

Black

Gunn M. Roll

“The tongues of those who have mocked and derided the warning of Armageddon shall be consumed!

The eyes of those who have refused to see the sign of the ‘latter days’ shall be consumed!

The flesh of those who refuse to accept that the name of the true and living God is Jehovah shall be consumed!

They will be consumed while still standing on their feet!

Is there any place where such people can hide from God’s annihilation?

No! ... They will have no chance of escape!

No matter where they flee, God will find them and annihilate them.”

*‘From Paradise Lost to Paradise Regained’,
Watchtower Society Publication, 1958)*

Tvedestrand, 10 February 1985

The young boy was sitting at the table, his head bowed. He was having trouble swallowing. The food seemed to swell inside his mouth. He needed to drink some water. But then he would have to pour from the mug standing on the table. It was on the far side, over by his father. That would mean asking his father to push it across, he would have to look up and talk. And if he talked, he was sure to start crying.

The rage that felt like a lump in his throat would burst out and take over the whole room. He looked at the knife lying beside the plate. He swallowed and swallowed.

The others had finished eating, but no one had left the table. Up on the wall the clock ticked heavily on. His sister was sitting on her own over by the kitchen unit. His mother was staring down at the tablecloth. He could not make eye-contact with her. Someone rang the doorbell. No one moved before his father had gone out into the passage to open the door. They all heard Elias Jacobsen’s deep voice. Fortunately. Now his father would be taking Elias with him to the office. His mother gave him a quick sidelong glance.

“Eat up your food,” she whispered. “Here’s some water.”

Neither of them looked at his sister.

A week had passed since his sister had come home. At nights, he could hear her crying. The first night she was home he wanted to tiptoe in to her room, just come with a glass of milk and talk for a bit. They had always been close, there was less than a year between them. As he went up the stairs, his bare legs freezing, he saw that his father had positioned himself outside her door. He stood there like a prison guard, legs apart and arms crossed. The boy scuttled past with a hardly audible “Goodnight, dad.” So he lay in his bed instead, cursing the whole lot of them – his father, mother, the meetings and the rest of the congregation. But most of all he cursed himself.

Almost sixteen, almost a man, yet just a kid who didn't dare defy his father's authority. Not even when his sister was lying there crying. Only once had he managed to do so. That terrible day. But then he hadn't stopped to think, he'd been so scared that he didn't know what he was doing. Lastly, he also cursed Jehovah, but was immediately afraid of his own thoughts. He lay there for hours, begging for forgiveness. For Jehovah saw everything, everything he did, everything he thought. Sometimes he thought that Jehovah was a huge eye, an eye that was hovering over his head and that saw everything.

On the other side of the wall, his sister lay squeezed into a ball. Her father had been in and talked to her again. It all began after she came back home a fortnight earlier. He came every single night. "You are defiled," he whispered. She had to strip naked before he forced her to kneel. "Pray," he said, while pressing into her from behind. "You must pray, for you are already impure. Through me you can become pure for Jehovah."

Her tears came in small painful gasps. She felt like howling, felt like tearing her duvet into small pieces, felt like tearing the wallpaper off the walls. But she lay still. Her stomach hurt, her thoughts hurt and there was a pain in her chest that hurt. She stuck it out during the daytime, but as soon as he came into her room, her tears began to flow. There were so many of them. It would never stop.

It felt so strange here. When she looked round, she could hardly recognise herself. The schoolbooks and satchel belonged to someone else. The few books on the Katy bookshelf seemed childish to her. The embroidery with the words "Jesus Christ is always with me" hung above her bed, mocking her. The next day, she was to be back at school. It felt like a lifetime since she had last been there. Although it was only six months. Six months, and everything had changed. Nothing could be as before.

She thought about everything she hadn't known. She didn't know what she had thought. Perhaps that she would give birth to the child, that she would come home and take care of it. That she and her mother would bath and feed the baby. Or that she would stay with her aunt and uncle in Haugesund until she could find a place of her own after a few years, and that she could get help to manage things, as the midwife had said. That she would be forgiven and allowed to come back into the congregation. She didn't know what she had thought. But she hadn't thought that they would take the child away from her.

She could remember bits of the day her parents discovered that she had sinned. She remembered her mother standing at the door with a packet of sanitary napkins in her hand. Suddenly, she was standing there with the unopened packet. "It's a long time since I bought these for you," she said. "Is there anything you'd like to confess?"

She shook her head. No, what would that be? Her mother went out again and for a brief moment she thought that everything was all right. That all the prayers she had prayed the previous night had done the trick. That nothing had happened. She heard her parents talking together down in the kitchen. Her father's voice was getting louder and louder. Then he was standing there. His eyes were completely black, she thought. So weird. The rest of the evening was one big wound.

