

PART ONE

1

ROVER KEPT HIS EYES ON the white-painted concrete floor in the eleven-square-metre prison cell. He bit down on the slightly too long gold front tooth in his lower jaw. He had reached the hardest part of his confession. The only sound in the cell was his nails scratching the madonna tattoo on his forearm. The boy sitting cross-legged on the bed opposite him had remained silent ever since Rover had entered. He had merely nodded and smiled his blissful Buddha smile, his gaze fixed at a point on Rover's forehead. People called the boy Sonny and said that he had killed two people as a teenager, that his father had been a corrupt police officer and that Sonny had healing hands. It was hard to see if the boy was listening, his green eyes and most of his face were hidden behind his long, matted hair, but that didn't matter. Rover just wanted his sins forgiven and to receive Sonny's distinctive blessing so that tomorrow he could walk out of Staten Maximum Security Prison with the feeling of being a truly cleansed man. Not that Rover was religious, but it could do no harm when he intended to change, to give going straight a real try. Rover took a deep breath.

'I think she was from Belarus. Minsk is in Belarus, innit?' Rover

looked up quickly, but the boy made no reply. 'Nestor had nicknamed her Minsk,' Rover said. 'He told me to shoot her.'

The obvious advantage of confessing to someone whose brain was fried was that no name and incident would stick; it was like talking to yourself. This might explain why inmates at Staten preferred this guy to the chaplain or the psychologist.

'Nestor kept her and eight other girls in a cage down in Enerhaugen. East Europeans and Asians. Young. Teenagers. At least I hope they were as old as that. But Minsk was older. Stronger. She escaped. Got as far as Tøyen Park before Nestor's dog caught her. One of those Argentine mastiffs – know what I'm talking about?'

The boy's eyes never moved, but he raised his hand. Found his beard. He started to comb it slowly with his fingers. The sleeve of his filthy, oversized shirt slipped down and revealed scabs and needle marks. Rover went on.

'Bloody big albino dogs. Kills anything its owner points at. And quite a lot he doesn't. Banned in Norway, 'course. A guy out in Rælengen got some from the Czech Republic, breeds them and registers them as white boxers. Me and Nestor went there to buy one when it was a pup. It cost more than fifty grand in cash. The puppy was so cute you wouldn't ever think it . . .' Rover stopped. He knew he was only talking about the dog to put off the inevitable. 'Anyway . . .'

Anyway. Rover looked at the tattoo on his other forearm. A cathedral with two spires. One for each sentence he had served, neither of which had anything to do with today's confession. He used to supply guns to a biker gang and modify some of them in his workshop. He was good at it. Too good. So good that he couldn't remain below the radar forever and he was caught. And so good that, while serving his first sentence, Nestor had taken him under his wing. Nestor had made sure he owned him so that from then on only Nestor would get his hands on the best guns, rather than

the biker gang or any other rivals. He had paid him more for a few months' work than Rover could ever hope to earn in a lifetime in his workshop fixing motorbikes. But Nestor had demanded a lot in return. Too much.

'She was lying in the bushes, blood everywhere. She just lay there, dead still, staring up at us. The dog had taken a chunk out of her face – you could see straight to the teeth.' Rover grimaced. Get to the point. 'Nestor said it was time to teach them a lesson, show the other girls what would happen to them. And that Minsk was worthless to him now anyway, given the state of her face . . . ' Rover swallowed. 'So he told me to do it. Finish her off. That's how I'd prove my loyalty, you see. I had an old Ruger MK II pistol that I'd done some work on. And I was going to do it. I really was. That wasn't the problem . . . '

Rover felt his throat tighten. He had thought about it so often, gone over those seconds during that night in Tøyen Park, seeing the girl over and over again. Nestor and himself taking the leading roles with the others as silent witnesses. Even the dog had been silent. He had thought about it perhaps a hundred times? A thousand? And yet it wasn't until now, when he said the words out loud for the first time, that he realised that it hadn't been a dream, that it really *had* happened. Or rather it was as if his body hadn't accepted it until now. That was why his stomach was churning. Rover breathed deeply through his nose to quell the nausea.

'But I couldn't do it. Even though I knew she was gonna die. They had the dog at the ready and I was thinking that me, I'd have preferred a bullet. But it was as if the trigger was locked in position. I just couldn't pull it.'

The young man seemed to be nodding faintly. Either in response to what Rover was telling him or to music only he could hear.

'Nestor said we didn't have all day, we were in a public park after all. So he took out a small, curved knife from a leg holster, stepped

forward, grabbed her by the hair, pulled her up and just seemed to swing the knife in front of her throat. As if gutting a fish. Blood spurted out three, four times, then she was empty. But d'you know what I remember most of all? The dog. How it started howling at the sight of all that blood.'

Rover leaned forward in the chair with his elbows on his knees. He covered his ears with his hands and rocked back and forth.

'And I did nothing. I just stood there, looking on. I did sod all. While they wrapped her in a blanket and carried her to the car, I just watched. We drove her to the woods, to Østmarksetra. Lifted her out and rolled her down the slope towards Ulsrudsvannet. Lots of people take their dogs for walks there so she was found the next day. The point was, Nestor wanted her to be found, d'you get me? He wanted pictures in the papers of what had happened to her. So he could show them to the other girls.'

Rover removed his hands from his ears.

'I stopped sleeping; every time I closed my eyes I had nightmares. The girl with the missing cheek smiled at me and bared all her teeth. So I went to see Nestor and told him I wanted out. Said I'd had enough of filing down Uzis and Glocks, that I wanted to go back to fixing motorbikes. Live a quiet life, not worry about the cops the whole time. Nestor said that was OK, he'd probably sussed that I didn't have it in me to be a tough guy. But he made it very clear what would happen to me if I talked. I thought we were sorted. I turned down every job I was offered even though I still had some decent Uzis lying around. But I kept thinking that something was brewing. That I would be bumped off. So I was almost relieved when the cops came and I got put away. I thought I'd be safer in prison. They got me on an old case – I was only an accessory, but they had arrested two guys who both said that I had supplied them with weapons. I confessed to it on the spot.'

Rover laughed hard. He started to cough. He leaned back in his chair.

