

CHAPTER 1

On Saturday 26 October 2002, Kurt Wallander woke up feeling very tired. It had been a trying week, as a severe cold had infected practically everybody in the Ystad police station. Wallander was usually the first to catch such viruses, but for some strange reason on this occasion he had been one of the few who did not fall ill. Since there had been a serious rape case in Svarte and several cases of GBH in Ystad during the week, Wallander had been forced to work long and strenuous hours.

He had remained at his desk until the early hours. He had been too exhausted to work, but at the same time he had no desire to go home to his flat in Mariagatan. A squally wind was blowing hard outside the police station. Occasionally someone would walk along the

corridor past his office, but Wallander hoped nobody would knock on his door. He wanted to be left in peace.

In peace from what? he asked himself. Perhaps what I want most of all is not to have to think about myself. About the increasing feeling of repugnance I'm carrying around inside myself and which I don't discuss with anybody else at all.

Autumn leaves swirled against the window of his office. He wondered if he ought to take some of the holiday owed to him and try to find a cheap package trip to Mallorca or some similar place. But he stopped short of making any such decision – even if the sun was shining down on a Spanish island, he would be unable to be at peace with himself.

He looked at his desk calendar. It was 2002. October. He had been a police officer for over thirty years, and had progressed from a probationer patrolling the streets of Malmö to become an experienced and respected detective who had successfully solved numerous difficult cases of serious crime. Even if he could not be pleased with his life as a human being, he could be pleased with his performance as a police officer. He had done his job well, and perhaps helped people to feel more secure.

A car in the street outside roared past at full speed, tyres screaming. A young man at the wheel, Wallander thought. He is no doubt well aware that he is driving past the police station. His intention is to irritate us, of course. But he can't do that to me. Not any more.

Wallander went out into the corridor. It was empty. He could hear faint sounds of laughter from behind a closed door. He went to fetch a cup of tea, then returned to his office.

The tea tasted odd. When he looked at the bag he realised that he had taken one tasting of sweet jasmine. He didn't like it, threw the bag into the waste-paper basket and poured the drink into a plant pot containing an orchid given to him by his daughter Linda.

It suddenly struck him how everything had changed during his many years as a police officer. When he had first started to patrol the streets there was a big difference between what happened in a city like Malmö and in small towns like Ystad. But nowadays there was hardly any difference at all. This was especially true for all the crimes connected with drugs. During his early days in Ystad a lot of drug addicts went to Copenhagen in order to obtain certain types of narcotic. Now you could buy everything in Ystad. He knew that there had also been an explosion in drug trafficking over the Internet.

Wallander often talked to his colleagues about how it had become so much more difficult to be a police officer in recent years. But now, as he sat in his office and watched the autumn leaves sticking on to the window-pane, he suddenly wondered if that were really true. Was that just an excuse? To avoid thinking about how society had changed, and hence also criminality?

Nobody has ever accused me of being lazy, Wallander

thought. But perhaps that's what I am, despite everything. Or am becoming so.

He stood up, put on the jacket that had been draped over his visitor chair, and left the office. His thoughts remained inside the room, the questions unanswered.

He drove home through the dark streets. Rainwater was glistening on the asphalt. His head was suddenly empty.

He had the next day off. Half asleep, he heard the distant ring of the telephone in the kitchen. His daughter Linda, who had started work as a police officer in Ystad the previous autumn, after finishing her training at the police college in Stockholm, was still living in his flat. She should really have moved out by now, but had not yet received a contract for the flat she had been promised. He heard her answer, and was relieved that he wouldn't need to bother about it. Martinson had recovered and been on duty since the previous day, and he had promised not to disturb Wallander.

Nobody else ever phoned him, especially not early on a Sunday morning. On the other hand, Linda spent ages every day on her mobile. He had sometimes wondered about that. His own relationship with telephones was quite complicated. He felt put out whenever a phone rang. He guessed it was a sign of the simple truth that they belonged to different generations.

The bedroom door opened. He gave a start and became angry.

‘Shouldn’t you knock?’

‘It’s only me.’

‘What would you say if I flung open the door of your room without knocking?’

‘I keep my door locked. You’re wanted on the phone.’

‘Nobody ever rings me.’

‘But someone has.’