In flashes she could recall that her father had grown more and more incensed. Because she refused to confess her sin, refused to state what had happened. But how was she to find the words? That she remembered – that the words had disappeared. No matter how much she tried, she couldn't find them. Finally, her father took her down to the basement.

"The Devil Satan has entered our house," he said to her mother. He used his belt when he hit her.

She remembered her mother at the top of the stairs and that she turned round and went. She remembered her brother coming, that he shouted, flung himself at her

father and shouted for him to stop. It was her brother who had saved her. Finally, she told him about the boy at school. He was in the class above her and was the coolest of the gang. Came and threw gravel at her window in the evenings when her parents were at a meeting of the congregation. Told her father that he climbed up onto the roof above the porch and in through her window without anyone knowing. And that he had sat on her bed, that he had kissed her and that he came each Wednesday for three weeks. On the fourth evening he had pulled up her skirt and clumsily removed her panties. Before she had collected her wits, she had felt a couple of hard thrusts in her crutch, it hurt, and then he had pulled up his trousers and climbed out the window again. She had got up bewildered. It felt as if it had only lasted a few seconds. What had actually happened? Nothing, she decided. Nothing serious. The following Wednesday he didn't come. Nor the one after that. He never came back. Every evening she waiting for the knock against the window. Wanted it to happen and not to happen.

She also remembered her mother's tears, her father's rage, the prayers, the yellow gleam in her brother's eye, her younger brother and sister huddled together in the kitchen doorway.

They looked like two young birds.

*The light from a candle. Sheep's tallow. Sulphur. Salt.
The box with the enemy's photo torn into 13 pieces.
7 strands of hair. A splinter of a cross.
30 needles. Pure hatred.*

*They are vermin. Broods of serpents.
They are Satan's children!*

Oslo, 9 November 2007

"It's four o'clock now," Ove nodded in the direction of the stairs.

"Got a watch suddenly, or something?" Nils was really peeved. He'd asked the time at least five times the last half hour. He was hungry and fed up with the lousy job he'd been given. Servicing a patrol car. That meant everything that other police stations throughout the country had done at a special garage. But not here, not in the Oslo Police District, where his superintendent was not only completely hung up about patrol cars always being perfectly polished and in top trim but also had a thing about economising. Skinflint is what was whispered on the sly. Freshly qualified officers were often given various maintenance jobs. Something that might be popular during the summer, but on autumn days when the Oslo mist hung like a milky soup over the fjord was simply lousy, lousy, lousy.

"I know it's four o'clock, because M's standing on the stairs ready to go home. And M always leaves on the dot."

Nils pulled himself from under the car, where he had been trying to open the foot valve to get a bloody oil change done.

"And who the hell is M?"

A tall, dark bloke in a coat was standing on the stairs, filling his pipe. Next to him sat a quivering Irish setter.

The man known as M snapped his fingers and the dog flew across the square like greased lightning.

"Pee," the man said, and the dog set off for the nearest bush and lifted a hind leg. It stood there peeing for several minutes.

"Bit of a party bladder that dog has – wouldn't have minded having one that could hold onto a few pints," Nils said.

"Come on now," Ove said, who had seen this before. The dog kept its eye on the man on the staircase, who raised one hand. A few seconds later, the dog was sitting at this heel. The man pushed down towards the ground with his hand and the dog lay flat beside him. A sign with one finger and it rolled round. A quick slap against his thigh and the dog went round behind his legs and took up its heel position once more.

"Struth, that some obedient dog," Nils said.

The man went over to the cycle racks, coupled the dog to the spring attachment on a bike standing there, mounted and shot off through the gateway. A narrow streak of smoke from his pipe mingled with the mist – and then he was gone.

"What was it you said he was called, M?"

"You know who he is, don't you?" Ole had been at the station for almost a year and felt a bit superior to Nils, who had only come from Bodø the day before.

"No, dammit." Nils was getting irritated again.

"That was Monsen."

"The Monsen? The chief in person?"

"Yep, the Karl Fredrik Monsen himself."

"Monsen." Nils nodded. Even though he hadn't met him yet, he naturally had heard about Monsen. The detective had become famous nationwide after solving a high-media-profile case the year before.

"So that's what the M stands for, M for Monsen."

"Yes," Ove cleaned his hands carefully on a piece of twist. "But it also stands for Maigret. You see, he's got all the Maigret books, bound in leather, in both Norwegian and French. He speaks fluent French. Well, he's got a French wife." Now Ove was really getting warmed up.

"What's more, there are lots of people who claim that he uses precisely the same methods of detection as Maigret, and that he once said himself that he's learnt most about detective work from reading Maigret."

"Jesus," Nils was getting really interested, "and he really looks like him too, with his coat, pipe and stuff."

"Maigret doesn't really exist, he's only a character in a novel," Ove replied.

"Know that of course," Nils shut up like a clam once more, "but he looks like the actor who played him in the TV series at any rate."