‘In eighteen hours I’m getting out of this place. Haven’t got a clue what’s waiting for me on the outside. But I know that Nestor knows I’m coming out even though I’m being released four weeks early. He knows everything that goes on in here and with the police, I’m sure of it. He has eyes and ears everywhere. So what I’m thinking is, if he wanted me dead, he might as well have me killed in here rather than wait for me to get out. What do you think?’

Rover waited. Silence. The boy didn’t look as if he thought anything at all.

‘Whatever happens,’ Rover said, ‘a little blessing can’t hurt, can it?’

It was as if a light came on in Sonny’s eyes at the word ‘blessing’ and he raised his right hand to signal that Rover should come closer and kneel. Rover knelt on the prayer rug in front of the bed. Franck didn’t let any of the other inmates have rugs on the floor in their cells – it was a part of the Swiss model they used at Staten: no superfluous items in the cells. The number of personal possessions was limited to twenty. If you wanted a pair of shoes, you would have to give up two pairs of underpants or two books. Rover looked up at Sonny’s face. The boy moistened his dry, scaly lips with the tip of his tongue. His voice was surprisingly light even though the words came slowly, but his diction was perfectly clear.

‘All earthly and heavenly gods have mercy on you and forgive your sins. You will die, but the soul of the penitent sinner shall be led to Paradise. Amen.’

Rover bowed his head. He felt the boy’s hand on his shaved head. Sonny was left-handed, but in this case it didn’t take a genius to work out that he had a shorter life expectancy than most right-handed people. The overdose could happen tomorrow or in ten years – who knew? But Rover didn’t think for one minute that the

boy's hand was healing like people said. Nor did he really believe this business with the blessing. So why was he here? Well, religion was like fire insurance; you never really thought you'd need it, so when people said that the boy was prepared to take your sins upon himself and didn't want anything in return, why not say yes to some peace of mind? What Rover did wonder was how someone like Sonny could have killed in cold blood. It made no sense to him. Perhaps it was like the old saying: The devil has many disguises.

'Salaam alaikum,' the voice said and the hand was lifted.

Rover stayed where he was with his head lowered. Probed the smooth backside of the gold tooth with his tongue. Was he ready now? Ready to meet his Maker if that was his fate? He raised his head.

'I know you never ask for anything in return, but . . .'

He looked at the boy's bare foot which he had tucked under. He saw the needle marks in the big vein on the instep. 'I did my last stretch in Botsen and getting hold of drugs in there was easy, no problem. Botsen isn't a maximum security prison, though. They say Franck has made it impossible to smuggle anything into Staten, but . . .'

Rover stuck his hand in his pocket, '. . . but that's not quite true.'

He pulled something out. It was the size of a mobile phone, a gold-plated object shaped like a pistol. Rover pressed the trigger. A small flame shot out of the muzzle. 'Seen one of these before? Yeah, I bet you have. The officers who searched me when I came here certainly had. They told me they were selling smuggled cigarettes on the cheap if I was interested. So they let me keep the lighter. I don't suppose they'd read my rap sheet. No one bothers doing their job properly these days – makes you wonder how anything in this country ever gets done.'

Rover weighed the lighter in his hand.

'Eight years ago I made two of these. I ain't boasting if I tell you

that nobody in Norway could have done a better job. I'd been contacted by a middleman who told me his client wanted a gun he would never have to hide, a gun that didn't look like a gun. So I came up with this. It's funny how people's minds work. At first they think it's a gun, obvs. But once you've shown them that you can use it as a lighter, they forget all about it being a gun. They still think it could also be a toothbrush or a screwdriver. But not a gun, no way. So . . .'

Rover turned a screw on the underside of the handle.

'It takes two 9mm bullets. I call it the Happy Couple Killer.' He aimed the barrel at the young man. 'One for you, sweetheart . . .' Then he pointed it at his own temple. 'And one for me . . .' Rover's laughter sounded strangely lonely in the small cell.

'Anyway. I was only supposed to make one; the client didn't want anyone else to know the secret behind my little invention. But I made another one. And I took it with me for protection, in case Nestor decided to try to kill me while I was inside. But as I'm getting out tomorrow and I won't need it any more, it's yours now. And here . . .'

Rover pulled out a packet of cigarettes from his other pocket. 'Because it'll look weird if you have a lighter, but no cigarettes, right?' He then took out a yellowed business card saying 'Rover's Motorcycle Workshop' and slipped it into the cigarette packet.

'Here's my address in case you ever have a motorbike that needs fixing. Or want to get yourself one hell of an Uzi. Like I said, I still have some lying—'

The door opened outwards and a voice thundered: 'Get out, Rover!'

Rover turned round. The trousers of the prison officer in the doorway were sagging due to the large bunch of keys that dangled from his belt, although this was partly obscured by his belly, which spilled over the lining like rising dough. 'His Holiness has a visitor.

A close relative, you could say.’ He guffawed with laughter and turned to the man behind him. ‘No offence, eh, Per?’

Rover slipped the gun and the cigarette packet under the duvet on the boy’s bed and took one last look at him.

Then he left quickly.

The prison chaplain attempted a smile while he automatically straightened his ill-fitting dog collar. *A close relative. No offence.* He felt like spitting into the prison officer’s fat, grinning face, but instead he nodded to the inmate emerging from the cell and pretended to recognise him. Glanced at the tattoos on his fore-arms. The madonna and a cathedral. But no, over the years the faces and the tattoos had become too numerous for him to distinguish between them.

The chaplain entered. He could smell incense. Or something that reminded him of incense. Like drugs being cooked.

‘Hello, Sonny.’

The young man on the bed didn’t look up, but he nodded slowly. Per Vollan took it to mean that his presence had been registered, acknowledged. Approved.

He sat down on the chair and experienced a slight discomfort when he felt the warmth from the previous occupant. He placed the Bible he had brought with him on the bed next to the boy.

‘I put flowers on your parents’ grave today,’ he said. ‘I know you haven’t asked me to, but . . .’

Per Vollan tried to catch the boy’s eye. He had two sons himself; both were grown up and had left the Vollan family home. As Vollan himself had. The difference was that his sons were always welcome back.

In court a witness for the defence, a teacher, had testified that Sonny had been a star pupil, a talented wrestler, popular, always helpful, indeed the boy had even expressed a desire to become a

police officer like his father. But ever since his father had been found dead next to a suicide note in which he confessed to corruption Sonny hadn't been seen at school. The chaplain tried to imagine the shame of the fifteen-year-old boy. Tried to imagine his own sons' shame if they ever found out what their father had done. He straightened his dog collar again.