‘Who?’

‘Martinson.’

Wallander sat up in bed. Linda looked disapprovingly at his bare stomach, but said nothing. It was Sunday. They had made an agreement to the effect that for as long as she lived in his flat, Sundays would be an exclusion zone in which neither of them was allowed to criticise the other. Sunday was proclaimed a day reserved for friendliness.

‘What did he want?’

‘He didn’t say.’

‘Today is my day off.’

‘I don’t know what he wants.’

‘Can’t you tell him I’m out?’

‘For God’s sake!’

She left him and returned to her own room. Wallander shuffled out into the kitchen and picked up the telephone receiver. He could see through the window that it was raining, but the clouds were scattered and he could detect traces of blue sky.

‘I thought today was supposed to be my day off!’

‘So it is,’ said Martinson.

‘What’s happened?’

‘Nothing.’

Wallander noticed that he was becoming irritated again. Was Martinson ringing without any specific reason? That wasn’t like him.

‘Why are you ringing? I was asleep.’

‘Why do you sound so angry?’

‘Because I *am* angry.’

‘I think I might have a house for you. Out in the countryside. Not so far from Löderup.’

For many years Wallander had been thinking that it was high time he moved from his flat in central Ystad. He wanted to get out into the countryside, he wanted to acquire a dog. Since his father had died several years ago and Linda had flown the nest, he had felt an increasing need to change the circumstances of his own life. On several occasions he had been to view houses that estate agents had on offer, but he had never found one to fulfil his requirements. Sometimes he had felt that the house was more or less right, but the price was out of his reach. His salary and his savings were inadequate. Being a police officer meant that a fat bank account was just not possible.

‘Are you still there?’

‘Yes, I’m still here. Tell me more.’

‘I can’t just now. It seems there’s been a break-in at the Åhléns supermarket last night. But if you drop by

the station I can tell you about it. And I can let you have some keys.'

Martinson hung up. Linda came into the kitchen and poured a cup of coffee. She looked enquiringly at her dad, then poured one for him as well. They sat down at the kitchen table.

'Do you have to work?'

'No.'

'What did he want, then?'

'He wanted to show me a house.'

'But he lives in a terraced house. You want to live out in the countryside, don't you?'

'You're not listening to what I say. He wants to show me a house. Not *his* house.'

'What kind of a house?'

'I've no idea. Do you want to come with me?'

She shook her head. 'No, I have other plans.'

He didn't ask her what those plans were. He knew that she was the same as he was. She explained no more than was necessary. A question that wasn't asked was a question that didn't need an answer.

CHAPTER 2

Shortly after noon Wallander left for the police station. When he came out into the street he paused for a moment, wondering if he should take the car. But his conscience immediately began to nag him: he didn't get enough exercise. Besides, Linda was no doubt standing at the window, watching him. If he took the car, he'd never hear the last of it.

He started walking.

We're like an old married couple, he thought. Or a middle-aged policeman with much too young a wife. At first I was married to her mother. Now it's as if the two of us are living in some sort of strange marriage, my daughter and I. All very respectable. But a cause of mutual and constantly increasing irritation.

Martinson was sitting in his office when Wallander arrived at the deserted police station. While his colleague concluded a telephone call about a missing tractor, Wallander glanced through a new edict from the National Police Board that was lying on the desk. It was about the use of pepper spray. An experimental operation had taken place in southern Sweden recently, and an assessment had concluded that the weapon had proved to be an excellent device for calming down violent individuals.

Wallander suddenly felt old. He was a terrible shot and was always frightened of getting into a situation when he would be forced to fire his service pistol. It had happened, and a few years ago he had shot and killed a man in self-defence. But the very thought of expanding his limited arsenal with a collection of little cans of spray was not something he found attractive.

I'm growing too old, he thought. Too old for my own good, and too old for my job.

Martinson slammed down the receiver and jumped up from his chair. The action reminded Wallander of the young man who had joined the Ystad police some fifteen years earlier. Even then Martinson had been unsure whether or not he was cut out to be a police officer. On several occasions over the years he had been on the point of resigning – but he had always stayed on. Now he was no longer young. But unlike Wallander, he had not put on weight: on the contrary, he had grown thinner. The biggest change was that his

thick brown hair had vanished – Martinson had become bald.