Police sergeant Sigrid Douglas was standing at the window, looking down at the two police officers. Karl Fredrik's as usual, she thought to herself, he likes to show off his dog tricks for new arrivals. Something she too had sometimes made use of. Even though for her there was also something else involved – to be able to get a 40-kilo police dog to obey even your smallest signals had a certain educative effect. Not bad, considering she herself weighed scarcely 15 kilos more than the dogs and, with her 165 cm, was almost shorter than they were when they got up on their hind legs. As a woman, you have to make use of all the tricks you have, she had said on several occasions. A black belt in karate was another of them.

Sigrid smiled slightly as she glanced down at the two men, who were still standing talking in the parking area. The only thing Ove and Nils had in common was that both of them had been born north of Dovre and had been accepted for the same in-service course on general detective techniques.

"Ove Kastbrekken and Nils Mikkelsen Gaup, they really are caricatures of a person from Trøndelag and Nordland," Sigrid said with a laugh after their application interviews. As a detective in the Oslo Police District, she was one of the teachers on the course, and responsible for dealing with applications.

"Ove, the steady Trøndelag man, thorough, hard-working, loyal, reliable."

"A labrador," Karl Fredrik had agreed with a nod. "And what about the one from Nordland?"

"Definitely a terrier – excitable, impulsive, quick, needs training, but very sharp – got top marks in his final exam at the Police University College in Bodø. So did Ove, by the way, but then he's been here a year and picked up some experience."

"Terrier and labrador," Karl Frederik said, summing up.

Sigrid and he sometimes liked to compare people with breeds of dog – something that irritated the superintendent, who was unaware what characteristics a terrier and a labrador had. Let alone a poodle, which she thought of as a poncy, styled creature, but she'd been wrong – poodles turned out to be easy to teach, eager and intelligent. She raised her eyebrows and requested them to speak plain Norwegian.

"I think they will complement each other and make a great team," Sigrid had answered.

The idea was for the trainees to work on actual cases that cropped up. The challenge would be cooperating with the real detective team. Detective work was hectic and stressful, and many felt sceptical about having these greenhorns around their legs.

They was no disguising the fact that the project had met with a lot of in-house resistance. Some sulked on the quiet, others were prepared to state what they felt in

no uncertain terms. And it all looked as if it would all fizzle out when the superintendent had called Karl Fredrik in and asked when they were ready to start. There was a political interest in the project, she said meaningfully, even the minister of justice had expressed his interest.

"Timing is everything," Sigrid said with laugh when he told her about the new turn things had taken. "This course was a real gift to the minister of justice after he was given such a rough time about police training on TV2."

Karl Fredrik Monsen was on his way home. The journey from the police station to Ulvøya took him just over twenty minutes. As always, he breathed deeply and thought how lucky people went to live in such a place. He cycled onto the Ulvøya bridge, greeting the fishermen standing there. At just before half-past four, he pulled up outside the shop and padded in to buy the papers. It was more or less true that he went home at the same time every day, but myths did best after all when there was no doubt attached to them. It was, however, true that as often as possible he left for home at four o'clock. That he often worked during evenings and nights was not something the myths said all that much about.

As Karl Fredrik pulled up in front of the house, he felt the same as he always did when entering his own front garden. He was hungry. He was home. In that order. For there was a good reason why his colleagues believed they could set their watches by him. He had a wife who was a fantastic cook and who loved to prepare food.

"I've been down by the jetty and got some really fresh cod, prawns and some trash fish, so today it's bouillabaisse," Marie called out as soon as she heard him come in. 'Trash fish' was her favourite expression in Norwegian, quickly picked up and adopted that first summer when they visited Karl Fredrik's parents. Astonished, the French mademoiselle had seen the fishermen hauling up loads of fish. It's only 'trash fish' they had explained to her. Now, 'trash fish' cost more than cod and featured as guest of honour on the menus of the finest restaurants. Karl Fredrik quickly scanned the kitchen. His daughters, Mia and Marit, were busy cutting up fruit for the dessert. Mia, the younger one, was as usual in the middle of a discussion with her sister's boyfriend.

"But good grief, Stig, you can't defend striptease, for goodness' sake!"

Stig was a car mechanic and worked in a typical male environment. In Mia's opinion, he was completely unenlightened when it came to such important issues as feminism, protecting the environment and globalisation. She regarded it as a quite important task to lick him into shape, for it looked as if he was likely to become her brother-in-law.

"It was only a binge, everyone was pissed, it was all completely innocent stuff."

"Exactly, everyone was pissed and that means it wasn't that serious," Mia said mockingly.

"Striptease is suppression of women, on a par with porno, Stig!"