'Thank you,' Sonny said.

Per thought how strangely young Sonny seemed. Because he must be close to thirty by now. Yes. Sonny had served twelve years and he was eighteen when he was sent down. Perhaps it was the drugs that had preserved him, preventing him from ageing so that only his hair and beard grew while his innocent baby eyes continued to gaze at the world in wonder. A wicked world. God knows it was evil. Per Vollan had been a prison chaplain for over forty years and seen the world grow more and more sinful. Evil spread like cancer, it made healthy cells sick, poisoned them with its vampire bite and recruited them to do its work of corruption. And once bitten no one ever escaped. No one.

'How are you, Sonny? Did you enjoy being out on day release? Did you get to see the sea?'

No reply.

Per Vollan cleared his throat. 'The prison officer said you got to see the sea. You might have read in the papers that a woman was found murdered the next day, not far from where you were. She was found in bed, in her own home. Her head had been . . . well. All the details are in here . . .' He tapped his finger on the Bible. 'The officer has already filed a report saying you ran away while you were at the sea and that he found you by the road one hour later. That you refused to account for your whereabouts. It's important that you don't say anything that contradicts his statement, do you understand? As usual you'll say as little as possible. All right? Sonny?'

Per Vollan finally succeeded in making eye contact with the boy. His expression told Per little about what was going on inside his head, but he felt fairly certain that Sonny Lofthus would follow orders and not say anything unnecessary to the police or the public prosecutor. All he had to do was utter a light, soft 'Guilty' when he was asked how he pleaded. Though it sounded paradoxical, Vollan occasionally sensed a direction, a force of will, a survival instinct that distinguished this junkie from the others, from those who had always been in free fall, who had never had any other plans, who had been heading for the gutter all along. This willpower might express itself as a sudden flash of insight, a question that revealed he had paid attention all along and seen and heard everything. Or in the way he might suddenly stand up, with a coordination, balance and flexibility you didn't see in other habitual drug users. While at other times, like now, he seemed to register nothing at all.

Vollan squirmed in his chair.

'Of course this means no more trips on the outside for you for quite a while. But you don't like the outside anyway, do you? And you did get to see the sea.'

'It was a river. Did the husband do it?'

The chaplain jumped. As when something unexpected breaks through black water right in front of you. 'I don't know. Is that important?'

No reply. Vollan sighed. He felt nauseous again. Recently it seemed to come and go. Perhaps he should make a doctor's appointment and get it checked out.

'Don't you worry about that, Sonny. Just remember that on the outside people like you have to scavenge all day to get their next fix. While in here everything is taken care of. And don't forget that time passes. Once you finish serving out your old sentences, you'll be no use to them, but with this murder you can extend your detention.'

‘So it was the husband. Is he rich?’

Vollan pointed to the Bible. ‘In here you’ll find a description of the house you entered. It’s big and well furnished. But the alarm that was supposed to guard all this wealth wasn’t turned on; the front door wasn’t even locked. The family’s name is Morsand. The ship-owner with the eyepatch. Seen him in the papers, have you?’

‘Yes.’

‘Have you? I didn’t think that you—’

‘Yes, I killed her. Yes, I’ll read up on how I did it.’

Per Vollan exhaled. ‘Good. There are certain details about how she was killed which you ought to memorise.’

‘Right.’

‘She was . . . the top of her head was severed. You used a saw. Do you understand?’

The words were followed by a long silence which Per Vollan considered filling with vomit. Throwing up was preferable to exploiting the boy. He looked at him. What determined the outcome of a life? A series of random events you had no control over or did some cosmic gravity pull everything in the direction it was predestined to go? He loosened his strangely uncomfortable dog collar, suppressed his nausea and steeled himself. Remembered what was at stake.

He got up. ‘If you need to get in touch with me I’m currently staying at the Ila Centre on Alexander Kiellands Plass.’

He saw the boy’s quizzical look.

‘Just for the time being, you understand.’ He laughed quickly. ‘My wife threw me out and as I know the people who run the centre, they—’

He stopped abruptly. Suddenly he realised why so many of the inmates went to the young man to talk. It was the silence. The beckoning vacuum of someone who simply listens without reaction or judgement. Who extracts your words and your secrets from you

without doing anything at all. He had striven for that ability as a chaplain all his life, but it was as if the inmates sensed that he had an agenda. They didn't know what it was, only that there was something he wanted by knowing their secrets. Access to their souls and later a possible recruitment prize in heaven.

The chaplain saw that the boy had opened the Bible. It was such a simple trick, it was comical; the cut-outs in the pages created a compartment. Inside were folded papers with the information Sonny needed in order to confess. And three small bags of heroin.

2

ARILD FRANCK BARKED A BRIEF ‘Enter!’ without taking his eyes off the document on his desk.

He heard the door open. Ina, his secretary in the front office, had already announced his visitor and, for a split second, Arild Franck considered asking her to tell the chaplain that he was busy. It wouldn’t even be a lie; he had a meeting with the Commissioner at Politihuset, Oslo Police’s headquarters, in half an hour. But recently Per Vollan hadn’t been as stable as they needed him to be and there was no harm in double-checking that he could still hold it together. There was no room for screw-ups in this case, not for any of them.

‘Don’t bother sitting down,’ Arild Franck said, signing the document and getting up. ‘We’ll have to walk and talk.’

He headed for the door, took his uniform cap from the coat stand and heard the chaplain’s shuffling feet behind him. Arild Franck told Ina that he would be back in an hour and a half and pressed his index finger against the sensor at the door to the stairwell. The prison was on two floors and there was no lift. Lifts equalled shafts which equalled any number of escape routes and had to be closed

off in the event of fire. And a fire and its ensuing evacuation chaos was just one of many methods ingenious inmates had used to break out of other prisons. For the same reason, all electric cables, fuse boxes and water pipes had been laid so they were inaccessible to the inmates, either outside the building itself or cemented into the walls. Here nothing had been left to chance. *He* had left nothing to chance. He had sat with the architects and international prison experts when they drew up the blueprint for Staten. Admittedly the Lenzburg Prison in the Aargau canton in Switzerland had provided the inspiration: hypermodern, but simple and with an emphasis on security and efficiency rather than comfort. But it was him, Arild Franck, who was responsible for its creation. Staten was Arild Franck and vice versa. So why had the board, in their infinite wisdom, damn them all to hell, made him only assistant prison governor and appointed that moron from Haldern Prison as governor? Yes, Franck was something of a rough diamond and, no, he wasn't the kind of guy who would suck up to politicians by jumping for joy at every bright new idea about how to reform the prison system while the previous reforms had yet to be implemented. But he knew how to do his job – keeping people locked up without them getting ill, dying or becoming noticeably worse human beings as a result. He was loyal to those who deserved his loyalty and he looked after his own. That was more than could be said for his superiors in this rotten-to-the-core, politically motivated hierarchy. Before he was deliberately overlooked for the post of governor, Arild Franck had hoped for a small bust as a memorial in the foyer when he retired – though his wife had expressed the opinion that his bull neck, bulldog face and straggly comb-over wouldn't suit a bust. But if people failed to reward your achievements, his view on the matter was you just had to help yourself.

