is closer to Anna now. The photographs in the commune are always taken from a greater distance.”

“Her father took the earlier pictures and now Henrietta is the one taking them. Is that what you mean?”

“Yes.”

They flipped through to the end of the album, but there was no picture of Westin. One of the last pictures was of Anna’s final school speech day. Zeba was at the edge of the group. Anna had been there too, but wasn’t in the photograph.

Linda was about to turn the page when the lights flickered and went out. The house was plunged into darkness and Wallander woke with a start. They heard a dog barking. Linda sensed the presence of people out there in the night, people who did not intend to show their faces, but rather shied away from the light and were retreating even further into the world of shadows.

# 

# CHAPTER 21

He felt secure only in total darkness. He had never understood why there was always this talk of light in connection with mercy, eternity, images of God. Why couldn’t a miracle take place in total darkness? Wasn’t it harder for the Devil and his demons to find you there, in the shadows, than on a bright plain where white figures moved as slowly as froth on the crest of a wave? For him, God had always manifested Himself as an enveloping, deeply comforting darkness.

He felt the same way now as he stood outside the house with the shining bright windows. He saw people moving around inside. When all the lights suddenly went out and the last door of darkness was sealed he took it as a sign from God. I am his servant in the darkness, he thought. No light escapes from here, but I shall send out holy shadows to fill the void in the souls of the lost. I shall open their eyes and teach them the truth of the images that reside in the shadow world. He thought about the lines in John’s second epistle: “For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist.” It was the holiest key to his understanding of God’s word.

After the terrible events in the jungles of Guyana, he could recognise a false prophet: a man with raven-black hair, even white teeth, who surrounded himself with light. Jim Jones had feared the dark.

He had cursed himself countless times for not seeing through the guise of this false prophet who would lead them so astray even to their deaths. All of them except himself. This had been the first task God had assigned him: to survive in order to tell the world about the false prophet. He was to preach about the kingdom of darkness, which would become the fifth gospel, which he would write to complete the holy writings of the Bible. This too was foretold at the end of John’s letter: “Having many things to write unto you, I would not write with paper and ink: but I trust to come unto you, and speak face to face, that our joy may be full.”

This evening he had been thinking about all the years that had gone by since he was here. Twenty-four years, a large part of his life. He was a young man when he left. Now age had started to claim his body. He took care of himself, chose his food and drink sensibly, kept himself constantly in motion, but the process of growing old had begun. No-one could escape it. God lets us age the better for us to understand that we are completely in His hands. He gives us this remarkable life, but as a tragedy so that we will understand that only He has the power to grant us mercy.

Everything had been what he had dreamed of until he followed Jim Jones to Guyana. Though he missed those he had left behind, Jim had managed to convince him that the loss of them was necessary to prepare him for the higher purpose God held in store for him. He had listened to Jim and sometimes he had not thought about his wife and his child for weeks at a time. It was only after the massacre, when the whole community lay rotting on the fields, that they returned to his consciousness. By then it was too late. The void created by the God whom Jim had killed in him was so huge that he could not think of anyone but himself.

He had retrieved the money and papers he had stored in Caracas, then took the bus to Colombia, to the city of Barranquilla. He remembered the long night he spent in the border station between Venezuela and Colombia, the city of Puerto Paez where armed guards watched over the travellers like hawks. Somehow he had managed to convince these guards that he was John Clifton as his documents stated and he even managed to convince them that he didn’t have any money left. He had slept with his head on the shoulder of an old Indian woman who had a small cage with two chickens on her lap. They had exchanged no words, only a look. She had seen his suffering and his exhaustion and offered him her shoulder and wrinkled neck to rest his head. He dreamed that night of those he had left behind. He woke up, the sense of loss almost physical. The old woman was awake. She looked at him and he lay back against her shoulder. When he woke in the morning she was gone. He felt inside his shirt to touch the wad of dollar bills.

It was still there. He wanted her back again, the old woman who had let him sleep. He wanted to lean his head against her shoulder and neck and stop there for the rest of his life.

From Barranquilla he took a flight to Mexico City. He washed off the worst of his filth in a public toilet. He bought a new shirt and a small Bible. It had been confusing to see so many people milling about in rushing crowds again, this life that he had left behind when he followed Jim. He walked past the news stands and saw that what had happened had made the frontpage headlines. Everyone had died, he read. No-one was thought to have survived. That meant they must think he was dead too. He existed, but he had stopped living, since he was presumed to be one of the bloated bodies found in the jungle.

He still didn’t have a clear plan. He had $3000 after paying for the fare to Mexico City, and if he was frugal he could get by on that for quite a while. But where should he go? Where could he find the first step back to God, out of this unbearable emptiness? He didn’t know. He stayed in Mexico City, in a pension, and spent his days attending various churches. He deliberately avoided the large cathedrals as well as the neon-lit tabernacles run by greedy and power-hungry clergy. Instead he sought out the small congregations where the love and the passion were palpable, where the ministers were hard to tell apart from those who came to listen to their sermons. That was the way he had to find for himself. Jim hid himself in the light, he thought. Now I want to find the God who can lead me to the holy darkness.

One day he woke up with the overwhelming presentiment that it was time to leave. He took a bus going north that same day, and to make the journey as cheap as possible he took local buses. Sometimes he hitched a lift with a truck driver. He crossed the border into Texas at Laredo, where he checked into the cheapest motel he could find. He spent a week in the public library, reading every article there was on the catastrophe. To his alarm, he learned that former members of the People’s Temple were accusing the FBI and CIA or the American government of fostering hostility towards Jim Jones and his movement, thereby inciting the mass suicide. How could they defend the false prophet?

During long sleepless nights it occurred to him that he should write about what had happened. He was the only living witness. He bought a notebook and started to write, but he was overcome with doubt. If he was going to tell the real story, he would have to reveal his true identity: not John Clifton, as his documents claimed, but another man with another name and nationality. Did he want that? He hesitated.

Then he read an interview with a woman named Mary-Sue Legrande in the Houston Chronicle. There was a photo of her: a woman in her forties with dark hair and a thin, pointed face. She talked about Jim Jones and claimed to know his secrets. She was a distant spiritual relative of Jim. She had known him at the time he had the series of visions that would later lead him to found his church, the People’s Temple.

I know Jim’s secrets, said Mary-Sue Legrande. But what were they? She didn’t say. He stared at the photograph. Mary-Sue was looking right at him. She was divorced with a grown son and she owned a small mail-order company in Cleveland. Her company sold something they called “manuals for self-actualisation”.

He put the newspaper back on the shelf, nodding to the friendly librarian, and walked out on to the street. It was a mild December day. He stopped in the shade of a tree. If Mary-Sue Legrande can tell me Jim Jones’s secrets, I will understand why I was taken in by him. Then I will never suffer this same weakness again.

He got off the train in Cleveland on Christmas Eve after a journey of more than 30 hours. He found a cheap hotel close to the railway station and ate his dinner at a Chinese grocery. There was a green plastic Christmas tree with flashing lights in the lobby of the hotel. He lay on the bed in the dark hotel room. Right now, I’m nothing more than the person who is registered in this hotel room, he thought. If I were to die now, no-one would miss me. They would find enough money in my sock to cover the costs of the room and a funeral that is, if no-one stole the money and they had to dump me in a pauper’s grave. Perhaps someone would discover that I was not John Clifton. But the case would probably be put on the back burner. That would be the extent of it. Right now, I’m nothing more than a traveller in a hotel room, and I can’t remember the name of the hotel.

Snow fell over the city on Christmas Day. He ate warm noodles, fried vegetables and rice at the Chinese grocery and then returned to lie motionless on his bed. The following day, December 26, the snowy weather had passed. A thin white powder had dusted the streets and pavements and it was3 C. There was no wind and the water on Lake Erie was icy calm. He had located Mary-Sue Legrande with the help of a telephone directory and a map. She lived in a neighbourhood in the south-western part of the city. He thought it was God’s will that he meet her this day. He washed, shaved and put on the clothes he had bought in a second-hand shop in Laredo. What will she see when she opens her door? he wondered. A man who hasn’t given up, a man who has suffered greatly. He shook his head at his reflection in the mirror. I don’t inspire fear, he thought. Perhaps pity.

He left his hotel and took a bus along the lake shore. Mary-Sue Legrande lived on 1024 Madison, in a stone house partially hidden behind tall trees. He hesitated before he walked up to the door and rang the bell. Mary-Sue Legrande looked exactly like her photograph in the Houston Chronicle, save that she was even thinner. She regarded him with suspicion, ready to slam the door in his face.

“I survived,” he said. “Not every one of us died in Guyana. I survived. I’ve come because I want to know Jim Jones’s secrets. I want to know why he betrayed us.”

She looked at him for a long time before answering. When she did, she didn’t show any sign of surprise, or of any emotion whatsoever.

“I knew it,” she said at last. “I knew someone would come.”

She opened the door wide. He followed her in and stayed in her house for almost 20 years. With her help he came to know the real Jim Jones, the man he had not been able to see through. Mary-Sue told him in her mild voice about Jim Jones’s dark secret. He was not the messenger of God he had given himself out to be; he had taken God’s place. Mary-Sue claimed that Jim Jones knew deep down that his vanity would one day be the destruction of everything he had built. But he had never been able to overcome this flaw and change course.

“Was he deranged?” he had asked.

No, Mary-Sue insisted, Jim Jones had been far from deranged. He had meant well; he had wanted to start a Christian awakening around the world. It was his vanity and pride that had prevented him from succeeding, that had turned his love into hate. But someone needed to take up where he left off, she told him. Someone who was strong enough to resist the pitfall of pride yet at the same time be merciless when the need arose. The Christian awakening would only come to pass through the shedding of blood.

He stayed and helped her run the mail-order business she called God’s Keys. She had written all the self-help manuals herself, with their blend of vague suggestions and inaccurate Bible quotations, and he soon came to understand that she knew Jim Jones well because she was a kind of charlatan herself. But he stayed with her because she let him. He needed time to plan what would become his life’s mission. He was going to be the one to take over where Jim Jones had gone astray. He would evade the pitfalls of pride and vanity, and he would never forget that the Christian rebirth would demand sacrifice and blood.

The mail-order company did well, especially with a product she called “The Aching Heart Package”, priced at $49, not including tax and shipping. They started to get rich, leaving the house on Madison for a larger one in Middleburg Heights. Mary-Sue’s son Richard came home after completing his studies in Minneapolis and settled in a house nearby. He was a loner but always friendly. He seemed grateful not to have to take on his mother’s loneliness.

The end arrived quickly and unexpectedly. One day Mary-Sue came back from a trip into Cleveland and sat across from him at his desk. He thought she had been running errands.

“I have cancer and I’m going to die,” she announced. She said the words with a strange air of relief, as if telling the truth lifted a great burden from her shoulders.

She died on the 87th day after she came back from the doctor with the news. It was in the spring of 1999. Richard inherited all her assets, since she had never married. They drove out to Lake Erie for a walk the evening after the funeral. Richard wanted him to stay; he suggested that they continue running the mail-order business and share the profits. But he had already made up his mind. The void in him had been assuaged by living with Mary-Sue, but he had a mission to accomplish. His thinking and his plans had matured over the years. He didn’t say any of this to Richard. He simply asked him for some money -only as much as Richard could comfortably part with. Then he would make his preparations. Richard asked no questions.

He left Cleveland on May 19,2001, flying to Copenhagen via New York. He arrived in Helsingborg on the south coast of Sweden on the evening of May 21. He paused after stepping on to Swedish soil. He had left all his memories of Jim Jones behind him at last.

# 

# CHAPTER 22

Wallander was looking for the number of the electricity company when the power came back on. Seconds later they all gave a start as Henrietta and the dog walked in. The dog jumped up on Wallander with its muddy paws. Henrietta ordered it to its basket and it obeyed. Then she threw its lead furiously aside and turned to Linda.

“I don’t know what gives you the right to walk into my house when I’m not here. I don’t like people sneaking around.”

“If the power hadn’t gone out we would have walked right out again,” Wallander said. Linda could tell he was losing his temper.

“That’s not an answer to my question,” Henrietta said. “Why did you come in the first place?”

“We just want to know where Anna is,” Linda said.

Henrietta didn’t seem to listen to her. She walked around the room, looking carefully at her things.

“I hope you didn’t touch anything,”

“We haven’t touched anything,” Wallander said. “We simply have a few questions to ask and then we’ll be on our way.”

Henrietta stopped and stared at him. “What is it you need to know? Kindly tell me.”

“Should we sit down?”

“No.”

This is when he explodes, Linda thought and closed her eyes. But her father managed to control himself, perhaps because she was there.

“We need to be in touch with Anna. She’s not in her flat. Can you tell us where she is?”

“No, I can’t.”

“Who would know?”

“Linda is one of her friends, have you asked her? Or maybe she doesn’t have time to talk to you since she spends all her time spying on me.”

This sent Wallander over the edge. He yelled so loudly even the dog sat up. I know all about that voice, Linda thought, the yelling. God knows, it’s one of the earliest memories I have.

“You will answer my questions clearly and truthfully. If you won’t cooperate, we will bring you down to the station. We need to find your daughter because we believe she may have some information regarding Birgitta Medberg.” Wallander made a short pause before continuing. “We also need to assure ourselves that nothing has happened to her.”

“And what could possibly have happened to her? Anna studies in Lund. Linda knows that. Why don’t you talk to her housemates?”

“We will. Is there anywhere else she could be, in your opinion?”

“No.”

“Then we’ll move on to the question of the man who was in your house last night.”

“Peter Stigstrom?”

“Could you describe him for us, beginning with his hair?”

“I already have.”

“We can call on Mr. Stigstrom in person, of course, but perhaps you could humour us.”

“He has long hair, about shoulder length. It’s dark brown, with grey streaks. Will that do?”

“Can you describe his neck?”

“Good grief if you have shoulder-length hair it covers your neck. How would I know what it looks like?”

“Are you sure of this?”

“Of course I’m sure.”

“Then I’ll thank you for your time.”

He got up and left, slamming the front door behind him. Lindman hurried out after him. Linda was confused. Why hadn’t he confronted Henrietta with the fact that she had seen a man with short hair? As she made ready to leave, Henrietta blocked her way.

“I don’t want anyone coming in here when I’m gone. Is that clear? I don’t want to feel I have to lock the door every time I take the dog out.”

“Yes.”

Henrietta turned her back to her.

“How is your leg?”

“It’s better, thanks.”

“Sometime maybe you’ll tell me what you were doing out there.”

Linda left the house. Now she understood why Henrietta wasn’t worried about Anna, even though an appalling murder had been committed which had some connection with her daughter’s life. She wasn’t worried because she knew very well where Anna was.

Lindman and Wallander were waiting in the car.

“What is it she does?” Lindman asked. “All that sheet music. Does she write popular stuff?”

“She composes the kind of music no-one wants to hear,” Wallander said. He turned to Linda. “Isn’t that right?”

“Something like that.”

A mobile phone rang. All three clutched at their pockets. It was Wallander’s. He listened to the caller and checked his watch.

“I’ll be right there.”

“We’re heading out to Rannesholm,” he said. “Apparently there’s some information about people who have been seen in the area over the past few days. We’ll take you home first.”

Linda asked him why he hadn’t confronted Henrietta about the conflicting descriptions of the Stigstrbm man’s hair.

“I decided to sit on it,” he said. “Sometimes these things need time to ripen.”

Then they talked about Henrietta’s apparent lack of concern for her daughter’s safety.

“She knows where Anna is,” Wallander said. “There’s no other way to account for it. Why she’s lying is a mystery, though I expect we’ll find out sooner or later if we keep pushing. It’s just not top priority for us at this point.”

They drove on in silence. Linda wanted to ask more about the investigation at Rannesholm, but she felt it would be wiser to wait. They stopped outside the flat on Mariagatan.

“Could you switch off the engine for a minute?” Wallander turned round so he could see Linda. “Let me repeat what I just said: I’m satisfied that no harm has come to Anna. Her mother knows where she is and why she’s staying away. We don’t have the manpower to investigate this any further. But there is nothing to stop you from going to Lund and talking to her friends there. Just do me a favour, don’t pretend to be a police officer.”

Linda got out and waved them off. As she was opening the front door, she had one of those flashes of memory of something that Anna had said. Was it the last time before she disappeared? It came and at once was gone. Linda scoured her memory, but she couldn’t recover it.

The next day Linda got up early. The flat was empty and her father had clearly not been home at all since the day before. She left shortly after 8 a.m. The sun was shining and it was warm. Because she had plenty of time she decided to take the coast road to Trelleborg and then turn north to Lund when she got to Anderslov. She listened to the news on the radio, but there was nothing about Birgitta Medberg.

Then her mobile phone rang. It was her father.

“Where are you?”

“On my way to Lund. Why are you calling?”

“I just wanted to see if I needed to wake you up.”

“You didn’t have to do that. By the way, I saw you never made it home last night.”

“I slept awhile in a room up at the manor. We’ve staked out a few rooms for the time being.”

“How is it going?”

“I’ll tell you later. Bye.”

She put the phone back in her pocket. She found the address in Lund’s inner city, looked for a place to park and bought an ice cream. Why had her father called? He’s trying to control me, she thought.

The house which Anna shared was a two-storey wooden building with a small garden in front. The gate was rusty and about to fall off its hinges. Linda rang the doorbell but no-one answered. She rang again and strained her ears. She didn’t hear a ringing inside, so she started to knock loudly. Eventually a shadow appeared on the other side of the glass panel. The man who opened the door was in his twenties, his face covered in spots. He was wearing jeans, an undershirt and a large brown dressing gown with big holes. He reeked of sweat.

“I’m looking for Anna Westin,” Linda said.

“She’s not here.”

“But she lives here?”

The man stepped aside so that Linda could come in. She felt his eyes on the back of her head when she walked past him.

“She has the room behind the kitchen,” he said.

They walked into the kitchen, which was a mess of dirty dishes and leftover food. How can she live in this pigsty? Linda thought.

She reluctantly stretched out her hand to shake his, shuddering at his limp and clammy handshake.

“Zacharias,” he said. “I don’t think her door’s locked, but she doesn’t like anyone to go in there.”

“I’m one of her close friends. If she hadn’t wanted me to go in she would have locked the door.”

“How am I supposed to know that you are her friend?”

Linda felt like shoving him out of the kitchen, but pulled herself together.

“When did you last see her?”

He stepped back. “What is this a cross-examination?”

“Not at all. I’ve been trying to get in touch with her and she hasn’t got back to me.”

Zacharias kept staring at her. “Let’s go into the living room,” he said.

She followed him into a room full of shabby, ill-matched furniture. A torn Che Guevara poster hung on one wall, a tapestry embroidered with some words about the joys of home on another. Zacharias sat at a table with a chess set. Linda sat as far away from him as she could get.

“What do you study?” she said.

“I don’t. I play chess.”

“And you make a living from that?”

“I don’t know. I just know I can’t live any other way.”

“I don’t even know how the pieces move.”

“I can show you, if you like.”

Not a chance, Linda thought. I’m getting out of here as soon as I can.

“How many of you live here?”

“It depends. Right now there’s four of us: Margareta Olsson, who studies economics; me; Peter Engbom, who is supposed to be studying physics, but is currently mired in the history of religion; and then Anna.”

“Who is studying medicine,” Linda said.

The gesture was almost imperceptible, but she had seen it. He had registered surprise. At that moment, she caught hold of the thought she had lost last night.

“When did you see her last?”

“I don’t have a good memory for these things. It may have been yesterday or a week ago. I’m in the middle of a study of Capablanca’s most accomplished end games Sometimes I think it should be possible to transcribe chess moves like music. In which case Capablanca’s games would be fugues or enormous masses.”

Another unplayable music nut, she thought.

“That sounds interesting,” she said and got up. “Is anyone else home now?”

“No, just me.”

Linda walked back to the kitchen, with Zacharias at her heels.

“I’m going in now, whatever you say.”

“Anna won’t like it.”

“You can always try to stop me.”

He watched her as she opened the door and walked in. Anna’s room had been a maid’s room at one time. It was small and narrow. Linda sat on the bed and looked around. Zacharias appeared in the doorway. Linda had the feeling he was going to throw himself on top of her. She got up and he took a step back, but he went on watching her. It was no use. She wanted to look in all the desk drawers, but as long as he was standing there she couldn’t bring herself to do that.

“When do the others get home?”

“I don’t know.”

Linda walked into the kitchen again. He smiled at her, revealing a row of yellow teeth. She was starting to feel sick and decided to leave.

“I can show you all the chess moves,” he said.

She opened the front door and paused on the steps.

“If I were you, I’d spend some much-needed time in the shower,” she said, and turned on her heel.

She heard the door slam shut behind her. What a waste of time, she thought angrily. The only thing she had managed to do was to demonstrate her weaknesses. She kicked open the gate. It hit the letter box attached to the fence. She stopped and turned. The front door was closed, and she couldn’t see anyone looking out of a window. She opened the letter box. There were two letters. She picked them out. One was addressed to Margareta Olsson from a travel agency in Goteborg. The other was addressed, by hand, to Anna. Linda hesitated for a moment, then took it with her to the car. First I read her journal, then I open her post, she thought. But I’m doing it because I’m worried about her. Inside the envelope was a folded piece of paper. She flinched when she opened it; a dried, pressed spider fell on to her lap.

The message was short, apparently incomplete and with no signature: We’re in the new house, in Lestarp, behind the church, first road on the left, a red mark on an old oak tree, back there. Let us never underestimate the power of Satan. And yet we await a mighty angel descending from the heavens in a cloud of glory .. .

Linda put the letter on the passenger seat. She thought back to the insight she had had in the house. It was the one thing she could thank that noxious chess player for. He had listed what everyone who lived in the house studied, as well as their names. But Anna was just Anna. She was studying medicine, ostensibly to become a physician. But what had she said when she told Linda about the day she saw her father in Malmo? She had seen a woman who had collapsed in the street, someone who needed help. And she had said that she couldn’t stand the sight of blood. Linda had been struck by the incongruity of this coming from someone who professed to want to be a doctor.

She looked at the letter beside her. What did it mean? .. . we await a mighty angel descending from the heavens in a cloud of glory.

The sun was strong. It was the beginning of September, but it was one of the warmest days of the summer. She took a map of Skane out of the glove compartment. Lestarp was between Lund and Sjobo. Linda pushed down the sun visor. It’s so childish, she thought. The business with the dried spider, the kind that falls out of lamp shades. But Anna is missing. This childishness exists alongside the reality, the reality of a little gingerbread house in the forest. Hands at prayer and a severed head.

It was as if it was only now that she fully understood what she had seen in the hut that day. And Anna was no longer the person she thought she knew. Maybe she isn’t even studying medicine. Perhaps this is the day on which I realise that I know nothing about Anna Westin. She’s dissolving in an unfathomable fog.

Linda was not aware of formulating a plan as such, she just started driving towards Lestarp. It was 29 C in the shade.

# 

# CHAPTER 23

She parked beside the church in Lestarp. It had been recently renovated. Newly painted doors gleamed. A small black and gold plaque above them was inscribed with the year 1851. Linda remembered her grandfather saying something about his own grandfather drowning in a storm at sea that very year. She thought about him as she looked for a toilet in the porch. It was located in the crypt. The cool air felt good to her after the heat outside. I only remember important years, her grandfather had said. A year when someone drowns in a terrible accident, or when someone, like you, is born.

When she had finished, she washed her hands thoroughly as if she were washing off the remains of the chess-playing Zacharias’s handshake. She looked at her face in the mirror. It passed muster, she decided. Her mouth was stern as always, her nose a little big, but her eyes were arresting and her teeth were good. She shuddered at the thought of the chess player trying to kiss her, and hurried back up the stairs. An old man was carrying in a box of candles. She held open the doors for him. He put the box down and then placed his hands on his back.

“You would think God could spare his devoted servant from the trials of back pain,” he said in a low voice. Linda realised he was keeping his voice down because someone was sitting in the pews. She thought at first it was a man, then saw she was mistaken.

“Gudrun lost two children,” the old man whispered. “She comes here every single day.”

“What happened?”

“They were run over by a train, a terrible tragedy. One of the ambulance drivers who took care of their remains lost his mind.”

He picked up the box again and continued along the aisle. Linda walked out into the sun. Death is all around me, she thought, calling out to me and trying to deceive me. I don’t like churches, or the sight of women crying. How does that square with my wanting to become a police officer? Does it make any more sense than Anna not being able to stand the sight of blood? Maybe you can want to become a doctor or a police officer for the same reason: to see if you have what it takes.

Linda wandered into the little cemetery attached to the church. Walking along the row of headstones was like perusing the shelves of a library. Every headstone like the cover of a book. Here lay householder Johan Ludde and his wife Linnea. They had been buried for 96 years, but he was 76 when he died and she was only 41. There was a story here, in this poorly tended grave. She wondered what her own headstone would look like. One which was overgrown caught her eye. She crouched down and cleared moss and soil from its face. Sofia, 1854-1869. Fifteen years old. Had she too teetered on the rail of a bridge, but with no-one to save her?

She left the car where it was and followed the narrow road to the back of the church. She came upon the tree with the red mark almost immediately and turned on to a road down a small hill. The house was old and worn, the main part whitewashed stone with a slate roof, an addition built of rustic, red-painted wood. Linda stopped and looked around. It was absolutely quiet. A rusty, overgrown tractor stood on one side, by some apple trees. Then the front door opened and a woman in white clothes started walking out to greet Linda, who didn’t understand how she had been spotted. She hadn’t seen anyone and she was still partly hidden by the trees. But the woman was making her way briskly straight for her, smiling. She was about Linda’s age.

“I saw that you needed help,” she said when she was close enough. She spoke a mixture of Danish and English.

“I’m looking for a friend of mine,” Linda said. “Anna Westin.”

The woman smiled. “We have no use for names here. Come with me. You may find the friend you are looking for.”

The mildness of her voice made Linda suspicious. Was she walking into a trap? She followed her into the cool interior of the main house. It took some time for Linda to see clearly. The slowness of her eyes to adjust from bright outdoor light to dim interiors was one of her few physical weaknesses, one she had discovered during her time at the training college.

All of the walls on the inside were whitewashed and there were no rugs on the bare, broad planks of the floor. There was no furniture, but a large black wooden cross hung between two arched windows. People sat on the floor along the walls. Many with their arms wrapped around their knees, all silent. They were of all ages and in different styles of dress. One man with short hair was wearing a dark suit and tie; by his side was an older woman in very simple clothes. Linda looked around but could not see Anna among them. The woman who had come out to greet her looked enquiringly at her, but Linda shook her head.

“There’s one more room,” the woman said.

Linda followed. The wooden walls of the next room were also painted white. The windows there were much less elaborate. Here, too, people were sitting along the walls, but Linda did not see anyone who looked like Anna. What was going on in this house? What had the letter said? .. . a mighty angel in a cloud of glory.

“Let us go out again,” the woman said.

She led the way across the lawn, around the side of the house to a collection of stone furniture in the shadow of a beech. Linda’s curiosity was now fully engaged. Somehow these people had something to do with Anna. She decided to come clean.

“The friend I’m looking for is missing. I found a letter in her letter box which described this place.”

“Can you tell me what she looks like?”

I don’t like this, Linda thought. Her smile, her calm. It’s completely disingenuous and makes my skin crawl. Like when I shook that boy’s hand.

Linda gave her Anna’s description. The woman’s smile never wavered.

“I don’t think I’ve seen her,” she said. “Do you have the letter with you?”

“I left it in the car.”

“And where is the car?”

“I parked it by the church. It’s a red Golf. The letter is on the front seat. The car is unlocked, actually, which I know is careless of me.”

The woman was silent. Linda felt uncomfortable.

“What do you do here?”

“Your friend must have told you. Everyone who is here has the mission of bringing others to our temple.”

“This is a temple?”

“What else would it be?”

Of course, Linda thought sarcastically. What was I thinking? This is clearly a temple and not simply the somewhat dilapidated remains of a humble Swedish farmstead where the owners once struggled to put food on the table.

“What is the name of your organisation?”

“We don’t use names. Our community comes from within, through the air we share and breathe.”

“That sounds very deep.”

“The self-evident is always the most mysterious. The smallest crack in a musical instrument alters its timbre completely. If a whole panel falls out, the music ceases. So it is with human beings. We cannot fully live without a higher purpose.”

Linda did not understand the answers she was getting, and didn’t like this feeling. She stopped asking questions.

“I think I’ll leave now.”

She walked away quickly without turning around, nor did she stop until she reached the car. Instead of leaving right away, she sat and looked out at the trees. The sun was shining through the leaves and into her eyes. Just as she was about to start the engine, she saw a man cross the gravel yard in front of the church.

At first she saw only his outline, but when he crossed into the shade of the tall trees she felt as if she had just taken a gulp of frozen air. She recognised his neck, and not just that. During the seconds before he walked out into the blinding sun, she heard Anna’s voice reverberate inside her head. The voice was very clear, telling her about the man she had seen from the hotel window. I am also sitting by a window, Linda thought. A car window. And I’m convinced that I’ve just seen Anna’s father. It is utterly unreasonable, but that’s what I think.

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# CHAPTER 24

Is it absurd to think that you can identify a person by their neck? Linda wondered. What had convinced her about something she had no grounds for knowing? You can’t recognise someone you’ve never met, let alone someone you’ve only ever seen in snapshots and only heard about from a person who anyway hasn’t herself seen him in more than 20 years.

She shook off the thought and drove back to Lund. It was early afternoon and the sun was still strong. The great heat hung oppressively over the day. She parked outside the house she had visited just a few hours earlier and prepared herself for another meeting with Zacharias the chess player. But the door was opened by a girl younger than Linda with blue streaks in her hair and a chain suspended from her nostril to her cheek. She was wearing black clothes in a combination of leather and vinyl. One of her shoes was black, the other white.

“There are no rooms available,” she said brusquely. “If there’s still a notice up at the Student Union, it’s a mistake.”

“I don’t need a room. I’m looking for Anna Westin. I’m a friend of hers my name’s Linda.”

“I don’t think she’s here, but you can take a look.”

She let Linda pass her. Linda cast a quick glance into the living room. The chess set was still there, but not the player.

“I was here a few hours ago,” Linda said. “I talked to the boy who plays chess.”

“You can talk to whomever you like.”

“Are you Margareta Olsson?”

“That’s my assumed name.”

Linda was taken aback. Margareta looked amused.

“My real name is Johanna von Loof, but I prefer simple names. That’s why I call myself Margareta Olsson. There’s only one Johanna von Loof in this country, but a couple of thousand Margareta Olssons.

Who wants to be unique?”

“Beats me. You study law, right?”

“No. Economics.”

Margareta pointed to the kitchen. “Are you going to see if she’s in or not?”

“You know she isn’t here, don’t you?”

“Of course I know. But there’s nothing stopping you from checking it out for yourself.”

“Do you have some time to chat?”

“I have all the time in the world, don’t you?”

They sat in the kitchen. Margareta was drinking tea, but she didn’t offer Linda any.

“Economics. That sounds hard work.”

Margareta tossed her head with irritation.

“It is hard. Life should be hard. What did you want to know?”

“I’m looking for Anna. She’s my friend, and I want to make sure nothing has happened to her. I haven’t heard from her for a while and that’s not like her.”

“And what can I do for you?”

“You can tell me when you last saw her.”

Margareta’s answer was caustic.

“I don’t like her. I try to have as little to do with her as possible.”

Linda had never heard that before someone not liking Anna. She thought back to their school days. Linda had often fought with other students, but she couldn’t remember Anna doing so.

“Why?”

“I think she’s stuck up. I can generally tolerate this in others since I’m as bad myself. But not in her case. There’s something about her that drives me up the wall.”

She got up and rinsed her cup.

“It probably bothers you to hear me say this about your friend.”

“Everyone has a right to their opinion.”

Margareta sat down again. “Then there’s another thing. Or two, more precisely. She’s stingy and she doesn’t tell the truth. You can’t trust her. Either what she says or that she won’t use all your milk.”

“That doesn’t sound like Anna.”

“Maybe the Anna who lives here is a different person. All I’m saying is, I don’t like her, she doesn’t like me. We cope. I don’t eat when she’s eating and there are two bathrooms. We rarely bump into each other.”

Margareta’s mobile phone rang. She answered and then left the kitchen. Linda thought about what she had just been told. More and more she was starting to realise that the Anna she had become re-acquainted with was not the same as the Anna she had grown up with. Even though Margareta or Johanna didn’t make the best impression, Linda instinctively felt that she had been telling the truth.

I have nothing more to do here, she thought. Anna has chosen to stay away. She has some reason for it, just as there will turn out to be a reason why she and Birgitta Medberg were in contact.

Linda got up to leave as Margareta came back into the kitchen.

“Are you angry?”

“Why would I be angry?”

“Because I’ve told you unflattering things about your friend.”

“I’m not angry.”

“Then maybe you’d like to hear more?”

They sat down at the table again. Linda noticed that she was tense.

“Do you know what she studies?”

“Medicine.”

“That’s what I thought, too, we all did. But then someone told me she had been expelled from the medical school. There were rumours about plagiarism I don’t know if that was true or not. Maybe she simply gave up. But she never said anything to us about it. She pretends that she’s still studying medicine, but she’s not.”

“What does she do?”

“She prays.”

“Prays?”

“You heard me,” Margareta said. “Prays. What you do when you go to church.”

Linda lost her temper. “I know what it is. Anna prays, you say. But where? When? How? Why?”

Margareta did not react to her outburst. Linda was grudgingly impressed by this display of self-control that she herself lacked.

“I think it’s genuine. She’s searching for something. I can understand her in a way. Personally, I’m on a quest for material wealth; other people are looking for the spiritual equivalent.”

“How do you know all of this if you don’t even talk to her?”

Margareta leaned over the table. “I snoop, I eavesdrop. I’m the person who hides behind curtains and hears and sees everything that goes on. I’m not kidding.”

“So she has a confidante?”

“That’s a strange word, isn’t it? “Confidante’ what does it really mean? I don’t have one, I doubt if Anna Westin does either. To be completely honest, I think she’s unusually dim-witted. God forbid I would ever be diagnosed and treated by a physician like her. Anna Westin talks to anyone who will listen. I think all of us here find her conversation a series of naive and worthless sermons. She’s always lecturing us on moral topics. It’s enough to drive anyone off their rocker, except perhaps our dear chess player. He cherishes vain hopes about getting her into bed.”

“Any chance?” Nil.

“What do her lectures consist of?”

“She talks about the poverty of our daily existence. That we don’t nurture our inner selves. I don’t know exactly what she believes in other than that she’s Christian. I tried to discuss Islam with her one time and she went ballistic. She’s a conservative Christian. More than that I don’t know. But there’s something genuine about her when she talks about her religious views. And sometimes I hear her when she’s in her room. It sounds real. That’s when she isn’t lying or stealing. She’s being herself. Beyond that, I can’t say.”

Margareta looked at her. “Has something happened?”

Linda shook her head. “I don’t know. Maybe.”

“But you’re worried?”

“Yes.”

Margareta got up. “Anna Westin’s God will protect her. At least that’s what she always brags about. Her God and some earthly angel named Gabriel. I think it was an angel. I can’t remember exactly. But with that kind of protection she should be fine.”

She stretched out her hand. “I have to go now. Are you also a student?”

“I’m a police officer. Or will be soon, that is.”

Margareta took a closer look at her.

“I’m sure you will, the number of questions as you’ve been asking.”

Linda realised she had one more.

“Do you know anyone called Mirre? She left a message on Anna’s answering machine.”

“No. But I can ask the others.”

Linda gave her her phone number and left the house. She was still vaguely envious of Margareta Olsson’s poise, her self-confidence. What did she have that Linda didn’t?

The following morning, Monday, Linda was awakened by the sound of the front door slamming shut. She sat up in bed. It was 6 a.m. She lay down and tried to fall back to sleep. Raindrops were splattering against the windowsill. It was a sound she remembered from childhood. Raindrops, Mona’s shuffling, slippered gait, and her father’s firm footsteps. Once upon a time these sounds had been her greatest source of security. She shook off her thoughts and got up. Her father had forgotten to turn off the stove and he hadn’t finished his coffee. He’s nervous and he left in a hurry, she thought.

She pulled the paper towards her and leafed through it until she saw an article about the developments in the Rannesholm case. There was a short interview with her father. It was early, he had said, and although there were almost no clues, they had some leads. But no, he was not able to comment further for the time being. She put the paper away and thought about Anna. If Margareta Olsson was right and she had no reason to doubt she was telling the truth Anna had become a very different person. But why had she left the flat in Ystad? And why did she claim to have seen her father? Why wasn’t Henrietta telling the truth? And that man Linda had seen walk past the church why was she convinced it was Anna’s father?

And the other crucial question: what was the connection between Anna and Birgitta Medberg?

Linda had trouble separating all these thoughts. She heated the coffee and wrote everything down on a piece of paper. Then she crumpled it up and threw it away. I have to talk to Zeba, she thought. I’ll tell her everything. She’s smart. She never loses touch with reality. She’ll give me some good ideas. Linda showered, put her clothes on and then called Zeba. Her answering machine cut in. Linda tried her mobile, but it was out of range. Since it was raining, she could hardly have taken her boy out for a walk. Maybe she was with her cousin.

Linda was impatient and irritated. She thought of calling her father, possibly even her mother, just to have someone to talk to. She decided she didn’t want to interrupt her father. And a conversation with Mona could drag on for ever. She didn’t need that. She pulled on her boots and an anorak and walked down to the car. She was getting used to having a car. That was dangerous. When Anna came back she would have to start walking again. When she couldn’t borrow her father’s car. She drove out of the city and stopped at a petrol station. A man at the next pump nodded to her. She recognised his face without being able to place him until she was standing in the queue at the cashier’s window. It was Sten Widen, her father’s friend.

“It’s Linda, isn’t it?” His voice was hoarse and weak.

“Yes. Sten, right?”

He laughed, something that seemed to cost him an effort.

“I remember you as a little girl. And suddenly you’re all grown up. A police officer no less.”

“How are the horses?”

He didn’t answer until she had finished paying and they were walking back to their cars.

“Your dad has probably told you what’s going on,” Widen said. “I have cancer and I’m going to die soon. I’m selling the last of the horses next week. That’s how it is. Good luck with your life.”

He didn’t wait for an answer, just got into his muddy Volvo and drove away. Linda watched him leave and could think only one thing how grateful she was that she wasn’t the one selling her last horses.

She drove to Lestarp and parked by the church. Someone has to know, she thought. But if Anna isn’t here, where is she? Linda pulled up the hood of her yellow anorak and hurried down the road at the back of the church. The garden was deserted. The old tractor was wet and shiny from the rain. She banged on the front door and it swung open. But no-one had opened it, it hadn’t been properly closed. She called out, but no-one answered. The house was abandoned. Nothing was left. She saw that they had taken the black cross on the wall. It felt as if the house had been empty for a long time.

Linda stood in the middle of the room. The man in the sun, she thought. The one I saw yesterday and thought was Anna’s father. He came here, and today everyone is gone. She left the house and drove to Rannesholm. There she was told that Inspector Wallander was up at the manor, holding a meeting with his associates. She walked over in the rain and settled down in the big hall, to wait for him. She thought about the last thing Margareta Olsson had said, something about Anna Westin not having to worry about her safety because she had God and an earthly guardian angel named Gabriel for protection. It seemed important, but she just couldn’t think how.

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# CHAPTER 25

Linda never ceased to be surprised by her father, by his rapid mood changes, that is. When she saw him come through a door in the large hall at Rannesholm Manor she expected him to seem tired, anxious and downcast. But he was in good spirits. He sat down next to her and launched into a long-winded story about a time he had left a pair of gloves at a restaurant and been offered a broken umbrella in their stead. Is he getting soft in the head? she wondered. Then her father left to go to the toilet and Martinsson stopped on his way out. He told her Wallander had been in better humour ever since she had moved back to town. Martinsson hurried on when Wallander returned. Linda remembered that there had been some trouble between them not so long ago.

Wallander sat down so heavily on the old sofa that the springs groaned. She told him about running into Sten Widen at the petrol station.

“He’s remarkably stoical,” Wallander said. “He’s very like Rydberg -the same calm attitude. I hope that will turn out to be true for me one day, that I’ll be stronger than I think.”

Some officers walked past carrying cases of equipment. Then the room was silent.

“Are you making progress?” Linda said.

“Not much, or slowly, I should say. The worse the crime, the more impatient one becomes about solving it, even though in these cases patience is critical. I once knew an officer in Malmo Birch who used to compare our investigative work to that of a surgeon facing a complicated operation. The calm, time and patience needed for such procedures are key ingredients even for us. Birch is dead now, as it happens. He drowned in a tiny lake. He was swimming, must have got cramp, no-one heard him. He should have known better, of course,

but now he’s dead. I feel as if people are dying all around me, although I know it’s irrational. People are being born and dying off all the time. But the dying seems more pronounced when you reach the front of the queue. Now that my father is dead there’s no-one ahead of me any more.”

Wallander looked down at his hands. Then he turned to her and smiled. “What was it you asked me?”

“How is the investigation going?”

“We haven’t found a single trace of the murderer. We have no idea who was living in that hut.”

“What do you think?”

“You know you should never ask me that. Never what I think, only what I know or what I suspect.”

“I’m curious.”

He sighed. “I’ll make an exception. I think Birgitta Medberg came upon the hut accidentally in her search for the pilgrim trail. The person who was there panicked or became enraged and killed her. But the fact that he dismembered the body complicates the picture.”

“Have you found the rest of it?”

“We have divers in the lake and a dog unit combing the forest. They haven’t come up with anything yet.”

He got ready to launch himself out of the sofa.