Mia was in a woman's group at Blitz. Her pitch-black hair had some bright-red tufts and matched her uniform – red DocMarten shoes, longs with holes, a Fair Isle sweater and a black leather jacket. There was only a year between the two sisters, but they were incredibly different. Marit was studying to become a nurse, had no interest in politics, was orderly, tidy and almost annoyingly conscientious.

"Hey you two, there's food on the table. Karl Fredrik, would you fetch the wine?" Marie asked. Even though his wife didn't avoid a discussion, it had to be either before the meal or after coffee. Heated words turn the milk sour, as she put it, something Karl Fredrik suspected was a revised version of a fairly sensible French idiom.

Late that same evening, Karl Fredrik lay in bed and did a count-over. Incredible, he thought, no murder in the Oslo Police District for several months. Deaths, yes, but nothing suspicious, only the usual overdoses and traffic accidents. Nothing suspicious. Amazing, Karl Fredrik thought. Almost too good to be true.

*One after the other. What's necessary must be done.
There is a time for everything. A time for fear and a time for revenge.
That time is now.
There's something black at the edge of my vision.
Fluttering like black feathers. Like raven's wings.
That's how I know. That the time has come.
And the first shall be the last.*

Oslo, 10 November 2007

Friday evening had neatly and precisely slid over into Saturday morning. The day came on tiptoe. In Spanish this time of day is called *madrugada*, the same as the Norwegian rock band, Karl Fredrik thought. It looked as if it would be a fine autumn day, one of those clear, sharp days with a smell of chanterelle mushrooms in the air. When the telephone rang, Karl Fredrik was quick. His wife was still asleep.

"Monsen," he almost whispered, while trying to get out of bed without waking her.

"Hello, it's from the station. The overdose team from the emergency service have reported a dead person found in a flat in Schweigaard Street."

"Overdose?"

"Looks like it."

"Hardly something for us." Karl Fredrik tried to start brewing some coffee, with the receiver tucked between his hunched-up shoulder and his ear.

"They know what to do, the people in the overdose team."

"Yes, but..." the police officer sounded a bit uneasy. "It was the head of the overdose team, Slettholm you know, who insisted we should contact you."

"Tell me more."

"Well, it appears that the dead person has got some missing fingers. And Slettholm told me to say it looks as if they had been recently amputated, perhaps just before or at any rate immediately after he died."

"OK, send a team out to secure the crime scene, and phone Sigrid and ask her to meet me there. Oh yes, and call in the crime scene investigators, the photographer and the doctor, of course. When are you off duty?"

"In half an hour's time."

"Right, well make sure you write a fresh report before you leave. And ask Slettholm to phone me on my mobile – he's to get his lot out of there as fast as possible."

"Yes, sir."

"And the victim – any identification?"

"Could be an old acquaintance. Slettholm said the flat belonged to a Palle Olsen."

Palle Olsen, Karl Fredrik thought. Accused of pimping, suspected of being behind various drug deliveries over the past ten years, of having been involved in the porn production industry – and plenty besides. They had managed to get a couple of convictions, but Palle Olsen had 'friends', so he turned up with the most expensive lawyers in town. And practically always got off scot-free. Now someone had made a final conviction, if it was murder they were looking at. His thoughts were interrupted by his mobile ringing. Slettholm was quick.

"Yes, we thought it was best if you lot took a lot at this. At first we thought it was a usual case of an overdose, we got an anonymous tip-off and went with our usual team. An overdose looked likely – the syringe was still in the arm of the victim. We could see there was quite a lot of blood about, thought he had perhaps injured

himself, but as we were lifting him onto the stretcher, we could see there were three fingers missing."

"What hand?"

"Right."

"No possibility this could have occurred earlier during the night?"

"Doesn't look like it. Apart from which, it's pretty difficult to do a fix on your left arm with three fingers of your right hand missing."

"You've got a point there. And the tipper-off? Any clues?"

"No."

"Well, thanks anyway. We'll get in touch with you tomorrow, have got to get the reports and things in order and then we'll want to have a chat with the others on the team too."

"OK, I'm on duty in the afternoon, try around four to five – things are normally a bit quieter by then. My apologies, by the way, but we've made a bit of a mess of the crime scene. We didn't realise it might be one before we'd stomped around a bit," Slettholm concluded.

Karl Fredrik got dressed quickly, in ten minutes he was out of the door with a cup of coffee in one hand and a sandwich in the other.

It was early Saturday morning, with practically no traffic on his way in to the city centre. A few cabs with late-nighters on their way home, a bus or two with people who began work early. Even the prostitutes had gone to bed.

When he turned into Schweigaard Street, he saw that the team that was to secure the scene had already organised things.

Just inside the door, he stopped to put on the blue plastic galoshes the officer had given him with the thin plastic gloves. He went up to the second floor, keeping close to the wall, taking care not to disturb anything. Outside the flat there was another policeman.

"The crime scene has been secured," he reported. "No one has been since Slettholm and the others left."