'I can't keep doing this, Arild,' Per Vollan said behind him as they walked down the corridor.

‘Doing what?’

‘I’m a chaplain. What we’re doing to the boy – making him take the fall for something he didn’t do. Serve time for a husband who—’

‘Hush.’

Outside the door to the control room, or ‘the bridge’ as Franck liked to call it, they passed an old man who paused his swabbing of the floor and gave a friendly nod to Franck. Johannes was the oldest man in the prison and an inmate after Franck’s own heart, a gentle soul who sometime in the previous century had been picked up – almost by chance – for drug smuggling, had never hurt a fly since and over the years had become so institutionalised, conditioned and pacified that the only thing he dreaded was the day he was released. Sadly, inmates like him didn’t represent a challenge for a prison like Staten.

‘Is your conscience troubling you, Vollan?’

‘Yes, yes, it is, Arild.’

Franck couldn’t remember exactly when his staff had started addressing their superiors by their first names, or when prison governors started wearing plain clothes rather than uniforms. In some jails the prison officers wore plain clothes as well. During a riot at the Francisco de Mar Prison in São Paulo, officers had shot at their own colleagues in the tear-gas smoke because they couldn’t tell staff from inmates.

‘I want out,’ the chaplain implored him.

‘Is that right?’ Franck was jogging down the stairs. He was in good shape for a man less than ten years away from retirement, because he worked out. A forgotten virtue in an industry where obesity was the rule rather than the exception. And hadn’t he coached the local swimming team when his daughter used to compete? Done his bit for the community in his spare time, given something back to this country which had given so much to so many? So how dare they overlook him. ‘And how is your conscience when it comes

to those young boys we've evidence you've been abusing, Vollan?' Franck pressed his index finger against the sensor at the next door; this took them to a corridor which to the west led to the cells, and to the east, the staff changing rooms and the exit to the car park.

'I suggest you think of it as Sonny Lofthus atoning for your sins as well, Vollan.'

Another door, another sensor. Franck pressed his finger against it. He loved this invention which he had copied from the Obihiro Prison in Kushiro, Japan. Instead of issuing keys that could be lost, copied or misused, the fingerprints of everyone who was authorised to pass through the doors were entered into a database. Not only had they eliminated the risk of careless handling of the keys, they also maintained a record of who had passed through which door and when. They had installed surveillance cameras as well, of course, but faces could be concealed. Not so with fingerprints. The door opened with a sigh and they entered a lock, a small room with a barred metal door at either end where one door had to be closed before the other would open.

'I'm saying that I can't do it any more, Arild.'

Franck raised a finger to his lips. In addition to the surveillance cameras which covered practically the entire prison, the locks had been fitted with a two-way communication system so that you could contact the control room if, for some reason, you got stuck. They exited the lock and continued towards the changing rooms where there were showers and a locker for clothing and personal property for each staff member. The fact that the assistant prison governor had a master key that opened every locker was something Franck had decided his staff didn't need to know. Quite the opposite in fact.

'I thought you knew who you were dealing with here,' Franck said. 'You can't just quit. For these people loyalty is a matter of life and death.'

‘I know,’ Per Vollan said; his breathing had acquired an ugly rasping. ‘But I’m talking about eternal life and death.’

Franck stopped in front of the exit door and glanced quickly at the lockers to his left to make sure that they were alone.

‘You know the risk?’

‘As God is my witness, I won’t breathe a word to anyone. I want you to use those exact words, Arild. Tell them I’ll be as silent as the grave. I just want out. Please, help me?’

Franck looked down. At the sensor. Out. There were only two ways out. This one, the back way, and the other through reception at the front entrance. No ventilation shafts, no fire exits, no sewer pipes with dimensions just wide enough to allow a human body to squeeze through.

‘Maybe,’ he said and placed his finger on the sensor. A small red light at the top of the door handle flashed to indicate the database was being searched. It went off and a small green light appeared in its place. He pushed open the door. They were blinded by the bright sunlight and put on their sunglasses as they crossed the large car park. ‘I’ll tell them you want out,’ Franck said and took out his car keys while he peered at the security booth. It was staffed with two armed guards 24/7 and both the roads in and out had steel barriers which even Franck’s new Porsche Cayenne could not force. Possibly one could do it with a Hummer H1 which he had quite fancied buying, but that car would have been too wide since they had made the entrance narrow precisely to stop larger vehicles. It was also with large vehicles in mind that he had placed steel barricades within the six-metre-high fence which surrounded the entire prison. Franck had asked to have it electrified, but the planning authorities had turned down his application on the grounds that Staten was located in central Oslo and innocent civilians might hurt themselves. Innocent, ha – if anyone wanted to touch the fence from the street, they would first have to scale a five-metre-high wall with barbed wire on top.

‘Where are you going, by the way?’

‘Alexander Kiellands Plass,’ Per Vollan said hopefully.

‘Sorry,’ Arild said. ‘It’s not on my way.’

‘Not a problem, the bus stops right outside.’

‘Good. I’ll be in touch.’

The assistant prison governor got into his car and drove up to the security booth. The rules stated that all vehicles, including his own, must be stopped and the occupants checked. Only now, when the guards had seen him exit the prison building and get into the car, did they raise the barrier and let him pass. Franck returned the guards’ salute. He stopped at the traffic lights by the main road. He glanced up at his beloved Staten in the rear-view mirror. It wasn’t perfect, but it came close. He blamed the planning committee, the new, inane regulations from the ministry and the semi-corrupt human resources for any shortcomings. All he had ever wanted was the best for everyone, for all of Oslo’s hard-working, honest citizens who deserved a safe existence and a certain standard of living. So, OK, things could have been different. He didn’t like having to go about things this way. But like he always said to the learners in the pool: you sink or swim, no one is going to do you any favours. Then his thoughts returned to what lay ahead. He had a message to deliver. And he had no doubt as to the outcome.