“I take it there’s something you want to tell me.”

Linda told him in great detail about her visits to Anna’s house in Lund as well as to the house in Lestarp.

“Too many words,” he said when she had finished.

“I’m working on it. But you got the gist?”

“Yes.”

“Then it couldn’t have been too bad.”

“I’d give it a beta query,” Wallander said.

“What’s a beta query?”

“When I was at school, anything less than a beta query was considered a failing grade.”

“So what do you think I should do?”

“Stop worrying. You haven’t been listening to me. What happened to Medberg was a mishap, one of almost biblical proportions. She went down the wrong path. Unless I’m mistaken, Medberg had excruciatingly bad luck. Therefore there’s no longer any reason to think Anna is in any danger. The journal shows there is a connection between the two of them, but it’s no longer of concern to us.”

Ann-Britt Hoglund and Lisa Holgersson came walking briskly past. Holgersson nodded kindly to Linda. Hoglund didn’t seem to notice her. Wallander got up.

“Go home now,” he said.

“We could have used an extra set of hands,” Holgersson said. “I wish the money was there. When is it you start?”

“Next Monday.”

“Oh, good.”

Linda watched them go out together, then she too left the manor. It was raining now and much colder, as if the weather couldn’t make up its mind. She walked back to the car. The house behind the church had sparked her curiosity. Why were they all gone? I can at least find out who the owner of the house is, she thought. I don’t need a permit or a police uniform for that. She drove back to Lestarp and parked in her usual spot. The doors to the church were half open. After hesitating for a moment, she walked in. The old man she had met before was in the porch. He recognised her.

“Can’t stay away from our beautiful church?”

“I wanted to ask you something.”

“Isn’t that why we all come here? To find answers to our questions?”

“That wasn’t quite what I meant. I was thinking about the house down the hill behind the church. Do you know who owns it?”

“It’s been in many different hands. When I was young, a man with one leg shorter than the other lived there. His name was Johannes Palsson. He worked as a day labourer at Stigby farmstead and was good at mending china. The last few years he lived alone. He moved the pigs into the main room and the chickens into the kitchen. That kind of thing went on in those days. When he was gone, someone else used the place as storage for grain. Then there was a horse breeder and after that, sometime in the 1960s, the house was sold to someone whose name I’ve forgotten.”

“You don’t know who owns it now?”

“Oh, I’ve seen people come and go lately. They’re peaceful and discreet. Some say they use the house for meditation. They’ve never bothered us. But I don’t know who the owner is. You should be able to find out through the property tax records.”

Linda thought for a moment. What would her father have done?

“Who knows all the gossip in this village?”

He looked at her with a smile. “That would be me, wouldn’t it?”

“But apart from you. If there’s anyone who might know who owns the house, who would it be?”

“Maybe Sara Eden. She was the school teacher; she lives in the little house next to the car-repair place. She devotes her time to talking on the phone. She knows everything that’s going on, and fills in the rest as needed. She’s a good sort, just insatiably curious.”

“What happens if I ring her doorbell?”

“You’ll make a lonely old woman’s day.”

The front door opened wider and the woman Linda had seen the previous day walked in. She met Linda’s gaze before walking to her pew.

“Every day,” the old man said. “The same time, the same face, the same grief.”

Linda left the church and walked down to the house. It was still empty. She returned to the church, decided to let the car stay where it was and walked down the hill to “Rune’s Auto and Tractor’. On one side of the shop there was a ramshackle pile of spare parts, on the other there was a high fence. Linda supposed that the retired teacher didn’t care for a view of a car-repair shop. She opened the gate and stepped into a well-tended garden. An elderly woman was kneeling over a flower bed. She stood up when she heard Linda.

“Who are you?” she asked sternly.

“My name is Linda. Do you mind if I ask you some questions?”

Sara Eden came over to where Linda was standing, holding a garden shovel aggressively outstretched. It occurred to Linda that there were people who were the human equivalent of ill-tempered dogs.

“Why would you want to ask me questions?”

“I’m looking for a friend who’s disappeared.”

Sara Eden seemed sceptical.

“Isn’t that something for the police? Looking for missing persons?”

“I am from the police.”

“Then perhaps you’ll show me your ID. That’s my right, my older brother once informed me. He was the headmaster at a school in Stockholm. He lived to be one hundred and one years old despite his bothersome colleagues and even more bothersome students.”

“I don’t have an ID card yet. I’m still in training.”

“I’ll have to take your word for it, then. Are you strong?” rainy.

Sara Eden pointed to a wheelbarrow filled to the brim with plants and weeds.

“There’s a compost heap on the other side of the house, but my back has been giving me a bit of trouble. I must have slept in a strange position.”

Linda took hold of the wheelbarrow. It was very heavy, but she managed to coax it around to the compost heap. When she had emptied it, Sara Eden showed a kindlier side. There were some chairs and a table tucked into a little arbour.

“Do you want a cup of coffee?” she asked.

“Yes, please.”

“Then you’ll have to fetch one yourself from the vending machine by the furniture warehouse on the road to Ystad. I don’t drink coffee or tea for that matter. But I can offer you a glass of mineral water.”

“No, thank you.”

They sat down. Linda had no trouble imagining fru Eden as a school teacher. She probably saw Linda as an unruly schoolgirl.

“Well? Tell me what happened.”

Linda gave her an outline of the events and said she had traced Anna to the house behind the church.

“We were supposed to meet,” she said. “But something happened.”

The old lady looked doubtful. “And how do you think I can be of assistance?”

“I’m trying to find out who owns the house.”

“In the olden days one always knew who was who and who owned what. But in this day and age there’s no way of telling. One day I’ll find out I’ve been living next to an escaped criminal.”

“I thought perhaps in such a small place people still knew these things.”

“There have been a great many comings and goings in that house during the past while, but nothing that caused any disturbance. If I have understood it correctly, the people there now are involved in some sort of health organisation. Since I take good care of myself and am not planning to give my departed brother the satisfaction of dying at a younger age, I watch what I eat and drink, and am curious about this new so-called alternative medicine. I went up to the house one time and spoke to a very friendly English-speaking lady. She gave me a pamphlet. I don’t remember what the organisation was called, but they espoused meditation and certain natural juices for promoting health.”

“Did you ever go back?”

“The thing was far too vague for my taste.”

“Do you still have the pamphlet?”

Eden nodded towards the compost.

“I doubt there’s anything left of it by now.”

Linda tried to think of something else to ask, but didn’t see the point of pursuing it further. She got up.

“No more questions?”

“No.”

They walked back to the front of the house.

“I dread the autumn,” fru Eden said. “I’m afraid of the creeping fog and the rain and the noisy crows in their treetops. The only thing that keeps my spirits up is the prospect of the spring flowers I’m planting now. Ah, yes, there may be something else.”

They were standing now on either side of the gate.

“There was a Norwegian,” the old lady said. “I sometimes go into Rune’s shop and complain if they’re making too much of a racket on a Sunday. I think Rune is a little afraid of me. He’s the kind of person who never grows out of the respect he had for his teachers. The noise usually stops. One day he told me about a Norwegian who had just filled up his car and who paid with a thousand-kronor note. Rune isn’t used to notes that big. He said something about the Norwegian owning the house there.”

“So I should ask Rune?”

“Only if you have time on your hands. He’s on holiday in Thailand. I don’t even want to think about what he might be getting up to.”

Linda thought for a moment. “A Norwegian. Did he say at all what he looked like?”

“No. If I were in your place I would ask the people who most likely handled the sale of the house. That would be the Sparbanken property sales division. They have an office in town. They may know.”

Linda left. She thought that Sara Eden was a person she would have liked to know more about. She crossed the street, passed a hair salon and stepped into the tiny Sparbanken office. There was only one person inside; he looked up when she came in. Linda asked him her question and the answer came without his having to consult any binders or notes.

“That’s right,” he said. “We handled the sale of that house. The seller was a dentist from Malmo by the name of Sved. He had used the house as a summer retreat for a while but grown tired of it. We advertised the property online and in the Ystad Allehanda. A Norwegian came in and demanded to see the place. I asked one of the Skurup estate agents to take care of him. That’s fairly normal, since I run the branch by myself and can’t always take on the extra responsibility for property sales. Two days later, the sale was finalised. As far as I recall, the Norwegian paid cash. They’ve got money coming out of their ears these days.”

The last comment revealed his grumbling displeasure at the vibrant Norwegian economy. But Linda was more interested in the Norwegian’s name.

“I don’t have the papers here, but I can call the Skurup office.”

A client entered the branch, an old man who walked with the help of two canes.

“Please excuse me while I attend to herr Alfredsson,” the man behind the counter said.

Linda waited impatiently. It took what seemed like an age before the old man was finished. Linda held the door open for him. The man behind the counter placed his call, and after about a minute he received an answer that he wrote on a piece of paper. He finished the conversation and pushed the note over to Linda. She read: Torgeir Langas.

“It’s possible he spells the last name with a double ‘a’; that would be Langaas.”

“What’s his address?”

“You only asked me for his name.”

Linda nodded.

“If you need more information, you can ask the Skurup office directly. Do you mind my asking why you so urgently need to contact the owner of the house?”

“I may want to buy it,” Linda said, and left.

She hurried to the car. Now she had a name. As soon as she opened the car door she noticed that something was amiss. A receipt that had been on the dashboard was on the floor, a matchbox had been moved. She had left the car unlocked and someone had been in it while she was gone.

Hardly a thief, she thought. The car radio is still here. But who’s been in the car? Why?

# 

# CHAPTER 26

The first thought that ran through Linda’s head was purely irrational: Mum did this. She’s been rifling through my stuff again like she used to. Another thought ran through her like electric current: a bomb. Something was going to explode and tear her to pieces. She got hesitantly into the car. And of course there was no bomb. A bird had left a big dropping on the windscreen, that was all. Now she noticed that the seat had been pushed back. The person who had got into the car was taller than she was. So tall that he or she had had to adjust the seat to sit behind the wheel. She sniffed for new scents, but she couldn’t pick anything out, no aftershave or perfume. She looked everywhere. Something was different about the black plastic cup of loose change that Anna had taped behind the gear stick, but it was not clear what.

Linda’s thoughts returned to her mother. The game of cat-and-mouse had gone on for most of her childhood. She couldn’t remember exactly when she realised that her mother was forever rifling through her things in search of who knew what secrets. Maybe it had started when Linda was eight or nine and she could tell that something had changed about her room when she came home from school. At first she had assumed she must be wrong. The red cardigan had been lying over the green jumper like that, not the other way around. She had even asked Mona, who had snapped at her. That was when the suspicion had been born and the game started in earnest. She left traps in her clothes, among her toys and books. But it seemed as if Mona sensed what was going on. Linda laid increasingly elaborate traps and even recorded in a notebook the precise arrangement of her things so that she could catch her mother.

Linda went on studying the interior of the car. Some kind of mother has been here, she thought, one who may be a man or a woman.

Snooping in kids’ stuff is more common than you’d think. Most of my friends had at least one parent who did it. She thought about her father. He had never been through her things. Sometimes she had seen him peer through her half-open door to make sure she was there, but he never made surreptitious expeditions into her life. That had always been her mother.

She concentrated on what sort of person it had been in the car. Taking the radio would have been a simple way to cover his or her tracks. That way Linda would have assumed there had been a straightforward breakin. So this is not a particularly cunning mum, she thought.

She got no further. There was no conclusion to be drawn, no answer to who or why. She re-adjusted her seat, got out and looked around. A man had walked past in the blinding sun. She had seen his back and thought it was Anna’s father. Linda scratched her head in irritation. Anna had just been imagining things when she said she had seen her father in the street. Maybe her acute disappointment was what had made her take off. She had done that before taken a trip without warning but Zeba said she had always let at least one person know where she was going.

Who did she tell this time? Linda wondered.

She walked across the gravel yard in front of the church, glancing up at some pigeons circling the bell tower, and then carried on down to the empty house. A man named Torgeir Langaas bought this house, she thought. He paid cash.

She walked round to the back of the house, looking thoughtfully but absent-mindedly at the stone furniture. There were several black currant and red-currant bushes. She picked a few strands of berries and ate them. Her memories of Mona returned. Linda did not think she had snooped out of curiosity, rather it seemed that she was prompted by fear. Of what had she been so afraid? Was she afraid I wasn’t who she thought I was? A nine-year-old can play roles and have her secrets, but hardly of a magnitude that requires continuous snooping in order to truly understand her, especially if she is your own child.

Open warfare had broken out only when Mona started reading Linda’s journal. Linda had been 13 by then and had been keeping her journal hidden behind a loose panel at the back of her wardrobe. One day she discovered that it had been pushed back a few centimetres too far. She could still remember her rage. That time she really hated her mother.

There was an epilogue to that memory. Linda had decided to set another trap for her mother. She wrote a message on the first blank page in the journal stating that she knew her mother was reading it, that she was snooping in all her things. She put the journal back in its hiding place and set off for school. About halfway there, she decided to cut class. She knew she would not be able to concentrate anyway. She spent the day wandering around the shops in town. When she came home she broke out in a cold sweat, but her mother greeted her as if nothing had happened. After they had all gone to bed Linda took out the journal and saw that her mother had written, without apology or explanation: I won’t read it again, I promise.

Linda picked a few more berries. We never talked about it, she thought. I think she stopped snooping altogether after that, but I could never be sure. Maybe she got better at covering her tracks, maybe I stopped caring as much. But we never talked about it.

The estate agent’s name was Ture Magnusson and he was in the middle of the sale of a house in Trunnerup to a retired German couple. Linda skimmed through a folder of houses for sale while she waited. Ture Magnusson spoke very bad German. Finally he got up and walked over to her. He smiled.

“They want a moment alone,” he said, sitting down as he introduced himself. “These things take time. What can I do for you?”

Linda gave him her story without playing the policewoman this time. Magnusson nodded even before she was finished. He remembered the sale without having to look it up.

“That house was indeed bought by a Norwegian,” he said. “A pleasant sort, quick to make up his mind. He was what you would call an ideal client, paid in cash, no hesitation, no second thoughts.”

“How can I get in touch with him? I’m interested in the house.”

Magnusson leaned back and seemed to take stock of her. His chair creaked as he pushed it on to its back legs and balanced it up against the wall.

“To be perfectly honest, he paid a very high price for the house. I shouldn’t tell you that, but it’s true. I can show you three other places in better condition, in more beautiful surroundings, all going for less.”

“This is the house I want. I’d like at least to ask the owner if he would consider selling.”

“Of course. I understand. Torgeir Langaas was his name,” Magnusson said, singing the last sentence. He had a good voice. He went into the next room, and soon reappeared with an opened folder.

“Langaas,” he read. “He spells the name with a double ‘a’. He was born in somewhere called Baerum, forty-three years old.”

“Where in Norway does he live?”

“He lives in Copenhagen.”

Magnusson put the document down in front of her so that she could see. Nedergade 12.

“What sort of man would you say he was?”

“Why do you ask?”

“I want to know if there’s any point my looking him up in your opinion.”

Magnusson leaned against the wall.

“It was clear from the moment I laid eyes on him that Langaas meant business. He was courteous and he had picked out the house he wanted so we drove out there together and inspected the property. He asked no questions, I remember. When we returned, he pulled the cash out of his shoulder bag. I don’t think that’s ever happened to me except on one other occasion when one of our young tennis stars came with a suitcase full of bank notes and bought a large estate in West Vemmenhog. He’s never once been there since, so far as I know.”

Linda wrote down Langaas’s address in Copenhagen and prepared to leave.

“Come to think of it,” Magnusson said, “there was something else about him. It was nothing extraordinary, just that he turned around a lot, as if he was afraid of running into someone he knew. He also excused himself a number of times and when he returned from the toilet the last time his eyes were glazed over.”

“Had he been crying?”

“No, I would say rather that he seemed high.”

“Alcohol?”

“He might have been drinking vodka.”

Linda tried to think of something else to ask.

“But respectful, pleasant,” Magnusson said again. “Perhaps he will sell you the house. Who knows?”

“What does he look like?”

“He has a pretty normal-looking face. What I remember best is his eyes, not simply because they were glazed over, but because there was something disturbing about them. Some people would perhaps have found his look menacing.”

“And yet his manner struck you as pleasant?”

“Oh very. The ideal client, as I said. In fact, I bought myself a rather nice bottle of wine that evening. Just to celebrate such an easy day’s work.”

Linda left the estate agent’s office. This is another step on the way, she thought. I can go to Copenhagen and find this Torgeir Langaas. I don’t know exactly why perhaps it helps to diminish my anxiety -I’m treating this as if Anna decided on the spur of the moment to go away and forgot to mention it to me.

Linda drove towards Malmo. Just before the turn-off to Jagersro and the Oresund Bridge she decided to make an unexpected visit. She pulled up outside the house in Limhamn, parked and walked in through the gate. A car was parked in the driveway. She stopped herself as she was about to ring the doorbell; why, she couldn’t say. Instead, she walked to the back of the house, to the glassed-in porch. The garden was neatly tended. The gravel path was raked. The door to the porch was ajar. She pushed it open and listened. All was quiet, but she was sure that someone was there. These people spent far too much time locking doors and checking their alarm systems. She walked into the living room, looking at the painting over the sofa. It was a picture she had often looked at as a child, fascinated and disturbed by the brown bear shot through with flames and seeming about to explode. It still

disturbed her. Her father had won it in a lottery and given it to her mother as a birthday present.

Linda heard a noise in the kitchen and walked to the door. Her “hello” stuck in her throat. Mona was standing at the kitchen counter. She was naked and drinking vodka straight from the bottle.

# 

# CHAPTER 27

Afterwards, Linda would think that it had been like staring at an image from her past. An image that reached beyond the reality of her mother standing there naked to something else, an impression, a memory she only managed to grasp when she drew a deep breath. She had experienced the same thing herself once.

She had been only 14 at the time, in the midst of those fearful teenage years when nothing seems possible or comprehensible, but when everything is at the same time straightforward, easy to see through. All parts of the body vibrate with a new hunger. It had happened during a brief period in her life when not only her father but even her mother disappeared off to work all day, pulling herself out of an unfulfilling stay-at-home existence to work for a shipping company. This finally allowed Linda to be alone for a few hours after school, or to bring friends home with her. She was happy.

That was the time Torbjorn came into her life. He was her first real boyfriend, one whom Linda imagined looked much like Clint Eastwood would have looked at 15. Torbjorn Rackestad was half Danish, a quarter Swedish and a quarter American Indian, which gave him not only a beautiful face, but also a dash of exoticism.

It was with him that Linda started a serious investigation into all that went under the rubric of love. They were slowly approaching the moment of truth, although Linda prevaricated. One day, when they were sprawled half-naked on her bed, her door opened. It was Mona. She had had a fight with her boss and left work early. Linda still broke into a sweat when she remembered the shock she had felt. At the time, she had started laughing hysterically. She had buried her face in her hands so she didn’t know exactly how Torbjorn had reacted, but he must have pulled his clothes on and left very soon afterwards.

Mona hadn’t lingered in the doorway. She had simply given her a look that Linda could never quite describe. There had been everything in that look from despair to a kind of smug triumph in finally having her worst fears about her daughter’s nature confirmed. When Linda eventually went out into the living room they had had a shouting match. Linda could still recall Mona’s repeated war cry: “I don’t give a shit what you do as long as you don’t get pregnant.” Linda could also hear echoes of her own shouts, their sound, not the words. She remembered the embarrassment, the fury, the humiliation.

All these thoughts ran through her head as she stared at the nude older woman by the sink. It occurred to her, too, that she hadn’t seen her mother naked since she was a little girl. Mona had put on a lot of weight, the flesh spilled out in unappealing bulges. Linda’s face registered disgust, a brief unconscious expression but distinct enough for Mona to see it and snap out of her initial shock. She slammed the bottle down on the counter and pulled the refrigerator door open as a kind of shield for her body. Linda couldn’t help giggling at the sight of her mother’s head sticking up over the door.

“What do you mean by sneaking in like this? Why can’t you ring the doorbell?”

“I wanted to surprise you.”

“But you can’t just barge into a person’s house!”

“How else would I find out that my mother spends her days getting pissed?”

Mona slammed the refrigerator door shut.

“I am not a drunk!” she screamed.

“You were swigging vodka from the bottle, Mum.”

“It’s water. I chill it before I drink it.”

They lunged for the bottle at the same time, Mona to hide the truth, Linda to uncover it. Linda got there first and sniffed it.

“This is pure, undiluted vodka. Go and put something on. Have you taken a look at yourself recently? Soon you’ll be as big as Dad. You’re all blubber, he’s just heavy.”

Mona grabbed the bottle out of her hands. Linda didn’t fight her. She turned her back to Mona.

“Mum, put your clothes on.”

“I can be naked in my own house if I want to be.”

“It’s not your house, it’s the banker’s.”

“His name is Olof and he happens to be my husband. We own this house together.”

“You do not. You have a pre-nuptial agreement. If you get divorced he keeps the house.”

“Who told you that?”

“Grandpa.”

“That old bastard. What did he know?”

Linda turned and slapped her face. “Don’t say that about him.”

Mona took a step back, unbalanced more by the alcohol than the blow.

“You’re just like your father. He hit me too.”

“Put some clothes on, for God’s sake.”

Linda watched as her mother took one more long swallow from the bottle. This isn’t happening, she thought. Why did I come here? Why didn’t I go straight to Copenhagen?

Mona tripped and fell. Linda wanted to help her up, but her attempts were pushed aside. Mona finally pulled herself into a chair.

Linda went into the bathroom and brought a dressing gown, but Mona refused to put it on. Linda began to feel sick to her stomach.

“Can’t you cover yourself up?”

“All my clothes feel too tight.”

“Then I’m leaving.”

“Can’t you at least stay for a cup of coffee?”

“Only if you put something on.”

“Olof likes to see me naked. We always walk around the house naked.”

Now I’m becoming a mother to my mother, Linda thought, firmly guiding her into the dressing gown. Mona put up no resistance. When she reached for the bottle, Linda moved it away. Then she set about making coffee. Mona followed her movements with dull eyes.

“How is Kurt?”

“He’s fine.”

“That man has never been fine in his entire life.”

“Right now he is. He’s never been better.”

“Then it must be because he’s rid of his old man who loathed him.”

Linda held her hand up as if to strike and Mona shut up. She lifted her palms in apology.

“You have no idea how much he misses him. No idea.”

Mona got up from the chair, swaying but staying on her feet. She disappeared into the bathroom. Linda pressed her ear against the door. She heard a tap running, no bottles being taken from a secret stash.

When Mona reappeared she had combed her hair and washed her face. She looked around for the vodka that Linda had poured down the sink, then served the coffee. Linda suddenly felt a wave of pity for her. I never want to be like her, she thought. Not this snooping, nervous, clinging woman who never really wanted to leave Dad, but who was so insecure that she ended up doing the very things she didn’t want.

“I’m not usually like this,” Mona said.

“Just now I thought you said you and Olof always walk around naked.”

“I don’t drink as much as you think.”

“Mum, you used to drink next to nothing. Now I catch you stark naked in your kitchen, tossing back vodka in the middle of the day.”

“I’m not well.”

“You mean you’re sick?”

Mona started to cry, to Linda’s dismay. When had she last seen her mother cry? She would sometimes fall into a nervous, almost restless sobbing if a meal didn’t turn out well or if she had forgotten something, and she had cried when she had fought with Linda’s father. But these tears were different. Linda decided to wait them out. The sobbing stopped as suddenly as it had started. Mona blew her nose and drank her coffee.

“I’m sorry.”

“I’d rather you told me what was bothering you.”

“What would that be?”

“Only you know that, not me. But obviously there is something on your mind.”

“I think Olof has met another woman. He denies it, but if there’s one thing life has taught me it’s to tell when a man is lying. I learned that from your father.”

Linda immediately felt the need to jump to his defence.

“I don’t think he tells lies more than anyone else. No more than I do.”

“Oh, the things I could tell you.”

“And you can’t know how little I care about that.”

“Why do you have to be so mean?”

“I’m telling you the truth.”

“Right now I could actually do with some plain old-fashioned kindness.”

Linda’s feelings had always oscillated between pity and anger, but now they seemed to have reached an unprecedented intensity. I don’t like her, she thought. My mother asks for a love I’m incapable of giving her. I need to get out of here. She put down her cup.

“Are you leaving already?”

“I’m on my way to Copenhagen.”

“What for?”

“I don’t have time to go into it.”

“I hate Olof for what he’s doing.”

“I’ll come back another time when you’re sober.”

“I can’t live like this any more.”

“Then leave him. You’ve done it before.”

“You don’t need to tell me what I’ve done.” Her voice was full of aggression again.

Linda turned and walked out. She heard Mona’s voice behind her: “Stay a little longer.” And then, just as she was about to close the door: “All right, then go. But don’t you dare show your face here again!”

Linda reached the car sweating and furious. Bitch, she thought, but she knew that before she was halfway across the Oresund Bridge her anger would switch to guilt: a good daughter would have stayed with her mother, listening to her troubles.

The guilt had already started to take over as she paid her toll for the bridge and she wished she were not an only child. I’m the one who will have to take care of them one day. She shivered in dismay and made up her mind to tell her father what had happened. He would know if Mona had ever had problems with alcohol in the past, if there was something Linda didn’t know about.

She reached Denmark and started to feel better. The decision to talk to her father made her feel less guilty. Leaving Mona was the only thing she could have done. If she had stayed they would have been yelling at each other until Mona sobered up.

Linda drove to a car park and got out. She sat on a bench facing the sound, and stared over the water at the misty outline of Sweden. Somewhere there were her parents. They had enveloped her whole childhood in a strange mist. My dad was worse, she thought. The talented but gloomy policeman who had a sense of humour but never let himself laugh. My father, who never found a new woman to share his life since he still loves Mona. Baiba tried to explain it to him, but he wouldn’t listen. According to Baiba, he said, “Mona belongs to the past.” But he hasn’t got over her and he never will. She is his one great love. Now I’ve seen her wandering around naked, knocking back the hard stuff in the middle of the day. She too is lost in the foggy gloom. I’m almost 30 and I haven’t managed to free myself from it.

Linda kicked angrily at the gravel, picked up a pebble and threw it at a seagull. The eleventh commandment is the most important, she thought, the one that reads: “Thou shalt never become like thy parents.” She got up and returned to the car. She stopped in Nyhavn and bought a city map.

Darkness was falling by the time she reached Nedergade. It was a street in a shabby neighbourhood, of tall, identical apartment buildings. Linda felt unsafe and would have preferred to come back in broad daylight, but the bridge toll was too expensive to waste the journey. She locked the car and stamped her foot on the pavement as a way of rousing her courage.

She tried to make out the names of the people who lived in the building, although it was difficult to see in the dim light. The front door opened and a man with a scar across his brow walked out. He was startled when he saw her. She caught the door and walked back in before it closed behind him. Inside there was another notice board with names, but no-one by the name of Langaas or Torgeir. A woman walked by carrying a bag of rubbish. She was about Linda’s age, and smiled at her.

“Excuse me,” Linda said. “I’m looking for a man by the name of Torgeir Langaas.”

The woman stopped and put the bag down. “Does he live here?”

“He gave this as his address.”

“What was his name? Torgeir Langaas? Is he Danish?”

“Norwegian.”

She shook her head. It seemed to Linda she genuinely wanted to help.

“I don’t know of any Norwegians around here. We have a couple of Swedes and some people from other countries, but that’s all.”

The front door opened and a man walked in, dressed in a hooded sweatshirt. The woman with the rubbish bag asked him if he knew of a Torgeir Langaas. He shook his head. The hood was pulled up and Linda couldn’t see his face.

“Try fru Andersen on the first floor. She knows everything about everyone in this building. I’m sorry I can’t help you myself.”

Linda thanked them and started up the stairs. Somewhere above her a door was pulled open, and loud Latin American music reverberated in the stairwell. Outside fru Andersen’s door there was a small stool with an orchid. Linda rang the bell. Immediately a dog started to bark in the flat. Fru Andersen, shrunken and hunched over, was one of the smallest women Linda had ever seen. The dog, still barking beside her slippered feet, was also one of the smallest Linda had seen. She asked fru Andersen her question. The old lady pointed to her left ear.

Linda shouted out her question again.

“I may hear badly, but there’s nothing wrong with my memory,” frun Andersen said. “There’s no-one by that name living here.”

“Could he be staying with someone?”

“I know everyone who lives here, whether they be on the contract or not. It’s been forty years, believe it or not, since they built this block. Now there are all kinds of people here, of course.” She leaned closer to Linda and lowered her voice. “They sell drugs here. And no-one does anything about it.”

Fru Andersen insisted on inviting her in and serving her coffee that she poured from a pot in the narrow kitchen. Linda managed to leave after half an hour. By then she knew all about what a wonderful husband herr Andersen had been, a man who had died far too young.

The Latin American music had stopped. Instead there was the sound of a child wailing. Linda walked out of the front door and looked each way before crossing the street. She sensed someone’s presence in the shadows and turned her head. It was the man with the hooded sweatshirt. He grabbed her by her hair. She tried to get away, but the pain was too great.

“There is no Torgeir,” he said through clenched teeth. “No Torgeir Langaas. Drop it.”

“Let me go!” she screamed.

He let go of her hair, and punched her hard in the temple. Everything went black.

# 

# CHAPTER 28

She was swimming as fast as she could, but the great waves had almost caught up with her. Suddenly she saw rocks in front of her, big black prongs sticking out of the water ready to spear her. Her strength ebbed away and she screamed. Then she opened her eyes.

Linda felt a sharp pain in her head and wondered what was wrong with the bedroom light. Then she saw her father’s face looming over her and wondered if she had slept in. What was she supposed to do today? She had forgotten.

Then she remembered. What caught up with her was not the great waves but the memory of what had happened right before she plunged into darkness. The stairwell, the street, the man who stepped out of the shadows, delivered his threat and hit her. She winced. Her father laid a hand on her arm.

“It’s OK. Everything’s going to be OK.”

She looked around the hospital room, the dim lighting, screens and the rhythmic hissing of medical equipment.

“I remember now,” she said. “But how did I get here? Am I hurt?”

She tried to sit up while at the same time testing all her limbs to make sure nothing was broken. Wallander tried to restrain her.

“They want you to stay lying down. You were knocked unconscious, though there doesn’t appear to have been any internal damage, not even a concussion.”

“How did you get here?” she asked and closed her eyes. “Tell me.”

“If what I’ve heard so far from my Danish colleagues and one of the emergency-room physicians here at the Rikshospital is correct, you were extremely lucky. A patrol car was driving past and actually saw a man knock you down. It only took minutes for the ambulance to arrive. The officers found your driver’s licence as well as your ID card from the training college. They had contacted me within half an hour. I drove over as soon as I heard about it. Lindman is here too.”

Linda opened her eyes and looked at her father. She thought in a fuzzy way that she might be a little in love with Lindman, even though she had hardly had anything to do with him. Am I delirious? I return to consciousness after some lunatic has knocked me out and the first thing I think is that I’ve fallen in love, and much too quickly at that.

“What are you thinking about?”

“Where’s Lindman now?”

“He went to get a bite to eat. I told him to go home, but he wanted to come with me.”

“I’m thirsty.”

Wallander gave her some water. Linda’s head was clearer now; images from the moments before the assault were coming back.

“What happened to the creep who assaulted me?”

“They arrested him.”

Linda sat up so quickly her father couldn’t stop her.

“Lie down!”

“He knows where Anna is. Or perhaps he doesn’t know that but he does know something.”

“Stay calm.”

Reluctantly she stretched out on the bed again.

“I don’t know his name, he could be Torgeir Langaas. But he knows something about Anna.”

Her father sat down on a chair beside the bed. She looked at his watch. It was 3.15.

“Where are we? In the night or the day?”

“It’s night. You’ve been sleeping like a baby.”

“He grabbed my hair and he threatened me.”

“I don’t understand what you were doing here in the first place. Why Copenhagen?”

“The bastard who attacked me may know where Anna is. Maybe he assaulted her too. Or he may have something to do with Birgitta Medberg.”

Wallander shook his head. “You’re tired. The doctor said your memory would come back in bits and pieces, and things may be jumbled for a while.”

“Don’t you understand what I’m saying?”

“I do. As soon as the doctor checks you again we can go home. Lindman can drive your car.”

The truth was starting to dawn on her.

“You don’t believe a word I’ve told you, do you? That he threatened me?”

“No, I know he threatened you. He’s admitted that.”

“He admits what exactly?”

“That he threatened you because he wanted the drugs that he assumed you bought while you were in the apartment building.”

Linda stared at her father while her mind was trying to absorb this information.

“He threatened me and told me to stop looking for Torgeir Langaas. He never said a word about drugs.”

“We should be grateful the matter has been cleared up, and that the police were nearby at the time. He’s going to be charged with assault and attempted robbery.”

“There was no robbery. It’s all about the man who owns the house behind the church in Lestarp.”

Wallander frowned. “What house is that?”

“I haven’t had time to tell you about this before. I went to Anna’s house in Lund and found a lead that pointed to a house behind the church in Lestarp. After I was there asking about Anna everyone in the house left, vanished. The only thing I managed to find out was that the house is owned by a Norwegian called Torgeir Langaas, and his address is here in Copenhagen.”

Her father looked at her for a long time, then took out his notebook and started reading from one of the pages.

“The man they arrested is Ulrik Larsen. If my Danish colleague is to be believed, Larsen is not the kind of man who owns a country house in Sweden.”

“Dad, you’re not listening to me!”

“I am listening, but this is a man who has confessed to trying to steal drugs from you.”

Linda shook her head desperately. Her left temple throbbed. Why didn’t he understand what she was trying to tell him?

“My mind is completely clear. I know I was knocked out, but I’m telling you what actually happened.”

“You think you are. But I don’t see the connection between what you were doing in Copenhagen and your barging in on Mona and upsetting her as you did.”

Linda went cold. “How do you know that?”

“She called me. She was in a terrible state, crying so hard she couldn’t speak clearly. At first I thought she was drunk.”

“She was drunk, dammit. What did she say?”

“That you had accused her of all manner of things and complained about both her and me. She’s crushed. And her banker husband was apparently not there to comfort her.”

“I found Mum naked in her kitchen, with not much left of a bottle of vodka.”

“She said you sneaked into the house.”

“I walked in through the veranda doors, which hardly qualifies as sneaking in. She was as high as a kite, whatever she may have told you.”

“We’ll talk about this later.”

“Thanks.”

“So what were you doing in Copenhagen?”

“I’ve told you.”

Wallander shook his head. “Explain to me why a man has been arrested for trying to rob you.”

“You explain to me why you refuse to believe me.”

He leaned over. “Do you understand what I went through when they called me? When they told me you had been admitted to a hospital in Copenhagen after an assault do you know what that felt like?”

“I’m sorry that you had to worry about me.”

“Worry? I was scared out of my mind more frightened than I’ve been in years.”

Maybe you haven’t been so scared since I tried to kill myself, she thought. She knew his greatest fear was that something would happen to her.

“I’m sorry, Dad.”

“I wonder what it’s going to be like when you start working,” he said. “If that will turn me into a sleepless old man when you’re working the night shift.”

She tried to tell her story again, painstakingly slowly, but still he seemed not to believe her. She had just finished when Lindman walked into the room. He nodded happily at her when he saw she was awake. He had brought a bag of sandwiches.

“How are you doing?”

“I’m fine.”

Lindman handed the bag to Wallander, who immediately started to eat.

“What kind of car do you have? I’m going to get it for you,” Lindman said.

“A red Golf. It’s parked across the street from the apartment block, Nedergade twelve. I think it’s in front of a tobacconist’s.”

He held up the key.

“I took this from your coat pocket. You were lucky, you know. Desperate drug addicts are about the worst thing you can run into.”

“He wasn’t a drug addict.”

“Tell Lindman what you told me,” Wallander said, between bites.

She proceeded through her account again, calmly and methodically, just as she had been taught.

“This doesn’t sit very neatly with what our Danish colleagues reported,” Lindman said when she was done. “Nor with what the mugger admitted to.”

“I’m only telling you what really happened.”

Wallander wiped his hands with a paper napkin.

“Let me put it this way,” he said. “It’s unusual for people to confess to crimes they haven’t committed. It happens, admittedly, but not very often, and least of all with addicted drug users, since what they fear most is incarceration and the possibility that they will be cut off from their drug supply. Do you see what I’m saying?”

Linda didn’t answer. A doctor walked into the room and asked her how she felt.

“You can go home,” he said. “But take it easy for a few days, and call your doctor if the headache doesn’t subside.”

Linda sat up. Something had just occurred to her.

“What does Ulrik Larsen look like?”

Neither Lindman nor her father had seen him.

“I’m not leaving until I know what he looks like.”

Her father was instantly livid. “Haven’t you caused enough trouble? We are going home now”

“Surely it can’t be hard to get a description of him. Can’t you telephone one of these Danish colleagues you keep referring to?”

Linda realised she was almost shouting herself. A nurse popped her head round the door and gave them a stern look.

“We need this room for another patient,” she said.

There was a woman lying on a stretcher in the corridor, a head bandage soaked in blood, banging her fist against the wall. They found an empty waiting room.

“The man who hit me was about one hundred and eighty centimetres tall. I couldn’t see his face because he was wearing a sweatshirt with the hood pulled up. The sweatshirt was either black or dark blue. He had dark trousers and brown shoes. He was thin. He spoke Danish and had a high-pitched voice. He also smelled of cinnamon.”

“Cinnamon?” Lindman said.

“Maybe he had been eating a cinnamon bun, how should I know? Anyway, call your colleagues and find out if the man they have in custody matches this description. If I can just find that out I’ll keep my mouth shut, for the time being anyway.”

“I said no,” Wallander said. “We’re leaving now.”

Linda looked at Lindman. He nodded carefully after Wallander had turned his back.

The doorbell rang. Linda sat up in a daze and looked at the clock. It was 11.15. She climbed out of bed and put on her dressing gown. Her head was sore but the throbbing was gone. She opened the front door. It was Lindman.

“I’m sorry if I woke you.”

She let him in. “Wait in the living room. I’ll be right there.”

She ran into the bathroom, splashed water on her face, brushed her teeth and combed her hair. When she came back he was standing in front of the balcony door, which was open.

“How are you feeling today?”

“I feel OK. Would you like some coffee?”

“I don’t have time. I just wanted to tell you about a phone call I made an hour ago.”

Linda waited. He must have believed what she told him back at the hospital.

“What did they say?”

“It took a while to get to the right officer. I had to wake somebody called Ole Hedtoft, who had been on the night shift. He was one of the patrol officers who found you, and who arrested the mugger.

Lindman took a piece of paper out of the pocket of his leather jacket and looked at her.

“Give me Ulrik Larsen’s description again.”

“I don’t know if his name is Ulrik Larsen, but the man who attacked me was one hundred and eight centimetres, thin, with a black or dark blue hooded sweatshirt, dark trousers and brown shoes.”

Lindman nodded and then rubbed the bridge of his nose with his thumb and index finger.

“Hedtoft described the same individual. But perhaps you misunderstood the threat he made.”

Linda shook her head. “That’s not possible. He actually used the name of the man I was looking for, Torgeir Langaas.”

“Well, somebody must have misunderstood something.”

“Why do you keep going on about a misunderstanding? I know what happened, and I’m more than ever afraid that Anna is in danger.”

“Report it, then, and tell her mother. Why doesn’t she report her missing herself?”

“I don’t know.”

“Shouldn’t she be worried?”

“I can’t explain why she doesn’t seem to be worried, but I do know that Anna may be in danger.”

Lindman started for the front door. “Report it to the police and let us take care of it.”

“You haven’t done much up to this point.”

Lindman stopped dead. “We are working around the clock,” he said angrily. “We’re investigating something that has actually taken place: a murder, and an exceptionally repulsive and baffling one at that.”

“Then we’re in the same boat,” she said calmly. “My friend Anna isn’t there when I call or knock on her door. And I am baffled by that too.”

She opened the door for him. “Thanks for at least believing part of what I told you.”

“This is between us. There’s no need to mention it to your father.”

Lindman ran down the stairs. Linda ate a rapid breakfast, got dressed then called Zeba. She didn’t answer. Linda drove to Anna’s flat. This time there were no signs that the place had been disturbed in any way.

Where are you? Linda called out silently. You’ll have a lot to explain when you get back.

She opened a window, pulled up a chair and opened Anna’s journal.

There has to be a clue somewhere, she thought. Something that can explain what’s happened.

Linda started reading from early August 2001. Suddenly she stopped. There was a name scribbled in the margin, as if a reminder by Anna to herself. Linda frowned. She had seen or heard the name recently, but where? She put down the journal. The heat was oppressive. There was a distant rumble of thunder. A name that she had seen or heard, the question was where or from whom. She put on some coffee and tried to distract herself enough to make her brain relax and shake out the source of the name. Nothing happened.

It was only later, when she was about to give up and go out, that she remembered. It was the name of one of the people living in the apartment block on Nedergade.

# 

# CHAPTER 29

Vigsten. She was sure she was right. She couldn’t be sure if it was someone living on the street side or in the inner building over the courtyard, nor if it had been a D or an O as a first initial, but she knew she was right about the surname. What do I do now? she thought. I’m on to something that is actually starting to hang together. But I’m the only one taking it seriously. I haven’t managed to convince anyone else. Of course, I have no idea what is actually going on. Anna thought she saw her father and then she disappeared. Two disappearances that camouflage each other, cancel each other out or complete each other?

Linda felt a sudden need to talk to someone, and there was no-one to turn to except Zeba. She ran down the stairs of Anna’s building and drove to Zeba’s place. She was just on her way out with her son. Linda tagged along. They went to a playground nearby, where the boy ran off to the sand pit. There was a bench too, but it was littered with dirt and chewing gum.