Someone was coming up the stairs behind him – it was Rødtvedt, head of the crime scene investigators.

"Early bird, Monsen? And what's all this – an overdose victim missing three fingers, I hear?"

"Well, that's what I've been told. I haven't been inside yet, so if you'd like to give me a couple of minutes, that would be fine."

"Of course, I'll nip down and wait for the others." He knew well that Karl Fredrik liked to be alone at the crime scene first for a few minutes.

Karl Fredrik went in, stopping just inside the door. This was something he simply had to experience on his own first of all. Something about the smell, the atmosphere of the place, a feeling about the person who had lived here and those people who had last been here. It was as if what had happened had left behind some invisible traces.

So Karl Fredrik stopped just inside the door. Completely still. There was a slight smell of sweat and a faint smell of cleaning fluid. He might have had a cleaner, he thought. A training bag and some weights had been flung into a corner. There was a long, narrow passage with five doors apart from the front door. One probably led to a bathroom, two to bedrooms, one to the kitchen and one to the living room, Karl Fredrik guessed. A completely typical ground plan for flats in this part of the city. Rented flats that had been tarted up with parquet flooring and glass-fibre wallpaper painted white.

On one of the walls between two doors there was a huge mirror in an old-fashioned frame above a chest of drawers that Karl Fredrik assumed could be called rococo. On top of it there was an array of pools coupons, horse-racing programmes, cigarette packets, lighters, keys, screwdrivers and something that looked like a set of keys for picking locks. As well as parking tickets, chewing gum, a couple of porn

magazines, some balls of silver paper, probably with some narcotics or other, and quite a lot of bars of tablets. The chest of drawers alone – which also looked so completely out of place in a bachelor's flat that it is highly likely to be stolen property – says quite a bit about the person who lives here, Karl Fredrik thought. Nothing else, Nothing that could indicate that a crime had taken place here. He opened a door to what proved to be Palle Olsen's bedroom. A monstrosity of a bed, with a gaudy red quilt, dominated the room. Immediately opposite was a huge TV with a flatscreen and several computers. The side-wall was covered with mirrors, and black curtains had been drawn across the window. Cameras had been mounted in all four corners.

Cautiously, he went across the passage to something that indeed looked as if it had been intended as a bedroom but which more or less looked like a warehouse. TV sets and DVD players in their original packaging were stacked up along the walls; on the floor there were boxes of spirits and hundreds of cartons of cigarettes. There was a bookcase crammed with films – porn it looked like. And, incongruously in such a room, there was a bunk bed.

"Good grief," a sigh escaped Karl Fredrik. "Don't tell me he had kids spending the night here in all of this. There were some boxes under the bed as well. But the crime scene investigators will have to take care of those, he thought.

The bathroom was typical of those in such flats – white tiles, a corner shower, toilet and washbasin with a mirror cabinet. To bet on it being crammed with various drugs and pills would give poor odds. It was relatively clean in there; some towels had been thrown onto the floor and there was an empty bog roll that had rolled in under the washbasin. The cleaner's been here recently, Karl Fredrik thought, perhaps as recently as the previous day. The kitchen showed the same orderliness. There were some glasses on the kitchen unit, an opened packet of crisps and some empty McDonald's packaging strewn about the kitchen table. Horse-racing programmes lay in piles on the window sill, along with the post and some ad magazines.

Apart from that, the kitchen was surprisingly well equipped. A state-of-the-art coffee machine, a microwave, toaster, juice-presser, kitchen aid, tin-opener, egg-boiler and something he thought was probably a deepfryer were all lined up on the kitchen unit. Apart from the microwave, they all looked completely unused.

He went out into the passage again, and stood in front of the half-open door to the living room. There it was. First the smell, then the palpitations, the cold sweat, the nausea. There was this roaring in his ears and Karl Fredrik had to squat down and hold his head between his legs. It's only fear, he said to himself, trying to breathe deeply and calmly. First a deep breath, then breathe out with your stomach, focus on the breathing, nothing else. Karl Fredrik knew that it worked, his breath wasn't galloping away any more, his dizziness grew less and sounds came drifting back. He slowly got up stood still. There was something he couldn't quite get hold of. The smell. A faint smell of iron, from blood, he thought. A hospital smell, probably from the overdose team. And the sour smell of fear.

Then he opened his eyes and stepped into the living room. At first glance, it all looked quite normal. Tidy, if you ignored the stretcher lying diagonally over by the bookcase. The coffee table was a bit askew, and the armchair had been pushed to one side. Otherwise, it looked quite tidy. Good cleaner, Karl Fredrik thought. Rotten luck that she's been here just before it happened. On the other hand, it's probably made life easier for the crime scene investigators. He stood there, looking at the room. A black leather corner settee – a stressless – a brown bookcase with a number of films, some magazines, a DVD player and a huge TV. A cocktail cabinet with built-in lighting in the corner. On an oval coffee table with a marble top there was an ashtray with three cigarette ends, a pack of Prince and a magazine, 'Trot and Gallop' it looked like. On the floor, oak parquet and a patterned carpet.

