

PARADISE LOST

Birger Baug

'I love heroin so much that I give it top spot – ahead of my boy, my lover, everything.
And I so hate it – because it has top spot.'

Informer in Mette Snertingdal's report
to the National Centre for Alcohol and Drug Research

18 February

the sand. He was standing with both hands raised, ready to throw. His hair gleamed in the rays of the sun, high up in the Danish sky. It was obvious he was having a good time. He felt that he'd got me now. The bubbles in his throat finally forced their way up, and he threw back his head in a surge of laughter. But I was able to read his body language when he was about to throw his arms forward and let go of his projectiles, and I flung myself to one side with all my strength at precisely the right moment.

I realised too late what shifting my position meant. Both of us heard the dull smack behind my back. For a brief instant our eyes met, before he turned sharply and I got up onto my legs in double-quick time.

'What the...' we heard behind us, before her unwillingness to swear and the sounds of our own panting breath along with the waves breaking on the shore drowned everything else.

We thought so alike, he and I. Both of us immediately knew what would save us. He was first, and jumped like a long-legged foal over the thick rind of jellyfish that separated the beach from the sea. I was right after him, caught hold of him by the waist, just as his legs became too short for him to keep his balance in the water. With him on my arm, I made sure we had a couple of extra metres left before the deep water began. Only then did we turn round and were able to confirm that our flight had been justified, even though we had been forced to enter into a temporary alliance, despite being mortal enemies.

Like a reincarnation of a Medusa in armour, Marianne stood howling on the far side of the jellyfish. Her breasts bobbed up and down in time with her flailing arms, but even so I could make out a wet patch on one of her sun-dried thighs and realised where Jakob's jellyfish had landed. I was surprised that her usually brief but violent outburst of anger hadn't taken her past the belt of jellyfish long ago.

On the other hand, I now realised that she was not pleased with the way in which we had got away. She slowly turned her back on us – and what a back! what a rear end! – and marched ten metres further away from us. Then she turned round again, and I could feel how Jakob's body was shivering against mine. His eyelids were open just enough for him to be able to glimpse his mother in the hazy field between the lashes. Now she was on her way! With huge strides she set out to give us the punishment we

I've been searching for many weeks now, but there is only one torn-out page, inserted into a volume of Bjørnson's Collected Works, that I've been able to find of my old diaries. I remember the jellyfish war between Jakob and me, but I can't recall if Marianne caught us or not. I would dearly love to have found the rest of the diaries. Now that I have started to write again, I intend to keep really good care of this one.

Vega/Oslo, Thursday 30 July – Friday 31 July 2009

'The bones were completely stripped of flesh, and it took several hours before we were absolutely sure at the local police station that it was a man. We don't exactly have a body turning up around here every day. You can see it from the hips, the pathologist told us. None of us knew then how long it had been lying there...'

Kåre Olsen took a generous swig of Nils Oscars God Lager that he had got hold of over in Sweden the previous week.

'...and we still don't exactly know. Even after a thorough investigation, nobody was able to come any closer than naming a year. Sometime in 2002, or the beginning of 2003.'

It was calm out on the jetty – only the coals of the grill a couple of metres further off flared up with a puff from time to time. The sun was dipping below the horizon, colouring the world yellow. The reflection from the water was so strong that both of them were wearing sunglasses, even though it was past midnight.

Halvor Heming suddenly began to grin. It was slow work. 'Was it really the pathologist who had to tell you what sex it was?'

'Helloooo there! You bloody Easterner...!' Kåre flipped his friend's head with a limp hand. Fortunately it was the hand without a bottle in it. '1,298 people live in this municipality. Or maybe 1,299. I don't know if Anders Hansen at the pub has notified his change of address yet. How many skeletons do you think we've got to practise on?'

Silence. Three new puffs could be heard from the grill before he once more opened his mouth. 'Last year our worst case was a local lad riding a moped with false number plates. He'd taken them from the old Ferguson tractor in his grandad's barn. I had to take his plates on the spot.'

Halvor grinned again, but didn't have time to say anything before Kåre continued: 'When I think about it, we had a car fire as well. And what was probably an illegal dumping of herring in Vegsteinvik and... We never found out who it was.'

Now Kåre started to grin too. Suddenly both of them were roaring with laughter, so that the sound waves struck the dead-calm sea. Even the sheep on the far side of the sound pricked up their ears and turned round, causing their bells to tinkle.

'Knock-knock!' They both fell silent again. Halvor turned towards the half-open window of the fisherman's shack while he tried to blink away the tears in his eyes. The curtains fluttered. From the small chink they could hear a subdued but extremely distinct 'Sshh! The children are asleep!'

They looked at each other while still chuckling away inside. Kåre bent down and picked up another brown bottle, placed it on his left thigh, and flipped off the cap with the handcuffs he always had on his belt, whether he was out on a job or not. Halvor knew that the only thing he really ever used them for was to fasten the dog to when it was on a running line. And as a beer opener.

Halvor was handed a Nils Oscar, and Kåre started to open one more.

'Thanks. Weren't you in the process of telling me something? About a body?'

'Oh yes. As I said, only the skeleton was left. The man was lying on his back in a small heap of stones, and his eyes were two empty sockets gazing up at the sky. When they had removed the remains, even us locals could see that he had a huge hole in the back of his head. Part of his skull had quite simply been bashed in. There were small skeleton fragments everywhere inside where his brains had once been.'

'So, he'd fallen down backwards onto his head in the scree. What's so strange about that? Sounds like an accident to me.'

'That's what we – and the CID – thought for a long time too. It was just that we spent several days searching for the stone that could fit the injury to his head.' Kåre got up, and toddled off unaided to the grill. He took the last two sausages from the kids' pack and put them on the grid. 'Ow! Bloody hell!'. He stuck a finger in his mouth.

'And?'

'Nothing. Absolootly nuffin. We searched the whole vluddy island...' His diction was even worse with a finger in his mouth, if that was possible. '...in the belief that he could have fallen thumwhere elsh and in some miraculush manner wandered over to the shtones where we found 'im.'