Martinson gave him a bunch of keys. Wallander could see that most of them looked rather ancient.

‘It belongs to a cousin of my wife’s,’ said Martinson. ‘He’s very old, the house is empty, but for ages he’s been digging in his heels and refusing to sell it. Now he’s in a care home, and he accepts that he won’t be leaving there alive. A while ago he asked me to look after the selling of his house. The time has now come. I thought of you straight away.’

Martinson gestured towards a worn-out and rickety visitor chair. Wallander sat down.

‘I thought of you for several reasons,’ he continued. ‘Partly because I knew you were looking for a house out in the country. But also because of where it’s actually situated.’

Wallander waited for what was coming next. He knew that Martinson had a tendency to make a long story of things – to complicate matters that ought to be simple.

‘The house is in Vretsvägen, out in Löderup,’ said Martinson.

Wallander knew where he meant.

‘Which house is it?’

‘My wife’s cousin is called Karl Eriksson.’

Wallander thought for a moment.

‘Wasn’t he the one who had a smithy next to the petrol station some years ago?’

‘Yes, that’s him.’

Wallander stood up.

‘I’ve driven past that house lots of times. It might be too close to where my father used to live for it to be suitable for me.’

‘Why not go and take a look?’

‘How much does he want for it?’

‘He’s left that up to me. But as it’s my wife who’s in line for the money, I have to ask for a fair market price.’

Wallander paused in the doorway. He had suddenly become doubtful.

‘Could you perhaps give some indication of the asking price? There’s not much point in my driving out there and looking at the house if it’s going to be so expensive that I can’t even contemplate buying it.’

‘Go and have a look,’ said Martinson. ‘You can afford it. If you want it.’

CHAPTER 3

Wallander walked back to Mariagatan. He felt exhilarated, but also doubtful. Just as he got into the car it started pouring down. He drove out of Ystad, joined the Österleden motorway, and it occurred to him that it had been many years since he had last taken this route.

How long had his father been dead now? It took him some time to recall the year of his death. It was a long time ago. Many years had passed since they made that final journey together to Rome.

He recalled following his father, who had sneaked off to wander around Rome on his own. Wallander still felt a bit ashamed of having spied on him. The fact that his father was old and not fully in control of his senses was not a sufficient excuse. Why hadn't he left his father in

peace to look around Rome and soak up his memories? Why had Wallander insisted on following him?

It wasn't good enough to say that he'd been concerned about his father, worried that something might have happened. Wallander could still recall his emotions from that time. He hadn't been especially worried. He had simply been curious.

Now, it was as if time had shrunk. Surely it could have been only yesterday that he drove out here to visit his father, to play cards with him, maybe have a drink and then start quarrelling about something of no significance.

I miss the old man, Wallander thought. He was the only father I'll ever have. He was often a pain in the neck and could drive me up the wall. But I miss him. There's no getting away from that.

Wallander turned off into a familiar road and glimpsed the roof of his father's old house. But he continued past the side road and turned in the other direction instead.

He stopped after two hundred metres and got out of the car. It was only drizzling now.

Karl Eriksson's house was in a neglected and overgrown garden. It was an old Scanian farmhouse, and would originally have had two wings. One had disappeared – maybe it had burnt down, maybe it had been demolished. The house and garden were well away from the road, apparently in the middle of a field. The soil had been tilled, and was waiting for its winter covering of snow

and ice. In the distance Wallander could hear the noise of a tractor.

Wallander opened the squeaking gate and entered the yard. The sandy path had certainly not been raked for many years. A small flock of crows was cawing away in a tall chestnut tree directly in front of the house. Perhaps it was originally the family's magic tree – planted in the old days to stand guard over the house and be a home to the trolls and fairies and spirits who looked after the welfare of the inhabitants. Wallander stood still underneath it and listened – he needed to like the noise surrounding a house before he could start thinking about the possibility of living in it. If the sound of the wind or even the silence wasn't right, he might just as well get back in his car and drive away. But he was duly impressed by what he heard. It was the stillness of autumn, the Scanian autumn, waiting for the onset of winter.