He approached the person lying on the stretcher. It was Palle Olsen, hardly any doubt about that. The wax-yellow corpse colour had already suffused the skin of his

face which was stretched tautly over his skull, as if somebody had taken hold of his pony-tail and pulled it sharply backwards. His beard, or moustache, or whatever you could call the devil's look so popular among criminals at present, looked as if it had been drawn on the yellow skin with black charcoal. Two thin streaks down from the corners of the mouth and up along the jaw towards the ears. Palle Olsen had met his end clad in a black singlet and patterned tracksuit trousers. His bodybuilder muscles made him look strangely out of proportion there on the stretcher. One of his hands was hanging loosely down towards the floor, as if someone had simply thrown it away. It was his right hand and three fingers were missing – the first, second and ring fingers. A congealed drop of blood was hanging from the small stump left of the first finger. Strange, Karl Fredrik thought, no signs of a struggle, or of a forced entry. Nothing. Just this body, lying all nice and tidy on a stretcher with three amputated fingers. He bent down. The smell of iron was stronger here. There was an irregularity in the symmetrical pattern of the Persian carpet. Blood, he noted. Carefully, so as not to disturb the carpet, he looked under the chair and the table. Nothing. He lay flat on the floor and looked under the settee and across under the ugly bookcase. Nothing. As far as he could see, the amputated fingers had disappeared.

"All right, Rødtvedt, you can start now." Karl Fredrik had collected the team round him out in the passage.

"Ask the photographers to be sure to get some close-ups of the carpet. There's something odd about the bloodstains on it. – Sigrid, get Slettholm here at once, it's important. And take Nils along with you and do the rounds of the neighbours. Whether they've heard anything, seen anything, the usual stuff. And try to find out who his cleaner was."

"Cleaner? How do you know he had a cleaner?"

"The place has been washed recently and I doubt if Palle Olsen is the type to do the weekly cleaning himself. This is definitely a bachelor's pad. So unless the murderer cleaned up afterwards, it's reasonable to assume he had a cleaner. And that she was possibly one of the last persons to have been in the flat."

"You, Ove, stay with Rødtvedt, but keep a step behind him all the time."

"Yep, watch and learn, lad, but for heaven's sake don't put your foot in it," Rødtvedt said in agreement.

"I'm going down to the station," Karl Fredrik said.

His fear from the crime scene had vanished. Organising the detective work was perhaps Karl Fredrik's strongest point. Rational, efficient and good at getting people to pull in the same direction. And to give clear orders, Sigrid thought to herself.

"Phone me as soon as Slettholm's ready, and I'll be there within a few minutes."

In the car on his way to the station, Karl Fredrik thought about what they needed. Definitely a profile of the victim, his record, income, civil status, education, schooling, parents, siblings.

Most of this could be found through public registers. After that, the circles he moved in, his friends, social life. Much of this was already as clear as ink. Porno, gambling, drugs and stolen property – probably some illegal possession of weapons and smuggling as well. If Ove and Nils were prototypes of people from Trøndelag and Nordland, Palle Olsen was the prototype of a 35-year-old criminal.

Back at the station, Karl Fredrik could note with satisfaction that Evert was on duty.

"Evert, good to see you here. You are to lead operations on the Palle Olsen case. Briefing in my office in five minutes. By the way, bring one of the trainees along with you – Hilde Brun – she'll be a good partner for you."

"And where can I find this Hilde Brun?"

"Try the garage. I've got feeling that the super has given the new ones some maintenance work."

Evert muttered a bit to himself, but plodded obediently off to find Hilde Brun. Deep down, he was really chuffed. It counted a lot to be leader of operations on a murder case, even if he was going to have one of these greenhorns hanging around all the time.

The briefing with Evert took little time. They didn't have much to go on as yet, but Evert, with Hilde's help, was to starting working on Palle Olsen's profile.

"I'll be getting back there," Karl Frederik said, "expect Sigrid's got hold of Slettholm by now, and that he'll be turning up soon at Schweigaard Street."

They arrived at almost the same moment.

"Sorry to drag you back here, but I think it's important for you to show the crime scene investigators exactly how you found the body. And there are a couple of things I'm wondering about."

"Well, let's go up then." Slettholm looked tired. He hadn't had much sleep the last twenty-four hours.

"To begin with, who let you into the flat?"

"No one. The door was ajar."

"And you didn't think that was odd?"