Kåre took his finger out again. 'The only conclusion we were finally able to arrive at was that someone had removed the murder weapon.'

'*Murder* weapon?'

'Yes. We naturally defined it as a murder when we couldn't find any object that might have caused his death.'

'How can anyone lie there that long without anyone discovering him?'

'That's not all that strange. The last family left Kavlingen over 30 years ago. Nobody has seen any reason to maintain a summer cottage there, since the island lies too far out in the mouth of the fjord for normal boat people. And shallows with underwater rocks means that fishermen nearly always choose somewhere else to go out to. If it hadn't been for Willy's diesel leak, the skeleton would probably still be lying there.'

'But what on earth was the body doing there?'

'It had lived there.'

'Lived there!?'

'Yes. When we went through the last house, which was in a state of virtual collapse, we discovered that someone must have been living there not so many years ago. We found piles of both opened and unopened tins, and about 20 rubbish sacks stacked against the back wall.'

Halvor was just about to answer when the ringing of a telephone cut through the silence. He didn't feel this had to do with him in any way. It was not until Kåre pointed to the phone and looked at him from the other side of the table that his brain seemed to react.

Slowly and methodically Halvor manoeuvred himself up out of the chair, stretched out his hand and took the phone, just as it was about to vibrate its way off the edge of the roughly hewn plank table. He had caught innumerable escaping sea urchins the same way over the past few days, so even a thick alcoholic fog was unable to prevent him from placing his hand in precisely the right spot.

Seeing the name of Murder Squad Chief Fridtjof Andersen light up on the screen made Chief Inspector and Chief Investigator Heming sober up a bit. But only a tiny bit.

'Heming.'

'Hello. Andersen here. What are you doing right now?'

An irritated bubbling from way down in his stomach wanted to gain access to his mouth. Halvor tried to suppress the feeling, but the bubbles got stuck somewhere around his vocal chords instead. This led to a slight tremor in his voice when he replied.

'Sitting here on the jetty with a beer, looking out across a dead-calm, sun-drenched sea with sheep's bells tinkling away in the far distance. You ought to try it, Andersen.'

'In another life. Sorry to disturb you during your holiday, but you know I wouldn't have called unless it was important, Halvor.'

Halvor noted the use of his first name. That didn't sound promising.

'And what's that?'

'It looks as if we've got our third big case in less than a week. And with half the unit away on holiday, it's not possible to get through half of the things we ought to be doing. You're due back here in four days, Halvor, any chance of you coming in tomorrow? I happen to know there's a plane from Brønnøysund at two twenty. Even with a stopover in Trondheim, you ought to be able to be here around seven.'

Once again, Halvor registered the fluttering of the curtains in the room where Birgitte and their three children were. But he didn't hear any voice this time.

'Sorry. Simply can't be done. I only have two weeks of uninterrupted holiday with my family, and that's something I hadn't thought of ruining. We leave for home on Sunday, and I'll be back at work on Monday morning. End of story.'

'Halvor, you know I wouldn't have done this if I'd had other possibilities. It was you and Kristine who were on the list – and I've tried to get hold of her all evening. She simply doesn't answer.'

Great strategy on Kristine's part. Halvor noticed that he once again felt a little respect for the informal second-in-command of his investigating team. But Kristine was single, and it ought to be a lot easier for her in spite of everything.

'Sorry, Andersen. The answer's no.' He pressed the red button. As expected, the phone rang again after a few seconds. Halvor was seized by a violent anger, and a warning vein began to pulse at his temple. He grabbed the phone, pressed the button, and without bothering to place the phone to his ear, roared:

'NO, DAMMIT!'

He then got up on shaky legs, drew back his arm with the mobile phone, and threw. The plop! when the phone hit the water was reminiscent of the impact of a 50-gramme stickleback landing. Halvor hoped that Andersen could hear that sound.

He flopped down into the rickety wooden chair that was marked by many year's combat with the intractable elements of the mouth of the fjord, and turned to face his friend. The good atmosphere was gone. Kåre Olsen noticed that too. He emptied the last bottle, got up and staggered round the fisherman's shack to his bike, which was leaning against the back wall. Halvor followed him.

'Don't get arrested for reckless biking, then.'

'That would make it the case of the year here on Vega,' Kåre said.

Neither of them laughed. The pleasant feeling of being intoxicated and of close friendship had disappeared. Halvor wished his friend goodnight, and decided not to think about the chucked-away phone until the following day.'

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Inspector Kristine Holm couldn't understand how it could get so dark in late-July, only a month after they had celebrated the longest day of the year. But the combination of midnight, thunder clouds heavy with rain, a steaming forest floor and huge spruce trees made Sognsvann – or what she hoped at any rate was still Sognsvann – an inferno of darkness.

She stumbled along among the enormous exposed roots, while trying to keep the gurgle of the water to her left. This was her only point of reference. If she managed to keep roughly the same distance to the water all the time, sooner or later she must come to the jetty. And there she would be able to refind her directions.

It was a while since she had heard them now. Even so, she didn't dare switch on her small Megalite torch. In this darkness even the glow of a cigarette could be seen at a distance.

The tree-stump was slimy with age and too much moisture. Kristine sat down even so, and tried to get her breath back. Her trainers were wet through, and it felt as if the sodden skin took up twice as much space as it had done in the shoe shop.

She listened. Not a sound, except for the gurgling of the water and some owl or other in the distance. She took out the Megalite torch, taking care to hold it right down to the ground before switching it on and using the other hand to screen off the slim ray of light.

Her right ankle didn't look all that good. The wound went from just under the lump she now knew, after hours with the pathologist, was called the navicular bone almost right down to the sole of the foot. The razor-sharp branch had made a deep gash in the flesh. Blood had seeped into the white fabric of the shoe almost round the entire foot, so now it looked as if she was wearing one dirty grey and one red shoe.