The lights changed to green and he pressed the accelerator.

3

PER VOLLAN WALKED THROUGH THE park by Alexander Kiellands Plass. It had been a soaking wet and unseasonably cold July, but now the sun was back and the park was just as intensely green as on a spring day. Summer had returned, people around him sat with upturned faces and closed eyes soaking up the sunshine as if it was about to run out; there was a rumbling of skateboards and a clunking of six-packs of beers on their way to barbecues in the city's green spaces and balconies. There were, however, some who were even more delighted that the temperature had risen. People who looked as if the traffic around the park had coated them in fumes: shabby figures huddled up on benches or around the fountain, who called out to him in hoarse, happy voices that sounded like seagulls screeching. He waited for the green light at the junction of Uelandsgate and Waldemar Thranes gate while trucks and buses swept past him. He looked at the facades on the other side of the street as they flashed in front of him through the gaps in the traffic. Plastic sheeting covered the windows of the notorious pub, Tranen, which had quenched the thirst of the city's most parched residents since its construction in 1921 – the last thirty years accompanied by

Arnie 'Skiffle Joe' Norse who dressed in a cowboy costume and rode a unicycle while he played guitar and sang accompanied by his band consisting of an old, blind organist and a Thai woman on tambourine and car horn. Per Vollan's eyes shifted to the front of a building where cast-iron letters spelling out 'Ila Pensjonat' had been cemented into the facade. During the war the building had housed unmarried mothers. Now it was a residential facility for the city's most vulnerable addicts. Those who didn't want to get clean. Last stop before the end.

Per Vollan crossed the street, stopped outside the entrance to the centre, rang the bell and looked into the eye of the camera. He heard the door buzz open and he entered. For old times' sake the centre had offered him a room for two weeks. That was a month ago.

'Hi, Per,' said the young, brown-eyed woman who came down to open the barred gate to the stairs. Someone had damaged the lock so that the keys no longer worked from the outside. 'The cafe is shut now, but you're in time for dinner if you go in right away.'

'Thanks, Martha, but I'm not hungry.'

'You look tired.'

'I walked all the way from Staten.'

'Oh? I thought there was a bus?'

She had started climbing back up the stairs and he shuffled along after her.

'I had some thinking to do,' he said.

'Someone came by earlier asking for you.'

Per froze. 'Who?'

'Didn't ask. Could have been the police.'

'What makes you think that?'

'They seemed very keen to get hold of you, so I thought it might be about an inmate you know. Something like that.'

Already, Per thought, they've come for me already.

‘Do you believe in anything, Martha?’

She turned on the stairs. Smiled. Per thought that a young man might fall deeply in love with that smile.

‘Like God and Jesus?’ Martha asked, pushing open the door into reception which was a hatch in a wall with an office behind it.

‘Like fate. Like chance versus cosmic gravity.’

‘I believe in Mad Greta,’ Martha muttered as she leafed through some papers.

‘Ghosts aren’t—’

‘Inger said she heard a baby cry yesterday.’

‘Inger is highly strung, Martha.’

She stuck her head out of the hatch. ‘We need to have a talk, Per . . .’

He sighed. ‘I know. You’re full and—’

‘The centre in Sporveisgata called today to say the fire means they’ll be closed for another two months at least. More than forty of our own residents are currently in shared rooms. We can’t go on like this. They steal from each other and then they start fighting. It’s only a matter of time before someone gets hurt.’

‘It’s all right; I won’t be here very much longer.’

Martha tilted her head to one side and looked at him quizzically. ‘Why won’t she let you sleep in the house? How many years have you been married? Forty, is it?’

‘Thirty-eight. She owns the house and it’s . . . complicated.’ Per smiled wearily.

He left her and walked down the corridor. Music was pounding behind two of the doors. Amphetamine. It was Monday, the benefits office was open after the weekend and trouble was brewing everywhere. He unlocked his door. The tiny, shabby room with a single bed and a wardrobe cost 6,000 kroner per month. You could rent a whole flat outside Oslo for that kind of money.

He sat down on the bed and stared out of the dusty window.

The traffic hummed sleepily outside. The sun shone through the flimsy curtains. A fly was fighting for its life on the windowsill. It would die soon. That was life. Not death, but life. Death was nothing. How many years was it since he had come to that conclusion? That everything apart from death, everything he preached about, was nothing but a defence people had created against their fear of death. And yet none of what he used to believe meant anything at all. What we humans think we know is nothing compared to what we need to believe to numb the fear and pain. Then he came full circle. He regained his faith in a forgiving God and life after death. He believed it now, more than ever. He took out a pad from under a newspaper and started writing.

Per Vollan didn't have much to write. A few sentences on a single sheet of paper, that was all. He crossed out his own name on an envelope which had contained a letter from Alma's lawyer briefly stating what share of the matrimonial property they thought Per was entitled to. Which wasn't much.

The chaplain looked in the mirror, adjusted his dog collar, put on his long coat and left.

Martha wasn't at reception. Inger took the envelope and promised to deliver it.

The sun was lower in the sky now; the day was retreating. He walked through the park while out of the corner of his eye he registered how everything and everyone played their parts without obvious errors. No one rose from a bench a little too quickly as he passed, no cars pulled out discreetly from the kerb when he changed his mind and decided to walk along Sannergata towards the river. But they were there. Behind a window which reflected a peaceful summer evening, in the casual glance of a passer-by, in the chill in the shadows that crept out from the eastside of the houses and banished the sunlight as they gained territory. And Per Vollan thought that his whole life had been like this; a constant, pointless,

vacillating struggle between the darkness and the light, which never seemed to result in victory for either side. Or had it? With every day the darkness encroached a little more. They were heading for the long night.

He increased his speed.