"No, it's quite usual – a person gets an overdose, a mate or girlfriend gives us the alarm, opens the door, but has often vanished into thin air by the time we arrive. So no, we didn't think it was odd. The flat, on the other hand, was clean and tidy compared to loads of other places we're called out to, but there are all sorts of drug-addicts, not only those who used to hang out in the streets, as most people seem to believe."

"And there was no reason to doubt it was an overdose?"

"Not before we caught sight of the fingers. Until then, we treated it as an overdose."

They had reached the flat. Karl Fredrik told the crime scene investigators to have a break – the doctor had also arrived, he said.

"This is Slettholm from the overdose team," he explained. "They were the ones who found the victim. I'd like him to tell us where and how the victim was lying when they came, and you try and make a reconstruction later based on what he tells you. It's all yours, Slettholm."

"Well, there were three of us on duty – a nurse and an ambulance driver as well as me. When we got here, the door was ajar and we came into the flat."

"All three of you?"

"No, the driver was waiting outside in the car."

"We need to have the clothes and shoes you were wearing," Rødtvedt broke in.

"OK."

"Go on."

"We came into the living room and saw the victim lying on the floor. He had a syringe in his arm. We checked his pulse, but quickly confirmed that he was dead. It was then we notice that three fingers had been amputated."

"Did you move anything?"

"We may have moved the table a bit to get the stretcher in, but apart from that, no."

"And the syringe, do you know what became of that?"

Slettholm looked confused for a moment.

"It ought to be lying here."

Karl Fredrik looked at Rødtvedt.

"No syringe as far as we've been able to see," he said.

"Strange," Slettholm said.

"Can you check with your colleagues? And one more thing. The amputated fingers – did you see them?"

Slettholm shook his head.

"The fingers aren't in the living room," Rødtvedt answered for him.

"But we'll go through the whole flat with a toothcomb, so they may turn up yet."

Sigrid and Nils had done the rounds of the neighbours. No one had seen anything, no one had heard anything. All of them had been sleeping soundly that night. On the second floor, however, there were a couple who had a few things to say about their neighbour when they heard he was no longer among the living.

"You can pretty much guess," Sigrid said to Karl Fredrik.

"I might just have an idea," he replied. "I think we ought to confer back at the station, at three o'clock. By that time, the crime scene team ought to have been able to have come up with some preliminary results. If we're lucky, the doctor may be able to tell us the cause of death. Evert and Hilde will also have been able to find out a thing or two."

"Are you going to inform the next of kin?"

"Yes, I'd better do that."

Sigrid tapped him lightly on the shoulder. None of them liked this, having to tell the family. Karl Fredrik nearly always did it himself. He felt they ought to show the family respect by hearing it from a superior, not just from a subordinate. In some strange way, it seemed as this was some form of consolation.

"Both parents are dead," Evert said. "But he's got a sister who's married and lives in Sweden. Has lived in Gothenburg for more than 20 years and works for Swedish customs."

"Of all things."

"Yep."

"We can perhaps assume that there was no close contact between the two of them. This time I think I'll do it by phone. It takes too long to travel all the way down to Gothenburg."

His sister had been composed when he rang. They agreed that she should come up the following day to make a formal identification. She'd get her husband to drive her, she said.

"But this is what mother was always afraid of. So in a way we've been expecting something to happen, that something or other would happen to Palle and that the police would come and tell us. I'm glad at least that mother never had to experience that."

But Karl Fredrik understood it all too well. On many occasions he had seen the apprehension in the eyes of the person opening the door to him. The fear that had been lurking there, gnawing away like a hungry rat. Far too many sleepless nights waiting for a son who was out partying, a daughter who had grown wild and uncontrollable and mixing with the wrong type of young men. As a newly qualified officer, he was convinced that most of those who ended up on the slippery slope came from bad homes. But over the years he had found out that this wasn't true at all. Increasingly, it was young people from good homes with well-off, kind parents that went off the rails. It was all due to drugs, those damned narcotics, he thought to himself grimly.

Karl Fredrik remained sitting at his desk after the briefing, with a thin-lipped expression on his face. Then he pulled himself together, pushed his hands through his hair in an attempt to bring it into some sort of order. He knew it was time for a visit to the hairdresser's when his wife tugged at it and called him a hippie. That he was a bit dishevelled and long-haired, which she actually rather liked – it reminded her of the good old days in Paris, she used to say. He phoned home and was

disappointed when nobody answered. But a couple of minutes later, she phoned back.

"I thought it might be you who rang, but I was down in the basement, so I couldn't get to the phone in time. Are you coming home for dinner?"

"No, unfortunately. We're holding a briefing at three o'clock and will be working overtime. I won't be home till late."

"We'll keep something for you, so you can just heat it when you get home. "Tell Sigrid I said hello and remind her to eat properly." I know what she's like," she said with a laugh.

Sigrid came in at that moment and threw herself down into the chair right opposite him.

"I've handed over a report of the interrogation of the neighbours to Evert, but he probably won't be able to get it copied for the briefing."