She took off her light summer jacket and peeled off the top she had on underneath. She tore it along the seams and wrapped it as best she could round her foot, outside the shoe. She had no idea if this would help or not. For the first time she began to fear the pain would prevent her from getting all the way round the edge of the water and to where there were other people.

At the same time, it was her best chance. The alternative was to sit still and wait until it grew lighter. With an air temperature of only 10–12°C this was not something that appealed to her.

Instead she decided to believe that her pursuers had given up, and she got up on shaky legs. Placed one foot in front of the other, and slowly stumbled along again. A root sticking slightly up out of the ground could make her fall over again. She didn't know how much longer she would have the strength to get up.

How had she actually ended up here, in the forest that marked the beginning of Nordmarka? It had all started in an idiotic way. She was deeply and fervently ashamed – yes, so ashamed of herself that she had thought for a moment of not handing in a report when she got back to the police station. If she ever got back at all. The colossal building on Grønland in Oslo felt even further off than the mobile phone in the Corsa at the parking place, if that was possible.

She had, of course, put the idea out of her head. Her personal honour would have to make way for the possibility of teaching those three idiots a lesson. But she wasn't looking forward to making a statement.

The sound of something moving close by caused her to stop dead. Suddenly something with fur streaked past, close enough for her to be able to feel the hairs against her skin. Was it a fox? A badger? She had heard of how badgers could attack human beings, and quickly turned in the direction the animal had taken. Took a cautious backward step while desperately trying to make anything out in the utter darkness.

The hole in the ground came as a complete surprise. It wasn't deep, but more than deep enough for exhausted Kristine to fall backwards. Don't let it be a sheer drop, she thought. But instead of a long fall into nothingness, she landed on top of something large and quite soft. She turned round and noticed that something was moving under her arm.

Vega/Oslo, Friday 31 July 2009

Halvor and Ole both had high hopes of Holmvatn. That his son had got up of his own free will at 5.30am to cycle the eight kilometres to a stretch of water in order to fish for trout was something that made Halvor proud.

He was pretty proud of himself too, come to that. Especially because Birgitte had laughed out loud when he stated that he was going to have both Kåre pay him a visit and to go off on an angling trip at the crack of dawn the following day. That he was alive at all after having drunk himself to bed four hours earlier was a feat in itself. Even if it meant that he was now hopelessly behind Ole. No matter how hard he tried, he was unable to catch up with the lad. He hoped that his body would remember how it was meant to function before they arrived.

Despite his twinges of remorse, Halvor noted that he felt profoundly content when he looked at the competitive boy's back in front of him. He abandoned the idea of trying to catch him up and instead enjoyed the beautiful Vega scenery of the county that marked the beginning of the northernmost part of Norway. Slightly on their right lay the dark-blue sea, dotted with green, undulating small islands. On their left lay plains covered with heather and cloudberry, with the odd birch or pine tree. And further off: Vegafjella mountain, which with its 700 metres or so had been a landmark and guide for fishermen for many generations. In Norway it was scarcely possible to get further away from Oslo yet still have people around you.

It was this experience his superior in the Violent Crime Unit wanted to deprive him of. He felt a whiff of irritation from the previous evening, a feeling he decided to hold on to for a little while. It could hardly be life-threatening to be without a mobile phone for a day or two.

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Two 250-gramme trout in three hours wasn't exactly what they had been dreaming of in waters where the average size was said to be almost a kilo. It was just past nine o'clock, and the sun was already high in the sky above Holmvatn, but with the exception of swarms of midges and the occasional flock of rising geese, the solitude and silence were total.

Ole had declared he intended to change to worm-bait and find his own small cove. His father's warnings that the resistance of the classic red-and-white polystyrene float would frighten off the large trout from biting properly were completely lost on him. Halvor decided to let the lad find things out for himself, and just gave him a goodbye wave when his son pointed to a knoll a couple of hundred metres away. Just below the knoll there was a small cove with a metre-wide shelf of rock a few centimetres above the surface of the water – a perfect place both to sit and to land a big catch.

Halvor himself had taken a short break and lain down on his back in the surprisingly dry heather, using his backpack as a support. The great challenge now was to lift the thermos mug to his lips without spilling. When it was empty, he sat up. He decided to inspect Ole's worm-bait angling and strolled off in the direction of the knoll. He enjoyed the sight of yet another flock of geese taking off from the far side of the water and thought to himself that Vega's hunters probably had a lot to look forward to in a couple of weeks' time.

He was now so close to the knoll that he could see beneath him where the ledge began and a fishing rod that stuck half-way out over the surface of the water. A couple of metres out a float was bobbing in the small ripples of the waves. He looked down at the ledge below him. He could see a foot rocking up and down at quite a fast rate, as if his son was listening to his Ipod. Halvor took another step forwards, and suddenly realised what it was: the lad had pulled his trousers down over his thighs, and above the left one was the shadow of something moving fast and regularly. It looked like ... a hand.

Halvor quickly took a couple of steps backwards. He didn't know whether to laugh or to cry. His son, less than 12 years old! When had he himself ...? Good god! His smile stopped when he heard a loud scraping sound. Rather like when a fishing rod is pulled over a ledge of rock.

As in a trance, Halvor fixed his eyes on the float. It was no longer there. What the hell! He took a couple of steps forwards again, just in time to see rod and reel disappear below the surface. Next to it, Ole's foot had increased its rocking, and his father realised that he couldn't intrude on what was taking place on the ledge of rock.

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It was half-past nine, and Inspector Kristine Holm was sitting waiting in the office of the Murder Squad Chief and Superintendent at the Violent Crime Unit, Fridtjof Andersen. She had made a statement for an hour and a half, and felt in desperate need of sleep. All she had been able to snatch had been a couple of hours on the old settee that Halvor had managed in some mysterious way to manoeuvre into his cramped office. She feared that Andersen wouldn't let her slip off home to her bed either for quite some time.