4

SIMON KEFAS RAISED THE COFFEE cup to his mouth. From the kitchen table he could look out at the small garden in front of their house in Fagerliveien in Disen. It had rained overnight and the grass was still glistening in the morning sunlight. He thought he could actually see it grow. It meant another outing with the lawnmower. A noisy, manual, sweat- and swear-inducing activity, but that was all good. Else had asked him why he didn't get an electric lawnmower like all their neighbours. His answer was simple: money. It was an answer which had ended most discussions when he was growing up in this house, as well as in the neighbourhood. But that was back when ordinary people lived here: teachers, hairdressers, taxi drivers, public sector workers. Or police officers, like him. Not that the current residents were anything special, but they worked in advertising or IT, they were journalists, doctors, had agencies for faddy products or had inherited enough money to buy one of the small, idyllic houses, pushing up the prices and moving the neighbourhood up the social ladder.

'What are you thinking about?' asked Else, who was standing behind his chair, stroking his hair. It was thinning noticeably; lit

from above you could make out his scalp. But she claimed to like it. Liked that he looked what he was: a police officer close to retirement. Liked that she, too, would grow old one day. Even though he had twenty years' head start on her. One of their new neighbours, a moderately famous film producer, had mistaken her for Simon's daughter. That was all right with him.

'I'm thinking about how lucky I am,' he said. 'Because I have you. Because I have this.'

She kissed him on the top of his head. He could feel her lips right against his skin. Last night he had dreamed that he could give up his sight for her. And when he had woken up and not been able to see, he had – for a second before he realised that it was due to the eye mask he wore to block out the early-morning sun in summer – been a happy man.

The doorbell rang.

'That'll be Edith,' Else said. 'I'll go and change.'

She opened the door to her sister and disappeared upstairs.

'Hi, Uncle Simon!'

'Well, look who it is,' Simon said as he gazed at the boy's beaming face.

Edith came into the kitchen. 'Sorry, Simon, he kept pestering me to get here early so he would have time to try on your cap.'

'Of course,' Simon said. 'But why aren't you at school today, Mats?'

'Teacher-training day,' Edith sighed. 'Schools don't know what a nightmare it is for single mums.'

'Then it's especially kind of you to offer to drive Else.'

'Not at all. He's only in Oslo today and tomorrow, as far as I understand.'

'Who is?' Mats asked as he pulled and tugged at his uncle's arm to get him to move from his chair.

'An American doctor who is brilliant at eye operations,' Simon

said, pretending to be even stiffer than he really was as he allowed himself be pulled to his feet. 'Come on, let's go and see if we can find that police cap. Help yourself to some coffee, Edith.'

Simon and Mats went out into the hallway and the boy squealed with delight when he saw the black-and-white police cap which his uncle took down from the wardrobe shelf. But he grew silent and reverent when Simon placed the cap on his head. They stood in front of the mirror. The boy pointed to the reflection of his uncle and made shooting noises.

'Who are you shooting at?' his uncle asked him.

'Villains,' the boy spluttered. 'Bang! Bang!'

'Let's call it target practice,' Simon said. 'Even the police can't shoot villains without permission.'

'Yes, you can! Bang! Bang!'

'If we do that, Mats, we go to jail.'

'We do?' The boy stopped and gave his uncle a baffled look. 'Why? We're the police.'

'Because if we shoot someone we could otherwise have arrested that makes us the bad guys.'

'But . . . when we've caught them, then we can shoot them, can't we?'

Simon laughed. 'No. Then it's up to the judge to decide how long they'll go to prison.'

'I thought you decided that, Uncle Simon.'

Simon could see the disappointment in the boy's eyes. 'Let me tell you something, Mats. I'm glad I don't have to decide that. I'm glad that all I have to do is catch criminals. Because that's the fun part of the job.'

Mats narrowed one eye and the cap tipped backwards. 'Uncle Simon . . .'

'Yes?'

'Why don't you and Auntie Else have any kids?'

Simon stepped behind Mats, placed his hands on the boy's shoulders and smiled at him in the mirror.

'We don't need kids, we've got you. Haven't we?'

Mats looked pensively at his uncle for a couple of seconds. Then his face lit up. 'Yeah!'

Simon stuck his hand in his pocket to answer his mobile which had started to buzz.

It was a colleague. Simon listened.

'Where by Aker River?' he asked.

'Past Kuba, by the art college. There's a pedestrian bridge—'

'I know where it is. I'll be there in thirty minutes.'

He put on his shoes, tied the laces and pulled on his jacket.

'Else!' he called out.

'Yes?' Her face appeared at the top of the stairs. It struck him once again how beautiful she was. Her long hair flowing like a red river around her petite face. The freckles on and around her small nose. And it occurred to him that those freckles would almost certainly still be there when he was gone. His next thought, which he tried to suppress, followed swiftly: who would take care of her then? He knew that she was unlikely to be able to see him from where she was standing, she was only pretending. He cleared his throat.

'I've got to go, sweetheart. Will you give me a call and tell me what the doctor said?'

'Yes. Drive carefully.'

Two middle-aged men walked through the park popularly known as Kuba. Most people thought the name had something to do with Cuba, possibly because political rallies were often held here and because Grünerløkka was once regarded as a working-class neighbourhood. You had to have lived there for many years to know that there used to be a large gas holder here and that it had had a

framework shaped like a cube. The men crossed the pedestrian bridge which led to the old factory that was now an art college. Lovers had attached padlocks with dates and initials to the bars of the railings of the bridge. Simon stopped and looked at one of them. He had loved Else for ten years, every single day of the over three and a half thousand they had been together. There would never be another woman in his life and he didn't need a symbolic padlock to know that. And neither did she; hopefully she would outlive him for so many years that there would be time for new men in her life. And that was all good.

From where they were standing he could see Åmodt Bro, a modest little bridge that crossed a modest little river which divided this modest little capital into east and west. Once upon a time, a long time ago, when he was young and foolish, he had dived from this very bridge into the river. A drunken troika of three lads, two of them with an unshakeable faith in themselves and their prospects. Two of them convinced that they alone were the best of the three. The third one, Simon, had realised long ago that he couldn't compete with his friends when it came to intelligence, strength, social skills or appeal to women. But he was the bravest. Or, to put it another way, the most willing to take risks. And diving into polluted water didn't require intellect or physical skill, only recklessness. Simon Kefas had often thought that it was pessimism that had prompted him to gamble with a future he didn't value very much, an innate knowledge that he had less to lose than other people. He had balanced on the railings while his friends had screamed for him not to do it, that he was mad. And then he had jumped. From the bridge, out of life, into the wonderful, spinning roulette wheel which is fate. He had plunged through the water which had no surface, only white foam and, under that, an icy embrace. And in that embrace there was silence, solicitude and peace. When he resurfaced, unharmed, they had cheered. Simon, too. Even though he

had felt a vague disappointment at being back. It was amazing what a broken heart could drive a young man to do.