They sat on the edge of the sand pit while the boy threw sand around and let out whoops of joy. Linda looked at Zeba and felt the usual sting of envy: Zeba was extravagantly beautiful. There was something arrogant and inviting about her at the same time, the kind of woman Linda had once dreamed of becoming. But I became a policewoman, she thought. A policewoman who hopes she won’t turn out to be a scaredy-cat.

“I’ve been trying to reach Anna,” Zeba said. “She hasn’t been home. Have you seen her?”

This infuriated Linda. “Hello? Hello? Have you been listening to a single word I’ve told you? About her being gone, that I’m worried sick about her, that I think something’s happened to her?”

“But you know what she’s like, don’t you?”

“Do I? Apparently I don’t. What is she like?”

Zeba frowned. “Why are you so worked up?”

“I’m frightened for her.”

“What do you think has happened? And what is that bruise on your head, for heaven’s sake?”

Linda decided to tell her all she knew. Zeba paid attention in silence. The boy played.

“I could have told you”, Zeba said when Linda finished, “the part about Anna being religious.”

Linda looked at her. “Religious?”

“Yes.”

“She never said anything to me.”

“You only just met up again, after a long gap. And Anna is the kind of person who says different things to different people. She tells a lot of lies.”

“Really?”

“I had been meaning to warn you, but I thought it would be better if you found out for yourself. She is a compulsive liar.”

“She didn’t used to be like that.”

“People change, don’t they?” Zeba said in a mocking tone. “I’m friends with Anna because of her good qualities. She’s cheerful, nice to my son, helpful. But when she starts telling one of her stories, I don’t bother to listen. Do you know that she spent last Christmas with you?”

“I was in Stockholm last winter.”

“She said she had been up to see you. Among the many things you did together, apparently, was take a trip over to Helsinki on the ferry.”

“That’s absurd.”

“Of course. But that’s what Anna told me. I don’t know why she lies, perhaps it’s an illness, or else she’s just bored.”

“Do you think she was lying when she said she had seen her father in Malmo?”

“Of course. It’s typical of her to invent an amazing reappearance like that. Her father has probably been dead for a long time.”

“So you don’t think anything bad has happened to her?”

Zeba looked at her with an amused expression. “What could possibly have happened to her? She’s gone off like this many times before. She comes back when she’s had enough, and she has a fantastic and completely made-up story about where she’s been.”

“And nothing of what she says is true?”

“Compulsive liars are only successful if they weave in enough threads that are true. Then we believe it, then the lie sails by, until eventually we find that their whole world is built out of lies.”

Linda shook her head in bewilderment. “And the medical studies?”

“I never believed a word of it.”

“But where does she get her money? What does she do?”

“I’ve wondered about that. Sometimes I think she might be a professional con artist, but really I don’t have a clue.”

Zeba’s son called out to her and she joined him in the sand pit. Linda watched her as she walked over. A man on the street turned to look at her. Linda thought about what Zeba had said. It explains a part of it, she thought. And it reduces my anxiety and above all infuriates me, since I now know that Anna has been feeding me lies. But it doesn’t explain everything.

When they had gone their separate ways, Linda walked into the centre of town and took some money from an ATM. She was careful with money since she worried about finding herself without. I’m like my father, she thought. We’re both thrifty to the point of being miserly.

She walked home, cleaned the flat and then called the housing agency. After several tries she managed to reach the man in charge of her case. She asked if she could move into the flat earlier than planned. Apparently that was not possible. She lay on the bed in her room and thought about the conversation with Zeba. Her concern for Anna’s well-being had been replaced by a feeling of unease over the fact that she hadn’t seen through her lies. But how was one to see through someone who did not concoct remarkable, fantastical stories but lied about everyday events?

Linda got up and called Zeba.

“We didn’t finish talking about Anna’s religious beliefs.”

“Why don’t you ask her about it when she comes back? She does believe in God.”

“Which one?”

“The Christian one. She goes to church occasionally, or she says she does. But I know she does pray because I’ve caught her at it a couple of times. She gets down on her knees.”

“Do you know if she belongs to a particular congregation or sect?”

“No. Do you?”

“I don’t know. Have the two of you ever talked about it?”

“She’s tried to a couple of times, but I’ve always put a stop to it. Me and God never got along.”

Linda heard a howl in the background.

“Whoops … he just hurt himself. Bye.”

Linda went back to her bed and continued staring up at the ceiling. What do we really know about people? An image of Anna floated through her mind, but it was like looking at a stranger. Mona was there too, naked, with her bottle. Linda sat up. I’m surrounded by a bunch of crazy people, she thought. The only normal one is Dad.

She walked on to the balcony. It was still warm. I’m going to drop this thing here and now, she said to herself. I should concentrate on something important, like enjoying this weather for instance.

Linda read the newspaper story about the Medberg investigation. Her father was interviewed again. She had read the same thing many times. No crucial leads … the investigation goes on on many fronts … results may take time. She put the paper down and thought about the name in Anna’s journal. Vigsten. The second person there after Birgitta Medberg to have crossed Linda’s path.

One more time, she thought. One more trip across the bridge even though it’s expensive. I should present Anna with a bill for all the worry she’s caused.

This time I’m not going to walk about on Nedergade in the dark, she thought as she drove across the bridge to Denmark. I’m going to look up the man I’m assuming it’s a man whose name is Vigsten and ask him if he knows where Anna is. That’s all. Then I’m going to go home and cook dinner for my father.

Linda parked in the same place as on the previous day and was struck by a sense of dread as she got out of the car. It was as if she hadn’t fully grasped it before now: she had been attacked on this street only last night.

She got back into her car and locked the doors. Take it easy, she thought. I’m going to get out of the car; no-one’s going to knock me down. I’ll just walk into that building and find this Vigsten person. And that will be that.

Linda kept telling herself to stay calm, but she ran across the street. A cyclist veered sharply to avoid her and nearly fell, yelling an obscenity after her. The front door opened when she pushed it. She saw the name almost immediately. On the fourth floor, F. Vigsten. She hadn’t remembered the initial correctly. She started up the stairs. Fredrik Vigsten, she thought. It’ll be Fredrik if it’s a man, that’s typically Danish. Or Frederike for a woman. She stopped and caught her breath on the third floor. Then she rang the bell, a short melody. She waited and counted slowly to ten. Then she rang again, and the door opened at about the same time. An old man with ruffled hair and glasses hanging from a cord round his neck gave her a stern look.

“I can’t walk any faster,” he said. “Why don’t you young people have some patience?”

He stepped back without asking for her name or why she was there, ushering her into the hall.

“I sometimes forget when I have a new student,” he said. “I don’t make a note of everything as conscientiously as I should. Please feel free to hang up your things. I’ll wait in there.”

He shuffled down a long corridor with short, almost springy steps. A student of what? Linda wondered. She took off her jacket and followed him. It was a large flat, perhaps the result of knocking down a wall between two smaller ones. In the room furthest from the front door there was a baby grand piano. The white-haired man was by the window, leafing through a monthly planner.

“I don’t see an appointment for today,” he complained. “What did you say your name was?”

“I’m not a student,” Linda said. “I just want to ask you some questions.”

“I’ve been answering questions my whole life,” he said. “I’ve told them why it’s so important to sit correctly when playing the piano. I’ve tried to explain to countless young pianists why not everyone can learn to play Chopin with the required combination of caution and power. Above all, I try to get my impatient opera singers to stand properly, and not to attempt the hardest pieces without wearing good shoes. Have you got that? Opera singers need good shoes, and pianists need to take care not to develop haemorrhoids. What did you say your name was?” “It’s Linda, and I’m neither a pianist nor an opera singer. I’ve come to ask you about something that has nothing to do with music.”

“Well, you must have the wrong man, because I can only answer questions about music. The world beyond that is incomprehensible to me.”

Linda was momentarily confused. “Your name is Fredrik Vigsten, isn’t it?” “Not Fredrik: Frans. But the last name is right.” He sat at the piano and began turning over the paper of some music. Linda had the feeling that he had forgotten she was there.

“Your name appears in the journal of my friend Anna Westin,” she said.

Vigsten tapped rhythmically on the paper and did not seem to hear her.

“Anna Westin,” she repeated, louder.

He looked up abruptly. “Who?”

“Anna Westin. A Swedish girl.”

“I’ve had many Swedish pupils,” he said. “Of course, now it is as if everyone has forgotten about me, and .. .”

He interrupted himself and looked at Linda. “Did you tell me your

| name?”

“I’m happy to tell you again. It’s Linda.”

“And you are not a pupil? Not a pianist? Not an opera singer?” “No.”

“You’re asking about someone called Anna?” “Anna Westin.”

“I don’t know an Anna Westin. Vest-in. My wife was a vestal, but she died thirty-nine years ago. Have you any idea what it is like to be a widower for almost four decades?”

He stretched out a thin hand with finely etched blue veins and touched her wrist.

“Alone,” he said. “It was one thing when I had my day job doing rehearsals at Det Kongelige. But one day they told me I was too old. Maybe it was that I insisted on doing things the old-fashioned way. I didn’t tolerate sloppiness.”

“I found your name in my friend’s journal,” Linda interrupted him.

She took his hand. The fingers that held hers so hungrily were surprisingly strong.

“Anna Westin, is that right?”

“Yes.”

“I’ve never had a pupil of that name. My memory is not what it once was, but I remember all their names. They are the only ones who have given my life meaning since Mariana was taken by the gods.”

Linda didn’t think there was any point in pursuing the conversation. There was really only one thing left to ask.

“Do you know someone called Torgeir Langaas?”

But Vigsten was lost in dreamland again. He picked out some notes on the piano with his free hand.

“Torgeir Langaas,” she repeated. “A Norwegian.”

“I have had many Norwegian pupils. The one I remember best was Trond 0rje. He was from Rauland and a wonderful baritone, but he was so shy that he could only pull it off in the recording studio. The most remarkable baritone and the most remarkable person I ever met in my life. He cried with alarm when I told him he had talent. A remarkable man. There are others .. .”

Linda got up. She was never going to get a sensible answer out of him. Nor did it seem likely that Anna had had any contact with him.

She left without saying goodbye. As she walked to the front door she heard him start to play the piano. She glanced into the other rooms on her way out. The flat was a mess and the air was stale. A lonely man who has only his music, she thought. Like my grandfather and his painting. What am I going to do when I get old? What about Dad? And what about Mum? Will it be the bottle?

She lifted her jacket from the hook in the hall. Music filled the flat. She stood motionless and studied the clothes hanging by the door.

Vigsten might be a lonely old man, but he had a coat and a pair of shoes that did not belong to an old man. She looked back into the flat. There was no-one there, but she knew now that Frans Vigsten did not live alone. Fear came over her so swiftly that she jumped. The music stopped and she listened for any other sound. Then she fled, back to the street, running across to the car, and driving away as fast as she could. She only started to calm down when she was on the Oresund Bridge heading home.

At the same time as Linda was crossing the bridge, a man broke into the pet shop in Ystad. He doused the shelves of caged birds, hamsters and mice with petrol, threw a match on the floor and left just as the animals caught fire.

# 

# PART 3

## The Noose

# CHAPTER 30

He chose the locations for his ceremonies with great care. This was something he had learned as early as during his flight from Jamestown: where could he rest, where would he feel safe? There were no ceremonies as such in his world in those days. That came later, once he had reestablished a connection to God which was finally going to help to fill the emptiness that threatened to consume him from inside.

It was more important than ever now not to make any mistakes in choosing the places where his assistants prepared their assignments. Everything had gone well until the unfortunate incident where a woman accidentally lit upon one of their hide-outs and was killed by his disciple, Torgeir Langaas.

I never saw Langaas’s weakness in its totality, he thought. The spoiled brat that I plucked from a sewer in Cleveland had a temper I never succeeded in taming. I treated him with infinite patience and listened to him talk. But he carried a powerful rage inside him, beyond mending.

Why? he had asked in vain. Why this senseless fury at a woman stumbling down the wrong path? They had once even discussed what they should do in the event that someone one day chose to follow the abandoned path. They had to remain alert to the possibility of the unexpected. The agreed response had been to meet all visitors in a cordial fashion, then remove themselves from the area as soon as practical. Langaas had adopted the polar-opposite response. A fuse had blown in his brain. Instead of giving the woman a friendly welcome, he had reached for an axe. Why he had cut off her head he couldn’t say, nor why he saved the head and arranged the hands as if in prayer. The remaining body parts he had put in a sack with a very big stone, then he had removed his clothes and swum to the middle of the nearest lake, and let the sack sink to the bottom.

Langaas was strong. That had been one of his first impressions when he stumbled over the drunk crawling in the gutter in one of Cleveland’s ugliest slums. He was going to walk on, but he heard the man moaning some slurred words in a language that sounded like Danish or Norwegian. He had stopped and bent down, understanding that God had put this man in his path. Langaas had been close to death. The physician who later examined him and prepared the rehabilitation programme had been very clear on this point: there was no room left for any alcohol or drugs in his body. Only his physical strength had saved him to this point, but his organs were drawing on their last reserves. His brain was damaged, would perhaps never recover the portions of memory that had been destroyed.

He would always remember the moment when a homeless

Norwegian by the name of Torgeir Langaas had looked up at him with eyes so bloodshot they glowed like a rabid dog’s. But it wasn’t the look that had made such an impression, it was what he said, because in Langaas’s confused mind the face bending towards him belonged to God. He had grabbed his redeemer’s coat with his massive hands and directed his terrible breath at his face.

“Are you God?” Langaas said.

Everything that had been unresolved in his life his failures, his hopes, his dreams was reduced to a single point, and he answered: “Yes, I am your God.”

In the following moment he had been beset with doubts, although there was no reason his first disciple couldn’t be one of the lowest. But who was he? How had he ended up here?

He had walked away and left Langaas there, but his curiosity was not extinguished. He returned to the slum the very next day. It was like descending into hell, he thought. The lost souls crawled all about. In looking again for Langaas he had been close to being mugged several times, but at last an old man with a stinking pus-filled sore where his left eye should have been told him there was a Norwegian with large hands who sometimes crawled into a rusting bridge pillar when there was rain or snow. That was where he found him. Langaas was sleeping,

snoring. His clothes reeked of sweat and urine and his face was badly cut.

It didn’t take more than a couple of sessions under the crumbling bridge to get Langaas’s life story. He was born in Baerum in 1948, heir to the Langaas Shipping Company, which specialised in oil and cars. His father, Captain Anton Helge Langaas, had studied the industry during his own years at sea. Langaas Shipping was an offshoot of the established Refsvold Shipping Company. The parting was not amicable. Nor was it known where Captain Langaas had made the fortune which obliged the unwilling board members of the Refsvold Shipping Company to admit him into their midst. Rumours abounded.

Captain Langaas waited until his company was in the black and he himself was financially secure before marrying. In a gesture of contempt for the shipping aristocracy, he chose his wife as far from the sea as it was possible in Norway, from a village in the forests east of Roros. There he found a woman called Maigrim who delivered post to the isolated farmhouses of the region. They built a large house in Baerum outside Oslo and had three children one after the other. Torgeir and then two girls, Anniken and Hege.

Torgeir Langaas sensed what his parents wanted of him from an early age, but at an equally early age realised that he would never be able to live up to their expectations. He started rebelling in early adolescence. Captain Langaas fought a battle that was doomed from the outset. Finally he capitulated and accepted that Torgeir would never take his place in the family business. He turned instead to his daughters. Hege resembled her father, showing a focused determination even as a child, and earned an executive position within the company at the age of 22. Torgeir had already started his long slide into oblivion with a focused determination of his own. He had developed several addictions, and none of the expensive clinics nor Maigrim’s best efforts did any good. The final breakdown came one Christmas. Torgeir gave his family presents of rotting meat, old car tyres and dirty cobblestones. Then he tried to set fire to himself, his siblings and his parents. He ran away, having no intention of ever returning, a fat bank balance to his name.

When his passport expired and was not renewed he was wanted by Interpol, but no-one looked for him in the streets of Cleveland. He kept his assets hidden from those he lived among, changing his bank, changing everything except his name. He still had five million Norwegian crowns to his name when the man he came to see as his saviour turned up in his life.

I did not take adequate stock of his weakness, he thought again. The rage that grew into uncontrollable violence. Langaas was so blinded by his fury that he hacked the woman to pieces. But there was something of value even in this unexpected reaction and capacity for brutality. To set light to animals was one thing, killing a person quite another. Apparently Langaas would not hesitate to commit such an act. Now that all the animals had been sacrificed, he would lift him to the next level of human sacrifice.

They met at the railway station in Ystad. Langaas had come by train from Copenhagen since occasionally he lost his concentration when driving. Langaas had bathed that was part of the purification process that preceded the ritual sacrifice. It was important to be clean. Jesus even washed his disciples’ feet. He had explained to Langaas that everything was there in the Bible. It was their map, their guide.

Langaas carried a small black bag. He did not have to ask what was in it. The Norwegian had long since proved himself to be reliable -save in the case of the woman in the forest. That had caused a most unnecessary amount of publicity and activity. Newspapers and television stations were still broadcasting the news. The act they were preparing now had had to be postponed for two days, and he had felt it best that Langaas use his Copenhagen safe house while they waited it out.

They walked towards the centre of town, turned when they reached the post office and continued on to the pet shop. There were no customers inside. The woman behind the counter was young. She was busy putting out cat food on a shelf when they arrived. There were hamsters, kittens and birds in the cages. Langaas smiled but said nothing; there was no point in letting her hear his Norwegian accent.

While Langaas walked around the shop and made a mental note of how he would carry out his task, his saviour selected and bought a packet of bird seed. Then they left the shop, walked past the theatre and towards the harbour. It was a warm day still with a number of yachts coming and going.

That was the second element of their preparations, to be close to the water. Once they had met by the shores of Lake Erie, and from then on they always sought out a body of water when they had important work to do.

“The cages are close together,” Langaas said. “I’ll spray with both hands in either direction, throw in the match and run. Everything will be on fire within a few seconds.”

“And then?”

“Then I say: “The Lord’s will be done.””

“And then?”

“I go left, then right. Not too fast, not too slow. I stop on Stortorget and make sure no-one’s on my tail. Then I walk to the newsstand by the hospital, where you’ll be waiting.”

They broke off to watch a small boat on its way into the harbour. The engine sound was loud and hacking.

“These are the last animals. We have reached our first goal.”

Langaas was about to kneel right then and there on the pier. He dragged him up by the arm.

“Never in public.”

“I forgot.”

“Are you calm?”

“Yes.”

“Who am I?”

“My father, my shepherd, my saviour, my God.”

“Who are you?”

“The first disciple. Found on a street in Cleveland, saved and helped back into life. I am the first apostle.”

“What else?”

“The first priest.”

Once I made sandals for a living, he thought. I dreamed about bigger things and had to run away to escape my shame, my sense of failure,

my sense of having destroyed the dreams by my inability to live up to them. Now I fashion people in the same way that I once cut out soles, insteps and straps.

It was 4 p.m. They walked around the city and passed the time on various park benches. They were beyond words now. From time to time he looked at Langaas. He seemed calm and focused on the task at hand.

I’ve made him happy, he thought. A man who grew up spoiled but also stifled and desperately unhappy. Now I bring joy to his life by taking him seriously and giving him a purpose.

They progressed from bench to bench until it was 7.00. The pet shop closed at 6.00. Many people were out in the streets in the warm evening. That was to their advantage.

They went their separate ways. He walked to Stortorget and turned around. Their plans ticked like a timer in his head. Langaas was breaking down the front door with the crowbar. Now he was on the inside, closing the shattered door behind him, listening for signs of anyone in the shop. Now he was dropping the bag, taking out the bottles of petrol and the lighter.

He heard the boom and thought he saw a flash of light reflected in some windows a long way down the street. A narrow plume of smoke rose up to the sky. He turned and walked away. He heard the first sirens before he had made it to the appointed meeting place.

It’s over, he thought. We are reviving the Christian faith, the Christian dictates of a righteous life. The long years in the desert have come to an end. No longer are we concerned with the simple beast who feels pain but lacks comprehension. Now we turn to the human being.

# 

# CHAPTER 31

When Linda got out of the car at Mariagatan she smelled something that reminded her of a week’s holiday she had spent with Herman Mboya in Morocco. They had chosen the cheapest package and stayed in a hotel infested with cockroaches. During that week she had begun to think they didn’t have a future together. The following year they had parted; Herman had returned to Africa and she had started along the way that finally led her to the police training college.

The smell was what had triggered the memory. Mounds of rubbish were burned every night in Morocco. But no-one burns their rubbish in Ystad, she thought. Then she heard the fire engine and police sirens. There must be a fire somewhere in the centre of town. She started to run.

It was still burning when she arrived, panting like a house-bound old woman. When had she become so out of shape? She saw tall flames leaping up through the roof. The people who lived in the upper storeys had been evacuated. A fire-damaged push chair had been abandoned in the street. Firemen were securing the surrounding buildings. Linda made her way up to the police tape.

Her father was quarrelling with Svartman about a witness who had not been thoroughly interviewed and to make it worse had been allowed to leave.

“We’ll never get this madman if we can’t even follow the simplest of routines.”

“Martinsson was in charge.”

“He’s told me twice that he handed it over to you. Now you’ll have to track the witness down.”

Svartman left, clearly upset. They’re like angry bulls, Linda thought. All this time and energy spent marking their territory.

A fire engine which was reversing in the narrow street knocked a hose loose. It started whipping about, spraying water. Wallander jumped to the shelter of a doorway and saw Linda at the same time.

“What happened here?” she asked.

“One or more fire bombs in the shop. Petrol, same as the calf.”

“Any clues?”

“One witness, but no-one seems to know where the person went.”

Wallander was so angry he was shaking. This is how he’ll die, Linda thought. Exhausted, outraged by a careless error in an urgent investigation.

“We absolutely have to get these bastards,” he said, interrupting her chain of thought.

“I think this is different.”

“In what way different?” He looked at her as if she knew the answer.

“I don’t know. It’s as if it were really about something else.”

Hoglund called out to Wallander.

Linda watched him walk away, a large man with his head pulled down into his shoulders, stepping carefully over the hoses and past the smoking remains of what had once been a pet shop. Linda’s gaze fell on a tearful young woman who was watching the blaze. The owner, she supposed. Or simply someone who loves animals. There were a number of spectators, all silent. Burning buildings always inspire dread, she thought. A house fire is a frightening reminder that our own homes could one day be razed to the ground.

“Why aren’t they asking me questions? I don’t get it.”

Linda turned and saw a young woman, pressed up against the shop front. She was talking to a friend. A swirl of thick smoke made them both pull back further.

“Why don’t you just go over and tell them what you saw?” her friend said.

“I’m not going out of my way for the police.”

The witness, Linda thought, and approached the woman.

“What did you see?” she said.

The woman peered at her and Linda saw that she was slightly walleyed.

“Who are you?”

“My name is Linda Wallander. I’m a police officer.” It’s almost true, she thought.

“How can someone kill all those animals? Is it true there was a horse in there too?”

“No,” Linda said. “What did you see?”

“A man.”

“What was he doing?”

“He started the fire that burned all the animals. I was coming from the direction of the theatre. To post some letters, which I do several times a week. I was about halfway to the post office, about a block from the pet shop, when I noticed that someone was walking behind me. I jumped since he had been walking almost soundlessly. I let him pass. I followed him, trying to walk as quietly as he did, I don’t know why. But then I realised I had left a letter in the car so I turned around and went back for it.”

Linda raised her hand. “How long did it take you to go back and get the letter?”

“Three or four minutes. The car is parked by the delivery entrance at the theatre.”

“What happened when you came back this way? Did you see the man again?”

“No.”

“And when you walked past the pet shop, what did you do?”

“I looked in the window but I’m not so interested in hamsters and turtles.”

“Did you see anything inside?”

“A blue light. It’s always on. It’s some kind of heat lamp, I think.”

“And then?”

“I posted my letters that took another three minutes or so and I was walking back to the car, and the shop exploded, or it felt that way. I had just walked past it. There was a sharp light all around me. I threw myself down on to the pavement. The shop was all in flames. An animal must have escaped, it ran past me with its fur on fire. It was horrible.”

“What did you do then?”

“It all happened so fast. But I saw a man standing on the other side of the street. The light was so strong that I was positive it was the man who had overtaken me on the street. He was carrying a bag.”

“Had he been carrying it before?”

“Yes. I didn’t mention that. A black bag, an old-fashioned doctor’s bag.”

“What did you do?”

“I called to him to help me.”

“Were you hurt?”

“I thought so. It was such a loud bang and such a terrible light.”

“Did he help?”

“No, he looked at me and walked away.”

“In which direction?”

“Towards Stortorget.”

“Had you seen him before this evening?”

“Never.”

“How would you describe him?”

“He was tall and strong-looking. Maybe bald, or with very short hair. He had a dark blue coat, dark trousers. His shoes I had looked at when he walked past me and I wondered how he could walk so quietly. They were brown and had a thick rubber sole, but they weren’t sneakers.”

“Can you remember anything else?”

“He shouted something.”

“Who was he shouting to?”

“I don’t know.”

“Did you see anyone else there?”

“No.”

“What did he say?”

“It sounded like, “The Lord’s will be done’.”

““The Lord’s will be done’? Is that it?”

“I’m sure of “Lord’, but the word ‘will’ sounded like it was pronounced in a foreign language. Danish, maybe. Or Norwegian, more like. Yes, that’s it. He sounded like he was speaking Norwegian.”

Linda’s heart beat a little faster. It has to be the same man, she

thought. Unless there’s a conspiracy involving a whole pack of Norwegians. But that’s preposterous.

“Did he say anything else?”

“No.”

“Can I have your name, please?”

“Amy Lindberg.”

Linda fished a pen out of her pocket and wrote the phone number on her wrist. They shook hands.

“Thanks for listening to me,” the woman said, and she turned to rejoin her friend.

Torgeir Langaas. He keeps cropping up like some kind of shadow.

Linda could tell that the firefighting operation had reached a new phase. The firemen were moving more slowly, a sure sign that the blaze would soon be contained. She saw her father talking to the fire chief. When his head moved in her direction she pulled herself back even further, although it was impossible that he could see her in among the shadows. Lindman walked past with the young woman she had seen earlier, the one who had watched the fire and cried. It suits him to comfort crying women, she thought. I, on the other hand, almost never cry. I stopped all that while I was still little. She watched Lindman escort the woman to a patrol car. They said a few words to each other, then he opened the door for her and she climbed in.

The conversation with Amy Lindberg kept coming back to her. The Lord’s will be done. What did the Lord want, exactly? That a pet shop burn to the ground, that some helpless animals die in terror and pain? First it was swans, she thought. Then the calf: singled out, charred, dead. And now a whole shop full of pets. It was obviously the same man, one who had calmly observed his work and pronounced: “As God decreed.”

Linda walked over to Lindman, who looked at her with surprise.

“What are you doing here?”

“I’m just a curious onlooker, but I need to talk to you.”

“What about?”

“The fire.”

He thought for a moment. “I have to go home and eat something anyway,” he said. “I am finished here. You can come along.”

Lindman’s flat was in one of three high-rises planted arbitrarily, it seemed, across an area with a few other houses and a paper-recycling centre.

His was the middle building. The glass in the front door had been broken and replaced by a piece of cardboard, in which someone had also kicked a hole. A message was scribbled on the wall: Life is for sale. Alert the news media.

“I read that every day,” Lindman said. “Makes you think, doesn’t it?”

He unlocked the flat and handed her a hanger for her coat. They walked into the living room, which was furnished with a few simple pieces, randomly located around the room.

“I don’t have anything to offer you except water or beer,” he said. “This is just a place for me to camp out.”

“Where are you moving? You said something about Knickarp.”

“To a house there with a large garden. I’m looking forward to it.”

“I’m still at home,” Linda said. “I’m counting the days until I get out.”

“You have a good father.”

She was taken aback. “What do you mean?”

“Just that. You have a good father. I didn’t.”

There were some newspapers on a side table. She picked up a copy of the Boras Daily.

“It’s not that I’m nostalgic,” he said. “I enjoy reading about everything I’ve managed to escape.”

“Was it that awful?”

“I had to leave when I knew I was going to survive the cancer.”

He fell silent. Linda wasn’t sure how she was going to change the subject.

“I’ll get the beer and some sandwiches,” he said. Linda declined the sandwich.

He came back with two glasses.

She told him of the conversation she had overheard, and what Amy Lindberg had told her. Lindman began to take notes. Linda reverted to the incident when Anna thought she saw her father in Malmo, and she told him all she knew of this shadowy figure of a Norwegian, who was perhaps named Torgeir Langaas, and who kept figuring in her enquiries. She also told him of her second visit to Nedergade in

Copenhagen.

She said in conclusion, “Someone has killed a woman; someone is killing animals; and Anna has disappeared.”

“I fully appreciate your concern,” Lindman said. “Not only because of the vaguely disturbing possibility of a return by Anna’s father. We also have the menacing presence of a person unknown, someone who says: “As God decreed’. You have also learned that your friend Anna is religious. These random facts are starting to look like pieces of a grotesque puzzle, not least in the horrific evil of allowing the severed hands to go on begging for mercy. From everything you have told me, and which I see now in what I know, it’s clear that there’s a religious dimension to all of this that we haven’t taken as seriously as we perhaps should have.”

He drank the last of his beer. There was a rumble of thunder in the distance.

“That’s out over Bornholm,” Linda said. “There are often thunderstorms out there.”

“And an easterly wind, which means it’s on its way here.”

“What do you think about what I just told you?”

“That it’s true. And that what you’ve told me will have a real impact on our investigation.”

“Which investigation?”

“Medberg. Anna’s disappearance is not yet a priority, but I think that will change now.”

“Am I right to be scared?”

“I don’t know. I’m going to write up everything you’ve told me, and it would be a good idea for you to do the same. I’ll let my colleagues know about this tomorrow.”

Linda shivered. “Dad will be furious that I went to you first and not to him.”

“Why don’t you blame it on the fact that he was so busy with the fire?”

“He keeps saying that he’s never too busy when it comes to me.”

Lindman helped her on with her coat. She thought that she was genuinely attracted to him. His hands on her shoulders were gentle.

She returned to Mariagatan. Her father was waiting for her at the kitchen table and she could tell from his face that he was angry. Stefan, you bastard, she thought. Couldn’t you at least have waited until I got home?

She sat down across from him and braced herself.

“If you’re going to rant and rave I’m going to bed. No, I’ll leave. I’ll sleep in the car.”

“You could at least have talked to me. This amounts to a breach of trust, Linda. A huge breach of trust.”

“For Christ’s sake you were up to your neck in a pet massacre. A street was going up in flames.”

“You shouldn’t have taken it upon yourself to talk to that girl. What gave you the right to do that? How many times do I have to tell you this is not your business? You haven’t started working yet.”

Linda pulled up her sleeve and showed him Amy Lindberg’s phone number.

“Will that do? I’m going to bed.”

“I find it deeply disturbing that you don’t even have enough respect for me not to go behind my back.”

Linda’s eyes widened. “Go behind your back? Who said anything about going behind your back?”

“You know what I’m saying.”

Linda swept a salt cellar and a vase of withered roses to the floor. He had gone too far. She ran into the hallway, grabbed her coat and slammed the front door behind her. I hate him, she thought, fumbling in her pocket for the car keys. I hate his endless nagging. I’m not spending another night there.

She tried to calm herself in the car. He thinks I’m going to feel guilty, she thought. He’s waiting for me to go back inside and tell him that Linda Caroline rebelled a little but takes it all back now.

“Well, I’m not going back,” she said aloud. “I’ll stay with Zeba.” She was about to start the car when she changed her mind. Zeba would talk, ask questions, discuss. She didn’t have the energy for that. She drove to Anna’s flat instead. Her father could sit at the kitchen table until the end of the world as far as she was concerned.

She put the key in the lock and pushed the door open. Anna was standing in the hall with a smile on her face.

# 

# CHAPTER 32

“I knew it had to be you. No-one else would drop by like this, like a thief in the night. You probably intuited that I had come back and woke up. Isn’t that it?” Anna said brightly.

Linda dropped her keys.

“I don’t understand. Is it really you?”

“Of course it’s me.”

“I can’t tell you how relieved I am.”

Anna frowned. “Why are you relieved?”

“I’ve been worried sick about you.”

Anna raised her hands in apology. “I’m guilty, I know. Do you want me to apologise or to tell you what happened?”

“You don’t have to do either right now. It’s enough that you’re here.”

They went into the living room. Even though Linda was struggling to come to terms with the fact that Anna was back and sitting there in her usual chair, she noticed that the framed blue butterfly was still missing.

“I came over because I had a fight with my father,” Linda said. “I thought I would sleep on your sofa since you were away.”

“You can still sleep here even though I’m back.”

“He made me so mad. My father and I are like two fighting cocks. We were arguing about you, as it happens.”

“About me?”

Linda stretched out her hand and brushed Anna’s arm with her fingertips. Anna was wearing a dressing gown from which the sleeves had been cut off for some reason. Her skin was cold. There was no doubt that it really was Anna who had come back and not an impostor. Anna’s skin was always cold. Linda could remember that from their childhood when they with the tingling feeling of exploring forbidden territory had played dead. The game had made Linda warm and sweaty, but Anna had been cold, so cold, in fact, that they had stopped playing. Her cold skin scared them both.

“I was so worried about you,” Linda said. “It’s not like you to disappear and not be home when we had agreed to meet.”

“You have to remember my world was turned upside down. I thought I had seen my father. I was convinced he had come back.”

She paused and looked down at her hands.

“What happened?” Linda said.

“I went to look for him,” she said. “I didn’t forget about our plans, but I thought you would understand. I had seen my father and I had to find him. I was so worked up I was shaking and didn’t dare drive. I took the train to Malmo and set about looking for him. It was an absolutely indescribable experience. I walked up and down the streets using all my senses, thinking there had to be a trace of him somewhere, a scent, a sound.

“It took me several hours to get from the station to the hotel where I had seen him. When I walked into the hotel lobby a fat lady was half sleeping in the chair I had been sitting in. I became furious; she had taken my place! No-one had the right to sit in the holy chair where I had seen my father and he had seen me. I walked up to her and shook her arm. I told her she had to move because the furniture was going to be replaced. She did as I asked, although I can’t imagine how she could think I was one of the hotel staff in my raincoat and with wet hair stuck to my cheeks. I sat in the chair when she had left. I thought that if I just stayed there long enough he would return.”

Anna stopped talking and left to go to the toilet. Thunder rumbled in the distance. She came back and continued:

“I sat in the chair until the receptionists started looking at me suspiciously. I booked a room, but tried to spend as little time there as possible. On the second day the fat lady came back. She said, “You thief you stole my seat!” She was so worked up I thought she was going to hyperventilate. I thought that no-one would make up a story about sitting in a particular chair in the hope of catching a glimpse of a father they hadn’t seen in over twenty years. So I told her the truth and she believed me. She sat down in the chair next to me and said she’d be happy to keep me company while I waited. It was crazy. She talked non-stop, mainly about her husband, who was at a men’s head wear conference. You can laugh I didn’t, of course. She told me about it in excruciating detail, about the rows of sombre men in airless conference rooms deciding which hats to order for the new season. She talked until I was ready to strangle her. But then her husband appeared. He was as fat as she was, and was wearing a broad-brimmed and probably very expensive hat. She and I had never actually introduced ourselves. As she was about to leave with her husband, she said to him: “This young lady is waiting for her father. She’s been waiting for him a long time.” And the man asked, “How long?” “Almost twenty-five years,” she told him. He looked at me thoughtfully but also with great respect. And the hotel lobby with its polished, sterile surfaces and strong smell of commercial-grade cleaning agents was transformed into a church. He said, “One can never wait too long’. Then he put on his hat and I watched them leave the hotel. The whole situation was absurd, almost unbelievably so, but that’s what made it so real.

“I stayed in that chair for close to two days before I realised that my father was not going to reappear. I decided to go out and look for him, though I kept the room. There was no master plan to my search. I walked through the parks, along the canals and the various harbours. My father had left me and Henrietta because he sought a freedom he couldn’t have while he was with us. Therefore I looked for him in the open spaces. There were times when I thought I had found him. I would get so dizzy I’d have to lean against a wall or a tree, but it was never him. All the longing I had been bottling up for so long finally turned to rage. There I was, still looking for him, still wanting so badly to find him, and he had simply chosen to humiliate me by showing himself to me once and then disappearing again. Naturally I started to doubt myself. How could I have been so sure that it was him? Everything spoke against it. The last night I was there I ended up in Pildamm Park. I called out into the darkness: “Daddy, where are you?” But no-one answered. I stayed in the park until dawn and then I suddenly felt as though I had been through the final trial in my relationship with him, as though I had been wandering in a fog of delusion, thinking that he was going to show himself to me, and when at last I emerged into the light I accepted that he didn’t exist. Well, maybe he does exist, maybe he’s not actually dead. But for me, from that point on, he was going to be a mirage, a dream that I could evoke from time to time at will, nothing more. For all of these years I had believed, deep down, that he was out there somewhere. Now, at the moment I thought he had finally returned, I knew he was never coming back at all. Now that I could no longer hold on to the idea of him as a living, breathing person, someone to be mad at, to keep waiting for, he was finally gone for real.”

The storm clouds had moved on to the west. Anna stopped talking and looked down at her hands. To Linda it seemed that she was making sure none of her fingers were missing. She tried to imagine what it would be like if her own father had disappeared when she was a child. It was an impossible thought. He had always been there, a huge enveloping shadow, sometimes warm, sometimes cold, encircling her and keeping his eye on her. Linda wondered if following in his footsteps and becoming a police officer was going to be the greatest mistake of her life. Why did I do it? she asked herself. He’s going to crush me with all the kindness, understanding and love even jealousy he should really be giving to another woman and not to his own daughter.

Anna looked up. “It’s over,” she said. “It was no more than a reflection in the glass. I can return to my studies. Let’s not talk about it any more. I’m sorry I worried you so much.”

Linda wondered if she had heard about the death of Birgitta Medberg. That was an unanswered question what connection was there between her and Anna? And what about Vigsten in Copenhagen? Was the name Torgeir Langaas in any of her diaries? I should have ploughed through them while I had the chance, Linda thought callously. Reading one page or a thousand makes no difference, once you’ve crossed the line.

Somewhere inside her the sliver of anxiety was still there, gnawing away at her. But she decided that these questions would have to wait until later.

“I went to see your mother,” Linda said. “She didn’t seem particularly worried. I took that as a sign that she knew where you were. But she didn’t seem to want to tell me anything.”

“I didn’t tell her I thought I saw my father.”

Linda thought about what Henrietta had claimed, that Anna was regularly reporting sightings of her father. Who is lying, or not telling the whole truth? Linda decided that it wasn’t important for the moment.

“I went to see Mona yesterday,” she said. “I was going to surprise her, and in fact I did.”

“Was she happy?”

“Not particularly. I found her in the kitchen, stark naked, drinking vodka.”

“Is she an alcoholic?”

“That remains to be seen. I suppose anyone can have a bad day.”

“You’re right,” Anna said. “Well, I need to get some sleep. Do you want me to make up the sofa for you?”

“No, I’m going home,” Linda said. “Now that I know you’re back, I can sleep in my own bed, even though I’ll probably have another fight with my father first thing tomorrow morning.”

Linda got up and walked into the hall. Anna stood in the doorway to the living room. The storm had passed.

“I didn’t tell you what happened at the end of my trip,” she said. “I saw someone I wasn’t expecting. This morning I was having a cup of coffee at the railway station while I waited. Someone came over to my table. You’ll never guess who it was.”

“Since I’ll never guess, it must have been the fat lady.”

“Right. Her husband was standing guard over one of those huge old-fashioned trunks. It was probably full of hats all set to become the latest fashion. The fat lady was sweating and her cheeks were flushed. She leaned over to me and asked me if I had seen him. I didn’t want to disappoint her, so I said yes, I had seen him. Everything had gone well. Her eyes filled with tears, then she said, “May I tell my husband? We are returning to Halmstad now, and meeting a young woman who has been reunited with her father is a memory to cherish for life.””

“I’ll come round tomorrow,” Linda said. “Let’s go out as we were planning a week ago.”

They agreed to meet around noon. Linda gave Anna the car keys.

“I borrowed your car when I was looking for you. I’ll fill it up for you tomorrow.”

“There’s no need to do that. You shouldn’t have to pay for being worried about me.”

Linda walked home. The storm clouds were gone, but there was a light rain. She drew in the smell of asphalt and damp earth. Everything is all right, she thought. I was wrong. Nothing has happened. But the niggling splinter of anxiety survived. Anna had said, “I saw someone I wasn’t expecting.”

# 

# CHAPTER 33

Linda came awake with a start. Her curtain was askew, letting in a ray of sunlight reflected off the roof of a building across the street. She stretched her arm out into the light. When does the day start? she wondered. Every morning she had the feeling that she had had a dream just before waking which told her that the day was about to begin.

She sat up. Anna was back. Linda held her breath for a moment to allay the fleeting suspicion that she had dreamed it. But Anna had really been there, in that funny dressing gown with the sleeves cut off. Linda lay down again and put her hand back in the ray of sun. Summer will be over soon, she thought. I start work in five days. Then I get a new flat and my father and I won’t rub each other raw any more. Soon it will be autumn and one morning there will be frost on the ground. She looked at her arm bathed in sunlight. We’re still in the time before the frost.

She got up when she heard her father rattling around in the bathroom. She couldn’t help laughing no-one else could cause such a racket in a bathroom. It was as if he were doing fierce battle with soaps, taps and towels. She put on her dressing gown and went to the kitchen. It was 7.00. Her father appeared, still drying his hair.