She went through the night's events in her mind. That she had stumbled over an ant-hill had had one positive side-effect. The crawling ants and the adrenalin shock had helped her ignore the pain in her leg, so that she had managed to cover the few hundred metres still left to the jetty. And from there she had stolen between the trees until she was quite sure that the car with the three men had gone. Strangely enough, they hadn't damaged her Corsa, and the mobile phone was still under the front seat. That she had later found an ant – dead, fortunately – in her underwear was, despite everything, a small price to pay for the small creatures having helped her to safety.

The darkness, silence and the general feeling of insecurity had nevertheless prompted her to drive down to the Shell station near Ullevål stadium before phoning. From that point on, the police machinery had swung into action, and a search for the car of the three men had been going on for several hours already. Without any result as yet – as far as she knew. She had made it to the emergency medical service on her own and had four stitches put in her foot.

She wasn't looking forward to Andersen's arrival. He had had a copy of her report in his hand when he asked her to give her five minutes, and she presumed he was now reading it somewhere or other. In other words, her own personal future as a chief investigator would be in ruins right now. What would the superintendent think of one of his candidates having displayed such a lack of self-control that she had given the finger not just once but twice to three young men in a car? It was difficult to arrive at a clearer case of classic provocation. It was no help that she had been provoked first. According to criminal law it was admittedly the three of them who would be made responsible, but that was not the point here. A police officer must be able to

display a high degree of self-control she had repeatedly been told at the Police Academy...

Kristine still had an irritated grimace on her face when she heard a distinct click. The door-handle went down, and Andersen strode into the room. Nobody would ever guess he only had a couple of months left before retirement. He still had her five sheets of paper in his hand, but strangely enough he gave her a friendly smile as he sat down in his worn leather chair.

'You've had a long night, Kristine, and you need some sleep. I won't keep you long.'

His words had a strangely exhilarating effect on Kristine, rather like a cup of scalding hot coffee. He continued, returning to his habitual use of people's surnames:

'You didn't perhaps write everything in this report with the same degree of pride, but the second half you've no need to be ashamed of, Holm. It is that part I intend to deal with right now. The other part we can save to some other time next week. Before then, though, you can perhaps make sure you've had a look in the photo archives, and hand in a report on what you were exposed to.'

Kristine let the words sink in, glad not to have to think about her own stupidities right now. The report would only be a matter of principle was the conclusion she had arrived at. If they ever found the three of them, it would – despite her status – be a case of three against one. But she didn't believe in the photo archives, as she had hardly glimpsed anything else than the eye region of the offenders.

Andersen didn't say anything for a while, and Kristine wondered what he really wanted. Then a light began to dawn. What was it he had said? That they could talk about 'the other part' next week. But then she was still on holiday! She was just about to open her mouth when Andersen got in first.

'You've already been away for a couple of weeks, Holm, so perhaps you don't know. But the fact is that we are frantically busy here at the moment. In the middle of our summer manning we've had ...' He started to count on his fingers. '... The Vinderen murder, two cases of knife stabbings and an unexplained drowning at Katten. Furthermore – and this is the worst of it all – Narco has dumped a bloody awful case on us, one we've hardly begun to glimpse the scope of. At the moment, I've got no one to look into it, Kristine.'

'I'm off to Florence with my mother. The plane leaves on Sunday,' The words were softer than she had intended.

'If you cancel that trip, I can promise you full coverage of a new one, a new week's holiday leave and, in addition, a week's time off later this autumn. What do you say, Kristine?'

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His instinct called for action. Halvor tore off his jacket and at the same time started to run back to the small knoll two metres above the surface of the water. As he prepared to jump, he could still just make out the rod on its way down into the depths. He also just had time to think of the shock Ole would get at the splash that would inevitably come. But now it was too late.

The impact was hard and the water ice-cold. Halvor hoped that he had managed to gauge the jump roughly over the fishing rod, and that the resulting waves wouldn't push it too far out. He waved his arms, couldn't see anything, everything around him was black. He did a somersault in the water and started to swim

downwards. There! He felt something. It had to be the rod. He fumbled for the grip, turned and pushed his body in the direction of the light above him.

Good god! The fish was still on the hook. It was tugging away like mad, and Halvor wondered for a brief moment which of them would be the stronger in what was first and foremost not his element. As things began to swim before his eyes, he noticed something following him slowly from behind. But it was so heavy that Halvor doubted if he would make it to the surface with the rod before he ran out of air.

Now, however, he could just make out what had to be Ole directly above him. His trousers seemed to be on again, and the boy was leaning out over the water and looking down. Halvor used his last ounces of strength to push the rod as far upwards as he could. His son grasped it with both hands. The boy's father was in desperate need of air when he broke the surface, but managed even so to gasp: 'Up with the tip!' Then his lungs took over completely, and his chest went in and out like a pair of bellows.

Halvor clung to the side of the ledge of rock while Ole played the fish. It was not until he began to feel the cold that he did his best to come up out of the water. It took him a couple of minutes to ease his right leg over the edge. Ole was completely taken up with letting out and pulling in the line and was totally oblivious to what was taking place next to him. Finally Halvor managed to heave the rest of his body up. He huddled trembling in the small patch of sunlight at the farthest end of the ledge while enjoying the sight of his son. He could now see the float below the surface. It was moving from side to side, but not all that fast any longer. Halvor got the landing net from Ole's fishing bag ready and leant out over the edge. Soon he could see an enormous but visibly exhausted trout come into view. It proved surprisingly easy to get the net round it, although swinging the net in over the land was quite a bit harder.

Ole used his own knife to kill the trout. The boy was unable to take his eyes of almost three kilos of pure happiness. Halvor, for his part, had completely lost his hangover.

His son beamed at him: 'And I did it with this float, dad!'

On the way back, Halvor was pleased with every rise in the ground that meant he had to use his strength. The longest incline warmed him up thoroughly, and slowly but surely he could feel his clothes drying out. Ole, on the other hand, was indifferent to his state. Instead, he was whistling so tunefully that he could have tried to reach the final of 'Norwegian talents'. It could be that the large trout had released a latent musical talent that must at any rate have come from his mother's side. But the boy ought to change to something a bit less obvious than 'We are the champions' when they reached the gravel in front of the fisherman's shack, otherwise the moment of surprise would be lost.