"Well, you can do it orally for the time being."

"What do you think, what's all this about?"

"I don't like speculating before we've got some facts on the table, but all that with the fingers worries me."

"Hm, yes. You can't help associating it with Mafia methods," Sigrid said.

"Yes, but after all this is Norway, so I don't know how relevant that is."

"No, of course, little innocent Norway. But organised crime has got a foothold here too. Do you want me to ring the old man?"

Yes, do that. I'll go through the archives and see if I can find anything there, whether anything like this has happened in this country before."

Sigrid smiled. She never had as good contact with her father as when they were discussing cases. Robert Douglas had been in the FBI for a number of years and was the direct cause of his daughter's choice of profession. She used the telephone in her office. It was early, but she expected him to be up – her father had always been an early bird. While she heard his phone ringing in Washington, her heart fluttered. It always did that when she was about to talk to her father. Her flutter of expectation, she called it.

"Douglas." It was Liz, her father's new wife who answered.

"Hello, Liz. It's Sigrid here. Could I have a word with my father?" Sigrid still hadn't got used to the fact that her father had remarried and always sounded very formal when it was Liz who took the phone.

"Sigrid, how nice. When are you coming to visit us?" Liz, for her part, was always gushing. Like most Americans, Sigrid thought to herself – perhaps she had been in Norway too long.

"Not quite sure, maybe this summer." She longed for a trip, sometimes missed her father badly, but the fact that her father had got married again and to someone only a few years older than herself... well, she had to admit that she hadn't dealt with it.

"Sigrid, dear." It was her father. He pronounced her name with a clear -D at the end, something that always made Sigrid, when she was a little girl, think of Vikings.

After chatting a bit and exchanging the latest news about the family, Sigrid came to the matter in hand.

"Dad, a case has come up here today that I'd like to discuss a bit with you." She gave a quick account of the few facts they had.

"And," she concluded, "Karl Fredrik and I had roughly the same idea about those fingers. We both thought of the Mafia."

"Yes, it's not nice, you've been around long enough to know a bit about the Mafia and organised crime. It sounds as if someone's sent a message. And this is Mafia language. I seem to recall something similar I knew about once. Yes, not a case I had myself, but it rings a bell." Robert Douglas had flypaper memory, so it could not have been one of his own cases – otherwise he would certainly have remembered it. "I'll check things and call you back. OK?"

"Better with a mail. We're having a briefing soon."

Sigrid hung up with a good feeling that everything was now in order. Her father had been put on the case, so everything would turn out fine. It was like being small again, known that when daddy came home, you were quite safe. Completely irrational, she knew that, but that was always the feeling he gave her. She looked at her watch. Half an hour until the briefing. If she got a move on, she could fit in quarter of an hour on the treadmill and a quick shower.

Oslo, 28 February 2005

A garish yellow-green light is falling over the table by the window, casting long shadows into the gloomy room. The man standing by the table seems too tall for the small room. He takes up a mask lying at the end of it, a mask with a twisted mouth and a long, crooked nose like some grotesque beak. The surface looks like old leather. He picks it up, but lets go of it as if it was red-hot.

Then he makes a quick decision, lifts it up to his face and pulls the tight elastic band over his head. He closes his eyes and turns slowly round. Then he opens them and looks straight at the old mirror hanging on the wall. He takes a deep breath and lets it out with a hissing sound. It isn't him. There's someone else inside. Through the narrow slits for the eyes he stares at the distorted image in the mirror until he feels this other person taking over, catching hold of his soul and filling him completely. He can feel himself growing. Something large and red fills his chest and makes his blood throb right out to his fingertips. He pulls his head down towards his shoulders and raises his arms. His fingers spread out stiffly like raven's feathers. He flaps his arms and turns round.

At the centre of the circle of light a doll is lying. It is not very big, but bigger than the other ones. He searches with his eyes until he finds what he is looking for. The sharp tip of the needle glints as he lifts it up. He brings it swiftly down towards the doll. Without hesitation. The wax-like surface offers no resistance when he thrusts it through the red heart sewn onto the doll's black coat. He finds another needle and drives it right through the doll's eye. His head sings and roars. He feels strong. Invincible.

He quickly rummages through everything on the table. Under a heap of torn-up photos he finds a knife. He weighs it in his palm. Then he slashes the head off. He slashes again and again. Drops of sweat trickle down behind the mask into his eyes. A sound reaches him through the singing roar. Someone is calling his name. He feverishly rips off the mask.

When the woman comes into the room, he is sitting in the darkest corner, his arms squeezed down between his knees. His body is shaking in long shudders. The woman stands at the table for a moment, looking at the carnage. It looks like a battlefield, a grotesque massacre. Then she goes over to him and strokes his head lightly. "Good boy," she says. "Good boy."