“I’m sorry about last night,” he said.

Without waiting for a response, he walked over to her and bent his head.

“Can you tell if I’m losing my hair?”

She flicked through his wet hair.

“There’s a tiny bald spot right here.”

“Damn it. I don’t want to go bald.”

“Grandpa didn’t have much hair. It must run in the family. You’d look like an American army officer if you cut it all off.”

“I don’t want to look like an American officer.”

“Anna’s back.”

Wallander stopped in the middle of filling a kettle. “Anna Westin?”

“She’s the only Anna I know who’s been missing. Yesterday when I left I went over to her place to sleep. And there she was in her hall.”

“Where had she been?”

“She had gone to Malmo and stayed in a hotel. She was looking for her father.”

“Did she find him?”

“No. She finally realised that she had only imagined seeing him. So she came back. That was yesterday.”

Wallander sat down. “She spends a few days in Malmo looking for her father. She stays in a hotel and tells no-one neither a friend nor her mother where she is. Is that right?”

“Yes.”

“Do you have any reason to doubt her word?”

“Not really.”

“What does that mean? Yes or no?”

“No.”

Wallander filled the rest of the kettle.

“So I was right. Nothing had happened.”

“Birgitta Medberg’s name is in her journal. As is that man named Vigsten. I don’t know how much Lindman told you during your gossip yesterday.”

“It was no gossip. He was very thorough I shouldn’t wonder if he’s going to be the new Martinsson when it comes to making clear, concise reports. I’m going to have Anna come down to the station so she can answer a few questions for us. You can tell her that, but don’t mention Medberg, and no more independent investigating from your side, understood?”

“Now you’re starting to sound like a patronising chief inspector,” Linda said.

He looked surprised. “I am an inspector, in case you didn’t know,” he said. “But I don’t think I’ve ever before been accused of being patronising.”

They ate their breakfast in silence, each with a section of the Ystad Allehanda. At 7.30 Wallander got up to leave, but changed his mind and sat down again.

“You said something the other day,” he said tentatively.

Linda immediately knew what he was thinking of. It amused her to see him so embarrassed. “You mean what I said about you needing a little exercise?”

“What did you really mean by that?”

“What do you think? Isn’t it self-explanatory?”

“My sex life is my business.”

“You don’t have a sex life.”

“It’s still my business.”

“Even if it’s non-existent? Well, I don’t think it’s good for you to be alone. Every week that passes you put on more weight. All those extra pounds scream out how lonely you are you might as well hang a sign around your neck saying, “I need to get laid’.”

“You don’t have to raise your voice.”

“Who could possibly hear us?”

Wallander got up, quickly. “Forget it,” he said. “I’m going in.”

She watched him as he rinsed out his coffee cup. Am I too hard on him? she thought. But if I don’t tell him, who will?

Linda called Anna at around 10.00.

“I just want to make sure I didn’t dream the whole thing.”

“And I realise now how much worry I caused. I called Zeba, so she knows I’m back.”

“And Henrietta?”

“I’ll talk to her later. Are you still coming over at noon?”

“I’ll be there.”

Linda didn’t put the receiver down right away after they ended the conversation. That little splinter was still inside her somewhere. It’s a message, she thought. My body is trying to tell me something, like dreams where everything leads back to you even though it may seem that you’re dreaming about someone else. Anna has come back. She’s unhurt and nothing seems out of the ordinary, but I can’t forget the two names in her journal: Medberg and Vigsten. And then there’s a third person, the Norwegian, Langaas. I won’t be able to batten down the hatches on these worries until I get some answers.

She sat on the balcony. The day was cool and fresh after the night’s thunderstorm. The paper said the rain had caused sewers to overflow in Rydsgard. A butterfly lay dead on the balcony floor. That’s another question I need answered, Linda thought.

She put her legs up on the balcony railing. Only five more days, she thought. Then I’ll no longer be in limbo.

Linda didn’t know where the thought had come from, but she went inside and called enquiries. The hotel was one of the Scandic group. She was put through and a cheerful man’s voice answered. She sensed the trace of a Danish accent.

“I’d like to speak to one of your guests, Anna Westin.”

“One moment.”

The first lie is easy, she thought. Then it gets harder.

The cheerful voice returned. “I have no-one registered under that name.”

“Perhaps she’s checked out already. I know she was there yesterday.”

“Westin, Anna, you said?”

“Yes.”

“One moment, please.” This time he returned almost immediately. “There’s been no-one of that name registered in the last two weeks. Can I check the spelling of the name?”

“She spells it with a W.”

“We’ve had a Wagner, Werner, Wiktor with a W, Williamsson, Wallander ..

.”

Linda squeezed the receiver. “Excuse me. What was the last name?”

“Williamsson?”

“No, the next one.”

“Wallander.” The cheerful voice took on a steely edge. “I thought you said you were looking for a fru Westin?”

“Her husband’s name is Wallander. Perhaps she had booked them under his name?”

“Please hold the line, madam.”

It can’t be, she thought. This isn’t happening.

“I’m afraid that isn’t correct either. The only Wallander we’ve had was a woman who was staying alone here in a single room.”

Linda couldn’t speak.

“Hello? Are you still there?”

“Was her first name Linda, by any chance?”

“Yes, as a matter of fact, it was. I’m sorry I can’t do anything more for you. Perhaps your friend was staying elsewhere. We also have a wonderful establishment outside Lund.”

“Thank you.”

Linda almost slammed the phone down. At first she had felt surprise; now it was anger. She ought to speak to her father and not go on with this on her own. Right now this is the only question that matters to me, she thought: Why would Anna go to Malmo to look for her father and book a room under my name?

She tore a piece of paper from a pad on the kitchen table and crossed out the word “asparagus” which was written on it. He doesn’t even eat asparagus, she thought irritably. By the time she was ready to start jotting down all of the names and events associated with Anna’s disappearance, she no longer knew where she should begin. So she drew the outline of a butterfly and started filling it in with blue. Then the pen ran out and she got another. One of the wings was blue, the other black. This is a butterfly that doesn’t exist anywhere save in the realm of imagination, she thought. Like Anna’s father. Reality is full of other things, such as burning swans, a butchered body in the forest, a mugger in Copenhagen.

At 11.00 she walked to the harbour, strolling out on to the pier and sitting down on a bollard. She tried to think of a reasonable explanation for Anna using her name. A dead wild duck floated in the oil-slicked water. When Linda finally got up, she had still not thought of a reasonable explanation. It must exist, she thought. I just can’t think of it.

She rang Anna’s bell at exactly noon. The anxiety she had felt earlier was gone. Now she was simply on her guard.

# 

# CHAPTER 34

Langaas opened his eyes, surprised as always that he was still alive. His life should have ended in that Cleveland gutter, his body disposed of by the state of Ohio.

He lay still in what had once been the maid’s room off the kitchen a room Vigsten had forgotten all about and listened to noises issuing from the flat. A piano tuner was working on the baby grand. He came every Wednesday. Langaas had enough of an ear to know that the tuner needed to make only very minor adjustments to the pitch. He imagined old Vigsten sitting on a chair by the window, his eyes following the tuner in his work. Langaas stretched out. Everything had gone according to plan yesterday evening. The pet-shop premises had burned to the ground; not a mouse nor a hamster had escaped. Erik had stressed how important this last animal sacrifice was, how crucial that nothing go wrong. Erik came back to this point over and over, that God allowed no mistakes.

Every morning Langaas recited the oath that Erik had taught him, the first and foremost disciple: “It is my duty to God and my Earthly Master to follow the orders I receive without hesitation and undertake all actions necessary to teach the people what will happen to those that turn away from Him. Only by accepting the Lord through the words of His one true prophet will redemption be possible and the mercy of being counted among those who will return after the great transformation.”

He folded his hands in prayer and mumbled the verses from Jude that Erik had taught him: “And the Lord, having saved the people from the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed them that believed not.” You can turn every room into a cathedral, Erik had told him. The church you seek is here and everywhere.

Langaas whispered his oath, closed his eyes and pulled the blankets up to his chin. The piano tuner hit the same high note again and again.

Erik’s words were what had sparked the memory of his grandfather. Despite his diminishing comprehension, he had spent his last years alone in his house by Femunden. One of Langaas’s sisters had spent a whole week with him without his registering the fact. Langaas had told Erik about his idea and received his cautious blessing. Old Frans Vigsten had popped up as if from nowhere. Langaas sometimes wondered if Erik had steered him in his direction. Langaas had been at a cafe in Nyhavn, testing himself to see if he could resist the multitude of temptations that came his way. The old man had been there drinking wine. Out of the blue he had come over to Langaas and asked: “Could you tell me where I am?”

Langaas had realised that he was senile rather than drunk.

“At a cafe in Nyhavn.”

The old man had lowered himself on to a chair across from him, and after a long silence asked: “Where is that exactly?”

“Nyhavn? In Copenhagen.”

“I can’t seem to remember where I live.”

They found the address on a piece of paper in the man’s wallet. Nedergade.

“My memory comes and goes,” he said. “But this may be where I live, where my piano is, and where I receive my students.”

Langaas had helped him into a cab and then accompanied him to Nedergade. The name Vigsten appeared on the list of residents in the entrance. Langaas followed him up to the flat. Vigsten recognised the smell of stale air.

“This is where I live,” he said. “This is what it smells like.”

Then he had wandered off into the recesses of the large flat and appeared completely to forget about the man who had helped him home. Langaas found and pocketed a spare set of keys before he left. A few days later he returned and made the maid’s room into another of his temporary residences. Vigsten had still not grasped that he was host to a man who was waiting to be transported to a higher state. He had long since forgotten about their meeting in Nyhavn; he assumed Langaas was a pupil. When Langaas said he was there to service the radiators, Vigsten had turned his back and blanked him out in the same instant.

Langaas looked at his hands. They were large and strong, and they shook no longer. It had been many years since he had been lifted from the gutter, and he had not had a drop of alcohol or any drugs since then. Erik had always been there, supporting him. He could never have done it without him. It was through Erik that he had his faith, the strength he needed to continue living.

I am strong, he thought. I wait in my hiding places for my instructions. I follow them to the letter and return into hiding. Erik never knows exactly where I am, but I can always sense when he needs me.

I have received this strength from Erik, he thought. And I have only one small weakness left that I have not been able to shake off. The fact that he kept a secret from Erik was a source of great shame. The prophet had always spoken openly to him, the man from the gutter. He had not concealed any part of himself, and he had demanded the same from the man who would be his disciple. When Erik had asked him if he was free of all secrets and weaknesses he had answered yes. But it had been a lie. There was one link to his old existence. For the longest time he had resisted the task that awaited him. But when he woke this morning he knew he could no longer put it off. Setting fire to the pet shop last night had been the final step before he was lifted to the next level. He could wait no longer. If Erik did not discover his weakness, then surely God would turn His anger upon him. This fury would also strike Erik, and that was an unbearable thought.

He got up and dressed. He saw that it was overcast and windy. He hesitated between the leather jacket and his long coat, but decided on the jacket. He fingered the feathers from pigeons and swans that he picked up from the streets when he walked. Perhaps this collecting of feathers is also a form of weakness, he thought. But it is a weakness for which God forgives me.

He got off his bus at the town hall, walked to the railway station and bought the morning paper. The pet-shop arson in Ystad was frontpage news. A police officer was reported as saying, “Only a sick person could do something like this, a sick person with sadistic tendencies.”

Erik had taught him to keep his cool, whatever happened. But reading that what he had done was regarded as a twisted kind of sadism outraged him. He crumpled the newspaper and threw it into a rubbish bin. As penance for this weakness he gave 50 kronor to a drunk who was asking for any spare change. The man stared after him, slack-jawed. I’ll come back one day and beat you to a pulp, Langaas thought savagely. I’ll crush your face with a single blow, in the name of the Lord, in the name of the Christian uprising. Your blood will be spilled and join the river that will one day lead us to the promised land.

It was 10.00. He went to a cafe and ate breakfast. Erik had ordered him to lie low this day. His instructions were simply to seek out one of his hiding places and wait. Perhaps Erik knows I still have a weakness, he thought. Maybe he’s known all along, but wants to see if I have the strength to deliver myself of it on my own.

God makes His plans well, he thought. God and Erik, His servant, are no dreamers. Erik has explained how God organises everything down to the very last detail of a person’s life. This is why this day has been granted to me, in order that I should rid myself of my one remaining weakness, and stand prepared at last.

Sylvi Rasmussen had come to Denmark in the early 1990s, along with a boat-load of other illegal immigrants in a ship that had made a landfall on the west coast of Jutland. At that point she had already undertaken a long and at times terrifying journey from her home in Bulgaria. She had travelled in trucks, in trailers hitched to tractors, and had even spent two terrible days sealed in an increasingly airless container. Her name wasn’t Sylvi Rasmussen then, it was Nina Barovska. She had borrowed the money for her journey, and when she came ashore on that deserted beach in Jutland two men had been waiting for her. They had taken her to a flat in Arhus where they had raped her and beaten her again and again for a week, and then when they had crushed her will they had taken her to a flat in Copenhagen where they forced her to work as a prostitute. She had tried to escape after a month, but the two men cut off her little finger from each hand and threatened to do something worse if she ever tried to escape again. She didn’t. To make her existence more bearable she started using drugs and hoped she would not have to live too long.

One day a client whose name was Torgeir Langaas had come to her.

If

He became a regular and she would try to talk to him, desperately wanting to make the time they spent together more human, less cold. But he always shook his head and mumbled unintelligible responses. Although he was gentle, she would sometimes break into uncontrollable shivering after one of his visits. There was something threatening about him, something uncanny, though he was among her most loyal and generous clients. His large hands touched her carefully, but still he frightened her.

He rang her doorbell at 11.00. He invariably came to her in the mornings. Since he wanted to spare her the moment of realisation that she was to die this day at the beginning of September, he took hold of her from behind as they were on their way into the bedroom. His large hands reached for her forehead and her neck and he snapped her spine. He put her body on the bed, roughly pulled her clothes off and did what he could to make it look like a sex crime. When he had finished, he looked around and thought that Sylvi had deserved a better fate. If circumstances had been different he would have wanted to bring her with him to the promised land. But Erik set the rules, and he demanded that his disciples be free of all worldly weakness. Now he had achieved this state. Women, desire, were gone from his life.

He left the flat. He was ready. Erik was waiting for him. God was waiting.

# 

# CHAPTER 35

Her grandfather had often complained about difficult people, a category which included almost everyone. Accordingly, he did his best to minimise contact with other people. However, as he said, one could never avoid them altogether. Linda had been particularly struck by the image he had used.

“They’re like eels,” he said. “You try to keep a hold of them, but they wriggle free of your grasp. The thing about eels is also that they swim at night. By that I don’t mean you only meet difficult people at night if anything they seem more likely to come up with their idiotic suggestions in the morning. Their darkness is of a different order; it’s something they carry inside. It’s their total obliviousness to the difficulty they cause others by their constant meddling. I have never meddled in other people’s lives.”

That was the biggest lie of his life. He had died without recognising the extent to which he himself had meddled in the lives of those around him, especially in trying to bend his two children to his will.

These musings about difficult people came unbidden to Linda as she was about to ring Anna’s bell. She paused, her finger hovering a few centimetres in front of the buzzer. Anna is a difficult person, she thought. She doesn’t seem to understand the worry she caused, or how her actions affect me.

When she rang the bell, Anna opened, smiling, dressed in a white blouse and dark trousers. She was barefoot and had pulled her hair back into a loose knot.

Linda had decided to bring it up straightaway to clear the air. She threw her jacket over a chair and said: “I have to tell you that I read the last few pages of your journal. I only did it to see if there was any explanation to your disappearance.”

Anna flinched. “Then that was what I sensed,” she said. “It

was almost as if there was a different smell when I opened the pages.”

“I’m sorry, but I was so worried. I read the last couple of pages, nothing more.”

We lie to make our half-truths seem more plausible, she thought. Anna may see through me. The journal will always be between us now. She’ll be asking herself what I did and didn’t read.

Anna stood by the window in the living room, her back to Linda. Linda looked at her friend, thinking she might as well be looking at an enemy. She realised she no longer knew Anna.

“There’s one question you still need to answer.” She waited for Anna to turn around, but she didn’t. “I hate talking to people’s backs.”

Still no reaction. You may be a difficult person, Linda thought. But sometimes difficult people go too far. Grandpa would have thrown an eel like this into the fire and let it writhe in the flames.

“Why did you check into that hotel under my name?”

Linda tried to read Anna’s back while she wiped the sweat from her neck. This will be my curse, she had thought in the first month of her police training. There are laughing policemen and crying policemen, but I’m going to be known as the perspiring policewoman.

Anna burst into laughter and turned around. Linda tried to judge if her laughter was genuine.

“How did you find out?”

“I called the hotel.”

“May I ask why?”

“I don’t know.”

“What did you ask them exactly?”

“It’s not so hard to work out.”

“Tell me.”

“I asked if an Anna Westin was still there or if she had checked out. They didn’t have an Anna Westin, but they did have a Wallander, they said. It was that simple. But why did you do it?”

“What would you say if I told you I don’t know why I used your name? Maybe I was afraid my father would run away again if he found out that I had checked into the hotel where we saw each other. If you want the truth, it’s that I don’t know.”

The phone rang, but Anna made no move to pick it up. The answering machine switched on and Zeba’s chirpy voice filled the room. She was calling for no reason, she informed them happily.

“I love people who call for no reason with so much positive energy,” Anna said.

Linda didn’t answer. She had no room to think about Zeba.

“I read a name in your journal: Birgitta Medberg. Do you know what’s happened to her?”

“No.”

“Don’t you read the papers?”

“I was looking for my father.”

“She’s been found murdered.”

Anna looked closely at her. “Why?”

“I don’t know why.”

“What are you saying?”

“I’m saying she was murdered. The police don’t know who did it, but they’re going to want to talk to you about her.”

Anna shook her head. “What happened? Who would want to kill her?”

Linda decided not to reveal any details about the murder. She simply sketched out the news in broad brush strokes Anna’s dismay looked completely genuine.

“When did this happen?”

“A few days ago.”

Anna shook her head again, left the window and sat down in a chair.

“How did you know her?” Linda said.

Anna looked narrowly at her. “Is this an interrogation?”

“I’m curious.”

“We rode horses together. I don’t remember the first time we met, but there was someone who had two Norwegian Fjord horses that needed exercising. Birgitta and I volunteered to ride them. I didn’t know her at all. She never said very much. I know she studied pilgrimage trails. We also shared an interest in butterflies, but I don’t know anything more about her. She wrote to me fairly recently and suggested we buy a horse together. I never replied.”

Linda tried to remain alert for an indication that Anna was lying.

I’m not the person who should be doing this, she thought. I should be driving a patrol car and picking up drunks. My father should be talking to Anna, not me. It’s just that damn butterfly. It should be hanging on the wall.

Anna had already followed her gaze and read her mind.

“I took the butterfly with me when I went to look for my father. I was going to give it to him, but then when I realised it was all my imagination I threw it in the canal.”

It could be true, Linda thought. Or she lies so convincingly that I can’t tell.

The phone rang again. Ann-Britt Hdglund’s voice came on the answering machine. Anna looked at Linda, who nodded. Anna picked up the receiver. The conversation was brief and Anna didn’t say much. She hung up.

“They want me to come to the police station now,” she said.

Linda got up. “Then you’d better go.”

“I want you to come with me.”

“Why?”

“I’d feel more secure.”

Linda hesitated. “I’m not sure it’s appropriate.”

“But I’m not accused of anything. They just want to have a conversation with me, at least that’s what the woman said. And you’re both a police officer and my friend.”

“I’m happy to go down there with you, but I’m not sure they’ll let me stay in the room when they talk to you.”

Hoglund came into the reception area at the police station to meet Anna. She looked disapprovingly at Linda. She doesn’t like me, Linda thought. She’s the kind of woman who prefers young men with piercings and an attitude. Hoglund had put on weight. Soon you’ll be dumpy, Linda thought with satisfaction. I still wonder what my father saw in you when he courted you a few years ago.

“I want Linda to be there,” Anna said.

“I don’t know if that will be possible,” Hoglund said. “Why do you want her to be there?”

“I have a tendency to make things more complicated than they are,” Anna said. “I just want her there for support, that’s all.”

Hoglund shrugged and looked at Linda.

“You’ll have to ask your father if it’s OK,” she said. “You know where his office is. He’s waiting in the small conference room two doors down from there.”

Hoglund left them and marched off.

“Is this where you’ll be working?” Anna said.

“Hardly. I’ll be spending time in the garage and in the front seat of patrol cars.”

The door to the small conference room was half open. Wallander was leaning back in his chair, a cup of coffee in his hand. He’s going to break that chair, Linda thought. Do police officers have to get so fat? I’ll have to take early retirement. She pushed the door open. Wallander didn’t seem particularly surprised to see her with Anna. He shook Anna’s hand.

“I would like Linda to stay,” she said.

“Of course.”

Wallander threw a glance behind them into the corridor.

“Where’s Hoglund?”

“I don’t think she wanted to come along,” Linda said, seating herself as far away from her father as possible.

That day Linda learned something important about police work both from Anna and from her father. Her father impressed her by steering the conversation with imperceptible yet total control. He never confronted Anna directly, he approached her from the side, listening to her answers, encouraging her even when she contradicted herself.

He gave the impression of having all the time in the world, but never let her off the hook.

What Anna taught her was through her lies. She appeared to be trying to keep them to a minimum, but without success. Once, when Anna bent down to pick up a pencil that had roiled off the table, Linda and her father exchanged a look.

When it was over and Anna had gone home, Linda sat at the kitchen table at home and tried to write down the conversation exactly as she remembered it, like a screenplay. How was it that Anna had begun? Linda started to write and the exchange slowly reproduced itself on paper.

KW: Thanks for coming. I’m glad that nothing serious happened to you. Linda was very worried, and I was too.

AW: I suppose I don’t need to tell you about the person I thought

I saw in Malmo.

KW: No, you don’t. Would you like something to drink?

AW: Juice, please.

KW: I’m afraid we don’t have any. There’s coffee, tea or plain water.

AW: I’ll pass.

Slowly but surely, Linda thought. He has all the time in the world.

KW: How much do you know about what happened to Birgitta Medberg?

AW: Linda told me she was killed. It’s horrible. Incomprehensible. I know you saw her name in my journal.

KW: Not us. Linda was the one who saw it when she was trying to work out what had happened to you. AW: I don’t like people reading my journal. KW: Of course not. But Birgitta’s name was there, wasn’t it? AW: Yes.

KW: We’re trying to build a picture from all the people she came in contact with. The conversation we’re having is identical to those my colleagues are having with others, all round us. AW: We rode a pair of Norwegian Fjord horses together. They’re owned by a man called Jorlander. He lives on a small farm near Charlottenlund. He was a juggler in an earlier life. He has something wrong with his leg and can’t ride now. We exercised the horses for him.

KW: When did you first meet Birgitta? AW: Seven years and three months ago.

KW: How come you remember it so precisely?

AW: Because I’ve thought about it. I knew you would ask me that.

KW: Where did you meet?

AW: In the stables. She had also heard that Jorlander needed volunteers. We rode two or three times a week. We always talked about the horses, that was all.

KW: You never met each other apart from the riding?

AW: I thought she was boring, to be perfectly honest. Except for the butterflies.

KW: Which butterflies are they?

AW: One day when we were riding we realised we both had a passion for butterflies. Then we had a new topic of conversation.

KW: Did you ever hear her express any fears?

AW: She seemed nervous whenever we had to take the horses across a busy road, I remember that.

KW: And other than that?

AW: No.

KW: Did she ever have anyone with her?

AW: No, she would always be by herself on her little Vespa.

KW: So you had no other contact with each other?

AW: No. Just a letter she wrote to me once. Nothing else.

A slight hesitation, Linda thought as she wrote. An imperceptible tremor at times, but here she actually stumbled. What was she hiding? Linda thought about what she had seen in the hut and broke out into a sweat.

KW: When did you last see Birgitta?

AW: Two weeks ago.

KW: In what context was that?

AW: For heaven’s sake, how many times do I have to repeat myself? Riding.

KW: This is the last time, I assure you. I just want to make sure

I have all the facts straight. What happened in Malmo, by the way? When you were looking for your father.

AW: How do you mean?

KW: I mean, who rode the horses for you? Who filled in for

Birgitta and for you?

AW: Jorlander has some reserves, young girls mostly. He doesn’t like to use them because of their age, but he must have had to.

You can ask him.

KW: We will. Do you remember if there was anything different about the last time you met?

AW: Who? The young girls?

KW: No, I was thinking of Birgitta.

AW: She was her normal self.

KW: Do you remember what you talked about?

AW: I’ve told you several times now that we didn’t talk very much. A little about the horses, the weather, butterflies. That was about it.

And right here he had suddenly sat up in his chair, Linda thought, a tactical manoeuvre telling Anna to be on her guard.

KW: We have another name from your journal: Vigsten. Of Nedergade in Copenhagen.

Anna had looked over at Linda in surprise, then narrowed her eyes. There goes that friendship, Linda had thought at the time. If it wasn’t gone already, that is.

AW: Obviously someone has read more of my journal than I

realised.

KW: That’s as may be. Vigsten. What can you tell me about this person?

AW: Why is this important?

KW: I don’t know if it’s important.

AW: Does he or she have anything to do with Birgitta?

KW: Perhaps.

AW: He’s a piano teacher. He was my teacher for a while, and we’ve kept in touch since then.

KW: Is that it?

AW: Yes.

KW: When was he your teacher?

AW: It was during the autumn of 1997.

KW: And only then?

AW: Yes.

KW: Can I ask why you stopped going to him?

AW: I wasn’t good enough.

KW: Did he tell you that?

AW: I did. Not to him, to myself.

KW: It must have cost a great deal of money to have a piano teacher in Copenhagen, with all that travel.

AW: You have to set your priorities.

KW: You’re going to be a doctor, I understand.

AW: Yes.

KW: How is that going?

AW: What do you mean?

KW: Your studies.

AW: Fine.

At this point Wallander’s manner changed. He leaned towards Anna, still friendly, but now he clearly meant business.

KW: Birgitta Medberg was murdered in Rannesholm in an unusually brutal way. Someone cut off her head and hands. Can you imagine anyone who could do such a thing? AW: No.

Anna was very calm, Linda thought. Too calm. Calm in the way that only someone who knows what’s coming can be. But then she retracted her conclusion. It was possible, but she shouldn’t make the leap prematurely.

KW: Can you understand how anyone could do this to her? AW: No.

Then came the abrupt finish. After her last answer his hands came down on the table.

KW: Thank you for your time. You’ve been very helpful. AW: But I haven’t actually been able to help you with anything. KW: Oh, I wouldn’t say that, Anna. Thank you again. You may hear more from us at some point.

He had escorted them both back to reception. Linda could tell that

Anna was tense. She must be wondering what she said without knowing.

My father is still questioning her, but he’s doing it inside her head,

waiting to see what she’s going to say.

Linda pushed the paper away and stretched her back. Then she called her father on his mobile.

“I don’t have time to talk, but I hope you found it instructive.”

“Absolutely. But I don’t think she was telling the truth.”

“I think we can safely assume she wasn’t telling us the whole truth.

But the question is why. Do you know what I think?” “No, tell me.” “I think her father has actually returned. But we can talk more about that tonight.”

Wallander came back to the. flat just after seven o’clock. Linda had cooked dinner. They sat at the kitchen table and he had just begun to set out the grounds he had for thinking that Anna’s father had returned when the phone rang.

# 

# CHAPTER 36

They had arranged to meet in a parking place between Malmo and Ystad. Even a car park could become a cathedral if you chose to see it that way. The balmy September air rose from the ground like pillars for this towering, yet invisible, church.

He had told them to be there at 3 p.m.” instructing them to wear normal clothes as they would be impersonating tourists from Poland on a shopping trip to Sweden. Alone or in small groups. They would be arriving from different directions and would receive their final instructions from Erik, who would have Torgeir Langaas at his side.

Erik had spent the last weeks in a caravan in a campsite in Hoor. He had given up the flat in Helsingborg and bought an inexpensive used caravan in Svedala. His elderly Volvo had towed it to the campsite. Apart from his meetings with Langaas and the carrying out of their plans, he had spent all his time in the caravan, praying and preparing for the task ahead. Every morning he looked into the little mirror on the wall and asked himself if he was staring into the eyes of a madman. No-one could become a prophet without a great deal of natural humility, he would think to himself. To be strong was to be able to ask oneself the hardest questions. Even if his commitment to the task God had assigned him never wavered, he still needed to be sure that he was not carried away with pride. But the eyes that gazed steadily at him from the mirror confirmed what he already knew: that he was the anointed leader of the new age. There was nothing ill-conceived about the great task that lay before them. Everything was spelled out in the Holy Book. The Christian world had become mired in a bog of misconceptions and had tried God’s patience to the point where He had simply given up, waiting for the one who was prepared to act as His true servant to step in and set things right.

“There is only one God,” Erik Westin said at the beginning of all his prayers. “One God and His only son, whom we crucified. This cross is the symbol of our only hope. The cross is plainly made of wood, not gold or precious marble. The truth lies in poverty and simplicity. The emptiness we carry inside can be filled only by the Holy Ghost, not by material goods or riches, however tempting they may appear to us.”

He had carried on long conversations with God. He had also thought a great deal about Jim Jones, the false prophet, the fallen angel. He thought about the exodus from the United States to Guyana, the initial period of joy and then the terrible betrayal that had led to murder. In his thoughts and prayers there was always a place for those who had died in the jungle. One day they would be set free from the evil that Jim Jones had committed and uplifted to the highest realms, where God and the angels awaited them.

During this last little while he had also felt affirmed and accepted by those he had once left behind. They had not forgotten him. They understood why he had left and why he had now returned. One day when everything was over he would withdraw from the world and take up the life he had left so long ago: making sandals. He would have his daughter by his side and all would be fulfilled.

The time had come at last. God had appeared to him in a vision. All sacrifice is made for the creation of life, he thought. No-one knows if they have been chosen to live or to die. He had re-instituted the ritual sacrifices with their origins in the earliest days of Christianity. Life and death went hand in hand: God was both logical and wise. Killing in order to sustain life was an important practice in combating the emptiness that existed inside man. Now the moment was here.

On the morning of the day that they were to meet in the parking place, Erik Westin went down to the dark lake, which still retained some of the summer’s heat. He washed himself thoroughly, clipped his nails and shaved. He was alone in the remote camping area. After Langaas called, Erik threw his mobile phone into the lake. Then he put on his clothes, took his Bible and money with him to the car and drove a short distance up the road. There was one thing left to take care of. He set fire to the caravan and drove away.

Altogether there were 26 of them, 17 men and 9 women, and all had a cross tattooed on their chest above the heart. The men were from Uganda, France, England, Spain, Hungary, Greece, Italy and the United States. The women were American and Canadian, with the exception of one British woman who had lived in Denmark for a long time. It had taken Erik four years to build the core group of the Christian army he planned to lead into battle.

They were meeting each other for the first time. A light rain fell as they assembled. Erik had parked his car on a hill overlooking the parking place. He kept an eye on the proceedings with the help of a telescope. Langaas was there to receive them. He had been instructed to say that he didn’t know where Erik was. Erik had often explained to him that secret agreements of this nature could strengthen people’s belief in the holy task that awaited them. Erik looked into the telescope. There they were, some in cars, some on foot, two on bikes, one on a motorcycle, and a few more walked out from a small forested area next to the parking place as if they had been camping there. Each one carried only a small rucksack. Erik had been very strict on this point: no-one was to have a large amount of luggage or wear unusual attire. Nothing that would attract attention to God’s undercover army.

He trained the lens on Langaas’s face. He was leaning against the glass-fronted information board. It would not have been possible without him, Erik thought. If I hadn’t stumbled across him in that dirty Cleveland street and managed to transform him into an absolutely ruthlessly devoted disciple, I would not yet be ready to give my army their marching orders.

Langaas turned his head in the direction they had agreed. Then he stroked his nose twice with his left index finger. All was ready. Erik put away his telescope and started walking down to the parking place. There was a dip beside the road which meant he could walk right up to them without being seen. That way he would seem to appear from nowhere. When he walked among them everyone stopped what they were doing, but no-one talked, as he had instructed.

Langaas had come in a truck, into which they now loaded the bicycles and motorcycle, letting the people climb in after them. The cars would have to be left behind. Erik drove and Langaas sat in the front with him. They found their way to Mossbystrand, where they stopped and everyone got out. They walked down to the beach. Langaas carried two large baskets of food. They sat closely pressed together among the sand dunes, like tourists who found the weather a little too cold.

Before they started to eat, Erik said the necessary words: “The Lord commands our presence. He decrees the battle.”

They unpacked the baskets and ate. When the food was finished, Erik ordered them to rest. Then he walked with Langaas to the water’s edge. They went through the plan one last time. A large cloud bank moved in from over the sea, darkening the sky.

“We’re getting just what we wanted,” Langaas said. “It would be a grand night for catching eels.”

“We are getting what we need, for we are the righteous and the just,” Erik said.

They waited until it was evening, then climbed back into the truck. It was 7.30 when Erik swung back on to the road and drove east. He turned north just after Svarte, passing the main road from Malmo to Ystad, and then continued on a road that went west, past Rannesholm Manor. Two kilometres past Harup he turned on to a small dirt road, switching off the headlights and the engine. Langaas climbed out of the cab. In the wing mirror Erik watched two of the American men climbing out of the truck: Peter Buchanan, a former hairdresser from New Jersey, and Edison Lambert, a jack-of-all-trades from Des Moines.

Erik felt his pulse quicken. Was there anything that could go wrong? He regretted even thinking the question. I’m not crazy, he thought. I place my trust in God and His plan. He started the engine and pulled back out on to the road. One motorcycle overtook him, then another. He continued driving north, throwing a glance at Hurup Church where Langaas and the two Americans were headed. Half a mile north of Hurup he turned left towards Staffanstorp, then left again after ten minutes, drawing up in front of an abandoned farmhouse. He climbed out of the truck and motioned for those still in the back to follow him.

He checked the time: exactly on schedule. They walked slowly in order to accommodate the few who were older, or less fit, like the

British woman, who had been operated on for cancer six months before. Erik had debated whether to include her, but after consulting with God he received the answer that she had survived her illness precisely so that she could complete her mission. They followed a road that led to the back of Frennestad Church. Erik felt in his pocket for the key that Langaas had made him. Two weeks ago he had tried it, and it turned without a squeak. He stopped them when they reached the churchyard. No-one said anything and all he could hear was breathing. Only calm breaths, he noted. No-one is panting, no-one seems anxious, not even she who is going to die.

Erik looked again at his watch. In 43 minutes Langaas, Buchanan and Lambert would set fire to the church in Hurup. They started walking again. The gate opened without a sound. Langaas had oiled it. They walked in single file up to the church. Erik unlocked the doors. It was cool inside; one person shivered. He turned on the torch and looked around. Everyone seated themselves in the front pews, as they had been instructed. The last missive Erik had distributed included 123 instructions which were to be memorised to the letter. He knew already that they had done so.

Erik lit the candles that Langaas had placed near the altar. In the dim light he could see Harriet Bolson, the woman from Tulsa, seated on the far right. She was completely calm. The ways of God are inscrutable, he thought. But only to those who do not need to understand them. He looked at his watch. It was important that the two actions, the burning of Hurup Church and that which was to take place in Frennestad Church, be synchronised. He looked at Harriet Bolson again. She had a thin, worn face even though she was only 30 years old. Perhaps her face shows the traces of her sin, he thought. She could only be cleansed through fire. He turned off the torch and walked into the shadows by the pulpit. He reached into his rucksack and took out one of the ropes that Langaas had bought in a chandler’s in Copenhagen. He placed it in front of the altar, then checked his watch again. It was time. He turned and motioned for everyone to stand. He called them up one by one. He handed one end of the rope to the first person.

“We are irrevocably bound together,” he said. “From now on, from this day forward, we will never need a rope again. We are bound by our loyalty to God and our task. We cannot tolerate that the Christian world sink any deeper into degradation. The world will be cleansed through fire, and we must start with ourselves.”

While he was uttering the last words he had slowly moved so that he stood in front of Harriet Bolson. At the same moment that he tied the rope around her neck, she understood what was about to happen. It was as if her mind went blank from the sudden terror. She didn’t scream or struggle. Her eyes closed. All my years of waiting are finally over.

The church in Hurup began to burn at 9.15. As the fire engines were on their way they received reports that Frennestad Church was also on fire.

Langaas and the Americans had already been picked up. Langaas took Erik’s place and drove the truck to the new hide-out.

Erik remained behind in the darkness. He sat up on a hill close to Frennestad Church. He could see the firemen trying in vain to staunch the blaze. He wondered if they or the police would make it inside before the roof caved in.

He sat there in the darkness and watched the flames. He thought about how he would one day watch the fires burning with his daughter by his side.

# 

# CHAPTER 37

That night two churches in roughly the same area, a triangle bounded by Staffanstorp, Anderstorp and Ystad, burned to the ground. The heat was so intense that at dawn only the bare, smoking skeleton of the buildings remained. The bell tower of Hurup Church collapsed, and those who heard it said it sounded like a howl of bottomless despair.

The churchwarden of Frennestad Church was the first to make it into the burning building, in hopes of saving its unique mass staves dating from the Middle Ages. Instead he made a gruesome discovery that would haunt him for the rest of his life. A woman in her thirties lay in front of the altar. She had been strangled by a thick rope pulled so tightly it had almost removed her head from her body. He rushed screaming from the scene, and fainted on the front steps.

The first fire engine arrived a few minutes later. It had been on its way to Hurup when it had received fresh instructions. None of the firefighters understood fully what had happened, whether the first alarm had been a mistake or if both churches were indeed on fire.

There was a similar state of confusion at the police station in Ystad during the first few minutes when the two calls came in. When Wallander got up from the dinner table he was under the impression that he was going to Hurup where a woman had been reported dead. Since he had drunk some wine with dinner he asked for a patrol car to collect him.

It was only as they were leaving Ystad that he learned of the misunderstanding: the church in Hurup was on fire, but the dead woman had been found in Frennestad Church. Martinsson, who was driving, started shouting at the switchboard operator to try to determine once and for all how many damned churches were on fire.

Wallander sat quietly for the duration of the journey, not only because Martinsson was driving with his usual recklessness, but because he sensed that his worst fears were being confirmed. The animals that had been killed were only the beginning. Lunatics, he thought, satanists, fanatics. As they drove through the darkness he thought he was beginning to discern a logic to these events, if only dimly.

By the time they pulled up outside the burning church in Frennestad they at least had a clearer idea of the current situation. The two churches had caught fire at almost exactly the same time. In addition there was a woman dead in Frennestad. They sought out the fire chief, Mats Olsson, to whom, as it turned out, Martinsson was distantly related. In the midst of the intense heat and chaos, Wallander heard them issue greetings to their respective wives. Then they went into the inferno that was the church. Martinsson let Wallander take the lead, as he usually did at a crime scene, and as he was particularly willing to do in the devastating heat. But the aisle provided them a route and a fireman preceded them with a hose. The dead woman lay in front of the altar with a rope around her neck. Wallander tried to imprint the scene on his memory. It was staged, it had to be. He turned to Olsson.

“How long can we stay?”

“The roof is going to cave in. We’re not going to be able to put the fire out in time to save it.”

“When?”

“Soon.”

“How long?”

“Ten minutes. I can’t let you stay any longer.”

No technicians would be able to make it to the scene in time. Wallander put on a helmet that someone handed him.

“Go out and see if anyone in the crowd has a camera, or better yet a video camera,” he said. “Confiscate it. We’re going to need to document this.”

Martinsson left. Wallander started to examine the dead woman. The rope was thick, like a ship’s hawser. It lay around her neck with the ends outstretched. Two people pulling in different directions, he thought. Like the olden days when criminals were ripped apart by tying them to two horses that were sent off in different directions.

He glanced at the ceiling. Flames were starting to come through.

There were people running all around him, carrying objects from the church. An elderly man in Wellington boots and pyjamas was straining to rescue a beautiful old altar cabinet. There was something touching about their struggle. These people have realised they’re losing something irreplaceably precious, he thought.

Martinsson returned with a video camera.

“Do you know how to use it?”

“I think so,” Martinsson said.

“Then you be our photographer. Take full shots, details, from all angles.”

“Five minutes,” Olsson said. “That’s all you have.”

Wallander crouched down beside the dead woman’s body. She was blonde and bore an uncanny resemblance to his sister Kristina. An execution, he thought. First animals, now people. What was it the Lindberg woman had claimed she heard? “The Lord’s will be done”?

He rapidly searched the woman’s pockets. Nothing. He looked around. There was no handbag. He was about to give up when he saw a breast pocket on her blouse. Inside was a piece of paper with a name and address: Harriet Bolson, 5th Avenue, Tulsa.

“Time’s up,” Mats Olsson said. “Let’s go.”

He rounded up the people still in the church and hurried them out. The body was carried away and Wallander took the rope.

Martinsson called in to the station.

“We need information on a woman from Tulsa, that’s Oklahoma, United States,” he said. “All registers, local, European, international. Highest priority.”

Linda turned off the television impatiently. She knew that the spare keys to her father’s car were on the bookshelf in the living room. She picked them up, then headed out the door and jogged to the police station.