'Dad?!'

'Yes?'

'How big can trout get?'

'I think you were close to the limit today, for freshwater trout in Norway, at any rate.'

He had to grin. The slight exaggeration could hardly do much damage. There was a lot going inside Ole's head at present apart from that. Halvor had tried to talk to him a couple of times already, without being heard. And it would clearly get worse. He remembered only too well how distant he himself had been after having discovered trout – and girls.

Birgitte was standing in the yard at the back of the fisherman's shack when they jolted in on their bikes. The holiday smile on her face gave Halvor the strong

feeling of happiness back he had had a little earlier. Maybe she's got a bit older, but I certainly can't see it, he thought.

'What have you got in the bag,' Birgitte gravely asked the young lad, who had leapt off his bike before it had even stopped.

'You can see for yourself,' Ole answered, pretending to be indifferent.

While his wife and oldest son got through the admiring exclamations alternating with detailed fish accounts, Halvor turned in the direction of the jetty. At any moment he expected to hear quick thuds on the wooden terrace that was laid out from the side of the fisherman's shack facing the sea. And right he was: as soon as six-year-old Hans and nine-year-old Hanne had managed to take their temporary leave of 15-20 small crabs, 3 sea urchins, various shells and a 15-centimetre-long coalfish in a bowl. They were hardly able to stay on their legs as they rounded the corner to throw themselves round Halvor's neck.

'Are we off now?' Hanne asked.

'Yes, we are,' Halvor said with a smile, 'just give me five minutes to unload the gear.'

The plan for the rest of the day had been made a long time ago. If they came back with a catch, Ole and Birgitte would prepare the trout for a late lunch, while Halvor, Hanne and Hans were out in the 14-footer to put out the crab pots for the last time this holiday. And they had got hold of a babysitter for the evening. He and Birgitte were going to dine at Vega seaside hotel – which housed Helgeland's finest gourmet restaurant.

The expected remorse had still not materialised. To drive all the way to Brønnøysund to buy a new mobile phone seemed to be of no present interest whatsoever. Unlike the need to change into completely dry clothes.

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Kristine had got Andersen to promise her overtime compensation for each and every hour during the next week. For her part, she had accepted going back to work from the very next day – a Saturday – as she had to attend a briefing session with Narco.

She wasn't looking forward to talking with her mother. Admittedly she was an OAP and ought to be able to adapt fairly easily, but Kristine had a strong premonition that things wouldn't be that simple.

The door shut behind her. The linoleum on the floor and the peeling walls in the corridor didn't improve her mood. How much flat renovation would she actually get for her overtime pay over the coming week? But she knew that she ought to be praising her lucky stars. As a single policewoman it was a miracle that she was able to live in her own flat at Majorstua, considering the present state of the property market. A trip to Florence would have been completely out of the question if her mother hadn't paid for her. And now she had ruined the first holiday trip mother and daughter were to have together on their own.

Kristine flung herself down on the settee, placed her legs on the three empty beer crates that made up her living room table, and reached out for the cordless phone. It took an unusually long time for her to press the eight digits she knew so well.

She was able to talk unhindered for about 17 seconds before her mother's voice went into falsetto:

'I knew it! I knew it!'

Then a hard, plastic-like thump, and ... silence. Kristine sat there for a moment with the phone in her hand before deciding not to think about anything else except

sleep. She couldn't cope with anything more. Everything would get better if only she could sleep for a bit.

23 March

I saw him. Well, I'm almost certain I saw him at any rate. Admittedly I didn't recognise the cap, jacket or trousers, but according to what I've heard you can get plenty of fine new stuff from the Church City Mission nowadays.

It's over a year since last time. Then it was January, and he was lying ice-cold and white under an elm tree in Slottsparken. It was quite by chance that I caught sight of him. If I hadn't been showered with snow in the back of my neck precisely there, and turned round to brush it away, I don't know how things would have turned out. Anyway – I hit him three times, quite hard the final time, but he didn't raise an eyelid, even though he gasped. Then I rang. When they came, they drove the car in right close (I didn't know that was allowed in Slottsparken!), while stood there pretending to be watching the changing of the guard in front of the Palace. There in the courtyard they don't raise eyelid all that much, either.

It must have turned out all right. Judging from the speed with which he ran out of the shop today, it doesn't look as if he suffered any permanent physical damage. The two Securitas guards who looked after him up Karl Johan street didn't look as if they were particularly keen in taking up the chase. They turned round, at any rate, and went in again when he ran diagonally across Dronningens gate towards Kirkeristen. Against a red light, of course, as if that should come as a shock.

I was only there quite by chance. In actual fact, I was on my way to pay a personal visit to Jensen & Co (although I don't know what the Co stands for – I've never seen anyone else there). I've phoned three times and send three mails. In spite of this, I haven't seen a single receipt from Jensen in almost four months. And that doesn't make keeping accounts any easier.

It's almost as difficult as keeping account of Jakob.

17 May

I've got this strange feeling again. As if I'm sitting in a cage and people are looking at me from the outside – and don't quite know what to believe.

Perhaps it has to do with the fact I went into town today to fetch something I'd forgotten at the office. I was well aware it was reckless on Norway's National Day to go out at all, but I hadn't thought I would spend 20 minutes from the National Theatre underground station to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. To get right to my place of work took a further ten minutes. Fortunately I was wearing my blue work suit, so I didn't stand out all that much.

I don't know what came over me, but suddenly I was standing in front of a group of celebrating school leavers, asking for breakfast party cards. They looked at me as if I had a screw loose, but fortunately I recovered fast enough to say that it was for my son.

'Your grandson, you mean,' one of the louts said, gaining applause from the others. He was incredibly tall and thin, with his red student's cap on one side. On the peak it said: 'Father, Son and Holy Ghost'. Whatever he might think the connection was between himself and the Holy Trinity.

'Yes, of course,' I said, and tapped my forehead. That convinced them, and five tickets were ceremoniously – well, as ceremoniously as budding students are able to behave nowadays – handed over to me. I don't intend to repeat what was written on them.