Wallander walked round the building. Behind it were a few apple trees, currant bushes and some dilapidated stone tables, chairs and benches. He strolled around among the fallen autumn leaves, stumbling over something lying on the ground – possibly the remains of an old rake – and returned to the front of the house. He guessed which of the keys would open the front door, inserted it in the keyhole and turned it.

The house was musty and stuffy inside and there was a distinct smell of old man. He explored the rooms one

by one. The furniture was old-fashioned and worn; crocheted proverbs hung on the walls. An ancient television set stood in what must have been the old man's bedroom. Wallander went into the kitchen. There was a refrigerator that had been switched off. In the sink were the remains of a dead mouse. He went upstairs, but the upper floor was simply an unfurnished loft. The house would need a lot of work, that was obvious. And it wouldn't be cheap, even if he were able to do much of it himself.

He returned downstairs, sat down cautiously on an old sofa, and dialled the number of the Ystad police station. It was several minutes before Martinson answered.

'Where are you?' Martinson asked.

'In the old days people used to ask how you were,' said Wallander. 'Now they ask where you are. The way we greet each other really has undergone a revolution.'

'Did you ring me in order to tell me that?'

'I'm sitting inside the house.'

'What do you think?'

'I don't know. It feels unfamiliar.'

'But it's the first time you've been there, isn't it? Of course it feels unfamiliar.'

'I'd like to know what kind of price you're asking for it. I don't want to start thinking seriously about it until I know that. I take it you know there's a lot of work that needs doing.'

'I've been there. I know that.'

Wallander waited. He could hear Martinson breathing.

'It's not easy to do business with good friends,' said Martinson eventually. 'I can see that now.'

'Regard me as an enemy,' said Wallander cheerfully. 'But preferably a poverty-stricken enemy.'

Martinson laughed.

'We've been thinking in terms of a bargain price. Five hundred thousand. No haggling.'

Wallander had already decided that he could pay a maximum of 550,000.

'That's too expensive,' he said.

'The hell it is! For a house in much sought-after Österlen?'

'The place is a ramshackle hovel.'

'If you spend a hundred thousand on it, it will be worth well over a million.'

'I can stretch to four hundred and seventy-five thousand.'

'No.'

'That's that, then.'

Wallander hung up. Then he stood with the mobile in his hand, waiting. Counting the seconds. He got as far as twenty-four before Martinson rang.

'Let's say four hundred and ninety thousand.'

'Let's shake on that over the phone,' said Wallander. 'Or rather, I'll pay a deposit twenty-four hours from now. I need to talk to Linda first.'

'Do that, then. And say yea or nay by this evening.'

‘Why the rush? I need twenty-four hours.’

‘OK, you can have them. But no more.’

They ended the call. Wallander felt a surge of elation. Was he now, at long last, about to acquire the house in the country he had dreamed about for so long? And in the vicinity of his father’s house, where he had spent so much time?

He worked his way through the house once more. In his mind’s eye he was already knocking down partition walls, installing new electricity sockets, papering the walls, buying furniture. He was tempted to phone Linda, but managed to control himself.

It was too early to tell her. He still wasn’t totally convinced.

He walked around the ground floor once again, pausing here and there to listen before continuing into the next room. Hanging on the walls were faded photographs of the people who used to live there. Between two windows in the biggest room was also a coloured aerial photograph of the house and grounds.

He thought about the possibility of people who had once lived there still being present and breathing in the walls. But there are no ghosts here, he thought. There aren’t any because I don’t believe in ghosts.

Wallander went out into the garden. It had stopped raining, and the clouds were dispersing. He pushed and pulled the handle of a pump in the middle of the courtyard. There were squeaking and grinding noises, and the

water that eventually appeared was first brown, but then turned crystal clear. He tasted it, and found himself already imagining a dog drinking water from a bowl by his side.

He walked round the outside of the house one more time, then returned to the car.

Just after opening the car door he paused: a thought had struck him. At first he couldn't understand what it was that was preventing him from sitting down behind the steering wheel. He frowned. Something was nagging away inside him. Something he had seen. Something that didn't fit in.

He turned to face the house. Something or other had etched itself into his brain.

Then it dawned on him. He had stumbled over something lying on the ground at the back of the house. The remains of a small rake, or perhaps the root of a tree. That was what was preventing him from leaving the place.

It was something he had seen. Without seeing it properly.