Wallander’s car was parked in the corner. Linda recognised the car next to it as Hoglund’s. Linda fingered the Swiss army knife in her pocket, but this was not a night for slashing tyres. She had heard him mention Hurup and Frennestad. She unlocked the car door and drove as far as the water tower. There she pulled over and got out a map. She knew where Frennestad was, but not Hurup. She found it, turned off the light and drove out of Ystad. Halfway to Horby she turned left and after a few kilometres she could see the smoke from Hurup Church. She drove as close as she could, then parked and walked up to the church. Her father wasn’t there. The only police officers were young cadets and it struck her that if the fire had started a few days later she could have been one of them. She told them who she was and asked where her father was.

“There’s another church on fire,” she was told. “Frennestad Church. They have a casualty.”

“What’s going on?”

“It looks like arson two churches don’t just catch fire at the same time. But we don’t know what happened in Frennestad Church, only that there’s a body.”

Linda thanked them and walked away. A sudden noise made her turn. Parts of the church roof collapsed and a shower of sparks shot up into the sky. Who would burn a church? she wondered. But she couldn’t find an answer to that question any more than she could imagine what kind of person would set fire to swans or cattle or a pet shop.

She got back in the car and drove to Frennestad. She saw the burning church from a distance. Burning churches I associate with war, she thought. But here there are churches burning in peacetime. Can a country be engaged in an invisible war against an unseen enemy? She was unable to pursue this thought any further. The road to the church was blocked by cars. When she caught sight of her father in the light of the fire, she stopped. He was talking with a firefighter. She tried to see what he was holding. A hose? She walked closer, pushing past people who were crowded together outside the restricted area. He was holding a rope, she realised. A hawser.

Nyberg walked up to Wallander and Martinsson, who were standing outside the church. He looked irritable as usual.

“I thought you should take a look at this,” he said, holding out his hand.

It was a small necklace. Wallander took out his glasses. One side of the frame broke when he was putting them on. He swore and had to hold the glasses in place.

“It looks like a shoe,” he said.

“She was wearing it,” Nyberg said. “Or had been. The chain broke when the rope was pulled tight. The necklace fell inside her blouse. The doctor found it.”

Martinsson took it and turned towards the fire to get more light.

“An unusual motif for a pendant,” he said. “Is it really a shoe?”

“It could be a footprint,” Nyberg said. “Or the sole of a foot. Once I saw a pendant in the shape of a carrot. A diamond was placed where the greens would have been. That carrot cost four hundred thousand kronor.”

“It may help us identify her,” Wallander said. “That’s what counts right now.”

Nyberg walked to the low wall backing on to the graveyard and started yelling at a photographer who was taking pictures of the burning church. Wallander and Martinsson walked down to the barricades.

They saw Linda and waved her over.

“Just couldn’t stay away?” her father said. “You can come with us.”

“How is it going?”

“We don’t know what we’re looking for,” Wallander said slowly. “But these churches didn’t set fire to themselves, that much is sure.”

“They’re working on tracing Harriet Bolson,” Martinsson said. “They’ll let me know the minute they find something.”

“I’m trying to understand the significance of the rope,” Wallander said. “Why a church and why an American woman? What does it mean?”

“A few people, at least three but maybe more, come to a church in the middle of the night,” Martinsson said.

Wallander stopped him. “Why more than three? Two who commit the murder and one victim. Isn’t that enough?”

“Theoretically, yes. But something tells me there were more, maybe many more. They unlocked the door. There are only two existing keys. The minister has one and the churchwarden who fainted has the other. They have both confirmed possession of their keys. Therefore we have to assume they used a sophisticated pass key or a copy,” Martinsson said. “A group, a society, a band of people who chose this church to execute Harriet Bolson. Is she guilty of something? Is she a victim of religious convictions? Are we dealing with satanists or some other kind of lunatic fringe? We don’t have the answers.”

“Another thing,” Wallander said. “What about the note I found on her body? Why was it left behind?”

“So that we would be able to identify her. Perhaps it was a message to us.”

“We have to confirm her identity,” Wallander said. “If she so much as visited a dentist in this country we’ll know.”

“They’re working on it.” Martinsson sounded affronted.

“I don’t mean to get on your case. What’s the word?”

“Nothing, as of yet,” Martinsson said. “Then there’s another thing. Whoever saw a pendant necklace shaped like a shoe? Or a sandal?”

He shook his head and walked away.

Linda held her breath. Had she heard him correctly?

“What was it he said? What have you found?”

“A note with a name and address.”

“Apart from that. Something else.”

“A pendant necklace.”

“That looked like something?”

“A footprint, a shoe. Why do you ask?”

She ignored the question.

“What kind of shoe?”

“Maybe a sandal.”

The light from the fire grew brighter in spurts as gusts of wind caught the flames.

“May I remind you that Anna’s father was a sandal maker before he disappeared. That’s all.”

It took a moment for it to sink in.

“Good,” he said. “Very good. That may be the opening we need. The question is just where it leads us.”

# 

# CHAPTER 38

Wallander had tried to send Linda home to get some sleep, but she had insisted on staying. She had curled up in the back seat of a patrol car and woke up only when he rapped sharply on the window pane. He’s never learned the art of waking a person gently, she thought. My father doesn’t simply wake people up, he tears them from their dreams.

She got out of the car and shivered. Shreds of fog drifted over the fields. The church had burned to the ground and only the gaping, sooty walls remained. Thick smoke still rose through the caved-in roof. Most of the fire engines were gone; only two crews were needed for the mop-up. Martinsson had left, but she could see Lindman in the distance. He came over to her and handed her a cup of coffee. Her father was speaking to a journalist on the other side of the police line.

“I’ve never seen anything like this landscape before,” Lindman said. “Not in the west, not up in Harjedalen. Here, Sweden simply slopes down into the sea and ends. All this mud and fog. It’s very strange. I’m trying to find my feet in a landscape that’s completely alien to me.”

Linda mumbled that fog was fog, mud was mud. What could possibly be strange about something so ordinary?

“Anything new on the woman?” she said.

“Not yet. But she’s definitely not a Swedish citizen.”

“Any reason to think she’s not the person whose name is on the note?”

“No. It’s far-fetched to think the murderer would leave a false name.”

Wallander came walking over. The journalist disappeared down the hill.

“I’ve talked to Chief Holgersson,” he said. “You are already involved in the fringes of this investigation, so we may as well let you in on the whole thing. I’d better get used to having you around. It’ll be a little like having a ball constantly bouncing up and down by my side.”

Linda thought he was making fun of her.

“At least I can still bounce. More than some people I know.”

Lindman laughed. Wallander looked cross, but kept himself in check.

“Don’t ever have children, Lindman,” he said. “You see what I have to deal with.”

A car swung on to the road leading up to the church. It was Nyberg.

“He’s freshly showered,” Wallander said. “Ready for another day of unpleasantness, no doubt. He’ll keel over and die the day he retires and no longer has to be digging in the mud with rainwater up to his knees.”

“He’s like a dog,” Lindman said in a low voice. “Have you noticed? It’s almost as if he’s sniffing around, and wishes he could just get down on all fours.”

Linda had to agree: Nyberg really did look like an animal intent on picking up a scent.

Nyberg joined their group, seeming not to notice Linda. He smelled strongly of aftershave.

“Do we have any idea how the fires started?” Wallander said. “I talked to Olsson and he said the churches were both set alight in several places. The churchwarden who came on the scene early said that it looked as if the fire was burning in a circle, which would imply that it caught hold in more than one spot.”

“We haven’t found any evidence yet,” Nyberg said. “But it’s clearly arson.”

“There’s a difference between the two cases,” Wallander said. “The fire in Hurup seems to have started more in the manner of an explosion. Someone in one of the nearby houses said it sounded as if a bomb had gone off. The blazes were started in different ways, but synchronised.”

“It’s a definite pattern,” Lindman said. “Starting a fire to detract attention from the murder.”

“But why a church?” Wallander asked. “And why would you strangle a person with a hawser?”

He looked at Linda. “What do you see in all this?”

She felt herself blushing. The question had come so suddenly she was unprepared for it.

“The site has been chosen deliberately,” she started hesitantly. “Strangling someone with a rope seems akin to torture. But this has also to do with religion, like an eye for an eye, death by stoning or living burial. Why not strangle someone with a hawser?”

Before anyone had a chance to respond, Lindman’s mobile rang. He listened, then held it out to Wallander.

“We’re starting to get information from the States,” he said. “Let’s go back to Ystad.”

“Do you need me?” Nyberg asked.

“I’ll call if we do,” Wallander said. Then he turned to Linda. “But you should be there,” he said. “Unless you want to go home and sleep first.”

“You know there’s no need to even ask.”

He threw a glance at her. “I’m trying to be considerate.”

“Think of me as a police officer and not your daughter.”

They were silent in the car, from both lack of sleep and a fear of saying something that would irritate the other.

Once they had parked in front of the station, Wallander walked off to the town prosecutor’s office. Lindman caught up with Linda just outside the front door.

“I remember my first day as a police officer,” he said. “I was in Boras and had been to a party with friends the night before. The first thing I did when I walked through the front doors of the station was rush into the toilet and throw up. What do you plan to do?”

“Not that, at any rate,” Linda said.

Hoglund was standing by the reception desk. She still only barely registered Linda’s presence and Linda decided to treat her the same way from now on.

There was a message for Linda: Chief Holgersson wanted to speak to her.

“Have I done anything wrong?” Linda said.

“I wouldn’t think so,” Lindman said, then left.

I like him, in spite of his betraying my confidence, Linda thought. More and more, actually.

Holgersson was on her way out when Linda walked down the corridor to her office.

“Kurt has explained the situation to me,” Holgersson said. “We’re going to let you sit in on this one. It’s a strange coincidence that one of your friends is involved.”

“We don’t know that for sure,” Linda said. “She might be.”

The door to the conference room was closed at 9.00. Linda sat in the seat her father had pointed out to her. Lindman sat next to her. She looked at her father at the head of the table, drinking mineral water. He looked the way she had always imagined him in these situations: thirsty, his hair standing on end, prepared to jump into yet another day of a complicated criminal investigation. But it was an overly romanticised image and therefore a false one, she knew. She shook it off with a grimace.

She had always been under the impression that he was good at his job, a skilful investigator, but today she realised he had talents she hadn’t even imagined. Among other things, she was impressed by his ability to keep so many facts in his head, scrupulously arranged according to time and place. While she listened to him, something stirred in her at a much deeper level. It was as if she only now understood why he had had so little time for her or Mona. There had simply been no room for them. I have to talk to him about this, she thought. When all of the events have been explained and everything is over we have to talk about the fact that he prioritised work over us.

Linda stayed behind in the room when the meeting was over. She opened a window and thought about everything that had been said. Her father had set his bottle of mineral water down and summarised the very unclear situation they were in: “Two women have been murdered. Everything starts with these two. Maybe I’m being too presumptuous in assuming the same killer is responsible for both deaths since there is no obvious connection, no motive, not even any similarities. Medberg was killed in a hut hidden deep inside Rannesholm Forest, and now we find another woman, most probably a foreigner, strangled with a thick rope in a burning church. The only connections we have found between these events are tenuous, accidental not really connections at all. On the outskirts of this is another murky series of events. That is why Linda is here.”

Wallander slowly picked his way across the terrain, which involved everything from swans set on fire to severed hands. It was as if he proceeded with antennae stretched out in every direction at once. It took him one hour and twelve minutes without a break or retakes to reach his conclusion: “We don’t know yet what has happened. Behind the two dead women, the burning animals and the torched churches lies something else that we can’t quite put our finger on. And we don’t know if what we have here marks the culmination of something, or simply the beginning.”

At the words “simply the beginning”, Wallander sat down, but continued to speak.

“We’re still waiting for information regarding the person we believe to be called Harriet Bolson. While we wait I’m going to open this up for general discussion, but before I do I’d like to make a final comment. I have a feeling that the animals were not burned to satisfy the perverted instincts of a sadist. These atrocities may each have been a form of sacrifice, or acts with their own twisted logic. We have Medberg’s praying hands and a Bible that someone sat and wrote commentary in. And now something that looks like a ritual killing in a church. We have an eyewitness who claims she heard the man who set fire to the pet shop shouting the words “As decreed by God’ or something along that line. All of these things may point to a religious message, perhaps the work of a sect or a handful of crazed individuals. I doubt the latter. There is an organised quality to this cruelty that speaks against it being the work of a single individual. But are we talking about two or a thousand? We don’t know. That’s why I want us to take the time to discuss the matter without prejudice before we go on with our investigation. I think we’ll be more effective if we allow ourselves to push everything else aside and concentrate on this point for a moment.”

But this discussion was averted by a door opening and a woman announcing that American faxes about Harriet Bolson had started to come in. Martinsson left and returned with a few papers, among them a blurred photograph of a woman. Wallander held his broken glasses in front of his face and nodded. The dead woman was Harriet Bolson.

“My English is not quite what it should be,” Martinsson said and passed the papers over to Hoglund, who started to read aloud.

Linda had picked up a notebook as she walked into the room. Now she started making notes, without being clear about why she was doing so. She was involved in something without being fully involved, but she sensed her father had an assignment for her, one that he would present her with when the time was ripe.

Hoglund said the American police seemed to have covered the case thoroughly, but perhaps that hadn’t been so hard since Harriet Jane Bolson had been registered as a missing person since January 12,1997. That was when her sister, Mary Jane Bolson, had gone to the Tulsa police and filed the report. She had initially tried to reach her sister on the phone for a week without success. Then she had got in her car and driven the 300 kilometres to Tulsa where her sister lived and worked as archivist and secretary to a private art collector. Mary Jane had found her sister’s flat empty. She was not at her place of work. She seemed in fact to have disappeared without trace. Mary Jane and all of Harriet’s friends had described her as a reserved but conscientious and friendly woman who had had neither a drug addiction nor any other vice which might help explain her disappearance. The police in Tulsa had completed a preliminary investigation and maintained a current file on her case, but during the last four years no addition to it had been made. No clue, no sign of life, nothing.

“A police officer by the name of Clark Richardson is eagerly awaiting our reply and confirmation of the fact that the woman we’ve found really is Bolson. He would like the information as soon as possible.”

“We can supply him with that information immediately,” Wallander said. “It’s her, there’s no doubt about it. Is there really no theory about her disappearance?”

Hdglund scoured the documents.

“Harriet was unmarried,” she said. “She was twenty-six when she disappeared. She and her sister were daughters to a Methodist pastor in Cleveland, Ohio. Prominent, it says. They had a happy childhood, no evidence of trouble, studies at various universities. She had a position in Tulsa with a good salary. She lived simply with regular habits. She worked hard all week and went to church on Sundays.”

“Is that it?” Wallander asked when Hoglund had finished reading.

“That’s it.”

He shook his head.

“There has to be something more to her story,” he said. “We need to know everything about her. That will be your job. Pour on the charm. Give Officer Richardson the idea that this is the most important murder investigation in Sweden right now. Which it probably is, by the by.”

This was followed by a short period of open discussion. Linda listened attentively. After half an hour her father tapped the table with his pencil and ended the meeting. Everyone except Linda and her father left the room.

“I want you to do me a favour,” he said. “Talk to Anna, hang around, but don’t ask any questions. Try to work out why Medberg’s name was really in her journal. And Vigsten. I’ve asked my Danish colleagues to look a little closer at him.”

“Not the old man,” Linda said. “He’s senile. But there was someone else there, someone who kept himself hidden.”

“We don’t know that for sure,” he said impatiently. “Have you understood what I’ve asked you?”

“Act normal,” Linda said, “but try to get answers to these questions.”

He nodded and stood up. “I’m worried,” he said. “I don’t know what’s happening, and I’m fearful of what may be next.”

Then he looked at her, stroked her swiftly, almost shyly, on the cheek, and left the room.

Linda invited Zeba and Anna to join her for coffee down at the harbour the same day. They had just sat down when it started to rain.

# 

# CHAPTER 39

Zeba’s boy played happily with a toy car that squeaked because it was missing two of its wheels. Linda looked at him. Sometimes he could be almost unbearably needy and attention-seeking. At other times, like now, he was peaceful, lost in thought about the invisible roads his little yellow roadster was travelling.

The cafe was almost empty at this time of day. Three Danish sailors in one corner were hunched over a chart. The young woman behind the counter yawned.

“Girl talk,” Zeba said suddenly. “Why don’t we have more time for that?”

“Talk away,” Linda said. “I’m listening.”

“What about you?” Zeba asked, turning to Anna. “Are you listening?”

“Of course.”

They were quiet. Anna pushed a teaspoon around in her cup, Zeba folded a pinch of snuff into her upper lip. Linda sipped her coffee.

“Is this all there is?” Zeba wondered aloud. “In life, I mean.”

“What are you thinking of?” Linda said.

“All our dreams. What became of them?”

“You dreamed of having children,” Anna said. “At least, that seemed to be your main goal.”

“You’re right. But all the other stuff. I was such a dreamer! Especially when I was drunk out of my mind, you know the way you drink when you’re a teenager, when you end up on your hands and knees, throwing up in a bush, having to fight off some swam who’s looking to take advantage of the situation. But I never even realised any of my dreams. I drank them away, you could say. When I think of all the things I was going to do: be a fashion designer, rock star fly a jumbo jet, for God’s sake.”

“It’s not too late,” Linda said.

Zeba put her chin on her hands and looked at her.

“Of course it is. Did you really dream about becoming a policewoman?”

“Never. In my dreams, if you can call them that, I was always going to devote my life to the theatre or to old furniture. Neither very exciting.”

Zeba turned to Anna. “What about you?”

“I wanted to find a meaning in my life.”

“Did you find it?”

“Yes.”

“And?”

Anna shook her head. “It’s not the kind of thing you can talk about. Either you find it or you don’t.”

Linda thought Anna seemed to be on her guard. From time to time she looked at Linda as if she was thinking: “I know you’re trying to see through me.” But I can’t be sure, Linda thought.

Two of the sailors got up to leave. One of them patted Zeba’s boy on the head.

“His existence hung by a hair for a while,” Zeba said.

Linda raised her eyebrows. “How do you mean?”

“I was close to having an abortion. Sometimes I wake up in the middle of the night in a cold sweat and think I really did it, that he doesn’t exist.”

“I thought you wanted a baby.”

“I did, but I was scared. I didn’t think I’d be up to it.”

“Thank God you didn’t,” Anna said.

Zeba and Linda were both taken aback by her emphatic declaration. She sounded stern, almost angry. Zeba was immediately on the defensive.

“God makes no sense not to me in that context. Maybe you’ll understand when you get pregnant one day.”

“I’m against abortion,” Anna said. “That’s just the way it is.”

“Having an abortion doesn’t mean you’re ‘for’ abortion,” Zeba said calmly. “There can be other reasons for it.”

“Like what?”

“Like being too young. Or too sick.”

“I’m against abortion full stop,” Anna said.

“I’m happy I had my boy,” Zeba said. “But I don’t regret the abortion I had when I was fifteen.”

Linda was astonished, and so was Anna. She seemed to stiffen and stared at Zeba.

“For God’s sake, why are you staring at me like that?” Zeba said. “I was fifteen years old what would you have done?”

“Probably the same thing,” Linda said. “Not me,” Anna said. “It’s a sin.”

“Now you’re sounding like a priest.”

“I’m just telling you what I think.”

Zeba shrugged. “I thought this was girl talk. If I can’t talk about my abortion with my friends, who am I supposed to talk to?”

Anna stood up. “I have to go now,” she said. “I forgot about something I need to do.”

She disappeared out of the door. Linda thought it was odd that she would leave without saying goodbye to Zeba’s son.

“What got into her?” Zeba said. “It’s enough to make you think she had an abortion herself and can’t stand to talk about it.”

“Maybe she did,” Linda said. “You think you know everything about a person, but the truth often comes as a surprise.”

Zeba and Linda ended up staying longer than they had planned. With Anna gone, the atmosphere became more light-hearted. They giggled like teenagers. Linda followed Zeba home, saying goodbye outside her building.

“What do you think Anna will do?” Zeba said. “Say that we can’t be friends any more?”

“I think she’ll realise she overreacted.”

“I’m not so sure about that,” Zeba said. “But I hope you’re right.”

Linda went home. She lay on her bed, closed her eyes and drifted off. She was walking to the lake again, where someone had seen burning swans and called the police. Suddenly she opened her eyes. Martinsson had said they would check the phone log of calls to the station that night. That meant the conversation was preserved on a cassette tape.

Linda couldn’t recall anyone commenting on what the man had sounded like. Suppose it was a Norwegian by the name of Torgeir Langaas? Amy Lindberg had heard someone who spoke either Norwegian or Danish. She got up. If the man who called in had an accent we may be able to determine a link between the burning animals and the man who bought the house behind the church in Lestarp.

She walked on to the balcony. It was 10 p.m. and the air was chilly. It will be autumn soon, she thought, the frost is on its way. It will crunch under my feet by the time I become a police officer.

The phone rang. It was her father. “I just wanted to let you know I won’t be home for dinner.”

“It’s ten o’clock, Dad. I ate dinner hours ago.”

“Well, I’ll be here for another couple of hours.”

“Do you have time to talk?”

“What’s up?”

“I was thinking of taking a walk down to the station.”

“Is it important?”

“Maybe.”

“I can’t give you more than five minutes.”

“I only need two. Correct me if I’m wrong, but don’t all emergency calls to the police get recorded and stored?”

“Yes. Why?”

“How long are they kept?”

“For a year. Why are you asking?”

“I’ll tell you when I get there.”

It was 10.40 p.m. when Linda walked into the station. Her father came out into the deserted reception to greet her. His office was full of cigarette smoke.

“Who’s been here?”

“Boman.”

“Who’s that?”

“He’s our prosecutor.”

Linda was suddenly reminded of another prosecutor.

“Where did she go?”

“Who?”

“The one you were in love with? She was a prosecutor.”

“That was a long time ago. I made a mess of my chances.”

“How?”

“One’s worst embarrassments should be kept to oneself. Anyway, there are other prosecutors here now, and Boman is one of them. I’m the only one who lets him smoke.”

“You can’t breathe in here now!”

She opened the window.

“What was it you wanted?”

Linda explained.

“You’re right,” he said, when she had finished.

Wallander stood up and motioned for her to follow. They bumped into Lindman in the corridor. He was carrying a file of folders.

“Put those down and come with us,” Wallander said.

They went to the archive where the tapes were stored. Wallander gestured for one of the officers on duty to come over and talk to him.

“The evening of August the twenty-first,” he said. “A man called to report seeing swans burning at Marebo Lake.”

“I wasn’t on that night,” the officer said after studying a log book. “It was Underskold and Sundin.”

“Call them.”

The officer shook his head. “Underskold is in Thailand and Sundin is at a satellite intelligence conference in Germany. It won’t be easy to get hold of either of them.”

“What about the tape?”

“I’ll find it for you.”

They gathered around a cassette player. Between a call about a car theft and a drunk calling for help in “looking for Mum” was the call about the swans. Linda flinched when she heard the voice. It sounded as if he was trying to speak Swedish without an accent, but he couldn’t disguise his origins. They played the tape several times.

Police: Ystad Police Station.

Man: I would like to report that burning swans are flying over

Marebo Lake.

Police: Burning swans?

Man: Yes.

Police: Can you repeat that? What is burning?

Man: Burning swans are flying over Marebo Lake.

That was the end of the call. Wallander was listening through headphones that he then passed to Lindman.

“He has an accent, no doubt about it. I think he sounds Danish.”

Or Norwegian, Linda thought. What’s the difference?

“I’m not sure it’s Danish,” Lindman said and passed the headphones to Linda.

“The word he uses for ‘burning’,” she said. “Is it the same in Norwegian and Danish?”

“We’ll find out,” Wallander said. “But it’s embarrassing that a police cadet has to be the one to bring this up.”

They left the room, after Wallander had given instructions about keeping the tape readily available. He led the others to the canteen. A group of patrol officers sat around one table, Nyberg and some technicians around another. Wallander poured himself a cup of coffee, then sat down by a phone.

“For some reason I still remember this number,” he said.

He put the receiver close to his ear and asked the person he was speaking to to come down to the station as soon as possible. It was clear that whoever it was was reluctant to do this.

“Perhaps you would rather I send a patrol car with sirens blaring,” Wallander said. “And have them handcuff you so your neighbours will wonder what you’ve been up to.”

He hung up.

“That was Christian Thomassen,” he said. “He’s first mate on one of the Poland ferries. He’s also an alcoholic, though currently on the wagon. He’s Norwegian and should be able to give us a positive identification, as it were.”

Seventeen minutes later one of the largest men Linda had ever seen was escorted into the canteen. He had huge feet stuffed into enormous rubber boots, was close to two metres tall, had a beard down to his chest and a tattoo on his bald pate. When he sat down, Linda discreetly stood up to see the tattoo more clearly. It depicted a compass card. Thomassen smiled at her.

“It’s pointing south-south-west,” he said. “Straight into the sunset. That way the Grim Reaper will know which way to take me when the time comes.”

“This is my daughter,” Wallander said. “Do you remember her?”

“Maybe. I don’t remember too many people, to be honest. I’ve survived my drinking, but most of my memories haven’t.”

He stretched out his hand so she could shake it. Linda was afraid he would squeeze too hard. His accent reminded her of the man on the tape. She offered to fetch him a cup of coffee, but he said no.

“Let’s go in,” Wallander said. “I want you to listen to a recording for us.”

Thomassen listened carefully. He asked to hear the conversation four times, but stopped Lindman when he was about to play it for a fifth time.

“He’s Norwegian,” Thomassen said. “Not Danish. I was trying to hear where in Norway he’s from, but I can’t pinpoint it. He’s probably been away for a long time.”

“Do you think he’s been here a long time?”

“Not necessarily.”

“But no question that he’s Norwegian?”

“No. Even if I’ve lived here for nineteen years and drunk myself silly for eight of those, I haven’t forgotten where I came from.”

“That’s all we wanted to know,” Wallander said. “Do you need a lift back?”

“I came down on the bike,” Thomassen said, smiling. “I can’t when I’ve been drinking. I just fall over and hurt myself.”

“A remarkable man,” Wallander said to Linda after he left. “He has a beautiful bass voice. If he hadn’t been so lazy and drunk so much, he could have been an opera singer. I suspect he would have become world famous, for his bulk if nothing else.”

They went back to Wallander’s office.

“So he’s Norwegian,” Wallander said. “Now we can be sure that the man who set fire to the swans was the same as the one who set fire to the pet shop, as we suspected. It will probably turn out to be the same man who set fire to the calf. The question is whether he was the one who was hiding in the hut in the forest.”

“The Bible,” Lindman said.

Wallander shook his head. “Swedish. They’ve managed to decipher a lot of what’s been written in the margins and it’s all in Swedish.”

Linda waited.

Lindman shook his head. “I have to sleep,” he said. “I can’t think clearly any more.”

“Eight o’clock tomorrow,” Wallander said.

Lindman’s steps died away in the corridor. Wallander yawned.

“You should get some sleep too,” Linda said.

He nodded, then stood up. “You’re right. We need to sleep. I need to sleep. It’s already midnight.”

There was a knock on the door. One of the officers on phone duty looked in.

“This just came,” he said, handing a fax to Wallander. “It’s from Copenhagen. Someone called Knud Pedersen.”

“I know him,” Wallander said.

The officer left. Wallander skimmed the fax, but then sat down again at his desk and read it more carefully.

“Strange,” he said. “I know from way back that Knud Pedersen is a policeman who keeps his eyes open. They’ve had a murder there recently, a prostitute by the name of Sylvi Rasmussen. She was found with her neck broken. The unusual thing is that her hands were clasped in prayer not severed this time, but Pedersen has read about our case and thought we should know about this one.”

Wallander let the fax fall to the desk. “Copenhagen again,” he said.

Linda was about to ask a question, but he raised his hand.

“We should get some sleep,” he said. “Tired policemen always end up giving the criminal a chance to slip away.”

Wallander suggested they go home on foot.

“Let’s talk about something totally different,” he said. “Something to clear our thoughts.”

They walked back to Mariagatan without saying a single word.

# 

# CHAPTER 40

Each time he saw his daughter it was as if the ground disappeared beneath his feet. It might take several minutes before he regained his equilibrium. Images from his younger life flickered through his mind. Normally he bore his memories with calm; he checked his pulse and it was always steady no matter how upset he felt. “Like the feathered animal, you should shake hate, lies and anger from your body,” God had said to him in a dream. It was only when he met his daughter that he was overcome with weakness. When he saw her face, he also saw the others: Maria and the baby left behind to rot in the jungle marshland that madman Jim Jones had chosen for his paradise. Sometimes he longed passionately for those who had died, and also felt guilty that he hadn’t been able to save them. God demanded this sacrifice of me in order to test me, he thought.

He always varied the times and places he met his daughter. Now that he had stepped out of his former state of invisibility and shown himself to her, he made sure in turn that she did not disappear from him. He often tried to surprise her. Once, just after they had been reunited, he washed her car. He sent a letter to her address in Lund when he had wanted her to come to their hide-out behind the church in Lestarp. He had several times visited her flat without her knowledge, using her phone line to make important calls and once spending the night there. I left her behind once, he thought. Now I have to be the stronger so that she doesn’t do the same to me. He had prepared himself for the possibility that she wouldn’t want to follow him. Then he would have disappeared again. But already after the first three days he decided he would be able to make her one of the chosen. The fact that convinced him was the unexpected coincidence that she knew the woman whom

Langaas had happened upon and killed in the forest. He had understood then that she had been waiting for his return all these years.

This time he was going to see her in the flat. She had put a flowerpot in the window as a sign that the coast was clear. A few times he had got in with the set of keys she had given him without waiting for the flowerpot because God told him when the coast was clear. He had explained to her that it was important that she act natural in front of her friends. Nothing has happened on the surface, he told her. Your faith grows deep inside you for now, until the day I call it forth from your body.

Each time they met he did something that Jim Jones had taught him the only lesson that was not spoiled by betrayal and hatred. Jones had taught him how to listen to a person’s breath, especially of those who were new and who perhaps had not yet found the proper humility to lay their lives in their leader’s hands.

He walked into the flat. She kneeled on the floor of the hall and he laid his hand on her forehead and whispered the words that God demanded he say to her. He reached for a vein in her throat where he could feel her pulse. She trembled, but she was less afraid now. It was starting to become more familiar to her, all these elements of her new life. He kneeled in front of her.

“I am here,” he whispered.

“I am here,” she replied.

“What does the Lord say?”

“He demands my presence.”

He stroked her cheek, then they stood up and walked into the kitchen. She had put out the food he requested: salad, crisp bread two slices of meat. He ate slowly, in silence. When he had finished, she came over with a bowl of water, washed his hands and gave him a cup of tea. He looked at her and asked her if anything had happened since they had last met. He was interested in hearing about her friends, especially the one who had been looking for her.

He sipped the tea and listened to her first words, noticing that she was nervous. He looked at her and smiled.

“What is troubling you?”

“Nothing.”

He grabbed her hand and forced two of her fingers into the hot tea. She flinched, but he held her hand there until he was sure she had scalded herself. She started to cry. He let go.

“God demands the truth,” he said. “You know I am right when I say that something is troubling you. You have to tell me what it is.”

Then she told him what Zeba had said when they were at the cafe and her little boy played under the table. He noticed that she wasn’t sure she was doing the right thing. Her friends were still important to her. That wasn’t unusual, in fact he had been surprised at the speed with which he had been able to convert her.

“Telling me about this was the right thing to do,” he said when she was finished. “It is also only appropriate that you hesitated in this. Hesitation is a way to prepare to fight for the truth and not take it for granted. Do you understand what I am saying?”

“Yes.”

He looked at her for a long time, scrutinising her. She is my daughter, he thought. She gets her seriousness from me.

He stayed a while and told her about his life, wanting to bridge the long years of his absence. He would never be able to convince her to follow him if she did not fully understand that his absence had been decreed by God. It was my time in the desert, he had said repeatedly. I was sent out not for thirty days, but twenty-four years.

When he left her flat he was sure she was going to follow him. And even more significantly, she had given him yet another possibility to punish a sinner.

Langaas was waiting for him at the post office, since they always tried to meet in public. They had a brief conversation, then Langaas leaned forward so that his pulse could be checked. It was normal.

Later that same day they met at the parking place. It was a mild, cloudy evening with rain likely at night. Langaas had replaced the truck with a bus that he had stolen from a company in Malmo, being careful to put on new plates. They drove east, passing Ystad and continuing on minor roads towards Klavestrand, where they stopped at the church. It stood on a hill, some 400 metres from the nearest house. No-one would notice the bus where it was parked. Langaas unlocked the church door with the key that he had copied. They used shielded torches as they erected the ladders and covered with large black plastic rubbish bags the windows facing towards the road. Afterwards they lit the candles on the altar. Their footsteps made no sound; all was silent.

Langaas came to him in the vestry where he was making his preparations.

“Everything is ready.”

“Tonight I will let them wait,” Erik said.

He gave the remaining hawser to Langaas.

“Put this on the altar. The hawser inspires fear, fear inspires faith.”

Langaas left him alone. Erik sat down at the pastor’s table with a candle in front of him. When he closed his eyes he was back in the jungle. Jim Jones came walking out of his hut, the only one that was supplied with electricity from a small generator. Jim was always so well groomed. His teeth were white, his smile carved into his face. Jim was beautiful, he thought, even if he was a fallen angel. I cannot deny that there were moments with him when I was completely happy. I also cannot deny that what Jim gave me, or what I believed he gave me, is what I am trying to give the people who now follow me. I have seen the fallen angel; I know what to do.

He folded his arms and let his head come to rest on them. He was going to let them wait for him. The hawser on the altar would be a stimulus of the fear they should feel for him. If the ways of God were inscrutable, so too would be the ways of His servant. He knew Langaas would not disturb him again. He started to dream. It was like stepping down into the underworld, a world where the heat of the jungle penetrated the cold stone walls of the church. He thought about Maria and the child. He slept.

He woke with a start at 4 a.m. At first he wasn’t sure where he was. He stood up and shook life back into his stiff body. After a few minutes he walked out into the church. They were sitting, all of them, in the first few pews, frozen, fearful, waiting. He stopped and looked at them before letting them see him. I could kill them all, he thought. I could get them to cut off their hands and eat themselves. Because I too have a weakness. I do not completely trust my followers. I am afraid of the thoughts they think, thoughts I cannot control.

He walked out and stood in front of the altar. This night he was going to tell them about the great task that awaited them, the reason they had made the long journey to Sweden. Tonight he would pronounce the first words of the text that would become the fifth gospel.

He nodded to Langaas, who opened the old-fashioned brown trunk on the floor next to the altar. Langaas walked down the row of people, handing out the death masks. They were white, like masks in a pantomime, devoid of expression, of joy or sorrow.

God has made man in His image, Erik thought. But no-one knows the face of God. Our lives are His breath, but no-one knows His face. We have to wear the white mask in order to obliterate the ego and become one with our Creator.

He watched while they put on the death masks. It filled him with a sense of power and strength to see them cover their faces.

Finally Langaas put on a mask. The only one not wearing one was Erik.

This too he had learned from Jim. The disciples always have to know where to find their Master. He is the only one who should not be masked.

He pressed his right thumb against his left wrist. His pulse was normal. Everything was under control. In the future this church may become a shrine, he thought. The first Christians who died in the catacombs of Rome have returned. The time of the fallen angels is finally over.

The day he had chosen was September 8. This had come to him in a dream. He had found himself in a deserted factory with puddles of rainwater and dead leaves on the floor. There had been a calendar on the wall. When he woke up he remembered that the date in the dream was September 8. That is the day everything ends and everything begins again.

He took a step towards them and started to speak.

“The time has come. I had not intended that we should meet before the day that you undertake your great task, but God has spoken to me tonight and told me that yet another sacrifice is necessary. When we meet again another sinner will die.”

He picked up the hawser and held it above his head.

“We know what God demands of us,” he intoned. “The old scriptures teach us the law of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. He who kills must himself be killed. We must remove all doubt from our minds. God’s breath is steel and he demands hardness from us in return. We are like the snake who wakes from his winter sleep, we are the lizards who live in the crevices of the rock and change colour when threatened. Only through complete devotion and ruthlessness will we conquer the emptiness that exists inside men. The great darkness, the long days of degeneration and impotence are over.”

He paused and saw that they understood. He walked along the row and stroked their foreheads, then gave the sign that they were to stand. Together they said the holy words that he told them had come to him in a vision. They did not have to know the truth, that it was something he had read when he was a young man. Or had the words in fact come to him in a dream? He could not be sure, but it was of no importance.

And in our redemption we are lifted high on wings of might To join Him in His power and shine with His holy light.

Later they left the church. Langaas locked up and they drove away in the bus. A woman who came in to clean in the afternoon did not notice that anyone had been there at all.

# 

# PART 4

## The Thirteenth Tower

# 

# CHAPTER 41

The telephone woke her. She checked the time: 5.45 a.m.

There were noises coming from the bathroom. Her father was already up, but hadn’t heard the phone. Linda ran out into the kitchen and answered.

“May I please speak to Inspector Wallander?” a woman’s voice said.

“Who is speaking?”

“May I please speak to him?”

The woman spoke in a cultured way. Not a cleaning lady at the station, Linda thought.

“He’s busy right now. Who may I say is calling?”

“Anita Tademan from Rannesholm Manor.”

“We’ve met, actually. I’m his daughter.”

Anita Tademan ignored her. “When will I be able to speak to him?”

“As soon as he gets out of the bathroom.”

“It’s very important.”

Linda wrote down the number and put some water on for coffee. The kettle had just started to boil when Wallander appeared in the kitchen. He was so wrapped up in his own thoughts that it did not even strike him as strange to see her up so early.

“Anita Tademan just called,” Linda said. “She said it was important.”

Wallander looked at his watch. “It must be, at this hour.”

She dialled the number for him and held out the phone.

While he was speaking with fru Tademan, Linda looked through the cupboards and discovered that there were no more coffee beans.

Wallander hung up. Linda had heard him agree to a time.

“What did she want?”

“For me to come and talk to her.”

“What about?”

“To tell me something she heard from a distant relative who lives in a house on the Rannesholm grounds. She didn’t want to elaborate on the phone, and insisted I come up to the manor. I’m sure she thinks she’s too important to come down to the station like a regular person. But that’s when I put my foot down. Maybe you heard that part?”

“No why?”

Wallander muttered something unintelligible and started to rifle through the cupboard.

“It’s all gone,” Linda said.

“Do I have to be the only one around here who takes responsibility for keeping coffee in the house?”

That immediately infuriated her.

“You can’t know how incredibly relieved I will be to move out. I should never have come back here.”

He threw out his arms in apology. “That might have been best, but we don’t have time to argue about it now. Parents and children shouldn’t live on top of each other.”

They drank tea and leafed through their respective parts of the previous day’s paper. Neither one could concentrate on what they were reading.

“I want you to come along,” he said. “Get dressed.”

Linda showered and dressed as quickly as she could. But when she was ready he had already left. He had jotted something down in the margin of the newspaper. She took that as a sign that he was in a hurry. He’s as impatient as I am, she thought.

She looked out of the window. The thermometer said it was 22 C still summer. It was raining. She half ran, half walked to the station. It was as if she were hurrying to school, with the same anxiety about being on time.

Wallander was talking on the phone when she came in. She sat in the chair across from his desk until he put the phone down and stood up.

“Come with me.”

They walked into Lindman’s office. Hoglund was leaning against the wall, a mug of coffee in her hand. For once she acknowledged Linda’s presence. Someone’s mentioned it to her, Linda thought. Hardly my father. Maybe Lindman.

“Where is Martinsson?” Hoglund asked.

“He just called,” Wallander said. “He has a sick child on his hands, so he’ll be in a little later. But he was going to make some calls from home and find out more about this Sylvi Rasmussen.”

“Who?” Hoglund asked.

“Why are we all crowding around in here anyway?” Wallander said. “Let’s go to the conference room. Does anybody know where Nyberg is?”

“He’s still working on the two fires.”

“What does he think he’s going to find there?”

The last comment came from Hoglund. Linda sensed that she was one of those who looked forward to his retirement.

They discussed the case for three hours and ten minutes, until someone knocked on the door and said that an Anita Tademan had arrived to speak to Inspector Wallander. Linda wondered if the discussion had really come to its natural conclusion, but no-one made any objection when her father stood up. He stopped beside her chair on his way out.

“Anna,” he said. “Keep talking to her, keep listening to her.”

“I don’t know what we should talk about. She’s going to see through me, that I’m keeping an eye on her.”

“Just be natural.”

“Shouldn’t you talk to her again yourself?”

“Yes, but not just yet.”

Linda left the station. The rain had turned into a thin drizzle. A car honked its horn, so close to her that she jumped. It was Lindman. He pulled over and opened the door.

“Jump in. I’ll take you home.”

“Thanks.”

There was music on. Jazz.

“Do you like this stuff?” she said.

“Yes. A lot, actually.”

“Jazz?”

“Lars Gullin. A sax player, one of Sweden’s best jazz musicians ever. He died much too young.”

“I’ve never heard of him, but I don’t like this kind of music.”

“In my car I play what I like.”

He seemed stung, and Linda instantly regretted what she’d said. Unfortunately, she thought, one of the many things I’ve inherited from my father is this ability to make thoughtless, hurtful comments.

“Where are you going?” she said.

His answer was curt. “Sjbbo. To see a locksmith.”

“Is it going to take long?”

“I don’t think so. Why?”

“Maybe I could come along. If you’ll have me.”

“Only if you can put up with the music.”

“From now on I love jazz.”

The tension was broken. Lindman laughed and drove north. He drove fast. Linda had the urge to touch him, to stroke her fingers over his shoulder or his cheek. She felt more desire than she could remember feeling in a long time. She had a silly thought, that they should check into a hotel in Sjobo. Not that there was a hotel in Sjobo. She tried to shake off the thought, but it stayed with her. Rain splattered the windscreen. The saxophone poured out some high, insistent, quick notes. Linda tried to pick out the melody line, without success.