On re-reading this, I realise that the strange feeling definitely has a connection to that episode.

No new observations since last time, by the way. Perhaps not that dangerous, either. I don't think Jakob would have got very much out of the tickets.

2 June

Only three days to go before the big day. I've already bought the flower – I simply couldn't wait. Anyway, it's outside, waiting in a fine pot, so it'll probably survive. It's a peace lily that cost 200 kroner, but it's very handsome. Perhaps I'll buy a lovely bouquet of cut roses with bridal veil as well, on the actual day.

Right now I'm sitting at my desk looking at the picture from the Coliseum. Marianne is wearing the white dress with lacing at the waist, and has taken up a classical Roman position on a broken-off column. She has hidden both her arms behind her back, so that it looks as if they are cut off at the elbows, just like a statue that had been dug up after a couple of thousand years. It's a good thing, come to that, that I wasn't the one given the task of resembling a statue, considering all the time the Roman Catholic church has spent removing most of the private parts of men's statues. Although I don't think Marianne would actually have insisted on such a high degree of realism.

She looks quite hot, but then it was a historically hot summer in Rome that year. The light afternoon breeze has blown three small locks of hair down in front of her face, and she is looking roguishly at the photographer. Me, in other words.

That things should turn out as they did with us... Ah, well, we'll have to see what it feels like when I get on my knees to her in three days' time.

Oslo, Friday 31 July 2009

Just as Kristine, fully dressed, was laying her head on the pillow and closing her eyes, her mobile phone rang. She took it up out of her trousers to reject the conversation, but her pocket was narrow and the connection already made by the time she had fished it out. In resignation, she put the phone to her ear.

'Yes?'

'Kristine Holm?'

'Yes.'

'I think I've got something interesting for you.'

'What do you mean? Who are you?'

'Who I am doesn't matter. The point is I have a hot tip for you about the murder on Vinderen.'

'What?'

'I can't tell you over the phone. I want something in return. You can meet me at the Monolith at three o'clock – don't take anyone else with you. I know what you look like.'

'The tip would look a lot better if I knew who you were.'

'Just be there.'

Kristine looked at the time. A quarter past eleven. That gave her three hours' sleep. It would have to do. Unknown sources and unregistered numbers – it wasn't the first time she had experienced it, and he'd been honest and said he wanted something in return. Furthermore, it would be difficult to find a more public place than the Monolith, so there was no reason to be nervous.

But there *had* been something familiar about that voice ...

When she arrived at the answer a couple of minutes later, she could just as well forget the idea of sleep. Instead, she sat up and picked up the phone. She tried the same number for almost half an hour before giving up. When she was continually put through to the ansaphone it was obvious that Halvor had turned off his phone deliberately. All due credit to him for wanting to have his last three days on holiday in peace. She herself would never have dared switch off her phone. That bloody sense of duty that women have, she thought.

The alternative was phone Andersen without asking for Halvor's advice in advance. Since she would dearly like to lead an investigation team one day in the future, it was more difficult for her to phone the assistant chief of police than it was for Halvor, who already had a senior position. In addition, Andersen was one of the very few in the police service who had clearly given her the impression that her sex counted against her. Kristine felt that she had managed even so to convince the man of her qualities, and that as a result she could be well placed for the next vacant group leader position. Which, in all probability, would crop up before Andersen's retirement. No one expected Rasmussen to come back full time after half a year away, diagnosed as being burnt out.

She sighed and punched his number.

'Andersen.'

'Kristine Holm here.'

'Shouldn't you be asleep?'

'No. I've just received a telephone call that made sleep a bit difficult. It was a bloke who said he had a hot tip in connection with the Vinderen murder.'

'That could be interesting. We're not exactly flush when it comes to leads on that case, to put it mildly. But why are you phoning me – I thought you knew it was Berg who was in charge of that case?'

She did know that, but it was here that she came to the difficult part.

'The problem is that I don't think he's a real source. He wanted to meet me alone at the Frogner Park at three this afternoon. But his voice ... well ... reminded me strongly of the voice of one of the three from last night.'

There was silence at the other end for a while. Then, slowly, came the question: 'And you're quite sure about that? It's not fear from last night that is making you hear hallucinations?' Andersen chuckled a bit at his own formulation, before he added indulgently: 'I know that you're one of those who can keep a cool head, Holm, but it's only natural to be a bit affected by such an experience.'

Kristine tried to keep calm. Would he have asked a man that question? But it wouldn't help things if she started to raise her voice.

'I'm 95 per cent sure.'

'But how has he got hold of your name, in that case? You didn't state it, did you?'

'No, I only showed by police ID at a distance. In the dark they could hardly have seen anything else than "police". But if they noted the car number, I'm registered in the motor vehicle register like everybody else.'

'What do you think we should do, then?'

Kristine didn't feel the conversation was going the way it ought to have been. She noticed that her voice sounded more uncertain when she continued: 'I ought to have had a team with me that could check out the area before I arrived, and also to monitor the actual meeting. Very discreetly, of course.'

A new Andersen pause. Then it sounded as if he was launching himself: 'It's quite possible you're right, Kristine, but I don't really see how we can earmark resources for that right now. You know how tight things are. If it is the man from last night, we don't know what he's thought of doing when he sees you – and you say yourself you can hardly recognise him. What's more, an impartial police authority ought perhaps to have had this case, since you are the offended party. It won't be easy to go by the book here.'

'Is that what you think?' Kristine was unable to conceal her amazement. 'Here we are with the chance of directly apprehending someone for serious threats to a public official – and you feel we should just back out?'

'Yes, you didn't hear hallucinations this time, at any rate. That's what I said.'

Kristine didn't think, just pressed the red button. Dammit! That was her chance of getting back a bit after what she had experienced the previous night gone up in smoke. And her group leader job too, probably, when she broke off the conversation with Andersen.

Plan B. Did she have a plan B?