Simon shook off the memories and focused on the waterfall between the two bridges. More specifically on the figure that had been left there like a photograph, frozen in mid-fall.

‘We think he floated downstream,’ said the crime scene officer who was standing next to him. ‘And then his clothes got caught on something sticking out of the water. The river is usually so shallow there that you can wade across it.’

‘All right,’ Simon said, sucking the tobacco in his mouth and cocking his head. The figure hung straight down with its arms out to the sides and the cascading water formed a white halo around the head and body. It reminded him of Else’s hair. The other CSOs had finally got their boat into the water and were working on freeing the body.

‘A beer says it’s suicide.’

‘I think you’re wrong, Elias,’ Simon said and hooked a finger under his upper lip to extract the *snus*. He was about to drop it into the water below, but he stopped himself. Different times. He looked around for a bin.

‘So you won’t bet a beer?’

‘No, Elias, I won’t.’

‘Oh, sorry, I forgot . . .’ The CSO looked embarrassed.

‘That’s all right,’ Simon said and left. He nodded in passing to a tall, blonde woman in a black skirt and a short jacket. If it hadn’t been for the police warrant card dangling around her neck he would have taken her to be a bank clerk. He chucked the *snus* into the green rubbish bin at the end of the bridge and walked down to the riverbank, scanning the ground with his eyes as he did.

‘Chief Inspector Kefas?’

Elias looked up. The woman who had addressed him was the

archetypal Scandinavian female as imagined by foreigners. He suspected she thought she was too tall, which was why she stooped slightly and wore flat shoes.

‘No, that’s not me. Who are you?’

‘Kari Adel.’ She held up a warrant card around her neck. ‘I’ve just joined the Homicide Squad. They told me I would find him here.’

‘Welcome. What do you want with Simon?’

‘He’s supposed to mentor me.’

‘Lucky you,’ Elias said and pointed to the man walking along the river. ‘That’s him over there.’

‘What’s he looking for?’

‘Evidence.’

‘But surely the evidence will be in the river where the body is and not downstream.’

‘Yes, so he’s assuming we’ve already searched that area. And we have.’

‘The other CSOs say it looks like a suicide.’

‘Yes, I made the mistake of trying to bet a beer with him on it.’

‘Mistake?’

‘He has a problem,’ Elias said. ‘Had a problem.’ He noticed the woman’s raised eyebrows. ‘It’s no secret. And it’s best that you know if you’re going to work together.’

‘No one told me I would be working with an alcoholic.’

‘Not an alcoholic,’ Elias said. ‘A gambling addict.’

She brushed her blonde hair behind one ear and squinted against the sun. ‘What kind of gambling?’

‘The losing kind, as far as I understand. But if you’re his new partner, you can ask him yourself. Where are you from?’

‘Drug Squad.’

‘Well, then you’ll know all about the river.’

‘Yes.’ She narrowed her eyes and looked up at the body. ‘It could have been a drug hit, of course, but the location is all wrong. They don’t deal hard drugs this far up the river, for that you have to go down to Schous Plass and Nybrua. And people don’t usually kill for cannabis.’

‘Oh, good,’ Elias said, nodding towards the boat. ‘They’ve finally managed to get him down. If he has any ID on him, we’ll soon know who—’

‘I know who he is,’ Kari Adel said. ‘It’s Per Vollan, the prison chaplain.’

Elias looked her up and down. He guessed she would soon give up dressing in smart clothes like the female detectives she had seen in American TV series. But apart from that she looked as if she had something about her. Perhaps she was one of those who would go the distance. Perhaps she belonged to that rare breed. But he had thought that about others before.

5

THE INTERVIEW ROOM WAS DECORATED in pale colours; the furniture was pine. Red curtains covered the window which faced the control room. Inspector Henrik Westad from Buskerud Police thought it was a nice room. He had made the trip from Drammen into Oslo before and sat in this very room. They had interviewed children in a sexual assault case and there had been anatomical dolls here. This time it was a murder inquiry. He studied the long-haired man with the beard sitting across the table. Sonny Lofthus. He looked younger than the age stated in the file. He didn't look as if he was drugged up, either; his pupils were normal-sized. But then people with a high drug tolerance rarely did. Westad cleared his throat.

'So you tied her up, used an ordinary hacksaw on her and then you left?'

'Yes,' the man said. He had declined his right to a lawyer, but answered practically every question with monosyllables. In the end Westad had resorted to asking him yes and no questions. Which seemed to work. Of course it bloody worked; they were getting a confession out of it. But it felt wrong. Westad looked at the photos

in front of him. The top of the woman's head and her skull had nearly been sawn off and flipped aside so that they were attached only by the skin. The surface of the brain was left exposed. He had long since abandoned the idea that one could tell from looking at people what evil they were capable of. But this man, he . . . he didn't exude any of the iciness, the aggression or simply the imbecility Westad thought he had detected in other cold-blooded killers.

Westad leaned back in his chair. 'Why are you confessing to this?'

The man shrugged. 'DNA at the crime scene.'

'How do you know we found some?'

The man touched his long, thick hair which the prison management could have ordered to be cut if they wanted to. 'My hair falls out. It's a side effect of long-term drug abuse. Can I go now?'

Westad sighed. A confession. Technical evidence at the crime scene. So why did he still have doubts?

He leaned towards the microphone standing between them. 'Interview with suspect Sonny Lofthus stopped at 13.04.'

He saw the red light go out and knew that the officer outside had switched off the recording device. He got up and opened the door so that the prison officers could enter, unlock Lofthus's handcuffs and take him back to Staten.

'What do you think?' the officer asked as Westad came into the control room.

'Think?' Westad put on his jacket and zipped it up with a hard, irritated movement. 'He doesn't give me anything *to* think about.'

'And what about the interview earlier today?'