“If you’re talking to a locksmith in Sjobo it must have something to do with the investigation. One of them. How many are there exactly?”

“Medberg is one. Bolson is another, the burned animals, and the two church fires. Your father wants them all treated under the rubric of one investigation, and the prosecutor has agreed. At least for now.”

“And the locksmith?”

“His name is Hakan Holmberg. He’s not your run-of-the-mill locksmith; he makes copies of very old keys. When he heard that the police were wondering how the arsonists broke into the churches he remembered that he made two keys a few months ago that might very well have been old church keys. I’m on my way to see if he remembers anything else. His workshop is in the centre of Sjobo. Martinsson had heard of him before. He’s won prizes for his craftmanship. He’s also studied philosophy and teaches in the summer.”

“In his workshop?”

“In another part of the farmstead. Martinsson has thought about signing on sometime. The students work in the smithy half the time and explore philosophical issues the rest of the time.”

“Not something for me,” Linda said.

“What about your father?”

“Even less so.”

They arrived in Sjobo and stopped outside a red-brick house with a giant iron key hanging outside the door.

“Maybe I shouldn’t go in with you.”

“If I understood matters correctly, you’ve started work now.”

They walked in. It was very hot. A man working at the forge nodded at them, then took out a piece of glowing iron and started hammering it.

“I need to finish this key,” he said. “You can’t interrupt this kind of work once you’ve started. It lets a kind of hesitation into the iron. That happens and the key will never sit well in its lock.”

They watched him with fascination. At last the key lay finished on the anvil. Holmberg wiped the sweat from his brow and washed his hands. They followed him into a courtyard with tables and chairs. A coffee pot and some cups had been put out. They shook hands. Linda felt foolishly flattered by Lindman’s introduction of her as “a colleague”. Holmberg put on an old straw hat and served the coffee. He noticed Linda looking at it.

“One of the few crimes I’ve ever committed,” he said. “I take a trip overseas every year. A few years ago I was in Lombardy. One afternoon I was somewhere close to Mantua, where I had spent a few days in honour of the great Virgil, who was born there. I caught sight of a scarecrow out in a field. I don’t know what crop he was supposed to be protecting. I stopped and thought that for the first time in my life I wanted to commit a crime, become a dishonest blacksmith, in a word. So I snuck out on to the field and stole his hat. Sometimes in my dreams it isn’t a scarecrow at all but a living person. He must have realised I was a harmless coward who would never steal from anyone,

that’s why he let me take the hat. Perhaps he was the remains of a Franciscan monk hoping to do one last good deed on this earth. In any case, it was an overwhelming, tumultuous experience for me, to commit this crime.”

Linda glanced at Lindman and wondered if he knew who Virgil was. And Mantua? Where was that? It had to be Italy, but she had no idea if it was a region or a city. Zeba would have known; she could sit for hours over her maps and books.

“Tell me about the keys,” Lindman said.

Holmberg rocked back in his chair and fished a pipe out of the breast pocket of his overalls.

“It happened by accident, in a way,” he said, after lighting the pipe. “I don’t watch or read any kind of news in the summer it’s a way to rest my mind. But one of my customers came to pick up a key. It was the key of an old seaman’s chest that had once belonged to a British admiral’s ship in the eighteenth century. He told me about the fires and the police’s suspicion about copied keys. I recalled that I had made two keys a few months ago that looked like church keys. I’m not saying it was definitely the case, but I suspected it was.”

“Why?”

“Experience. Church keys often look a certain way. And there aren’t very many other doors these days that still use the locks and keys of the old masters. I decided to call the police.”

“Who ordered these keys?”

“He said his name was Lukas.”

“Lukas .. .”

“Herr Lukas. An uncommonly well-mannered sort. He was in a hurry and made a generous deposit.”

Lindman took a packet out of his pocket, which he unwrapped. Holmberg immediately recognised the contents.

“Those are the keys I made copies of.”

He stood up and walked into the smithy.

“This could be something,” Lindman said. “A strange old man. But his memory seems good.”

Holmberg returned with an old-fashioned ledger in his hand, turning the pages until he found the right one.

“It was June the twelfth. Herr Lukas left two keys. He wanted the copies made by the twenty-fifth at the latest. That didn’t leave me very long since I had a lot to do, but he paid well and even I need money, to keep up the forge and take my holiday.”

“What address did he give you?”

“No address.”

“Telephone number?”

Holmberg turned the ledger around so that Lindman could see. He dialled the number on his mobile phone, listened, then turned it off again.

“That was a florist in Bjarred,” he said. “I think we can safely assume that herr Lukas doesn’t have anything to do with them. What happened after that?”

Holmberg flipped forward a few pages.

“He fetched the keys on June the twenty-fifth. That was all.”

“How did he pay?”

“Cash.”

“Did you write a receipt for him?”

“No. I rely on my bookkeeping. I take great pains to pay my share of taxes, though this kind of case is ideal for the less scrupulous.”

“How would you describe Mr. Lukas?”

“Tall, light hair, maybe losing a little of it in front. Courteous, polite. When he first came in, he was wearing a suit. Same when he picked up the keys, though not the same one that time.”

“How did he get here?”

“I can’t see the road from the workshop, but I assume he drove a car.”

Linda saw Lindman gather himself for the next question, intuitively sensing what it must be.

“Can you describe the way he spoke?”

“He had an accent.”

“What kind of accent?”

“Something Scandinavian. Not Finnish, nor Icelandic. That would leave Danish or Norwegian.”

“Do you have anything else to say about him?”

“Not that I can think of.”

“Did he say that these keys were for church doors?”

“He said they were for some kind of storage facility, in an old manor house, come to think of it.”

“Which manor?”

Holmberg knocked some ash out of his pipe and wrinkled his forehead.

“He may have told me the name, but I’ve forgotten.”

They waited. Holmberg shook his head.

“Could it have been Rannesholm?” Linda asked.

The question simply sprang out of her, like the last time.

“Right,” Holmberg said. “That was it. Rannesholm. An old brewery at Rannesholm.”

Lindman got up, as if he was suddenly in a hurry. He finished the rest of his coffee.

“Thank you,” he said. “This has been valuable.”

“Working with keys is always meaningful,” Holmberg said, and smiled. “Locking and opening is, in a sense, man’s very purpose on this earth. Key rings rattle throughout history. Each key, each lock has its tale. And now I have yet another to tell.”

He followed them out.

“Who was Virgil?” Linda said.

“Dante’s guide,” he answered. “And a great poet.”

He raised the old straw hat, which was starting to come apart, and went back inside. They got into the car.

“So often you meet fearful, angry, shaken people,” Lindman said. “But sometimes there are moments of light. Like this man. I’m filing him away in my archive of interesting people I’ll remember when I’m old.”

They left Sjobo. Linda saw a sign for a hotel and giggled. He looked at her, but didn’t ask anything. His mobile rang. He answered, listened, hung up and increased his speed.

“Your father has finished talking to fru Tademan,” he said. “Apparently something important has come to light.”

“Better not tell him that I was with you today,” she said. “He had something other in mind for me today.”

“What was that?”

“Talking to Anna,” she said. “Maybe you’ll have time for both.”

Lindman let her off in the centre of town. When she made it to Anna’s flat and was greeted by her at the door, she immediately realised something was wrong. Anna had tears in her eyes.

“Zeba is gone,” she said. “Her boy was screaming so loudly that the neighbours were worried. He was home alone. And Zeba was gone.”

Linda held her breath. Fear overwhelmed her like a violent pain. Now she knew she was close to a terrible truth she should already have grasped.

She looked into Anna’s eyes and there she saw only her own fear.

# 

# CHAPTER 42

The situation was at once both crystal clear and confusing. Linda knew Zeba would never have abandoned her son of her own free will, or forgotten about him. Clearly something had happened. But what? It was something she felt she should know, something that was almost within her grasp and yet eluded her. The big picture. Her father always talked about looking for the way events came together. But she saw nothing.

Since Anna seemed even more confused than she did, Linda forced her to sit down in the kitchen and talk. Anna spoke in unconnected fragments, but it did not take Linda more than a few minutes to piece together what had happened.

Zeba’s neighbour, a woman who often watched the boy for her, had heard him crying through the thin walls. Since he cried for an unusually long time without Zeba seeming to intervene, she went round and rang the bell. When there was no answer she let herself in with the key Zeba had given her and found the boy alone. He stopped crying when he saw her.

This neighbour, whose name was Aina Rosberg, had noticed nothing unusual about the flat. It was messy as usual, but there were no signs of commotion. That was the phrase she had used, “no signs of commotion”. Fru Rosberg had called one of Zeba’s cousins, Titchka, who wasn’t home, and then Anna. That was what Zeba had instructed her to do if anything ever happened: first call Titchka, then Anna.

“How long ago did this happen?” Linda asked.

“Two hours ago.”

“Has fru Rosberg called again?”

“I called her back. But Zeba still hadn’t returned.”

Linda thought for a moment. Most of all she wanted to talk to her father, but she also knew what he would say. Two hours was not a long time, there was no doubt a natural explanation for Zeba’s absence.

But what could it possibly be?

“Let’s go over to her flat,” Linda said. “I want to take a look at it.”

Anna made no objections. Ten minutes later fru Rosberg let them in.

“Where can she be?” the neighbour said. “This isn’t like her. Nobody would leave such a young child alone, least of all her. What would have happened if I hadn’t heard him crying?”

“I’m sure she’ll be back soon,” Linda said. “But it would be best if the boy could stay with you until then.”

“Of course he can,” fru Rosberg said, and left to go back to her flat.

When Linda walked into Zeba’s flat she picked up a strange smell. Her heart grew cold with fear; she knew something serious had happened. Zeba had not left of her own free will.

“Can you smell that?” she asked.

Anna shook her head.

“That sharp smell. Like vinegar.”

“I don’t smell anything.”

Linda sat in the kitchen, Anna in the living room. Linda could see her through the open door. Anna was nervously pinching herself in the arm. Linda tried to think clearly. She walked over to the window and looked out. She tried to imagine Zeba walking on to the street. Which way had she gone? To the left or to the right? Had she been alone? Linda looked at the little tobacconist’s shop across the street. A tall, heavily built man was standing in the doorway, smoking. When a customer came by he walked back in, then resumed his station at the doorway. Linda thought he was worth a try.

Anna still sat on the sofa, lost in thought. Linda patted her on the arm.

“I’m sure she’ll turn up,” she said. “Probably nothing has happened. I’m going down to the tobacconist’s. I’ll be back soon.”

There was a sign welcoming customers to “Yassar’s shop”. Linda bought some chewing gum.

“Do you know Zeba?” she asked. “She lives on the other side of the street.”

“Zeba? Sure. I give her little one sweets when they come in.”

“Have you seen her today?”

His answer came without hesitation.

“A few hours ago. I was putting up one of the flags that had come down outside. I don’t understand how a flag can fall down when there is no wind .. .”

“Was anyone with her?” Linda interrupted.

“She was with a man.”

Linda’s heart beat faster. “Have you seen him before?”

Yassar looked anxious. Instead of answering her question, he started asking his own.

“Why do you want to know? Who are you?”

“You must have seen me before. I’m a friend of Zeba’s.”

“Why are you asking all these questions?”

“I need to know.”

“Has anything happened?”

“No. Have you ever seen the man before?”

“No. He had a small grey car, he was tall, and later I thought about how strange it was that Zeba was leaning on him.”

“How do you mean, ‘leaning on him’?”

“Just that. She was leaning, clinging. As if she needed support.”

“Can you describe the man?”

“He was tall. That’s about it. He had a hat on, a long coat.”

“A hat?”

“A grey hat. Or blue. A long grey coat. Or blue. Everything about him was either blue or grey.”

“Did you see the number plate?”

“No.”

“What about the make of the car?”

“I don’t know. Why are you asking all these questions? You come into my shop and make me as worried as if you were a police officer.”

“I am a police officer,” Linda said, and left.

When she came back to the flat, Anna was sitting where she had left her on the sofa. Linda had the same feeling that there was something she should be seeing, realising, seeing through, although she didn’t know what it was. She sat down next to Anna.

“You have to go back to your place, in case Zeba calls. I’m going down to the police station to talk to my father. You can drop me off there.”

Anna grabbed Linda’s arm so roughly that Linda jumped. Then, just as abruptly, she let go. It was a strange reaction. Perhaps not the action itself, but the intensity of it.

When Linda walked into the reception, someone called out to her that her father was at the prosecutor’s office, on the other side. She went over. The outer door was locked, but an assistant, recognising her, let her in.

“Are you looking for your father? He’s in the small conference room.”

She pointed down a corridor. A red light was on outside one of the rooms. Linda sat down and waited.

After ten minutes Ann-Britt Hoglund came out, saw her and looked surprised. Then she turned back to the room.

“You have an important visitor,” she said, and went her way.

Wallander came out with the very young-looking prosecutor. He introduced Linda and the young lawyer left. Linda pulled him down into a chair and told him what had happened, not even trying to be systematic about the order of her telling. Wallander was quiet for a long time after she finished. Then he asked a few questions, primarily about Yassar’s observations. He returned several times to the issue of Zeba “leaning” on the man.

“Is Zeba the touchy-feely kind?”

“No, I’d say the opposite, actually. It’s normally the man who is all over her. She’s tough and avoids showing any weakness, although she has several.”

“If she was being taken away against her will, why didn’t she cry out?”

Linda shook her head. Wallander answered his own question as he stood up.

“Maybe she wasn’t able to.”

“And she wasn’t leaning on the man? She was drugged and would have fallen down if he hadn’t held her up?”

“That’s exactly what I’m thinking.”

He walked quickly to his office. Linda had difficulty keeping up. On the way Wallander knocked on Lindman’s door and pushed it open. The office was empty. Martinsson walked past, carrying a large teddy bear.

“What the hell is that?” Wallander asked irritably.

“It was made in Taiwan. There’s a large package of amphetamines inside.”

“Get someone else to take care of it.”

“I was about to hand it over to Svartman,” Martinsson said, not hiding his own irritation.

“Try to round everyone up. I want a meeting in half an hour.”

Martinsson left.

Wallander sat down behind his desk, then leaned towards Linda.

“You didn’t ask Yassar if he heard the man say anything.”

“I forgot.”

Wallander handed her the phone.

“Call him.”

“I don’t know what his number is.”

Wallander dialled enquiries for her. Linda asked to be put through. Yassar answered. He hadn’t heard the man say anything.

“I’m starting to worry,” Yassar said. “What has happened?”

“Nothing that we know of,” Linda said. “Thanks for your help.”

She put the phone down.

“He didn’t hear anything.”

Her father rocked back and forth on his chair and looked at his hands. She heard voices come and go in the corridor.

“I don’t like it,” he said finally. “Her neighbour is right. No-one leaves such a young child alone.”

“I keep having the feeling that I’m overlooking something,” Linda said. “Something I should see, something that’s staring me in the face. There’s a connection the kind you’re always talking about but I can’t think what it is.”

He looked at her keenly.

“As if part of you already knows what’s happened? And why?”

She shook her head.

“It’s more as if I’ve kind of been waiting for this to happen. And as if Zeba isn’t the one who’s disappeared, but Anna. A second time.”

He looked at her for a long time.

“Can you explain what you mean?”

“No.”

“We’ll give Zeba a few more hours,” he said. “If she’s not back by three o’clock we’ll have to do something. I want you to stay here.”

Linda followed him to the conference room. When everyone was gathered and the door closed, Wallander began by telling them about Zeba’s disappearance. The tension in the room mounted.

“Too many people are disappearing,” Wallander said. “Disappearing, reappearing, disappearing again. By coincidence or because of factors as yet unknown, all this seems to involve my daughter, a fact that makes me like this even less.”

He tapped a pencil on the tabletop and continued.

“I talked to fru Tademan. She is not what you would call a particularly pleasant woman. In fact she’s about as good an example of an arrogant, conceited Scanian aristocrat as I’ve ever had the misfortune to meet. But she did the right thing in getting in touch with us. A distant cousin who lives on the Rannesholm Estate saw a band of people near the edge of the forest. There were at least twenty of them and they vanished as soon as they were seen. They could have been a group of tourists, but the fact that they were apparently so anxious not to attract attention means they could also have been something else.”

“Such as?” Hoglund said.

“We don’t know. But we found a hut in the forest there, you will bear in mind, where a woman was murdered.”

“That hut could hardly house twenty people or more.”

“I know. Nonetheless, this is important information. We have suspected that there were several people involved in the Frennestad

Church fire and murder. Perhaps what we have here is an indication that there are even more.”

“Are we dealing with a kind of gang?” Martinsson said.

“Possibly a sect,” Lindman said.

“Or both,” Wallander said. “That’s something we don’t yet know. This piece of information may turn out to lead us in the wrong direction, but we’re not drawing any conclusions. Not yet, not even provisional ones. Let us leave fru Tademan’s information to one side for the moment.”

Lindman reported on his meeting with Hakan Holmberg and his keys. He didn’t mention the fact that Linda had been with him.

“The man with an accent,” Wallander mused. “Our Norwegian or Norwegian-Danish link. He turns up again. I believe we can safely accept Mr. Holmberg’s assurance that the keys he copied were those to both Hurup and Frennestad Churches. A Norweigian orders copies of some church keys. An American woman is later strangled in the church. By whom and why? That’s what we need to find out.” He turned to Hoglund. “What do our Danish colleagues say about Frans Vigsten?”

“He’s a piano teacher. He was a rehearsal pianist at Det Kongelige Theatre and apparently very much admired as such. Now he’s increasingly senile and has trouble taking care of himself. But no-one has any information indicating that anyone else lives in the flat, least of all Vigsten himself.”

Wallander threw a hasty glance at Linda before continuing.

“Let’s stay in Denmark for a moment. What about this woman Sylvi Rasmussen? What do we have on her?”

Martinsson rifled through his papers.

“Her original name was something else. She came to Denmark as a refugee after the collapse of Eastern Europe. Drug addict, homeless, the same old story leading to prostitution. She was well liked by clients and friends. No-one has anything bad to say about her. There was nothing else unusual about her life, not even the sheer predictable tragedy of it.” Martinsson looked through the papers again before putting them down. “No-one knows who her final client was, but he must be the murderer.”

“Any indication of who it was?”

“There are the prints of twelve different people in her flat. They’re being examined and the Danes will let us know what they find.”

Linda noticed that Wallander was picking up the pace of the meeting. He tried to interpret the information that was brought in, never receiving it passively, always looking for the underlying message.

Finally he opened the meeting for general discussion. Linda was the only one who didn’t say anything. After half an hour they took a break. Everyone left to stretch their legs or to get some coffee, except Linda, who was assigned to guard the windows.

A gust of wind blew some of Martinsson’s papers onto the floor. Linda gathered them up and saw a picture of Sylvi Rasmussen. She studied her face, seeing fear in her eyes. She shivered when she thought of her life and fate.

She was about to put the papers back when a detail caught her eye. The pathologist’s report stated that Sylvi Rasmussen had had two or three abortions. Linda stared at the paper. She thought of the Danish sailors who had been sitting in the corner, the boy playing on the floor and Zeba telling them about her abortion. She also thought about Anna’s unexpected reaction. Linda froze, holding her breath and Sylvi Rasmussen’s photograph.

Wallander came back into the room.

“I think I get it,” she said.

“Get what?”

“I have one question. That woman from Tulsa.”

“What about her?”

Linda shook her head and pointed to the door.

“Close it.”

“We’re in the middle of a meeting.”

“I can’t concentrate if everyone comes back in. But I think I’m on to something important.”

He saw that she was in deadly earnest, and went to close the door.

# 

# CHAPTER 43

Wallander put his head out of the door and told someone that the end of the meeting would be postponed a little while. Someone started to protest, but he shut the door.

They sat across from each other.

“What did you want to ask?”

“Did the Bolson woman ever have an abortion? Did Medberg? If I’m correct, the answer will certainly be yes for Bolson, but for Medberg, most probably no.”

Wallander frowned, at first perplexed, then simply uncomprehending. He pulled his stack of papers over and started looking through them with growing impatience. He tossed the file to the side.

“Nothing about an abortion.”

“Are all the facts there?”

“Of course not. A full description of a person’s life, however uneventful or uninteresting, fills a much larger folder than this. Harriet Bolson does not seem to have had an exciting life, and certainly there’s nothing as dramatic as an abortion in the material we received from the force in Tulsa.”

“And Medberg?”

“I don’t know, but that information should be easier to come by. All we have to do is talk to her unpleasant daughter although perhaps it’s not the kind of thing mothers tell their children. I don’t think Mona ever had an abortion. Do you know?”

“No.”

“Does that mean that you don’t know if she did or that she never had one?”

“Mum never had an abortion. I would know.”

“I don’t understand what you’re getting at. Why is this important?”

Linda tried to clear her head. She could be wrong, but every instinct told her she was right.

“Can you find out about the abortions?”

“I’ll do it when you’ve told me why it’s important.”

Something inside her burst. Tears started to run down her face and she banged her fists into the table. She hated crying in front of her father. Not just in front of him, in front of anybody. The only person she had ever been able to cry in front of was her grandfather.

“I’ll ask them to do it,” Wallander said, and stood up. “But I expect you to tell me what this is all about when I get back. People have been murdered, Linda. This isn’t an exercise at the training college.”

Linda grabbed an ashtray from the table and threw it at him, hitting him right above the eyebrow. Blood ran down his face and dripped on Harriet Bolson’s file.

“I didn’t mean to do that.”

Wallander pressed a fistful of napkins against the gash.

“I just can’t stand it when you needle me,” she said.

He left the room. Linda picked up the ashtray from the floor, still trembling with agitation. She knew he was furious with her. Neither of them could stand to be humiliated. But she didn’t feel any regret.

He came back after 15 minutes with a makeshift bandage over his wound and dried blood still smeared across his cheek. Linda expected him to yell at her, but he simply sat down in his chair.

“Does it hurt a lot?” she asked.

He ignored her question.

“Hoglund called fru Jorner, Medberg’s daughter. She found the question deeply insulting and threatened to call the evening papers and complain, but Hoglund did establish that she has no knowledge of any abortion.”

“That’s what I thought,” Linda said. “And what about the other one? The one from Tulsa?”

“Hoglund is contacting the US,” he said. “We’re not entirely sure about the time difference, but she’s sending a fax, which will no doubt be waiting for the day shift whenever it starts.”

Wallander felt the bandage with his fingertips.

“Your turn,” he said.

Linda started speaking slowly to keep her voice from wobbling, but also so she wouldn’t skip anything.

“There are five women,” she said. “Three of them are dead, one of them has disappeared, and the last one disappeared and then returned. I’m starting to see a connection between them, apart from Medberg, who we’re assuming was killed because she found herself in the wrong place at the wrong time. But what about the rest? Sylvi Rasmussen was murdered; she had also had two or three abortions. Let’s assume that information from Tulsa will confirm that Bolson had had an abortion. It’s true, too, for the person who’s just gone missing: Zeba. She told me only a few days ago that she had one. I think this may be the connection between these women.”

Linda paused and drank some water. Wallander tapped his fingers and stared at the wall.

“I still don’t get it,” he said.

“I’m not finished yet. Zeba didn’t just tell me about her abortion, she told Anna as well. And Anna had the strangest reaction. She was upset by it in a way I couldn’t relate to, nor could Zeba. To say that Anna strongly disapproves of women who have had abortions would be an understatement. She walked out on us. And when Anna later discovered that Zeba was missing she clung to my arm and cried. But it was as if she wasn’t so much afraid for Zeba as for herself.”

Linda stopped. Her father was still fingering his bandage.

“What do you mean, she was afraid for herself?”

“I’m not sure I know.”

“Try.”

“I’m telling you all I can.”

Wallander gazed absently at the wall. Linda knew that staring at a blank surface was a sign of intense concentration on his part.

“I want you to tell the others,” he said.

“I can’t.”

“Why not?”

“I’ll get nervous. I might be wrong. Maybe that woman from Tulsa never had an abortion.”

“You have an hour to prepare,” Wallander said, and stood up. “I’ll tell them.”

He walked out and closed the door. Linda had the feeling that she was imprisoned, not with a lock and key, but by the imposed time limit. She decided to write down what she was going to say in a notebook, and pulled one across the table towards her. When she flipped it open she was confronted with a bad sketch of a seductively posed naked woman. To her surprise she saw it was Martinsson’s notepad. But why should that surprise me? she thought. All the men I know spend an enormous amount of mental energy undressing women in their minds.

She reached for an unused notepad beside the overhead projector and jotted down the five women’s names.

After 45 minutes the door opened and everyone marched in like a delegation, led by her father. He waved a piece of paper in front of her.

“Harriet Bolson had two abortions.”

He sat down, as did everyone else.

“The question, of course, is why this matters to our investigation. That’s what we’re here to discuss. Linda is going to present us with her ideas. Over to you, Linda.”

Linda drew a deep breath and managed to present her theory without faltering. Wallander took over when she finished.

“I think that Linda is on to something that may be very important. The terrain is still far from mapped, but there is enough substance here to merit our attention, more substance, in fact, than we have managed to uncover thus far in other facets of the investigation.”

The door opened and Lisa Holgersson slipped in. Wallander put his papers down and lifted his hands as if he were about to conduct an orchestra.

“I think we can glimpse the outline of something that we do not yet understand but is there nonetheless.”

He stood up and pulled over a flip chart set on an easel, with the legend higher wages dammit scrawled across it. Chuckles broke out across the room. Even Holgersson laughed. Wallander turned to a clean sheet.

“As usual I ask that you hold your thoughts until I’m done,” he said. “Save the rotten tomatoes and catcalls.”

“Looks like your daughter’s already been taking potshots,” Martinsson said. “Blood is seeping through the bandage. You look like the old Dobeln at Jutas, to use a literary analogy.”

“Who’s that?” Lindman said.

“A man who stood guard over a bridge in Finland,” Martinsson said. “Didn’t they teach you anything when you were in school?”

“We had to read that when I was a girl, but you’re getting them confused,” Hogland said. “The man standing guard had a different name. It’s a book by some Russian author.”

“No, Finnish,” Linda heard herself say. “Sibelius, isn’t it?”

“For the love of God,” Wallander said.

“I’ll call my brother Albin,” Martinsson said, standing up. “We have to get to the bottom of this.”

He left the room.

“I don’t think it was Sibelius,” Holgersson said after a moment. “He was a composer. But something similar.”

Martinsson returned after a few minutes of silence.

“Topelius,” he said. “Or possibly Runeberg. And Dobeln did have a large bandage, I was right about that.”

“He didn’t guard the bridge, though, did he?” Hoglund muttered.

“I’m trying to create an overview here,” Wallander interrupted them, and proceeded one by one to touch on all the known facts of the case.

After the rather lengthy overview he sat down.

“There’s one thing we’ve neglected: why haven’t we brought in the estate agent in Skurup, the one who sold the house in Lestarp, to listen to the burning-swans tape? We need to take care of that as soon as possible.”

Martinsson got up again and left the room. Lindman opened a window.

“Have we talked to Norway about Torgeir Langaas?” Holgersson asked.

Wallander looked at Hoglund.

“No word yet,” she said.

Wallander looked down at his watch in a way that indicated the meeting was drawing to a close.

“It’s too early to arrive at any definitive conclusions,” he said. “It’s too early and yet we have to work with two assumptions. Either that all this hangs together. Or that it doesn’t. And yet the first alternative is compelling. What do we have? Sacrifices, fires and ritual murder, a Bible in which someone has changed the text. It’s easy for us to see this as the work of a madman, but maybe that isn’t the case. Maybe we’re dealing with a group of very deliberate, methodical people, with a twisted and ruthless agenda. We need to work quickly. There’s a gradual increase in tempo in these events, an acceleration. We have to find Zeba, and to talk to Anna Westin again.”

He turned to Linda.

“I thought you could bring her in. We’re going to have a friendly but necessary conversation. We’re simply worried about Zeba, that’s all you have to say.”

“Who’s taking care of her son?” Hoglund asked Linda directly, without the superior air she normally adopted.

“Zeba’s neighbour.”

Wallander hit the table with the flat of his hand, marking the end of the meeting.

“Torgeir Langaas,” he said as everyone stood. “Lean on our Norwegian colleagues. The rest of us will look for Zeba.”

Linda and her father went to get a cup of coffee, without exchanging a word. Then they went to his office. Martinsson knocked on the door half an hour later, coming in before Wallander answered. He stopped when he saw Linda.

“Sorry,” he said.

“What is it?”

“Ture Magnusson is here to listen to the tape.”

Wallander jumped out of his chair, grabbing Linda by the arm and pulling her along. Ture Magnusson seemed nervous. Martinsson went to fetch the tape. Wallander received a call from Nyberg and immediately launched into an argument with him, so Linda was left to take care of Magnusson.

“Have you found the Norwegian?”

“Not yet.”

“I’m not sure I will be able to recognise his voice.”

“We’ll just hope for the best.”

Wallander hung up. At the same time Martinsson came back with a worried look on his face.

“The tape must still be here,” he said. “It’s not in the archive.”

“Didn’t anyone put it back?” Wallander asked crossly.

“Not me,” Martinsson said.

He looked through the shelf behind the tape recorder. Wallander stuck his head into the call centre.

“Can we get a little help here?” he shouted. “We’re missing a tape!”

Hoglund joined them, but no-one could find the tape. Linda watched her father get increasingly red in the face. But in the end it was Martinsson who exploded.

“How the hell are we supposed to do our work when archived tape can go missing like this?”

He picked up a booklet of instructions for the tape recorder and threw it against the wall. They kept looking for the tape. Linda finally had the feeling that the whole police district was looking for it, but it didn’t turn up. She looked at her father. He seemed tired and despondent, but she knew it would pass.

“We owe you an apology,” Wallander said to Magnusson, “for bringing you down here. The tape appears to be misplaced. There’s nothing for you to do.”

“I have a suggestion,” Linda said.

She had been debating with herself whether to suggest this.

“I believe I can imitate the voice,” she said. “He’s a man, I know, but I’d like a shot at it.”

Hoglund gave her a disapproving look. “What makes you think you could possibly imitate his voice?”

Linda could have given her a long answer, about how she had discovered a talent for imitation at parties. How her friends had been impressed, and she had assumed it was a one-off success, but how she soon realised she simply had a knack for it. There were voices she couldn’t imitate at all, but most of the time she was spot on.

“It’s not as if we have anything to lose,” she said.

Lindman had come back into the room. He nodded encouragingly.

“I guess since we’re all here anyway .. .” her father said hesitantly.

He waved to Ture Magnusson.

“Turn around. Don’t look, just listen. If you have even the slightest doubt, tell us.”

Linda quickly decided on a plan. She was not going to do the voice right away, but work up to it. It would be a test for everyone in the room, not just Magnusson.

“Who remembers what his exact words were?” Lindman said.

Martinsson had the best memory. He repeated the text. Linda made her voice as deep as possible, and found the right accent.

Magnusson shook his head.

“I’m not sure. I almost think I recognise it, but it’s not quite right.”

“I’d like to do it again,” Linda said. “It didn’t come out the way I wanted it to.”

No-one objected. Again Linda only approximated the right intonation and phrasing. Again, Magnusson shook his head.

“I don’t know,” he said. “I really couldn’t say for sure.”

“One last time,” Linda said.

This was the time that counted. She took a deep breath and repeated the text, this time getting as close as possible to the original.

“Yes,” Magnusson said. “That’s what he sounded like. That’s his voice.”

“But that was on the third try,” Hoglund said. “What’s that worth?”

Linda couldn’t quite hide her satisfaction. Her father saw it at once.

“Why did he only recognise it on the third attempt?” he said.

“Because the first two times I didn’t sound like him,” she said. “It was only the third time that I did the voice exactly.”

“I didn’t hear a difference,” Hoglund said suspiciously.

“When you imitate someone’s voice all the ingredients have to be right,” Linda said.

“That’s quite something,” Wallander said. “Are you serious about this?”

“Yes.”

Wallander looked straight at Ture Magnusson.

“Are you sure?”

“Absolutely.”

“Then we thank you for taking the trouble of coming in.”

Linda was the only one who shook Magnusson’s hand. She followed him out.

“Great job,” she said. “Thank you for coming in.”

“How could you do that so well?” he said. “It was almost as if I could see him in front of me.”

“Anna,” Wallander said. “We need to talk to her now.”

Linda rang the bell to Anna’s flat, but no-one opened. Anna wasn’t home. Linda shivered as she stood in the stairwell. She was afraid that Anna had decided to disappear again.

# 

# CHAPTER 44

It had been Langaas’s task to collect Anna from by the boarded-up pizzeria in Sandskogen. Erik had been planning to get her himself to make sure she was completely willing, but he decided she was so dependent on him she wasn’t likely to put up any resistance. Since she had no idea what had happened to Harriet Bolson Langaas had strict instructions to say nothing she had no reason to try to get away. The only thing he feared was her intuition. He had tried to gauge it and had concluded it was almost as strong as his own. Anna is my daughter, he thought. She is careful, attentive, constantly receptive to the messages of her subconscious.

Langaas had been briefed on how to handle the situation, though it was unlikely that Anna had been frightened by Zeba’s disappearance. There was a chance that she would talk to Linda, the girl Erik judged to be her closest confidante, though he had warned her and thereafter forbidden her to have intimate conversations with anyone but himself. She could be led astray, he had told her, now that she had found the right path. He was the one who had been gone for so long, but she was the prodigal child, she was the one who was finally coming home. What was happening now was necessary. Her father was the one who was going to hold people responsible for turning their backs on the Lord and for building cathedrals where they worshipped at the altar of their own egos rather than humbling themselves before their true maker. He had seen the bewitched look in her eye and known that with time he would be able to erase all doubt from her mind. The problem was that he didn’t have this time. It was a mistake, he acknowledged. He should have contacted her long before he showed himself to her in Malmo. But he had had all the others to work on, the members of his army who were one day to open the gates and take their place in his plan. Harriet Bolson’s death had been their biggest challenge to date. He had told Langaas to observe their reactions over the next few days, in case anyone seemed liable to break down, or even so much as waver in their conviction. No-one had shown any such signs. On the contrary, Langaas reported a growing impatience among them to undergo the ultimate sacrifice that lay ahead.

Before Langaas went to pick up Anna, Erik made sure that he understood he was to use force if she did not come willingly. That was why he had chosen such an out-of-the-way place for the rendezvous. He had watched Langaas’s reaction when he spoke of the possible use of force. A momentary hesitation, a glimpse of anxiety had flickered in his eyes. Erik had made his voice as mild as possible while he leaned forward and put a hand on his shoulder. What was it that worried him? Had Erik ever played favourites among his disciples? Had he not plucked Langaas from the gutters of Cleveland? Why shouldn’t his daughter be treated like everyone else? God created a world where everyone was equal, a world people had turned their backs on and destroyed. Was it not that world they were trying to recover?

If all went well and Anna showed herself worthy, she would one day be his successor. God’s New Kingdom on Earth could not be left without a ruler, as in the past. There had to be a leader, and God Himself had told him it was to be a position that would go from father to child.

There were times when he thought that Anna was not the one. If that proved to be the case, he would have to have more children and select his successor from among them.

Erik wasn’t sure how Langaas had found these houses that stood empty and unattended, but it was a matter of trust between them. He had also found a villa in Sandhammaren which was conveniently isolated from its neighbours and belonged to a retired sea captain who was in hospital with a broken leg. This house had the advantage of a basement room. The house had thick concrete walls and the room in the basement was well constructed and had a small window in the sturdy door. When Langaas first showed it to him they agreed that it seemed as if the sea captain had his very own prison cell. Langaas had suggested it was originally a bomb shelter during the war. But why the thick glass window in the door?

He stopped and listened. In the beginning, when the drugs had worn off, Zeba had screamed, punched the door and attacked the walls with the bucket they had put in for her use as a toilet. When she was quiet, he had looked in through the window. She had been curled up on the bed. They had put a sandwich and a plastic cup of water on a table, but she had touched neither. He hadn’t expected her to.

When he looked at her through the window a second time, she was on the bed with her back to him, sleeping. He watched her for a long time until he was sure that she was breathing. Then he went back upstairs and sat down on the veranda, waiting for Langaas to arrive with Anna.

There was still one problem, the question of what was to be done about Henrietta. So far, it seemed that Anna and Langaas had been able to convince her that all was well, but Henrietta was moody and unreliable. Once upon a time he had loved her although that time lay wrapped in a haze of unreality and if it were possible, he would spare her life.

He looked out to sea. People were walking on the beach. One of them had a dog, one was carrying a small child on his shoulders. I am doing this for your sakes, he thought. It is for you that I have gathered the martyrs, for your freedom, to fill the emptiness you may not even realise you carry within yourselves.

The walkers on the beach vanished beyond his sight. He looked at the water. The waves were almost imperceptible. A faint wind blew from the south-east. He went into the kitchen and poured himself a glass of water. Langaas and Anna would arrive in half an hour. He returned to the veranda and watched a ship making its slow way west on the horizon.

True Christian martyrs were so rare now that people hardly thought they existed. Some priests had died for the sake of their fellow men in concentration camps during the Second World War, and there had been many other holy men and women since then. But in general the act of martyrdom had slipped from Christian culture. It was the Muslims now who called on the faithful to make the ultimate sacrifice. He had studied their preparations on video, how they documented their intention to die the death of a martyr. In short, he had learned his craft at the hands of those he hated most, his chief enemy, the people he had no intention of making room for in the New Kingdom. Ironically, the dramatic events that were about to take place would in all probability be attributed to Muslims. A welcome benefit of this would be to provoke greater hatred of their faith, but it was regrettable that it would take the world a while fully to understand that the Christian martyrs had returned. This would be no mere isolated phenomenon, no Maranatha, but a wave of true evangelical power that would continue until the New Kingdom of the Lord was fully realised on Earth.

He studied his hands. Sometimes when he contemplated what lay before him they would shake. Now they were steady.

For a short while they will see me as a madman, he thought. But when the martyrs march forth in row upon row, people will understand that I am the apostle they have been waiting for. I could not have managed this without the help of Jim Jones. He taught me how to overcome my fear of death, of urging others to die for the greater good. He taught me that freedom and redemption come only through bloodshed, through death, that there is no other alternative and that someone must lead the way.

Someone must lead the way. Jesus had done so, but God had forsaken him because he had not gone far enough. Jesus had a weakness, he thought. He did not have the strength I possess. We will complete what he lacked the strength to do.

Erik scanned the horizon. The ship he had been watching was gone, and the soft breeze had died down. Soon they would be here. The rest of the day and night he would concentrate on her. It had been a big step for her to lie about her relationship to the man Vigsten in Copenhagen who was Langaas’s unwitting host. Anna had never taken a piano lesson in her life, but she had managed to convince the policeman she had talked to. Erik again felt irritation at the fact that he had underestimated the time needed to work on her. But it was too late. Not everything could go according to his plan, and the important thing was that the larger events not be affected.

The front door opened. He strained to hear them. During the past long and difficult years he had trained all of his senses. It was as if he had sharpened the blades of his hearing, sight and smell. Sometimes he thought of them like finely crafted knives hanging from his belt. He listened to the footsteps. Langaas’s were heavy, Anna’s lighter. She was moving at her own speed, which indicated that she had come gladly. They walked on to the veranda.

Erik stood and embraced Anna. She was anxious, but not so much that he would be unable to comfort her. He asked her to sit while he followed Langaas to the door. They spoke in low tones. The report Langaas gave him was reassuring. The equipment was stored safely, the others were waiting in two separate houses. No-one showed any signs of anything except impatience.

“They are hungry now,” Langaas said.

“We are approaching the fiftieth hour. Two days and two hours until we come out of hiding and make the first strike.”

“She was completely calm when I collected her. I felt her pulse and it was normal.”

Erik’s rage boiled up as if from nowhere.

“Only I have the right to feel a person’s pulse! Not you, never you.”

Langaas turned pale. “I should not have done it.”

“No. But there is something you can do for me to make up for it.”

“What is it?”

“Anna’s friend. The one who has been too curious, too interested. I am going to talk to Anna now. If it turns out that this friend suspects anything, she should disappear.”

Langaas nodded.

Erik signalled for him to leave, and quietly returned to the veranda. Anna was sitting in a chair against the wall. She always keeps her back to the wall, he thought. He kept watching her. She appeared relaxed, but somewhere he had doubts. There is one sacrifice I do not want to make, he thought. A sacrifice I fear. But I must be prepared even for this. Not even my daughter can expect to go free. No-one can expect to do that, except me.

When he sat down, the unexpected suddenly happened. A scream came up through the floor. The walls were simply not thick enough.

He cursed the sea captain silently. Anna froze. The scream modulated into something like the roar of a desperate animal.

Zeba’s voice, Zeba’s scream. Anna stared at him, the man who was her father and so much more. She bit her lower lip so hard it started to bleed.

He wasn’t sure if Anna had abandoned him or if Zeba’s scream would only have thrown her off track for a moment. It would be a long and difficult night.

# 

# CHAPTER 45

Linda stared at Anna’s door, thinking she should kick it open. But why what was it she thought she would find there? Not Zeba, who was the only one she cared about right now. Standing outside the door she broke into a cold sweat as she felt she understood the gist of what was happening, without being able to translate her insight into words. She pushed her hands into her pockets. She had returned all of Anna’s keys, except the ones to the car. But what good will they do me? she thought. Where would I go? Is her car even there? She walked down to the car park and saw that it was. Linda tried to think clearly, but fear blocked her thoughts. To start with she had been worried about Anna. Now it was Zeba who had disappeared. Then she grasped something which had been confusing her. It was about Anna. At first she had been afraid that something had happened to her, but now she was afraid of what she could do.