*

Inspector and group colleague Hans Petter Haneborg answered as he habitually did at the first ring. How he managed that when he was practically always on the phone – that was how it felt, at any rate, when you shared an office with him – was a mystery to Kristine.

'Feel like doing me a favour?'

'Always, you know that.' She did know that. A couple of times he had done a her some big private favours he ought not to have done as well, but she had the feeling that he didn't see it that way himself. He went on: 'What's it about this time?'

'First I've just got to know if you can help me around three o'clock this afternoon?'

'Can do. I start my holiday today. As soon as I've done a bit of paperwork, I was thinking of leaving a couple of hours early. Three ought to be OK.'

'Hasn't Andersen tried to get you to postpone your holiday, then?'

'Oh yes. He asked me a couple of days ago, but I when I said I was going to travel to Cyprus with a friend on Sunday, he relented.'

'Just like that?'

'Well, I haven't heard anything from him at any rate. Why?'

Bloody hell. Bloody hell!

'You still there, Kristine?'

She pulled herself together. 'Yes, I'm still here.' Then she told him about the mysterious telephone call, and how the sneaking feeling kept getting stronger that this was a trap. An attractive characteristic of her blond-haired well-built colleague was that he very rarely hid what he actually felt, and now he dished up a long list of less complimentary characteristics that Andersen had. Finally it was easy for Kristine to get to what her real reason for phoning was.

They agreed that Hans Petter was to start his private detective work at the Monolith half an hour before the agreed time. The plan was for him to pretend to be an ordinary tourist, with a camera on his stomach during the actual meeting.

'You realise there ought to be a lot more than just the two of us?'

'Of course I do,' Kristine said slightly irritated. 'But I refuse to believe that anyone wants to kill me in broad daylight in one of the most public spots in Oslo. He probably wants me to follow him somewhere.'

'Yes, but only if he's sure you won't recognise him.'

'He feels sure about that. I've seldom seen a hoodie jacket that concealed the face better.'

'In other words, you've nothing to go on except the voice?'

'Unless he should turn up in the same clothes as last time, but I seriously doubt that.' She paused for a moment. 'Is this plan OK with you?'

Hans Petter had clearly swept aside all doubts and his answer came immediately: 'Sure it is! No one is ever going to threaten one of my mates and get away with it.'

One of his. Kristine chewed over his choice of words. She arrived at the conclusion that she felt it was fine by her right now.

*

She had never believed that she would need it for real. Kristine had received the Kevlar jacket that lay in a box at the back of the cupboard as a joke from her friends when she had celebrated getting a place at the Police Academy. She had only been on live-ammunition assignments twice before, and then they had been supplied with equipment before leaving the station. Once she had thought about wearing it in a private connection, and another time after tens of threats in connection with the case against the money centre bank on Løren. But decided not to.

Things were different this time. Even if Andersen had apparently not believed her, she had a strong feeling that this was a potentially dangerous assignment. She knew that she ought not to do anything like this without the police apparatus being

mobilised. It was either an official assignment, or she didn't go on it. It ought to be that simple. On the other hand, she knew that a number of her colleagues were always having meetings with sources. No matter whether it was during work or their free time, with or without back-up, so there was a sliding scale here. She could defend it as such.

She read the jacket instructions for the first time. It appeared to be a classic model, with short sleeves – the type that was almost part of the uniform of American police series. It had been developed in close cooperation with Israeli defence, which presumably vouched for its high quality. According to the instructions, it guaranteed safety level III-A, enough to stop ricochets and shots from a 9mm Magnum. The jacket could further be strengthened with ceramic plates front and back, which this jacket didn't feel as if it had been. Despite this, if she should be exposed to more powerful hand weapons, such as a 7.62 Tokarev for example, which there were some of in the East European Oslo environments, the jacket would considerably reduce its destructive force. She hoped.

She chose a thin T-shirt under the jacket and a wide cotton top outside it. She then studied herself critically in the bathroom mirror. She came to the conclusion that the fastening straps on the jacket would possibly be visible if the person looking had a strong suspicion she was wearing one. But when she also put on her black favourite suit jacket on top of everything else, all signs of extra protection were gone. She looked a bit bulkier than usual – a feeling she would be well able to live with for a few hours. She chose low tennis shoes on her feet, which went just below the four stitches that had been sewn. The wound had practically stopped aching.

To be on the safe side, she tried Halvor's number one more time, but still only got the ansaphone. All right then, she and Hans Petter would have to take care of things themselves.

*

Five minutes after a text message from Hans Petter asking her if she was ready, she went down the staircase from the fourth floor. It was 14.27 and her colleague was already in position close to the Monolith. If anything or anyone looked threatening, she felt reassured that he would notice it and warn her.

Once outside in Hammerstad street she noticed that the humidity from the previous night still lingered. Fortunately, it was not frightfully hot, otherwise she would have been wearing far too much clothing. As it was, she would probably be seen as a career woman after a good business lunch on her way home from her air-conditioned office – not a policewoman wearing a bullet-proof jacket made in Israel.

She followed Hammerstad street in the direction of Kirkeveien. There was hardly a person in sight, but on the other hand she knew that there were swarms of people in the parallel street Bogstadsveien 150 metres away. People finished work early on Friday afternoons, and many made use of this to stop off for a Friday beer or window-shop for a bit in Norway's prime shopping street. For her part – and the mortgage's – she was glad that there was a Fretex shop not far from where she lived. She had just passed Schultz' street when she discovered that a man had rounded the corner from Sorgenfri street and was approaching her fast in the shadow of the huge oak trees 50 metres ahead. The man was wearing a hoodie jacket – which didn't have any positive associations for her – but was quite a bit more powerfully built than most skateboarders. Kristine was even more unhappy that he had pulled the hood well down over his head. A sudden impulse made her stop up and look behind her.

Another man was coming towards her over the pedestrian crossing in Schultz' street, he too wearing a large jacket with a hood pulled down.

When both of them began to run towards her from two sides, Kristine realised what was happening. A fraction of a second later, she realised that she was trapped on the pavement, with a large town block on the one side, and a huge, illegally parked lorry on the other.