Westad shrugged. A friend of the victim had come forward. She had reported that the victim had told her that her husband, Yngve Morsand, had accused her of having an affair and threatened to kill her. That Kjersti Morsand had been scared. Not least because the husband had good grounds for his suspicion – she *had* met someone

and was thinking of leaving him. It was hard to think of a more classic motive for murder. But what about the boy's motive? The woman hadn't been raped, nothing in the house had been stolen. The medicine cupboard in the bathroom had been broken into and the husband claimed that some sleeping tablets were missing. But why would a man who, judging from his needle marks, had easy access to hard drugs bother with a few measly sleeping pills?

The next question presented itself immediately: Why would an investigator with a signed confession care about little things like that?

Johannes Halden was pushing the mop across the floor by the cells in A Wing when he saw two prison officers approach with the boy between them.

The boy smiled; he looked as if he was walking with two friends going somewhere nice, the handcuffs notwithstanding. Johannes stopped and raised his right arm. 'Look, Sonny! My shoulder is better. Thanks to you.'

The boy had to lift both hands to give the old man a thumbs up. The officers stopped in front of one of the cell doors and unlocked the handcuffs. They didn't need to unlock the door as well since all cell doors were opened automatically every morning at eight o'clock and were left open until ten o'clock at night. The staff up in the control room had shown Johannes how they could lock and unlock all the doors with a single keystroke. He liked the control room. That was why he always took his time washing the floor in there. It was a bit like steering a supertanker. A little like being where he should have ended up.

Before 'the incident' he had worked as an able seaman and studied nautical science. The plan had been to become a deck officer. Followed by mate, first mate and then captain. And eventually join his wife and daughter in the house outside Farsund and get himself

a job as a pilot at the port. So why had he done it? Why had he ruined everything? What had made him agree to smuggle two big sacks out of the Port of Songkhla in Thailand? It wasn't that he didn't know they contained heroin. And it wasn't that he didn't know the penal code and the hysterical Norwegian legal system which at that time equated drug smuggling with murder. It wasn't even that he needed the huge amount of money he had been offered to deliver the sacks to an address in Oslo. So what was it? The thrill? Or the hope of seeing her again; the beautiful Thai girl in her silk dress with her long, shiny black hair, of looking into her almond eyes, hearing her soft voice whisper the difficult English words with sweet cherry lips, telling him he had to do it for her, for her family in Chiang Rai, that it was the only way he could save them. He had never believed her story, but he had believed in her kiss. And that kiss took him across oceans, through customs, into the remand cell, into the courtroom, into the visitors' room where his almost grown-up daughter had sat down and told him that the family wanted nothing more to do with him, through the divorce and into the cell in Ila Prison. That kiss was all he had wanted and the promise of that kiss was all he had left.

When he was released there had been no one waiting for him on the outside. His family had disowned him, his friends grown apart and he would never get work on a ship again. So he sought out the only people willing to accept him. Criminals. And resumed his old ways. Tramp shipping. Nestor, the Ukrainian, recruited him. Heroin from northern Thailand was smuggled in trucks using the old drug route via Turkey and the Balkans. In Germany the cargo was distributed to the Scandinavian countries and Johannes's job was to drive the last stretch. Later he became a confidential informant.

There hadn't been a good reason for that, either. Only a police officer who appealed to something inside him, something he didn't

even know he had. And though that prospect – a clear conscience – had seemed worth less than the kiss of a beautiful woman, he had really believed in that police officer. There had been something about his eyes. Johannes might have gone straight, changed his ways, who knows? But then one autumn evening the police officer was killed. And for the first and only time Johannes heard the name, heard it whispered with a mixture of fear and awe. The Twin.

From then on it was only a matter of time before Johannes was pulled back in again. He took bigger and bigger risks, moved bigger and bigger loads. Dammit, he wanted to get caught. Atone for what he had done. So he was relieved when customs officers pulled him over at the Swedish border. The furniture in the back of his lorry was stuffed full of heroin. The judge had reminded the jury both of the large quantity involved and that it wasn't Johannes's first offence. That was ten years ago. He had been at Staten for the last four years, since the prison opened. He had seen inmates come and go, seen prison officers come and go too, and he had treated them all with the respect they deserved. And, in return, he got the respect he deserved. That is to say, he enjoyed the respect the old-timer gets. The guy who is no longer a threat. Because none of them knew his secret. The betrayal he was guilty of. The reason he inflicted this punishment on himself. And he had given up all hope of finally getting the only things that mattered. The kiss he had been promised by a forgotten woman. The clear conscience he had been promised by a dead police officer. Until he had been transferred to A Wing and had met the boy they said could heal you. Johannes had been startled when he heard the surname, but he hadn't said anything. He had just carried on mopping the floors, keeping his head down, smiling, doing and receiving the little favours that made life bearable in a place like this. The days, the weeks, the months and the years had flown by and turned into a life which would soon end. Cancer. Lung cancer. Small cell, the

doctor had said. The aggressive kind which is the worst unless it is caught early.

It hadn't been caught early.

There was nothing anyone could do. Certainly not Sonny. He hadn't even come close to guessing what was wrong when Johannes had asked; the lad himself had suggested the groin, nudge nudge, wink wink. And his shoulder had got better of its own accord, if truth be told, not from Sonny's hand which definitely didn't have a higher temperature than the usual 37°C, was far colder in fact. But he was a good lad, he really was, and Johannes had no desire to disillusion him if he thought he had healing hands.

So Johannes had kept it to himself, both his illness and his betrayal. But he knew that time was running out. That he couldn't take this secret with him to the grave. Not if he wanted to rest in peace rather than the horror of waking up like a zombie, worm-eaten and trapped, doomed to eternal torment. He had no religious beliefs about who would be condemned to everlasting suffering or why, but he had been wrong about so many things in his life.

'So many things . . .' Johannes Halden muttered to himself.

Then he put the mop aside, walked over to Sonny's cell and knocked on the door. No reply. He knocked again.

Waited.

Then he opened the door.

Sonny sat with a rubber strap tied around his forearm below the elbow, the end of the strap between his teeth. He held a syringe just above a bulging vein. The angle was the prescribed thirty degrees for optimum insertion.

Sonny calmly looked up and smiled. 'Yes?'

'Sorry, I . . . it can wait.'

'Are you sure?'

'Yes, it's . . . there's no hurry.' Johannes laughed. 'It can wait another hour.'

‘Can it wait four hours?’

‘Four hours is fine.’

The old man saw the needle sink into the vein. The boy pressed the plunger. Silence and darkness seemed to fill the room like black water. Johannes withdrew quietly and closed the door.