I’m imagining things, she thought. What is it I think Anna could do? She started walking in the direction of Zeba’s house, then turned around and hurried back to Anna’s car. Normally she would at least write a note, but there was no time for that. She drove to Zeba’s house at high speed. The neighbour who had Zeba’s son was out, but her daughter was at home and she gave her the key to Zeba’s flat. Linda let herself in and picked up the strange smell again. Why is no-one testing this? she thought.

She walked into the middle of the living room, breathing quietly as if hoping to trick the walls into thinking no-one was there. Someone comes here. Her boy is here, but he can’t talk. Zeba is drugged and carried away. Her boy starts to cry and eventually the neighbour comes to check on him.

Linda looked around her, but could see no trace of what had happened. All I see is an empty flat, and I can’t interpret emptiness.

She stubbed her toe on the way out. As she was walking to her car,

Yassar came out of his shop.

“Did you find her?”

“No. Have you thought of anything else?”

Yassar sighed. “Nothing. My memory is not so good, but I’m sure she was clinging to his arm.”

Linda felt a need to defend Zeba. “She wasn’t clinging to him, she was drugged.”

Yassar looked worried. “You may be right,” he said. “But do things like that really happen in a town like Ystad?”

Linda heard only a part of what Yassar had to say. She was already on her way to see Henrietta. She had just started the engine when her mobile rang. It was the police station, but not her father’s office number. She hesitated, then answered. It was Lindman. She was happy to hear his voice.

“Where are you?”

“In a car.”

“Your father asked me to call. He wants to know where you are. And where is Anna Westin?”

“I haven’t found her.”

“What do you mean?”

“What do you mean, what do I mean? I went to her flat and she wasn’t there. Now I’m trying to work out where she could be. When I’ve found her, I’ll bring her back to the station.”

Why don’t I tell him the truth? she wondered. Is it something I learned because I had two parents who never told me what was going on, who always chose to skirt their way around the truth of every issue?

It was as if he saw through her.

“Is everything all right with you?”

“Apart from the fact that I haven’t found Anna yes.”

“Do you need any help?”

“No.”

“That didn’t sound very convincing. Do remember you aren’t a police officer yet.”

“How can I forget it when you’re all always bringing it up?”

She switched the phone off and threw it on to the passenger seat. She had only turned one corner before she stopped and switched it on again. Then she drove straight to Henrietta’s house. The wind had picked up and the air was brisk when she got out of the car and walked to the house. She looked towards the place where she had been caught in the animal trap. In the distance, on one of the narrow dirt roads between the fields, a man was burning rubbish next to his car. The thin spiral of smoke was torn apart by the gusts of wind.

Autumn was just around the corner, the first frost not far off. She walked into the garden and rang the doorbell. The dog started to bark. She drew a deep breath and shook out her body as if she were about to crouch down into the starting blocks. Henrietta opened the door. She smiled. Linda was immediately suspicious; it seemed as if Henrietta had been expecting her. Linda also noted that she had put on makeup, as if she wanted to make a good impression on someone, or to conceal the fact that she was pale.

“This is unexpected,” Henrietta said, and stepped aside.

Not true, Linda thought.

“You’re always welcome. Come in.”

The dog sniffed her, then returned to his basket. Linda heard a sigh. She looked around, but no-one was there. Sighs seemed to emanate from the thick stone walls themselves. Henrietta put out a coffee pot and two mugs.

“What’s that sound?” Linda asked.

“I’m playing one of my oldest compositions,” Henrietta said. “It’s from 1987, a concert for four sighing voices and percussion. Listen!”

Linda heard a single voice sigh, a woman.

“That’s Anna. I managed to persuade her to participate. She has a melodious sigh, full of sadness and vulnerability. There is always a somewhat hesitant quality to her speaking voice, but never to her sigh.”

Henrietta walked over to the tape recorder and turned it off. They sat down. The dog had started snoring and it was as if this sound drew Linda back to reality.

“Do you know where Anna is now?”

Henrietta looked down at her nails, then at Linda, who sensed a moment of doubt in her eyes. She knows, and she’s prepared to deny it, Linda thought.

“My mistake, then. Each time I think you’re here to see me and what you’re really after is to find out where my daughter is.”

“Do you know where she is?”

“No.”

“When did you talk to her last?”

“She called yesterday.”

“From where?”

“From her flat.”

“She doesn’t have a mobile phone?”

“No, she doesn’t, as you must know. She resists joining the ranks of those who are always available.”

“So she was home last night?”

“Are you interrogating me, Linda?”

“I need to know where Anna is, and what she’s up to.”

“I don’t know where she is presumably in Lund. She’s in medical school, you know.”

No she isn’t, Linda thought. Maybe Henrietta didn’t know that Anna had taken a break from her studies. That will be my trump card. But not now later.

She chose another route.

“Do you know Zeba?”

“Little Zeba? Of course.”

“She’s disappeared, just like Anna.”

Not a twitch or a quiver betrayed that Henrietta knew anything. Linda felt as if she had been floored by a punch she never saw coming. That had happened during her time at the training college. She had been in a ring, and suddenly found herself face-down on the floor without knowing how she got there.

“And maybe she’ll reappear, just as Anna did.”

Linda sensed more than saw her opportunity and she went in with her fists held high.

“Why didn’t you tell me the truth, Henrietta? Why didn’t you say you knew where she was?”

It hit the mark. Beads of sweat broke out on Henrietta’s forehead.

“Are you saying that I lied to you? If that is the case, I want you to leave right now. I will not be called a liar in my own home. You are poisoning me. I cannot work, the music is dying.”

“Yes, I am saying that you lied, and I won’t leave until you answer my questions. I have to know where Zeba is because I think she’s in danger. Anna is mixed up in this somehow, maybe you are too. And for sure, you know a lot more than you’re telling me.”

“Go away! I don’t know anything!” Henrietta yelled. The dog got up and started to bark.

Henrietta walked to a window, absently opening it, then closing it, then leaving it slightly ajar. Linda didn’t know how to continue, but knew she couldn’t let go. Henrietta seemed to have calmed down. She turned around.

“I’m sorry I lost my temper, but I don’t like being accused of lying. I don’t know where Zeba is, and I have no idea why you seem to think Anna is involved.”

Her indignation seemed genuine, or else she was a better actress than Linda imagined. She was still speaking with a raised voice, and she was still by the window.

“The night I got caught in the animal trap,” Linda said, “who were you talking to?”

“Were you spying on me?”

“Call it what you like. Why else would I have been here? I needed to know why you didn’t tell me the truth when I came to ask you about Anna.”

“The man who was here had come to talk to me about a composition we are planning together.”

“No,” Linda said, forcing her voice to remain steady. “It was someone else.”

“You are accusing me of lying again.”

“I know you are.”

“I always tell the truth,” Henrietta said. “But I prefer never to reveal any part of my private life.”

“You lied, Henrietta. I know who was here.”

“You know who was here?” Henrietta’s voice was high and shrill again.

“It was either a man called Torgeir Langaas, or it was Anna’s father.”

Henrietta flinched.

“Torgeir Langaas,” she almost screamed. “I don’t know anyone called Torgeir Langaas. And Anna’s father has been gone for twenty-four years. He’s dead. Anna is in Lund and I have no idea where Zeba might be.”

She went out into the kitchen and returned with a glass of water. She moved some cassette tapes out of the way and sat down on a chair next to Linda, who had to turn her body to look at her. Henrietta smiled. When she spoke again her voice was soft, almost careful.

“I didn’t mean to get so carried away.”

Linda looked at her and somewhere in her head a warning light came on. There was something she should be seeing. The conversation had been a failure. The only thing she had achieved was to put Henrietta even more on her guard. An experienced officer should have been in charge of this questioning, she thought. Now it would be even harder for her father, or whomever it would fall to, to get Henrietta to reveal whatever it was she was hiding.

“Is there anything else you think I’ve been lying about?”

“I believe hardly anything you say, but I can’t force you to stop telling lies. I just want you to know that I’m asking these questions because I’m worried about Zeba.”

“What could possibly have happened to her?”

Linda drew a deep breath. “I think someone, perhaps more than one person, is killing women who have had abortions. Zeba has had an abortion. The woman who was found dead in that church had had one two, actually. You’ve heard about the dead woman and the churches set on fire?”

Henrietta sat absolutely still, which Linda took as a yes.

“What has Anna to do with all this?”

“I don’t know, but I’m frightened.”

“What frightens you?”

“The thought that someone might try to kill Zeba. And that Anna is somehow involved.”

Something in Henrietta’s face changed. Linda couldn’t say what it was, but it flickered there for a moment. She decided she wasn’t going to get any further and bent to pick her jacket off the floor. There was a mirror next to the table. She glanced in it as she reached down and saw Henrietta’s face. She was looking past Linda.

Linda grabbed her jacket and sat up. Henrietta had been looking at the open window.

She started putting on her jacket and stood up, turning around. There was no-one outside, but Linda knew that someone had been there. She froze. Henrietta’s loud voice, the window that was opened for no reason, her repetitions of the names Linda had given her, and her vehement rejections of the accusations. Linda finished putting on her jacket. She didn’t dare turn around and look Henrietta in the eye since she was afraid her realisation would be spelled out in her face.

Linda quickly made her way to the front door and bent down to pat the dog. Henrietta followed her into the hallway.

“I’m sorry I couldn’t help you.”

“You could have helped,” Linda said. “But you chose not to.”

She opened the door and walked out. When she reached the end of the path she turned and looked around. I don’t see anyone, she thought, but someone can see me. Someone watched me in the house and -more to the point heard what we said. Henrietta repeated my questions and the person outside now knows what I know and what I believe and fear.

She walked swiftly to the car. She was scared, but she also berated herself for making a mistake. The point at which she was patting the dog and leaving was the point at which she should have started her questions in earnest. But she had chosen to leave.

She kept checking the rear-view mirror as she drove away.

# 

# CHAPTER 46

As Linda was walking into the police station she tripped and split her lip on the hard floor. For a moment she was dizzy, then she managed to get up and wave away the receptionist who was on her way over to help her. When she saw blood on her hand she walked to the ladies’, washed her face with cold water and waited for the bleeding to stop. Lindman was on his way in through the front doors as she came back out into reception. He looked at her with an amused expression.

“You make quite a pair,” he said. “Your father claims he walked into a door. What about you? That same door been making trouble for you too? Maybe we should call you Black-Eye and Fat-Lip, to avoid any confusion with the two of you having the same name.”

Linda laughed, which caused the wound to reopen and bleed. She went back into the ladies’ and got more tissue paper. They walked down the corridor together:

“It wasn’t a door. I threw an ashtray at him.”

They stopped outside Wallander’s office.

“Did you find Anna?”

“No.”

Lindman knocked on the door.

“You’d better go in and tell him.”

Wallander had his feet on the desk and was chewing on a pencil. He raised his eyebrows at her.

“Did you bring Anna?”

“I can’t find her.”

“What do you mean?”

“What do you think I mean? She’s not at home.”

Wallander didn’t conceal his impatience. Linda prepared for the onslaught, but then he noticed her swollen lip.

“What happened to you?”

“I tripped in reception.”

He shook his head, then started to laugh. Linda was glad of this shift in his mood, but she found his laugh hard to take. It sounded like a horse neighing and was far too high-pitched. If they were ever out together and he started to laugh, people would turn round to see who could possibly be responsible for such sounds.

Wallander threw his pencil down and took his feet off the desk.

“Have you called her place in Lund? Her friends? She has to be somewhere.”

“Nowhere that we can reach her, I think.”

“You’ve called her mobile number, at least?”

“She doesn’t have one.”

He was immediately interested in this piece of information.

“Why not?”

“Apparently she doesn’t want one.”

“Is there any other reason?”

Linda knew that there was more than idle curiosity behind these questions.

“Everyone has a mobile phone these days, especially you young people. But somehow not Anna Westin. How do you explain that?”

“I can’t. According to Henrietta, she doesn’t want to be ‘always available’.”

Wallander thought about this.

“Are you sure you know everything? Maybe she does have a phone, but she hasn’t told you about it?”

“How could I know that?”

“Exactly.”

Wallander pulled his phone over and dialled a number. Hoglund came into the office, looking tired and scruffy. Her hair was messy and her shirt was soiled. Linda was reminded of fru Jorner, Medberg’s daughter. The only difference that she could see between them was that Hoglund was not so fat.

Linda heard her father ask Hoglund to see if a mobile phone was registered under Anna’s name. She was irritated that she hadn’t thought I of that herself. Before leaving the room, Hoglund gave Linda a smile that was more like a grimace.

“She doesn’t like me.”

“If memory serves, you don’t care much for her either. It all evens itself out in the end. Even in a small police station like this people don’t always get along.”

He stood up.

“Coffee?”

They went to the canteen and Wallander was immediately drawn into an evidently exasperating exchange with Nyberg. Martinsson came in waving a piece of paper.

“Ulrik Larsen,” he said. “The one who tried to mug you in Copenhagen.”

“Not mug me,” Linda said sharply. “The one who threatened me and told me to stop asking questions about a man called Torgeir Langaas.”

“That’s exactly what I was going to tell you about,” Martinsson said. “Larsen has withdrawn his story. The problem is that he won’t let them have a new version. He continues to deny that he threatened you, and he maintains he doesn’t know anyone by the name of Langaas. Our Danish colleagues are convinced he’s lying, but they can’t get him to tell the truth.”

“Is that it?”

“Not completely. But I want Kurre to hear the rest.”

“Don’t call him that,” Linda warned. “He hates it.”

“Tell me about it,” Martinsson said. “He likes it about as much as I like being called “Marta’.”

“Who calls you that?”

“My wife. When she’s in a bad mood.”

Wallander and Nyberg finished discussing whatever it was they disagreed about, and Martinsson relayed the news about Larsen.

“There’s one more thing,” he said, “which is really the most significant. Our Danish colleagues have run a background check on Larsen and he has no previous criminal record. In fact, it turns out in all other respects that he’s a model citizen: thirty-seven years old, married, three children, and with an occupation where practitioners rarely turn to criminal activity.”

“What is it?” Wallander said.

“He’s a minister.”

They stared at Martinsson.

“What do you mean, a minister?” Lindman said. “I thought he was a drug addict.”

Martinsson looked through his papers.

“Apparently he played the role of a drug addict, but he’s a minister in the Danish state church, with a parish in Gentofte. There have been all kinds of headlines over there about the fact that a minister of the church has been accused of assault and robbery.”

“It turns up again, then,” Wallander said softly. “Religion, the church. This Larsen is important. Someone has to go over and assist our colleagues in their investigation. I want to know how he fits in.”

“If he fits in,” Lindman said.

“He does,” Wallander said. “We just need to know how. Ask Hoglund to do it.”

Martinsson’s telephone rang. He listened and then finished his cup of coffee.

“The Norwegians are stirring,” he said. “We’ve received some information about Langaas.”

“Let’s have a look at it.”

Martinsson went to get the faxes. There was a fuzzy version of a photograph.

“This was taken more than twenty years ago,” Martinsson said. “He’s tall. More than one hundred and ninety centimetres.”

They studied the snapshot. Have I seen this man before? Linda wondered. But she couldn’t be sure.

“What do they say?” Wallander asked.

Linda noticed he was getting more and more impatient. Just like me, she thought. The anxiety and impatience go hand in hand.

“They found our man Langaas as soon as they started to look. It would have come through sooner if the officer in charge had not misdirected our urgent query. In other words, the Oslo office is plagued by the same problems as we are. Here, tapes from the archives go missing, there, requests from other stations. But it all got sorted out in the end, and Langaas is involved in an old missing-persons case, as it turns out.”

“In what way involved?” Wallander said.

“You won’t believe me when I tell you.”

“Try me.”

“Torgeir Langaas disappeared from his native Norway nineteen years ago.”

They looked at each other. Linda felt as if the room itself was holding its breath. She saw her father sit up in his chair as if readying himself to charge.

“Another disappearance,” he said. “Somehow all of this is about disappearances.”

“And reappearances,” Lindman said.

“Or a resurrection,” Wallander said.

Martinsson kept reading, picking his way through the text as if there were land mines hidden between the words: “Torgeir Langaas was the heir of a shipping magnate. His disappearance was unexpected and sudden. No crime was suspected since he left a letter to his mother, Maigrim Langaas, in which he assured her that he was not depressed and had no intention of committing suicide. He left because he and I quote ‘couldn’t stand it any longer’.”

“What couldn’t he stand?”

It was Wallander who interrupted him again. To Linda it seemed as if his impatience and worry came out of his nostrils like invisible smoke.

“It’s not clear from this report, but he left with quite a bank balance. Several bank accounts, in fact. His parents thought he would tire of his rebellion after a while. They didn’t go to the police until two years had passed. The reason they gave, it says here in the report from January the twelfth, 1984, was that he had stopped writing letters, that they had had no sign of life from him for four months, and that he had emptied each of his accounts. Since which time, no-one has heard from him.”

Martinsson let the page fall to the table.

“There’s more, but those are the main points.”

Wallander raised his hand. “Does it say where the last letter was posted? And when were the bank accounts emptied?”

Martinsson looked through the papers for these answers, but without success. Wallander reached for his mobile.

“What’s the number?”

He dialled the number that Martinsson read out. The Norwegian officer’s name was Hovard Midstuen. Once he was on the line, Wallander asked his two questions, gave his phone number and hung up.

“He said it would only take a few minutes,” Wallander said. “We’ll wait.”

Midstuen called back after 12 minutes. Wallander pounced on the telephone and scrawled a few notes. He thanked his Norwegian colleague and triumphantly shut off the phone.

“This might be starting to hang together.”

He read from his notes: Langaas’s last letter was posted in Cleveland, Ohio. It was also from there that the accounts were emptied and closed.

Not everyone made the connection, but Linda saw what he was getting at.

“The woman who was found dead in Frennestad Church came from Tulsa,” he said. “But she was born in Cleveland, Ohio. I still don’t understand what’s happening, but there’s one thing I know, and that’s that Linda’s friend Zeba is in mortal danger. It may be that her other friend, Anna Westin, is in danger too.” He paused. “It might also be that Anna Westin is part of this. That’s why we need to concentrate on these two and nothing else for the moment.”

It was 3 p.m. and Linda was scared. She could think only of Zeba and Anna. A thought flew through her mind: she would start her real work as a police officer in three days. How would she feel about that if something happened to either of her friends in the meantime?

# 

# CHAPTER 47

When Anna recognised the scream as Zeba’s, Erik knew that God was testing him in the same way He had tested Abraham. He perceived her every reaction. She had merely flinched and then she had carefully adopted an expression which lacked all emotion. A moment of doubt, a series of questions was that a kind of animal or, in fact, a human scream? Could it be Zeba? She was searching for an answer that would satisfy her, and at the same time she was waiting to hear the scream again. What Erik didn’t understand was why she didn’t ask him about it. In a way, it was as well that Zeba had made her presence known. Now there was no turning back.

He would see soon if Anna was worthy of being called his daughter. And what would he do if it turned out she did not possess the strength he expected of her? It had taken him many years to travel the road his inner voices had told him to follow. He had to be prepared to sacrifice even that which was most precious to him, and it would be up to God whether he, Erik, would be granted a stay at the last minute.

I won’t talk to her, he thought. I must preach to her, as I preach to my disciples. She broke in during a pause. He let her speak, because he knew he could best interpret a person’s state of mind at such a moment of vulnerability.

“Once upon a time you were my father. You lived a simple life.”

“I had to follow my calling.”

“You abandoned me, your daughter.”

“I had to. But I never left you in my heart. And I came back to you.”

She was tense, he could see that, but still her sudden loss of control surprised him. Her voice rose to a shriek.

“That screaming I heard was Zeba! She’s here somewhere below where we are sitting. What is she doing here? She hasn’t done anything.”

“You know what she has done. It was you who told me.”

“I should never have told you!”

“She who commits a sin and takes the life of another must bear the wrath of God. This is justice, and the word of the Lord.”

“Zeba didn’t kill anyone. She was only fifteen at the time. How could she have cared for a child at that age?”

“She should not have allowed a child to be conceived.”

Erik could not calm her, and felt a wave of impatience. This is Henrietta, he thought. She’s too much like her.

“Nothing is going to happen to Zeba,” he said.

“Then what is she doing here, in a basement?”

“She is waiting for you to make up your mind. To decide.”

This confused her, and Erik smiled inwardly. He had spent many years in Cleveland poring over books about the arts of warfare. That work was paying off now. It was she who was on the defensive now.

“I don’t understand what you mean. I’m frightened.”

Anna started to sob, her body shook. He felt a lump in his throat, remembering how he had comforted her as a child when she cried. But he forced the feeling away, and asked her to stop.

“Of what are you scared?”

“Of you.”

“You know I love you. I love Zeba. I have come to join the earthly and the divine in transcendent love.”

“I don’t understand you when you talk like that!”

Before he had a chance to say anything else there was a new cry for help from the basement and Anna flew from her chair.

“I’m coming!” she cried, but he grabbed her before she could leave the veranda. She struggled, but he was too strong for her. When she continued to struggle, he hit her with an open hand. Once, then again, and then a third time. She fell to the floor after the third blow, her nose bleeding. Langaas appeared at the French windows and Erik motioned for him to go down into the basement. Langaas understood and left. Erik pulled Anna up on to a chair and felt her forehead with his fingertips. Her pulse was racing. His own was only somewhat accelerated. He sat down and waited. Soon he would have broken her will.

This was the last set of de fences He had surrounded her and was attacking from all sides. He waited.

“I didn’t want to do that,” he said after a while. “I only do what is necessary. We are about to embark on a war against emptiness, soullessness It is a war in which it is not always possible to be gentle, or merciful. I am joined by people who are prepared to give their lives for this cause. I myself may have to give my life.”

She didn’t say anything.

“Nothing will happen to Zeba,” he repeated. “But nothing in this life comes to us without a price.”

Now she looked at him with a mixture of fear and anger. She held a handkerchief to her nose. He explained what it was he wanted her to do. She stared at him with wide eyes. He moved his chair closer to her and placed his hand over hers. She stared back, but she did not pull it away.

“I will give you one hour,” he said. “No door will be locked, no guard will watch over you. Think about what I have said, and come to your decision. I know that if you let God into your heart and mind, you will do what is right. Do not forget that I love you very much.”

He stood up, traced a cross on her brow with his finger, and left.

Langaas was waiting in the hallway.

“She settled down when she saw me. I don’t think she’ll do it again.”

They walked through the garden to an outhouse that had been used for storing fishing equipment. They stopped outside the door.

“Has everything been prepared?”

“Everything has been prepared,” Langaas said.

He pointed to four tents that had been erected beyond the outhouse, lifting the flap to one of them. Erik looked in. There were the boxes, piled one on top of the other. He nodded. Langaas tied the tent flap shut.

“The cars?”

“The ones that will drive the greatest distances are waiting on the road. The others have been parked in the positions we agreed.”

Erik Westin looked down at his watch. The many, often difficult,

years he had spent laying the groundwork had seemed without end. Now time was passing too fast. From this point on everything had to conform exactly to the plan.

“It’s time to start the countdown,” he said.

He threw a glance at the sky. Whenever he had thought forward to this moment he had always imagined that the heavens would mirror its dramatic import, but in Sandhammaren on this day, September 7, 2001, there were no clouds and almost no breeze.

“What is the temperature?” he said.

Langaas looked at his watch, which had a built-in thermometer, as well as a pedometer and compass.

“Eight degrees,” he said.

They walked into the outhouse, which still smelled strongly of tar. Those who were waiting for him sat in a semicircle on low wooden benches. Erik had planned to perform the ceremony with the white masks, but he decided to wait. He did not yet know if the next sacrifice would be Zeba or the policeman’s daughter. They would perform the ceremony then. Now they only had time for a shorter ritual; God would not accept anyone who arrived late for their appointed task. Not to be mindful of one’s time was like denying that time was the gift of the Lord. Those who needed to travel to their destinations would shortly have to leave. They had calculated how much time was needed for each leg of their journey, and had followed the checklists in the carefully prepared manuals. In short, they had done everything in their power, but there was always the possibility that the dark forces would prevent them from achieving their goals.

When the cars with the three groups who had to travel had left, and the others had returned to their hide-outs, Erik remained in the outhouse. He sat motionless in the dark with the necklace in his hand the golden sandal that was now as important to him as the cross. Did he have any regrets? That would be blasphemy. He was no more than an instrument, but one equipped with a free will to understand and then to dedicate himself to the path of the chosen. He closed his eyes and breathed in the tar. He had spent a summer on the island of

Oland as a child, visiting a relative who was a fisherman. The memories of that summer, one of the happiest of his childhood, were nestled in the scent of tar. He remembered how he had crept out in the light summer night and run down to the boat shed in order to draw the smell more deeply into his lungs.

Erik opened his eyes. He was past the point of no return. The time had come. He left the outhouse and took a circuitous route to the front of the house. He looked at the veranda from the cover of a large tree. Anna was in the same chair. He tried to interpret her decision from the way she was sitting, but he was too far away.

Suddenly there was a rustling behind him. He took fright. It was Langaas. Erik was furious.

“Why are you sneaking around?”

“I didn’t mean to.”

Erik struck him hard in the face, below the right eye. Langaas accepted the blow and lowered his head. Then Erik stroked his hair and they walked together to the house. He made his way soundlessly to the veranda until he was standing behind her. She noticed his presence only when he bent over and she felt his breath on the nape of her neck. He sat down beside her, pulling his chair closer until their knees touched.

“Have you made your decision?”

“I will do as you ask.”

He had expected that she would say this, but still it came as a relief.

He collected a shoulder bag lying by the wall, and pulled out a small, thin and extremely sharp knife. He lowered it gently into her hands, as if it were a kitten.

“The moment she reveals that she knows things she shouldn’t, I want you to stab her not once, but three or four times. Strike her in the chest and force the blade up before you pull it out. Then call Torgeir and stay out of sight until we get you. You have six hours to do this, no more. You know I trust you, and love you. Who could love you more than I do?”

She was about to say something, but stopped herself. He knew she had been thinking of Henrietta.

“God,” she said.

“I trust you, Anna,” he said. “God’s love and my love are one and the same. We are living in a time of rebirth. A new kingdom. Do you understand this?”

“Yes.”

He looked deep into her eyes. He was still not utterly certain about this, but he had to believe that he was doing the right thing.

He followed her out.

“Anna is going home now, Torgeir.”

They got into a car that was parked by the front door. Erik tied the kerchief over her eyes himself to make sure that she saw nothing.

“Take a detour,” he said in a low voice to Langaas. “Make her think it is further than it really is.”

The car came to a stop at 5.30. Langaas took out Anna’s earplugs, then told her to keep her eyes closed and count to 50 after he had taken off her blindfold.

“The Lord watches you,” he said.

He helped her to step out on to the pavement. Anna counted to 50, then opened her eyes. She didn’t know where she was at first. Then she recognised it. She was on Mariagatan, outside Linda’s flat.

# 

# CHAPTER 48

During the afternoon and evening of September 7, Linda once again watched her father try to bring all the threads into one whole and come up with a plan for how they should proceed. During those hours she became aware that the praise he often received from his colleagues and at times in the media when they were not chastising him for his dismissive attitude towards them at press conferences was justified. Her father was not only knowledgeable and experienced, but he possessed a remarkable ability to focus and to inspire his colleagues.

During her time at the training college, the father of one of her friends was an ice-hockey coach for a top team in the second league. She and her friend had once been allowed into the changing room before a game, during the breaks and after the game was over. This coach had the ability she had just witnessed in her father, an ability to motivate people. After two periods the team was losing by four goals, but the coach didn’t let up. He urged them on, cajoled them not to let themselves be beaten, and in the last period the players had stormed back on to the ice and very nearly managed to turn the game around.

Will my father manage to turn this game around? she wondered. Will he find Zeba before it is too late? Over the course of the day, during a meeting or briefing when she stood at the back of the room, she several times had to rush out to go to the toilet. Her stomach had always been her weakest point; fear gave her diarrhoea. Her father, on the other hand, sometimes bragged about having the stomach lining of a hyena apparently their stomach acid was the strongest in all the animal kingdom. His weakness was his head, and sometimes when he was under a great deal of stress he would get tension headaches that might last days and could be cured only by prescription-strength pills.

Linda was afraid, and she knew she wasn’t the only one. There was an unreal quality to the calm and concentration at the police station. She understood something which no-one had mentioned at the training college: that sometimes the most important task of a police officer was keeping their own fear in check. If it got out of control, all this concentration and focus would crumble.

Shortly after 4.00 Linda saw her father pacing up and down the corridors like a caged animal. The press conference was about to take place. He kept sending in Martinsson to see how many journalists were assembled, and how many television cameras. From time to time he asked Martinsson about individuals by name, and from the tone of his voice it was clear he was hoping they would not be there. She watched him walking anxiously to and fro. He was the animal waiting to be sent into the arena. When Holgersson came to announce that it was time, he lunged into the conference room. The only thing missing was a roar.

During the 30-minute press conference, Wallander concentrated on Zeba. Photographs were passed out, a slide was projected on to the screen. Where was she? Had anyone seen her? Skilfully he side-stepped being pulled into detailed explanations, keeping his remarks concise and ignoring questions he did not want to answer.

“There is still a dimension here that we do not understand,” he said in closing. “The church fires, the two dead women and the burned animals. We cannot be entirely sure that there is a connection, but what we do know is that this young woman may be in danger.”

What danger? Who posed this danger? Could he add anything? The room buzzed with dissatisfaction. Linda imagined him lifting an invisible shield and simply letting the questions bounce back unanswered. Chief Holgersson said nothing during the proceedings, except to chair the question-and-answer session. Svartman mouthed answers to Wallander when there were data that escaped him.

Suddenly Wallander stood up as if he couldn’t take it any longer, nodded and left the room. He shook off the reporters who threw themselves after him. Afterwards he left the station without saying another word.

“That’s what he always does,” Martinsson said. “He takes himself out for some air, as if he were his own dog. Walks around the water tower. Then he comes back.”

Twenty minutes later he came storming down the corridor. Pizzas were delivered to the conference room. Wallander told everyone to hurry up, shouting at a young woman from the office who had not provided them with the paper he had asked for, and then he slammed the door. Lindman, who was sitting beside her, whispered:

“One day I think he’s going to lock the door and throw away the key. We’ll turn into pillars of salt. If we’re lucky, we’ll be excavated in a thousand years.”

Ann-Britt Hoglund had just returned from a quick investigation in Copenhagen.

“I met this Ulrik Larsen,” she said and pushed a photograph over to Linda. She recognised him immediately. Yes, he was the one who had warned her not to look for Torgeir Langaas, and who had then knocked her down.

“He’s changed his mind,” Hoglund continued. “There’s no more talk of drugs. He still denies having threatened Linda, but gives no alternative explanation. He is evidently a controversial minister. His sermons have become increasingly fire-and-brimstone of late.”

Linda saw her father’s arm shoot out and interrupt.

“This is important. How do you mean, ‘fire-and-brimstone’, and be specific about ‘of late’.”

Hoglund flipped through her notebook.

“I was led to believe that ‘of late’ meant this last year. The fire-and-brimstone is shorthand for the fact that he has started preaching about the Day of Judgment, the crisis of Christianity, ungodliness and the punishment that will be meted out to all sinners. He has been admonished both by his own congregation and by the bishop, but refuses to change the tenor of his sermons.”

“I take it you asked the most important question?”

Linda wasn’t sure what that was, and when Hoglund gave her answer, she felt stupid.

“His views on abortion? I was actually able to ask him myself.”

“The answer?”

“There was none. He refused to speak to me. But from the pulpit he has stated that abortion is a despicable crime that deserves the severest punishment.”

At that moment Nyberg opened the door. “The theologian is among us.”

Linda looked around the room and saw that only her father knew what Nyberg was talking about.

“Show him in,” Wallander said.

Nyberg went out, and Wallander explained for whom they were waiting.

“Nyberg and I have been trying to make sense of that Bible that was left, or maybe deliberately left in the hut where Medberg was murdered. Someone has written their own version of the text, notably in the Book of Revelation, in Romans and parts of the Old Testament. But what kind of changes? Is there a logic there? We talked to the state crime people, but they had no experts to send. That’s why we contacted the Department of Theology at Lund University and established contact with Dr. Hanke, who has come here today.”

Dr. Hanke, to everyone’s surprise, turned out to be a pretty young woman with long blonde hair, dressed in black leather trousers and a low-cut top. Linda saw that it discomfited her father. Hanke walked around the room shaking hands and then sat down on a chair that was pulled up next to Lisa Holgersson.

“My name is Sofia Hanke,” she said. “I’m a lecturer and have written a dissertation on the Christian paradigm shift in Sweden after the Second World War.”

She opened her portfolio and took out the Bible that had been found in the hut.

“This has been fascinating,” she said. “But I know you don’t have a lot of time, so I’ll try to make it brief. The first thing I want to say is that I believe this is the work of one person, not because of the handwriting, but because there is a kind of logic to what is written here.”

She looked in a notebook and continued, “I’ve chosen an example to illustrate what I mean, from Romans Chapter Seven. By the way, how many of you know the Bible? Perhaps it’s not part of the current curriculum at the training college .. .”

Everyone who met her gaze shook their head, except Nyberg, who surprised them by saying, “I read from the Bible every night. Foolproof way to induce sleep.”

Everyone laughed, including Sofia Hanke.

“I can relate to that experience,” she said. “I ask mainly because I’m curious. In any case, Romans Chapter Seven discusses the human tendency to sin. It says, among other things: “Yes, the good that I wish to do, I do not; but the evil that I do not wish to do, I do.” Between these lines our writer has rearranged good and evil. The new version reads: “Yes, the evil that I wish to do, I do; but the good that I do not wish to do, I do not do.” St. Paul’s message is turned upside down. One of the grounding assumptions of Christianity is the idea that humans want to do what is right, but always find reasons to do evil instead. But the altered version says that humans do not even want to do what is right. This happens again and again in the changes. The writer turns texts upside down, seemingly to find new meanings. It would be easy to assume this is the work of a deranged soul, but I don’t think that’s what we’re dealing with. There is a strained logic to these emendations. I think the writer is hunting for a significance he or she believes is concealed in the Bible, something that is not immediately apparent in the words themselves. He or she is looking between the words.”

“Logic,” Wallander said. “What kind of logic is there in something this absurd?”

“Not everything is absurd; some of it is straightforward, even simple. There are also other texts in the margin. For example: “All the wisdom life has taught me can be summed up in the words “he who loves God, is blessed”.””

Linda saw that her father’s patience was beginning to be tried.

“Why would someone do this? Why do you think we find this Bible in a miles-from-anywhere hut in which a woman has been the victim of an abominable murder?”

“It could be a case of religious fanaticism,” Hanke said.

Wallander leaned forward. “Tell us more.”

“I normally refer to something I call Preacher Lena’s tradition. A long time ago a milkmaid in Ostergotland had mystical visions and started preaching. After a while she was taken to a lunatic asylum, but such people have always been around. Religious fanatics who either choose to live as lone preachers or who try to assemble a flock of devotees. Most of these people are honest to the extent that they act out of a genuine belief in their divine inspiration. Of course, there have always been con artists, but these are in the minority. Most of them preach their beliefs and start their sects from a genuine desire to do good. If they commit crimes or evil deeds they often try to legitimi se these acts in the eyes of their God, for example by the interpretation of Bible verses.”

The discussion with Dr. Hanke went on, but Linda could tell that her father was thinking about other things. These scribbles between the lines of the Bible found in the Rannesholm hut had yielded no clues. Or had they? She tried to read his thoughts she had been practising since early childhood but there was a big difference between being alone with him at home and being in a conference room full of people at the police station, as now.

Nyberg escorted Dr. Hanke out and Holgersson opened a window. The pizza cartons were starting to empty. Nyberg returned. People walked out and in, talked on the phone, went to get cups of coffee. Only Linda and her father stayed at the table. He looked at her vaguely and then retreated into his own thoughts.

When they started their long meeting Linda was quiet and no-one asked her any questions. She sat there like an invited guest. Her father looked at her a few times. If Birgitta Medberg had been a person who mapped old, overgrown paths, then her father was a person who was looking for passable roads to travel. He seemed to have an endless patience even though he had a clock inside him ticking crossly and loudly. That was what he had told her once in Stockholm when he met Linda and a few of her student friends and told them about his work. During times of enormous pressure, as when he knew that a person’s life was in danger, he had a feeling that there was a clock ticking away on the right side of his chest, parallel to his heart. Outwardly, however, he was patient, and displayed signs of irritation only if anyone started to veer away from the subject: where was Zeba? The meeting went on,

but from time to time someone made or received a call or else someone left and returned with some documentation or a photograph that was immediately made into a thread of the investigation.

Chief Holgersson closed the door at 8.15 p.m. after a short break. Now no-one was allowed to disturb them. Wallander took off his coat, rolled up the sleeves of his dark blue shirt and walked to the flip chart. On a blank sheet he wrote Zeba’s name and drew a circle around it.

“Let’s forget about Medberg for the moment,” he said. “I know it may be a fatal mistake, but right now there is no logical connection between her and Harriet Bolson. It may be the same killer or killers, we don’t know. But my point is that the motive seems different. If we leave Medberg out, we see that it is easier to find a connection between Harriet Bolson and Zeba. Abortion. Let us assume that we are dealing with a number of people we don’t know how many who with some religious motivation judge and punish women who have had abortions. I use the word ‘assume’ here since we don’t know. We know that people have been murdered, animals killed and churches burned to the ground. Everything that has happened gives us the inescapable impression of thorough planning.”

Wallander looked at the others, then went back to his place at the table.

“Let us assume everything is part of a ceremony,” he said. “Fire is an important symbol in similar cases. The burning of the animals may have been a sacrifice of some kind. Harriet Bolson was executed in front of the altar in a way that could be interpreted as ritual sacrifice. We found a necklace with a sandal pendant around her neck.”

Lindman raised his hand and interrupted him.

“I’ve been wondering about that note with her name on it. If it was left there for us, then why?”

“I can’t tell you. What do you think?”

“Doesn’t it suggest that we are dealing with a lunatic who is challenging us, who wants us to try to catch him?”

“It could be. But that’s not the important thing right now. I think these people are planning to do to Zeba what they did to Harriet Bolson.”

The room grew quiet.

“This is where we are,” he said. “We have no suspect, no sure-fire motive, no definite direction. In my opinion, we’re at a stalemate.” No-one disagreed. “We keep working,” he said. “Sooner or later we’ll find our direction.”

The meeting was over. People left in different directions. Linda felt in the way, but she had no thoughts of leaving the station. In three days, on Monday, she would at last be able to pick up her uniform and start working in earnest. But the only thing that meant anything right now was Zeba. She went to the toilet. On her way back her mobile rang. It was Anna.

“Where are you?”

“At the station.”

“Is Zeba back yet? I called her flat, but there’s no answer.”

Linda was immediately on her guard. “She’s still missing.”

“I’m so worried about her.”

“Me too.”

She must really be worried, Linda thought. She couldn’t lie that well.

“I need to talk,” Anna said.

“Not now,” Linda said. “I can’t get away right now.”

“Not even for a few minutes? If I come up to the station?”

“You aren’t allowed in.”

“But can’t you come out? For a few minutes?”

“Are you sure this can’t wait?”

“Of course it can.”

Linda heard that Anna was disappointed. She changed her mind.

“A few minutes, then.”

“Thanks. I’ll be there in ten.”

Linda walked down the corridor to her father’s office. Everyone seemed to have vanished. She wrote on a note that she left on the desk: I’ve gone out for some air and to talk to Anna. Back soon. Linda.

She put on her jacket and left. The corridor was empty. The only person she passed on the way out was the cleaning lady with her trolley. The police officers manning the incoming calls were busy and did not look up. No-one noticed her walk through reception.

The cleaning woman, Lija, who was from Latvia, normally started at the far end of the corridor where the criminal police had their offices. Since several rooms there were occupied, she started with Inspector Wallander’s office. There were always loose pieces of paper under his chair that he hadn’t managed to throw into the waste-paper basket. She swept up everything that was under the chair, dusted here and there, and then left the room.

# 

# CHAPTER 49

Linda waited outside the station. She was cold and pulled the jacket tightly across her body. She walked down to the poorly lit car park and spotted her father’s car. She pushed a hand into her pocket and confirmed that she still had the spare keys. She checked her watch. More than ten minutes had gone by. Why wasn’t Anna here?

Linda waited at the front entrance of the police station. No-one was around. In other parts of the building there were shadows behind the lit windows. She walked back over to the car park. Suddenly, something made her feel ill at ease and she stopped short, looking around, listening. The wind rustled through the trees as if to catch her attention. She turned round quickly, adopting a defensive posture as she did so. It was Anna.

“Why on earth did you sneak up on me like that?”

“I didn’t mean to frighten you.”

“Where did you appear from?”

Anna pointed vaguely in the direction of the entrance to the car park.

“I didn’t hear your car,” Linda said.

“I walked.”

Linda was more than ever on her guard. Anna was tense, her face troubled.

“Tell me what is so important.”

“I just want to know about Zeba.”

“We talked about that on the phone.” Linda gestured towards the glowing windows of the station. “Do you know how many of them are working in there right now?” she said. “People with only one thing on their mind: finding Zeba. You can think what you like, but I’m part of that team and I really don’t have time to stand here talking to you.”

“I’m sorry, I should go.”

This isn’t right, Linda thought. Her whole inner alarm system was ringing. Anna was acting confused. Her sneaking manner and her unconvincing apology didn’t add up.

“Don’t go,” Linda told her sharply. “Now that you’re here, you might as well tell me why.”