The 9.5 hp engine chugged out between the small, green islands of the Vega skerries. Halvor knew exactly where he was to put the helm over to starboard to come to the place where the grocer recommended putting out crab pots. He had taken less to starboard, however, than he had been instructed, for even though he had made a good catch, he had a dawning suspicion that tourists were only ever told about the next-best place.

Which – naturally enough – was quite understandable. But it didn't prevent him from looking for the very best spot for himself. The last time they had been out to take up pots, Hanne had discovered some orange buoys a couple of hundred metres further out. In her father's head that meant there had to be a shallow there, and shallows normally meant a catch. So it was there they were heading for to put out the first pot.

Despite only being five and nine years old, Hans and Hanne had developed an impressive technique when it came to heaving out crab pots. They sat one separate mid-thwarts and counted while swinging the heavy wooden box back and forth. Precisely on the count of 'three' they let go at the same time; there was a splash after a further second, and then both of them followed the swift descent of the pot to the seabed. For a moment, Halvor was afraid the rope wouldn't be long enough, but just as the buoy disappeared from the gunnel, the pot reached the bottom and they could breathe a sigh of relief.

The two children sat down again contentedly, waiting for their father to start the engine again. But as Halvor got up, Hans exclaimed in astonishment:

'Dad! What's that out there?'

The boy pointed about 20 metres away. There was a large sticky mass of seaweed bobbing up and down on the surface of the water. But in the middle of it Halvor could see something else, a fairly large field of light-blue that differed considerably in colour from the heavy, blue-green of the sea.

Both the children sat eagerly in the bows while Halvor used the oars to manoeuvre them closer. The policeman in him made him think of a body, but he couldn't see any sign of limbs. So he felt it was safe to pass the boat hook over to the children.

'It looks like a jacket!' Hanne leant so far out that she almost tipped over the gunnel. Suddenly, though, she was sitting up again, and on the end of the boat hook something was dangling that really did look like a jacket. Hans had made a wry face, which meant that he wanted to get hold of it first, but fortunately he was far too curious to start a howling session. Both children leant out over the sodden, light-blue object to be investigated. Halvor pulled in the oars, and turned round.

There could no doubt that it was a quilted anorak. Halvor could see that it had been in the water for quite some time. The jacket was slimy, partly green and full of small rents and holes. Here and there the lining had completely disappeared. Both the side pockets were ruined, but when Halvor pulled out the corners of the jacket, the inside pocket seemed to be intact. Halvor squeezed it cautiously, and could make out something hard inside. A mobile phone? A wallet?

'Has somebody drowned, dad?' He could hear the apprehensiveness in his daughter's voice.

'No idea, my girl, but I doubt it. Most likely it's someone who's lost their jacket overboard. We must let Kåre take a look at it.'

'Kåre? Why him?'

'He's a police station commander, you see. That means he can most easily find out who the jacket belongs to.'

'But you're good at stuff like that, dad,' Hans said.

Halvor grinned. It was nice that the kids still had implicit faith in their father: 'Yes, in Oslo perhaps. But up here Kåre's probably the one who knows the most.'

*

Kristine looked around in vain for an escape route and immediately realised there was only one. She quickly fell to the ground and rolled in under the lorry. Despite the fact she was only focusing on what she was going to do herself, she couldn't help hearing the heavy, running steps getting closer.

Midway under the lorry she began to believe she would get away with it. On the other hand, she was caught in a death-trap if she didn't get out again before the two men arrived. They could just bend down and fire away, at her body, her legs, her head...

Now her head was out! She stretched her arms out in front of her and pulled her legs after her, while she heard the pounding of feet on the ground just a few metres away. As she got up, she was already in a running position and moving forwards. When her legs were swept away from under her, she felt for a moment as if she was flying.

*

'It's the dog days,' Kåre said over the phone.

'The dog days?'

'Everything comes to the surface then. The same happens every year. People report finding this, that and the other. If there are fishermen lost at sea, you can rest assured it's now they're going to turn up. We had a man in last year around this time.'

Halvor didn't feel sure that there really was a thoroughly researched, scientific phenomenon behind Kåre's cocksure statement.

'I see. And what causes that, then?'

'Well, no one really knows for sure. Some people talk about sea currents changing direction, others that the lowest layers of the water heat up so much that they move upwards, taking things with them from the sea-bed. And there are those who are more inclined to believe in the position of the stars, or some other superstition.

'How about you?' Halvor asked sceptically.

'Me? I don't believe anything myself. The only thing I know is that the same thing repeats itself year after year – that's all I have to think about.'

'Does this sort of thing happen all the time, or do you want to have a look at it, Kåre? You can join us for a late lunch or an early dinner if you like.'

'Be with you in a quarter of an hour.'

*

Kåre had just finished his working week, and picked up his wife Jorid on the way. Halvor liked the fact that she and Birgitte got on well with each other now. Right now, that meant that Jorid had been equipped with a glass of chilled white wine, while he and Kåre concentrated on the jacket. The children had already forgotten about

finding it and instead were busy feeding the mini-coalfish with entrails in one of the innumerable razor shells that are so typical of the Vega skerries.

The jacket was in a state of decomposition, not improved by the fact that it had now begun to dry out. White stripes of salt were starting to form on the outer lining.

'If we need to send it in for examination, it would be more sensible to keep it moist,' Kåre said.

'Sure,' Halvor said, 'but we could try carefully to open the inner pocket. There's either a mobile phone or a wallet in there. My guess is that their budget would appreciate not spending a few thousand kroner on a technical examination of something a fisherman has lost overboard.'

Kåre nodded and bent down over the jacket again. The two women had apparently become interested in their project, and were approaching with their white wine glasses in their hand.

Jorid pointed: 'Why don't you just look at the name tag up by the loop there?'

Halvor took a quick look at the loop. He felt his cheeks get slightly warm when he confirmed that Jorid was right. Perhaps Andersen is right too, he sighed to himself. Perhaps it was time to finish the holiday now.