“I’ve already told you.”

“If you know anything about where Zeba is, you have to tell me.”

“I don’t know where she is. I just came to ask you if you’ve found her, or at least have any clues.”

“You’re lying.”

Anna’s reaction was so surprising that Linda didn’t have time to prepare for it. It was as if she underwent a sudden transformation. She shoved Linda in the chest and shouted at her, “I never lie! And you don’t understand what’s happening!”

Then she turned and walked away. Linda didn’t say anything. She watched, speechless, as Anna went. Anna had one hand in her pocket. She has something in there, Linda thought. Something she’s clinging to like a life belt But why is she so upset? Linda wondered if she should run after her, but Anna was already far away.

She walked back up to the front doors of the station, but something stopped her. She tried to think fast. She shouldn’t have let Anna go. If it was true, as she thought, that Anna was acting strangely, then she should have brought her into the station and asked someone else to talk to her. She had been given the task of staying close to Anna. She had made a mistake and brushed her away too soon.

Linda tried to decide. She wavered between going back in, and trying to stop Anna. She chose the latter and decided to borrow her father’s car since that would be faster. She drove the way that Anna should have walked, but she didn’t find her. She drove the same way again but still saw nothing. She tried another possible route same result. She drove to Anna’s apartment building and stopped. The lights were on in her flat. On her way to the front door, Linda saw a bicycle. The tyres were wet and the water-splashed frame had not yet dried. It wasn’t raining, but the streets were full of puddles. Linda shook her head. Something warned her against ringing the bell.

Instead, she returned to the car and backed it up until it was in shadow.

She felt that she needed to consult with someone and so she dialled her father’s mobile. No answer. He must have left it somewhere again, she thought. She dialled Lindman’s number. Busy. Like Martinsson’s, which she tried next. She was about to try all three again when a car turned in to the street and stopped outside Anna’s door. It was dark blue or black, maybe a Saab. The light in Anna’s flat went out. Linda’s body was tense, her hands holding the mobile were sweating. Anna appeared and climbed into the back seat, then the car drove away. Linda followed. She tried again to call her father, but still no answer. On Osterleden she was overtaken by a speeding truck. She stayed behind the truck but pulled out from time to time to make sure that the dark car was still there. It turned off to Kaseberga.

Linda kept as great a distance between herself and the other car as she dared. She tried to make another call, but she succeeded only in dropping the phone between the seats. They passed the road to Kaseberga harbour and kept on east. It was only when they reached Sandhammaren that the car in front of her made a right turn. The turn seemed to come out of nowhere, as it had not indicated. Linda continued past the turning and stopped only when she had gone over a brow and round a corner. She found a bus stop and turned round, then drove back. She did not dare to take the same turning.

Instead she chose a dirt road to the left. It came to an end by a broken-down gate and a rusting combine harvester. Linda got out of the car. There was a stronger wind here by the sea. She searched for her father’s black-knit watch cap. She pulled it over her head and felt as if it made her invisible. She wondered if she should try to call again, but when she saw that her battery was running low, she put the phone in her pocket and started walking back the way she had come. It was only a few hundred metres to the other road. She walked so fast she broke into a sweat. The road was dark. She stopped and listened, but could hear only the wind and the roar of the sea.

She searched among the driveways of the houses in the area for about 45 minutes, and had almost given up when she spotted the dark blue car between some trees. There was no building nearby, not that she could see. She listened, but everything was quiet. She shielded the torch with her hand to hide the light, then shone it into the car. There were a scarf and some earplugs in the back seat where Anna had been. Then she directed the beam of light on to the ground. There were paths leading in several directions, but one had a multitude of footprints.

Linda thought again about calling her father, but she reminded herself that the battery was low. Instead she sent him a text message: with anna, will call later. She switched off the torch and started along the sandy path. She was surprised that she wasn’t scared, even though she was breaking the golden rule so often repeated during her training. Never work alone, never go into the field alone. She stopped, hesitating. Perhaps she should turn back. I’m just like Dad, she thought, and inside she felt a gnawing suspicion that this was about showing him she was good enough.

Suddenly she caught sight of a light between the trees and the sand dunes up ahead. She listened. There was still only the sound of the wind and the sea. She took a few steps in the direction of the light. There were several lighted windows. It was a house standing alone, without neighbours. There was a fence and a gate. The garden was large, and she knew the sea must be close, although she couldn’t see it. She wondered who it was who had such a large house near the shore and what Anna was doing there, if that was where she was. Then her phone rang. She was startled, but answered it quickly. It was one of her fellow students from the training college, Hans Rosquist, who now worked in Eskilstuna. They hadn’t talked since the graduation ball.

“Is this a bad time?” he said.

Linda could hear music, the clinking of glasses and bottles in the background.

“Sort of,” she said. “Call me tomorrow. I’m working.”

“You can’t talk even for a few minutes?”

“No. Let’s chat tomorrow.”

She kept a finger on the off button in case he called again. When she had waited for two minutes without anything happening she tucked the phone back into her pocket. Cautiously she climbed the fence. There were cars parked in front of the house and there were also tents on the lawn.

Someone opened a window close to where she was. She jumped back and dropped to her knees. There was a shadow behind a curtain and the sound of voices. She waited. Then, noiselessly, she made her way to the window. The voices had stopped. The sense that there were eyes out here in the darkness was very powerful. I should run away from this place, she thought, her heart pounding. I shouldn’t be here, at least not alone. A door opened, she couldn’t see exactly where, but she saw the long patch of light it cast on to the lawn. She held her breath. Now she caught the whiff of tobacco smoke on the wind. At the same time the voices through the window started up again.

The patch of light on the grass disappeared and the unseen door was closed. The voices became clearer. It took a few minutes for Linda to realise that there was only one speaker, a man. But the pitch of his voice varied so much that she had thought it was several people. He spoke in short sentences, paused and then continued. She strained to hear the language he was using. It was English.

She didn’t understand what he was talking about at first. It was simply an incoherent jumble: the names of people, of cities: Lulea, Vasteras, Karlstad. It was part of a briefing, she realised. Something was being arranged to happen in these places, at a time and on a date which were repeated over and over. Whatever it was, it would happen in 26 hours’ time. The voice spoke methodically, slowly, and could occasionally become sharp, almost shrill, before falling again to a mild tone.

Linda tried to imagine what the man looked like. She was very tempted to stand on tiptoe and try to see into the room, but she stayed in her uncomfortable position crouched next to the wall. Suddenly the voice started to talk about God. Linda felt a contraction in her stomach.

She didn’t have to think about what the alternatives were. She knew she should make her way back and contact the station. Possibly they were even wondering where she had gone. But she also felt that she couldn’t leave just yet, not while the voice was talking about God and the thing that was to happen in 26 hours. What was the message between the lines of what he was saying? He talked about a special grace that awaited the martyrs. Martyrs? Who was he talking about? There were too many questions and not enough room in her head. What was going on, and why was his voice so mild?

How long did she listen until she grasped what he was saying? It might have been half an hour or just a few minutes. The terrifying truth slowly dawned on her and at that point she had already started to sweat, in spite of the cold. Here in a house in Sandhammaren a group of people were preparing a terrible attack no, 13 attacks and some of those who would set the catastrophe in motion had already left.

She heard a number of phrases repeated: “located by the altars and towers”. Also, “the explosives”, and “at the corners of the structures”. Linda was suddenly reminded of her father’s annoyance when someone was trying to inform him of an unusually spectacular theft of dynamite. Was there a connection with what she was hearing through the window? The man was talking about how important it was to attack the foremost symbols of the false prophets, and that this was why he had chosen the 13 cathedrals as targets.

Linda was so cold that her legs were stiff and her knees ached. She knew that she had to get away immediately. What she had heard, what she now knew to be true, was so terrifying that she could hardly keep it in her head. This isn’t really happening, she thought, not in Sweden. These kinds of things happen far away.

She straightened her back. It was quiet inside now. Then, just as she was about to leave, another voice started. She stiffened. The man who was speaking now said: “All is ready”, only that: “All is ready”. But he wasn’t speaking a true Swedish; it was as if she were hearing a voice inside herself and on the tape that had disappeared from the station’s archive. She shivered and waited for Torgeir Langaas to say something else, but the room was silent.

Linda felt her way back to the fence and climbed over. She didn’t dare to turn on her torch. She walked into branches and stumbled over rocks.

After a while, she realised she was lost. She couldn’t find the path and she had ended up in some sand dunes. Wherever she turned, she could see no lights except from a ship far out to sea. She took off her hat and stuffed it into her pocket, as if her bare head would help her to find her way. She tried to work out where she was from her relation to the sea and the direction of the wind. Then she started walking, pulling out the hat again and putting it on.

Time was of the essence. She couldn’t keep wandering aimlessly in these sand dunes. She had to make a call. But the phone wasn’t in her pocket. She felt through all her pockets. The hat, she thought. It must have fallen out when I took out the hat. It fell on to sand and I didn’t hear it.

She crawled back along her tracks, with the torch on, but she didn’t find it. I’m so incompetent, she thought furiously. Here I am crawling around without a ghost of an idea how to get away from here. But she forced herself to regain her composure. Once more she tried to determine the right direction. From time to time she stopped and let the torch cut through the dark.

At long last she found the path she had walked in on. The house with the brightly lit windows was on her left. She veered as far away from it as she could, then broke into a run towards the dark blue car. It was a moment accompanied by a rush of relief. She looked at her watch: 11.15. The time had flown by.

The arm came out of the darkness, from behind, with no warning and gripped her tightly. She couldn’t move, the force holding her was too great. She felt breath against her cheek. The arm turned her around and a torch shone into her face. Without him saying a word, she knew that the man looking at her was Torgeir Langaas.

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# CHAPTER 50

Dawn came as a slowly creeping shade of grey. The blindfold over Linda’s eyes let in some light and she knew the night was coming to an end. But what would the day bring? It was quiet all around her. One stroke of good fortune was that her bowels had not betrayed her. It was a stupid thought, but when Langaas had grabbed her it had sped through her mind like a little sentry, screaming: Before you kill me you have to let me go to the toilet. If there isn’t one around then leave me for a minute. I’ll crouch in the sand, I always have toilet paper in my pocket, and then I’ll kick the sand over my shit like a cat.

But of course she hadn’t said anything. Langaas had breathed on her, the torch had blinded her. Then he had pushed her aside, put the blindfold over her eyes and tightened it. She had banged her head when he shoved her into the car. Her fear was so great that it could only be compared to the terror she felt when she was balancing on the railing of the bridge and arrived at the surprising insight that she didn’t want to die. It had been quiet all around her, just the wind and the bellow of the sea.

Was Langaas still there by the car? She didn’t know, nor did she know how much time passed before the doors were opened. But she deduced from the motion of the car that two people had climbed in, one behind the wheel and the other in the passenger seat. The car jerked into action. The person driving was careless and nervous, or simply in a hurry.

She tried to follow the route they were taking. They came out on the main road and turned to the left that was towards Ystad. She also calculated that they drove through Ystad, but at some point on what was probably the road to Malmo she lost control of her inner map. The car changed direction several times, tarmac gave way to gravel,

and that in turn gave way to tarmac. The car stopped, but no doors opened. It was still quiet. She didn’t know how long she sat there, but it was towards the end of this phase of waiting that the grey light of morning started to trickle in through her blindfold.

Suddenly the peace was broken by the sound of the car doors being thrown open, and someone pulled her out. She was led along a paved road and then on a sandy path. She was ushered up four stone steps, noting that the edges were uneven. She thought the steps were old. Then she was surrounded by cool air, an echoing coolness. She was in a church. The fear that had grown numb during the night returned with full force. She saw in her mind’s eye what she had only heard about: Harriet Bolson strangled at the altar.

Steps echoed on the stone floor, a door was opened and she tripped over the ledge. Her blindfold was removed. She blinked in the grey light and turned in time to see Langaas’s back as he walked out and locked the door behind him. A lamp was lit in the room. It was a vestry, with oil paintings of stern ministers from yesteryear. Shutters were closed over the windows. Linda looked around for a door to a toilet, but there was none. Her bowels were still calm, but her bladder was about to burst. There were some tall goblets on a table. She hoped the Lord would forgive her and used one of them as a chamber pot. She looked at her watch: 6.45, Saturday September 8. She heard a plane passing right over the church.

Linda cursed the mobile she had managed to lose during the night. There was no phone in the vestry, of course. She searched the cupboards and drawers. Then she started to work on the windows. They opened, but the shutters were tightly sealed. She looked through the vestry a second time, but she did not find any tools.

The door opened and a man walked in. Linda recognised him at once even though he was thinner than in the pictures Anna had showed her, the pictures she had kept hidden in her desk. He was dressed in a suit with a dark blue shirt buttoned all the way up. His hair was combed back and long in the neck. His eyes were light blue, just like Anna’s, and it was even more clear than from the photographs how much they resembled each other. He stopped in the shadows by the door and smiled at her.

“Don’t be afraid,” he said kindly, and approached her with his arms outstretched, as if he wanted to demonstrate that he was unarmed.

A thought flashed through Linda’s head when she saw his open outstretched arms. Anna must have had a weapon in her coat pocket. That’s why she came to the station. To kill me. But she couldn’t bring herself to do it. The thought made Linda weak at the knees. She staggered to one side and Westin helped her sit down.

“Don’t be afraid,” he said again. “I regret that you had to wait in the car, and I am sorry that I am forced to detain you for a few hours more. Then you will be free to go.”

“Where am I?”

“That I cannot tell you. The only thing that matters is that you not be afraid. I also need you to answer one question.”

His tone was concerned, the smile seemed genuine. Linda was confused.

“You have to tell me what you know,” Westin said.

“About what?”

He fixed her with his gaze, still smiling. “That wasn’t very convincing,” he said softly. “I could ask my question more directly, but that won’t be necessary since you understand full well what I mean. You followed Anna last night and you found your way to a house by the sea.”

Most of what I tell him has to be true, otherwise he’ll see through me. There is no alternative, she thought, giving herself more time by blowing her nose.

She recognised his voice now. He was the one who had been preaching to an invisible congregation in the house by the sea. Although his voice and presence gave an impression of a gentle calm, she could not forget what he had said during the night.

“I didn’t make it to a house,” she said. “I found a car under the trees. But it is true that I was looking for Anna.”

Westin seemed lost in thought, but Linda knew he was weighing her answer. He looked at her again.

“You did not find your way to a house?”

“No.”

“Why were you looking for Anna?”

No more lies, Linda thought.

“I am worried about Zeba.”

“Who is that?”

Now he was the one who was lying and she the one trying to conceal the fact that she saw through it.

“Zeba is a friend Anna and I have in common. I think she was abducted.”

“Why would Anna know where she is?”

“She has seemed awfully tense lately.”

He nodded. “You may be telling the truth,” he said. “Time will tell.”

He stood up without taking his eyes off her.

“Do you believe in God.”

No, Linda thought. But I know the answer you’re looking for.

“I believe in God.”

“We shall soon see the measure of your faith,” he said. “It is as is written in the Bible: “Soon our enemies will be destroyed and their excesses consumed by fire’.”

He walked to the door and opened it.

“You won’t have to wait by yourself.”

Zeba came in, followed by Anna. The door closed behind Westin and a key turned in the lock. Linda stared at Zeba, then at Anna.

“What are you doing7.” Linda asked.

“Only what needs to be done.” Anna’s voice was steady, but forced and hostile.

“She’s off her head,” Zeba said. She collapsed on to a chair. “Completely insane.”

“Anyone who kills an innocent child is insane. It is a crime that must be punished.”

Zeba leaped up from her chair and grabbed Linda’s arm.

“She’s barking mad,” she shouted. “She is saying I should be punished for the abortion.”

“Let me talk to her,” Linda said.

“You can’t reason with insane people.”

“I don’t believe she’s insane,” Linda said as calmly as she could manage.

She walked over to Anna and looked her straight in the eye, feverishly trying to order her thoughts. Why had Westin left Anna with her and Zeba?

“Don’t tell me you’re part of this,” Linda said.

“My father has returned. He has restored the hope I had lost.”

“What kind of hope is that?”

“That there is a meaning to life, that God has a meaning for each of us.”

That’s not true, Linda thought. She saw in Anna’s eyes what she had seen in Zeba’s: fear. Anna had turned her body so that she could see the door. She’s afraid it will open, Linda thought. She’s terrified of her father.

“What is he threatening you with?” she said, almost in a whisper.

“He hasn’t threatened me.”

Anna had also lowered her voice to a whisper. It can only mean she’s listening, Linda thought. That gives us a possibility.

“You have to stop telling lies, Anna. We can get out of this, if you’ll just stop lying.”

“I’m not lying.”

Linda didn’t want to argue with her. Time was too short. If she didn’t want to answer a question, or answered one with a lie, Linda could only press on.

“Believe what you like,” Linda said. “But you won’t make me responsible for people being murdered. Don’t you understand what’s going on?”

“My father came back to get me. A great task awaits us.”

“I know what task it is you’re talking about. Is that what you want? That more people lose their lives, more churches burn?”

Linda saw that Anna was close to breaking point. She had to keep going, not relax her grip.

“And if Zeba is punished, as you call it, you will for all eternity have her son’s face in front of you, an accusation you will never escape. Is that what you want?”

They heard the sound of the key in the lock. They had run out of time. But just before the door opened, Anna pulled a mobile phone out of her pocket and passed it to Linda. Westin was in the doorway. “Have you said your goodbyes?”

“Yes,” Anna said. “I’ve said goodbye.”

Westin stroked her forehead with his fingertips. He turned to Zeba and then to Linda.

“Only a little while longer,” he said. “An hour or so.”

Zeba lunged at the door. Linda grabbed her and forced her into the chair. She kept her there until Zeba started to calm herself.

“I have a phone now,” Linda whispered. “We’ll get through this.”

“They’re going to kill me.”

Linda pressed her hand over Zeba’s mouth.

“If I’m going to get us out of this, you have to help me by being quiet.”

Zeba did as she was told. Linda was shaking so hard she twice dialled the wrong number. The phone rang again and again without her father picking up. She was just going to shut it off when he answered. When he heard her voice he started to shout. Where was she? Didn’t she understand how worried he was?

“We don’t have time,” she whispered. “Listen to me.”

“Where are you?”

“Be quiet and listen.”

She told him what had happened when she left the station, after leaving the note on his desk.

He interrupted. “There’s no note. I stayed the whole night waiting for you to call.”

She was about to cry. He didn’t interrupt her again, only breathing heavily as if each breath were a difficult question he needed to find an answer to, an important decision that needed to be made.

“Is this true?” he said at last. “They’re stark raving mad.”

“No,” Linda said. “It’s something else. They believe in what they’re doing.”

“Whatever, we’ll alert every force in the country,” he said, clearly aghast. “I believe we have fifteen cathedrals.”

“I only heard mention of thirteen,” Linda said. “Thirteen towers. The thirteenth tower is the last one and marks the onset of the great cleansing process, whatever that means.”

“And you don’t know where you are?”

“No. I’m pretty sure we drove back through Ystad, the roundabouts matched up. I don’t think we could have gone as far as Malmo.”

“Can you think of anything else you were aware of when you were in the car?”

“Different kinds of road. Tarmac, gravel, sometimes dirt roads.”

“Did you go over any bridges?”

She thought hard. “I don’t think so.”

“Did you hear any sounds at all?”

She thought of it immediately. The aircraft flying in. She had heard them several times.

“I heard aeroplanes. One was pretty close.”

“How do you mean, ‘close’?”

“It seemed to be coming in to land. Or it was taking off.”

“Wait” her father said.

He called to someone behind him.

“We’re getting out a map,” he said when he came back on the line. “Can you hear an aeroplane now?”

“No.”

“Were they big or little planes?”

“Jets, I think. Big.”

“Then it has to be Sturup.”

Paper rustling in the background. Linda heard her father tell someone to call air-traffic-control at Sturup, to patch the call into his line with Linda.

“We have a map here,” he said. “Can you hear anything now?”

“Aircraft? No, nothing.”

“Can you tell me anything about where you are in relation to the aircraft noise?”

“Are church towers towards the east or west?”

“How would I know that?”

Wallander shouted to Martinsson.

“Martinsson says the tower is always in the west, the altar in the east. It has to do with the resurrection.”

“Then the planes have been coming from the south. If I’m facing east, the planes have been coming from the south towards the north. Maybe north-west. They have been passing almost directly overhead.”

There was mumbling and scraping at the other end. Linda felt the sweat running on her body. Zeba sat, apathetic, cradling her head in her hands.

Her father came back on the line. “I’m going to let you talk to a flight controller called Janne Lundwall. I’ll be able to hear your conversation and may jump in from time to time. Do you understand?”

“I’m not stupid, Dad. But you have to hurry.”

His voice wavered when he answered. “I know. But we can’t do much if we don’t know where you are.”

Janne Lundwall’s voice came on. “Let’s see if we can work out where you are,” he said cheerily. “Can you hear any planes right now?”

Linda wondered what her father had told him. The flight controller’s bright tone only increased her anxiety.

“I can’t hear anything.”

“We have a KLM flight due in five minutes. As soon as you hear it, you let me know.”

The minutes passed painfully slowly. Finally she heard the faint sound of an approaching plane.

“I can hear something now.”

“Are you facing east?”

“Yes. The noise is on my right.”

“Good. Now, you tell me when the plane is right above you or if it’s in front of you.”

There was a noise at the door. Linda switched off the mobile and shoved it in her pocket. Langaas came in. He stopped, looked at both of them and then left without a word. Zeba sat curled up in her chair. Only when Langaas had closed the door behind him did Linda realise that the plane had come and gone.

She dialled her father’s number again. He was upset. He’s just as scared as I am, Linda thought. Just as scared, and he has as little idea of where I am as I do. We can talk to each other, but we can’t find each other.

“What happened?”

“Someone came in. The one called Langaas. I had to shut down.”

“Good God .. . Here’s Lundwall again.”

The next flight in was due in four minutes, a charter flight from Las Palmas, 14 hours behind schedule.

“A whole lot of grumpy, pissed-off passengers on their way in for landing,” Lundwall said happily. “Sometimes I’m grateful I’m tucked up here in my tower. Can you hear anything?”

Linda told him when she heard the plane.

“Same as before. Tell me when it’s above you or in front.”

The noise grew louder. At the same time the mobile started to beep. Linda looked at the display. The battery was almost exhausted.

“The phone is dying,” she wailed.

“We have to know where you are,” her father shouted.

It’s too late, Linda thought. She cursed the phone and pleaded with it not to die on her just yet. The plane came closer and closer, the phone still beeped. Linda called out when the whine of the engines was right between her ears.

“We have a pretty good idea where you are,” Lundwall said. “Just one more question...”

What he wanted to know, Linda never discovered. The phone cut out. Linda switched it off and hid it in a cupboard with robes and mantles. Did they have enough information to identify the church? She could only hope so. Zeba looked at her.

“It’s going to be OK,” Linda said. “They know where we are.” Zeba didn’t answer. She was glassy-eyed and took hold of Linda’s wrist so hard that her nails dug into the skin and drew blood. We’re equally frightened, Linda thought. But I’m pretending not to be. I have to keep Zeba calm. If she goes into a panic our waiting period may be cut short. What were they waiting for? She didn’t know, but if the truth was that Anna had told her father about Zeba’s abortion, and if an abortion was the grounds for Harriet Bolson’s execution in Frennestad Church, then there was no doubt what was going to happen.

“It’s going to be all right,” Linda whispered. “They’re on their way.”

They waited. It could have been half an hour, maybe it was more. Then, as if lightning had struck, the door flew open and three men came in and grabbed Zeba. Two more followed and grabbed Linda. They were pulled out of the room. Everything went so fast that it never even occurred to Linda to resist. The arms that held her were too strong. Zeba screamed, the howl of an animal. Erik Westin was waiting with Langaas in the church. There were two women and a man in the front pew. Anna was there too, but she sat further back. Linda tried to intercept her gaze, but Anna’s face was like a mask. Or was she actually wearing a mask? Linda couldn’t tell. The people sitting in the front pew had what looked like white masks in their hands.

Linda was filled with a paralysing fear when she saw the hawser in Westin’s hands. He’s going to kill Zeba, she thought desperately. He’s going to kill her and then he’s going to kill me because I have seen too much. Zeba struggled to free herself.

Then it was as if the walls collapsed. The church doors burst open, and four of the stained-glass windows, two on either side of the church, were shattered. Linda heard a voice shouting through a megaphone, and it was her father. He shouted as if he didn’t trust the megaphone’s amplifying capacity. Everyone in the church froze.

Westin gave a start, then ran to grab hold of Anna and use her as a shield. She tried to pull away. He shouted at her to be calm, but she kept resisting. He dragged her towards the west doors of the church. Again she tried to escape his grasp. A shot rang out. Anna jerked and collapsed. Westin had a gun in his hand. He stared in disbelief at his daughter, then ran out of the church. No-one dared to stop him.

Wallander and a large number of armed officers Linda didn’t recognise most of them stormed into the aisle through the side doors. Langaas started to shoot. Linda pulled Zeba with her into a pew and pushed her on to the floor. The exchange of fire went on. Linda didn’t look to see what was happening. And then it grew quiet. She heard Martinsson’s voice. He shouted that a man had gone out through the front doors. That must be Langaas, she thought.

She felt a hand on her shoulder and flinched. Perhaps she even screamed without realising. It was her father.

“You have to get out,” he said.

“How is Anna?”

He didn’t answer, and Linda knew she was dead. She and Zeba scurried out into the day. A long way down the road leading to the church, she saw the dark blue car hurtling away with two police cars in distant pursuit. Linda and Zeba sat on the ground on the other side of the cemetery wall.

“It’s over,” Linda said.

“Nothing is over,” Zeba whispered. “I’m going to live with this for the rest of my life. I’m always going to feel something pressing around my throat.”

Suddenly there was one more shot, then two more. Linda and Zeba crouched behind the low wall. There were voices, orders, cars that took off at high speed with their sirens going. Then silence again.

Linda told Zeba to stay put. She got to her knees and looked over the wall. There were a lot of officers surrounding the church, but everyone was still. It was like looking at a painting. She saw her father and went over to him. He was pale and grabbed her arm hard.

“Both of them got away,” he said. “Westin and Langaas.”

He was interrupted by someone who handed him a mobile phone. He listened, then handed it back without a word.

“A car loaded with dynamite has just driven into Lund Cathedral, clear through the poles with iron chains, and crashed into the left tower. There’s chaos there. No-one knows how many are dead. We seem to have averted attacks against the other cathedrals. Twenty people have been arrested so far.”

“Why did they do it?” Linda said.

Wallander thought for a long time.

“Because they believe in God and love him,” he said. “I can’t think their love is reciprocated.”

“Was it hard to find us?” Linda said. “There are a lot of churches hereabouts.”

“Not really,” he said. “Lundwall was able to locate you. We had two churches to choose from. Whose was the mobile?”

“Anna’s. She felt terrible about what she had done.”

They walked over to Zeba. A black car had arrived and Anna’s body was carried from the church.

“I don’t think he meant to shoot her,” Linda said. “I think the gun went off in his hand.”

“We’ll catch him,” Wallander said. “And then we’ll find out.”

Zeba stood up as they approached. She was frozen and shivering.

“I’ll go with her,” Linda said. “I did almost everything wrong, I know, and I’m sorry.”

“I’ll be able to relax when I’ve got you wearing a uniform and know you’re securely in a patrol car, circling the streets of Ystad,” her father said.

“My mobile is somewhere in the dunes at Sandhammaren.”

“We’ll send someone out there who can call your number. Maybe the sand will answer.”

Svartman was standing by his car. He opened the back door and swept a blanket around Zeba, who crawled in and made herself small in the corner.

“I’ll come with her,” Linda said.

“How are you doing, Linda?” Svartman asked.

“I don’t know. The only thing I’m sure of is that I’m going to start work on Monday.”

“Put it off for a week,” her father said. “There’s no hurry.”

Linda sat in the car and they drove away. A plane flew low over their heads, coming in to land. Linda looked at the landscape. It was as if her gaze was being sucked into the brown-grey mud. And there was the sleep that she needed more than anything else right now. After that there was one more day of what had been a long wait before she started working. Very soon now she would throw away her invisible uniform. She thought about asking Svartman if he reckoned they would catch Westin and Langaas, but she didn’t say anything. Right now, she didn’t want to know.

Later, not now. Frost, autumn and winter; time enough later for thinking. She leaned her head on Zeba’s shoulder and closed her eyes.

Suddenly she saw Westin’s face in front of her. That last moment when Anna fell slowly towards the floor. Now she realised the despair that had been in his face, the vast loneliness. The face of a man who has lost everything.

She looked out at the landscape again. Slowly Erik Westin’s face fell away into the grey clay.

Zeba was asleep by the time they drew up outside Yassar’s shop. Linda gently shook her awake.

“We’re here,” she said. “We’re here and everything is over.”

# 

# CHAPTER 51

Monday September 10 was a cold and blustery day in Skane. Linda had tossed and turned and only managed to sleep at dawn. She was woken by her father coming in and sitting down on the side of her bed. Just like when I was little, she thought. He was always the one who would sit on the side of my bed, never my mother.

He asked how she had slept and she told him the truth: not well, and she had been plagued by nightmares.

The previous evening, Lisa Holgersson had called to say that Linda could wait a week before starting work. But Linda had said no. She didn’t want to put it off any longer, even after everything that had happened. They finally agreed that she would take one extra day and start work on Tuesday.

Wallander got to his feet. “I’ve got to go,” he said. “What do you have planned?”

“I’ll see Zeba. She needs someone to talk to, and so do I.”

Linda spent the day with Zeba. Her son was back with fru Rosberg for the day. The phone rang and rang, mostly reporters. Finally she and Zeba escaped to Mariagatan. They went over what had happened again and again, especially the part that Anna had played. Could they understand it? Could anyone understand it?

“She missed her father all her life,” Linda said. “When he finally turned up she refused to believe anything except that he was right, whatever he said and whatever he did.”

Zeba often fell silent. Linda knew what she was thinking, about how close to death she had been, and that not only Anna’s father but Anna herself had been to blame.

Mid-morning Wallander called and told her that Henrietta had collapsed and been taken to the hospital. Linda remembered Anna’s sighs that Henrietta had incorporated in one of her compositions. It’s all she has left, she thought. Her dead daughter’s sighs.

“She left a letter in the house,” Wallander said. “In which she tried to explain what she had done. She didn’t tell us about Westin returning because she was afraid. He had threatened her and said that she and Anna would die if she said anything. There’s no reason not to believe her, but she surely could have found a way to let someone know what was going on.”

“Did she say anything about my last visit?” Linda said.

“Langaas was in the garden. She opened the window so that he would hear that she didn’t give anything away.”

“Westin used Langaas to frighten people.”

“He knew a lot about people, we shouldn’t forget that.”

“Is there any trace of them?”

“We will find them, since this matter is top priority, all over the world. But maybe they’ll get new hiding places, new followers. No-one knows how many places Langaas had up his sleeve, and no-one will know for sure until the two of them are found.”

“Langaas is gone, Erik Westin is gone, but the most gone of all is Anna.”

Linda and Zeba talked about the fact that maybe Erik Westin was already building a new sect. There were many gullible people out there who would follow him. One such was Ulrik Larsen, the minister who had threatened Linda. He was one of Westin’s followers, waiting to be called to action. Linda thought about what her father had said. They couldn’t be sure of anything until Westin was caught. One day maybe a new assault would be launched, like the one in Lund.

Afterwards, when she had followed Zeba home, after first making sure she was up to being on her own with her boy, Linda took a walk and sat on the pier by the Harbour Cafe. It was cold and windy, but she found a sheltered spot out of the wind. She didn’t know if she missed Anna or if what she felt was something else. We were only true friends as children, she thought.

That evening Wallander came home and reported that Langaas had driven into a tree. Everything pointed to suicide. Westin was still at large. Linda wondered if she would ever know whether it was Westin she had seen in the sunlight outside Lestarp Church.

But there was one question she had found the answer to herself. The nonsense words in Anna’s journal: myth, fear, myth, fear. It was so simple, Linda thought: my father, my father. That was all it was.

Linda and her father sat up and talked. The police in Cleveland were reconstructing Erik Westin’s life and had found a connection to the minister Jim Jones and his sect who had been massacred in the jungle in Guyana. Westin might be a person whom it would never be possible fully to understand, but it was important to realise that he was by no means a madman. His self-image, not least as expressed in the holy pictures he asked his disciples to carry with them, was of a humble person carrying out God’s work. He wasn’t insane so much as a fanatic, prepared to do whatever it took to realise his beliefs. He was ready to sacrifice people if need be, kill anyone who stood in his way, and punish those whom he deemed to have committed mortal sins. He sought his justifications in the Bible.

Westin was also a desperate man because he saw only evil and decay around him. Not that this in any way justified his actions. The only hope of preventing something like this in the future, of identifying people prepared to blow themselves up in something they claimed was a Christian effort, was not to dismiss Westin as a madman plain and simple.

There was not much to add. Everyone who was to have carried out the well-planned bombings was awaiting trial. Police, if necessary all over the world, would be looking for Westin, and soon autumn would come with frosty nights and cold winds from the north-east.

They were about to go to bed when the phone rang. Wallander listened in silence, then asked a few short questions. When he hung up, Linda did not want to ask him what had happened. She saw the glimmer of tears in his eyes and he told her that Sten Widen had died. The woman who had called was a girlfriend, possibly the last one he had lived with. She had promised Widen that she would contact Wallander and tell him that everything was over and that it had “gone well”.

“What did she mean by that?”

“We used to talk about it when we were younger, Sten and I. That death was something one could face like an opponent in a duel. Even if the outcome was a given, a skilful player could hold off and tire death out so that it only had the power to deliver a single blow. That was how we wanted our deaths to be, something we could take care of so they would ‘go well’.”

He was sad, she could see that.

“Do you want to talk some more?”

“No. This is something I have to work through on my own.”

They were quiet for a while, then he stood up and went to bed without a word. Linda didn’t manage to sleep many hours that night either. She thought about all the people out there prepared to blow themselves up, and the churches they hated. From what her father and Lindman had said, and from what she had read in the papers, these people were a far cry from monsters. They spoke of their good intentions, their hopes to pave the road for the true Kingdom of God on Earth.

One day she had been prepared to wait, but no more. Therefore she walked up to the station on the morning of September 11. It was a cold, dreary day after a night that had left traces of the first frost. Linda tried on her uniform and signed receipts for her equipment. Then she had a meeting with Martinsson which lasted an hour, and received her first shift assignment. She was free for the rest of the day, but she didn’t feel like sitting alone at home at Mariagatan, so she stayed at the station.

At 3 p.m. she was drinking coffee in the canteen, talking to Nyberg, who had sat at her table of his own accord and was showing his friendly side. Martinsson came in and shortly thereafter her father. Martinsson turned on the television.

“Something’s happened in the States,” he said.

“What sort of thing?” Linda said.

“We’ll have to wait and see.”

There was an image of a clock, counting down the seconds to a special news report. More and more people filtered into the canteen. By the time the news report came on, the room was almost full.

# 

# EPILOGUE

## The Girl on the Roof

The call had come into the station shortly after 7.00 on Friday night, November 23, 2001. Linda, who that evening was partnered up with an officer named Ekman, answered the police dispatch department’s broadcast. They had just resolved a family conflict in Svarte and were driving back to Ystad.

A young woman had climbed on to the roof of an apartment building to the west of the city and was threatening to jump. To make matters worse, she was armed. Head of operations wanted as many patrol cars to the scene as possible. Ekman turned on the siren and put his foot down.

Curious onlookers had already gathered by the time they arrived. Spotlights illuminated the girl, sitting up on the roof with a shotgun in her arms. Ekman and Linda were briefed by Sundin, who was responsible for getting her down. A ladder truck, provided by Rescue Services, was also in place. But the girl had threatened to jump if the ladder was driven any closer.

The girl, Maria Larsson, was 16 and had been treated for several episodes of mental illness. She lived with her mother, who was a substance abuser. This particular evening something had gone wrong. Maria had rung a neighbour’s doorbell and when the door opened she had rushed in and grabbed a shotgun and some cartridges that she knew were kept in the flat. The owner of the flat could count on serious trouble, since he had obviously stored both the weapon and the cartridges in an insecure manner.

But this was about Maria. She had threatened first to jump, then to shoot herself, then to shoot anyone who tried to approach her. The mother was too far gone to be of any use, and there was also the chance that she would start to shout at her daughter and incite her to carry out her threats.

Several officers had tried to speak to the girl through a trapdoor 20 metres from the drainpipe where she was sitting. Right now an old minister was trying to talk to her, but she aimed the weapon at his head and he ducked out of sight. They were working on finding a close friend of Maria’s who would perhaps be able to get through to her. No-one doubted that she was desperate enough to do what she had threatened.

Linda borrowed a pair of binoculars and looked at the girl. Even when the call came through she had thought of the time she had stood on the bridge railing. When she saw Maria shaking on the roof, her cramped hold on the shotgun and the tears that had frozen on her face, it was like looking at herself. Behind her she could hear Sundin, Ekman and the minister talking. No-one knew what to do. Linda lowered the binoculars and turned to them.

“Let me talk to her,” she said.

Sundin shook his head doubtfully.

“I was in the same situation once,” she said. “And she might listen to me since I’m not that much older than she is.”

“I can’t let you take that risk. You’re not experienced enough to judge what you should and shouldn’t say. And her weapon is loaded. She’s showing signs of an increasing desperation. Sooner or later she’ll use the weapon.”

“Let her try.” It was the old minister. He sounded very firm.

“I agree,” Ekman said.

Sundin wavered. “Shouldn’t you at least call your dad first and talk to him?”

Linda almost lost her composure.

“For goodness’ sake, this has nothing to do with him. This is between me and Maria Larsson. Nothing to do with him.”

Sundin consented, but he made her put on a bullet-proof vest and helmet before he let her go up. She kept the vest on, but removed the helmet before sticking her head up through the trapdoor. The girl on the roof heard the screech of the metal. When Linda peeked out Maria had the gun aimed at her head. She almost ducked under again.

“Don’t come near me!” the girl shrieked. “I’ll shoot and then I’ll jump!”

“Take it easy,” Linda said. “I’m not going to move an inch. But will you let me talk to you?”

“What could you have to say to me?”

“Why are you doing this?”

“I want to die.”

“I wanted to die too, once. That’s what I have to say to you.”

The girl didn’t answer, and Linda waited. Then she started to tell her about how she had stood on the bridge railing, what had led up to it, and about the person who had finally been able to talk her down.

Maria listened, but her initial reaction was anger.

“What do you think that has got to do with me? My story is going to end down on the street. Go away! Leave me alone!”

Linda wondered what she should do next. She had hoped her story would be enough. What a naive assessment that was. I’ve watched Anna die, she thought. But I have also witnessed Zeba’s joy at still being alive.

She decided to keep talking.

“I want to give you something to live for,” she said.

“There is nothing.”

“Hand me the gun and come here. For my sake.”

“You don’t know me.”

“No, but I’ve teetered on a bridge railing. Sometimes I have nightmares where I throw myself off.”

“When you’re dead, you don’t dream anything. I don’t want to live.”

The conversation went back and forth. After a while how long it was Linda couldn’t say, because time seemed to have been suspended when she first poked her head up out of the roof and faced the barrels of the shotgun she could tell that the girl was fully engaged in what they were saying. Her voice was less shrill. This was the first step. Now she held an invisible lifeline of sorts around Maria’s body. But nothing was resolved until the moment when Linda had used up all her words and started to cry. And that was when Maria finally gave in.

“All right,” she said. “I just want them to turn off all the fucking lights. I don’t want to see my mother. I only want to talk to you. And I won’t come down right away.”

Linda hesitated. What if it was a trap? What if she had decided to jump as soon as the lights were turned off?

“Why won’t you come down with me now?”

“I want ten minutes.”

“What for?”

“Ten minutes to see what it feels like to have decided to live.”

Linda climbed down and all the lights were turned off. Sundin kept an eye on the time. Suddenly it was as if all of the events from the dramatic days at the beginning of September came out of the darkness at her with full force. She had been so grateful for her work and the new flat had taken so much of her attention that she had not yet had the opportunity to slow down enough to take on the impact of what she had been through. Even more important was the time she had been spending with Stefan Lindman. They had started seeing each other, and sometime in the middle of October Linda had realised she wasn’t alone in having fallen in love. He had been getting over a lost love in the north. Now, as she stood here trying to pick out the outline of the girl on the roof who had decided to live, it was as if the moment had arrived for a kind of resolution to all that had happened.

Linda stamped her feet to stay warm and looked up again at the roof. Had the girl changed her mind? Sundin mumbled that there was only a minute left. Then the time ran out. The ladder truck drove up to the edge of the building. Two firemen helped the girl down, a third went up and collected the weapon. Linda had told Sundin and the others what she had promised and she insisted that her side of the bargain be upheld. Therefore she was the only one of them there when Maria reached the bottom of the ladder. Linda hugged her and suddenly both of them started to sob. Linda had the strangest feeling that she was hugging herself.

An ambulance was near by. Linda helped Maria into it and waited until it drove away, the gravel crunching under its wheels. The frost had arrived; it was already below freezing. Officers, the old minister, the firemen: everyone came up and shook her hand.

Linda and Ekman stayed until the fire engines and the patrol cars had left, the yellow tape had been taken down and the crowd had gone. Then there was a radio message about a suspected drunk driver on Osterleden. They left, and Linda swore under her breath. Most of all she would have liked to go back to the station for a cup of coffee.

But that would have to wait, like so many other things. She leaned against Ekman to read the thermometer for the temperature outside.

It was 3 C. Winter had arrived in Skane.