

THE HONEY TRAP

UNNI LINDELL

Rage came rolling in like a wave. Recognisable, hard and dynamic, from nowhere. It always struck like lightning, starting a fire that could not be put out. It felt like entering a black hole, without brakes. Nothing except all these barbed feelings. Hands that are raised, muscles that move, and the heat of the hate when the blow falls. Miserable worm, come here thinking you can do whatever you like. Take whatever you feel like, demand a place for yourself. What's the name for that? Egoism, self-centredness or just brazen impudence. The water in the jug has the same colour as glass. That's how it always is – things aren't what they seem. Water isn't glass.

In burrows narrow as a finger, solitary bees
Keep house among the grasses. Kneeling down
I set my eyes to a hole-mouth and meet an eye
Round, green, disconsolate as a tear.
(.....)

The queen bee marries the winter of your year.
Sylvia Plath

10 June (14.42)

Vera Mattson stroked her broad forehead wearily. Her hair, gathered in an untidy bun at the back, was no longer jet black but had silver threads as well as lighter brown flecks along the central parting and at the hairline.

She sat on the painted kitchen chair, her hands clasping the brown coffee cup, gazing out between the kitchen curtains. She looked at the corrugated iron garage, where the hawthorn hedge had grown dense and was interlaced with ivy. Beside her on the table lay a furrowed dishcloth, grey with dirt. The paint on the window sill was beginning to flake. There were no police outside today, no Alsatian pulling at its lead, sniffing and wagging its tail. Had they finished their investigations, then?

She stared at the yellow house on the opposite side of the road. The climbing roses now had fresh green leaves and their buds were beginning to open, red against the yellow of the wall. The neighbour's daughter and her podgy friend with the red hair were jumping up and down on the trampoline again. Their voices slipped in through the chink in the window with hysterical sharpness. She could just make them out as they jumped – up and down and up and down. She caught a glimpse of them above and below the branches of the mauve lilacs. The girls were wearing jeans and some small tops that revealed half their stomachs. That today's parents didn't make sure their children were properly dressed. And why were the girls at home at midday?

Had the schools already closed for the summer holidays, or had they kept them at home because of what had happened to the boy a week ago?

Suddenly, the sound was there again. Vera Mattson kept the lukewarm coffee in her mouth for a moment before swallowing it. The irritating clanging of the approaching ice-cream van merged with the screams of the girls. Bing-bong. Bing-bong. Bing-bong. Then complete silence.

The ice-cream van came every Monday, and it irritated her endlessly every time. It was not only because the monotonous sound almost caused her physical pain; it was also the commotion it caused. People flocking to it, the shouting and the racket. She did not like disturbances. Vera Mattson put down her coffee cup with a little bang and looked down at her thick fingers. Things could change in the course of seconds.

The photo of the boy who had disappeared a week earlier were everywhere, on TV and in all the papers. She closed her eyes for a moment and saw the child in her mind's eye, the white hair and the half-open mouth with front teeth that were far too large. *She* was the last person to have seen him.

She got up, went over to the bread bin and opened it. Only two small crusts left, so she would have to be off to the shop. That was the worst thing of all for her. Her overweight was a problem. She didn't like meeting people. She still wore her winter coat, even though it was summer. It wasn't actually all that thick, more worn out than anything else. And she used socks in her shoes and the old string shopping bag of nylon.

The ice-cream van's clanging started up again. It's alright, I'm alright, she said to herself and put her hands to her ears. She went out into the small porch. There she stood looking at her face in the mirror on the wall. The silver-plating of its surface was blotched brown with age. Her face was so expressionless and unaccommodating that she almost wanted to avoid her own gaze. She had hardly changed over the last ten years. Everything else changed, but she didn't.

She had said this to the policemen several times, that she didn't want to get mixed up in anything. But they hadn't let her off the hook. They'd kept on about her having to tell them what she knew. But she knew *nothing*, she had told them. What could she? What sort of thing could she possibly know?

She had given her account time and time again, that she *had* seen the three boys that day. That she had called out to them, because as usual they had tried to take a short cut through her garden. All of it most irritating, she had confided to the investigators. She did not mince her words once they had begun to question her. The boys had driven her crazy with this constant sneaking past her walls. That they loved provoking her, no doubt about that. The day the light-haired one disappeared, she had opened the door and run out and called after them, shouted that this *really* was too much, that she would call on their parents, and suchlike. But two of them had already got past the disused gate at the bottom of the garden and had disappeared down the slope towards Oddeveien. The third one, that light-haired little brat, hesitated and stopped up. Then he came back. Her scolding had had its effect. He stood there, scared to death and confused, as if his legs were bolted to the ground a few metres away from her. It only lasted a short moment. He had plucked a stem of lilac. She had stared furiously at him, while he dissected the violet-coloured clusters of small flowers with his small hands. Rubbed his fingers back and forth, so that the tiny heads of the flowers were crushed and fell to the ground.

All this was a week ago to the day. The police said that she was probably the last person who had seen Patrik Øye. She naturally hadn't the faintest idea what his name was, not before the police knocked on her door. She had told the investigators everything, that he had turned round and come back and afterwards had run out the gateway, disappeared between the gateposts and sprinted across the gravel road, the same way he had come from. She had told them that this was the last she had seen of him. And that the much too big satchel had joggled up and down on his back – black and beige, with a diagonal green stripe.

10 June (15.16)

Signe Marie Øye raised herself on one elbow and lay there in that position. On the table there was a glass of water. Next to the glass lay a white serviette with a brown grease stain on it. She stared at the closed verandah door and at the sky that had coloured the pane blue. The strong summer light warmed the hours yellow in an oppressive and insistent way.

Her sister was suddenly there again. She took her hand. 'Come on,' she said, 'sit up. I've made you an omelette.'

Her mouth felt dry and strange. Her sister went on about food the whole time. A friend had phoned and said she would come and mow the grass for her. The lawn was already overgrown. It had been a warm spring, but what did grass matter now that Patrik was gone.

She forced herself to sit up. Her sister placed a plate in front of her. Sat next to her on the sofa and began to feed her. She fed her small yellow portions. And Signe Marie Øye chewed slowly, as if her mouth was something else than a mouth.

She hadn't slept, not for a long while. Not last night and the night before.

Suddenly she heard a car on the road outside. She turned her head and listened. The engine turned over in neutral for a moment, then it was put into reverse and the car backed a bit. She heard it swing out onto the road again and disappear. So it wasn't the police with a message to her about Patrik this time either. He had been gone a week now. A whole week.

The air was heavy and static. The window was open. The murmur of traffic on the E18 flooded into the room in a steady stream, blending with the sound of the ice-cream van as it drew nearer.

She had taken his school route hundreds of times, there and back. Many people were out walking along the paths: old people out for a walk, young mothers with prams, children and people with dogs on a lead. They walked along as if nothing had happened. She looked downwards whenever she met anyone she knew. She had been up at the school several times, stood there and looked at the building, gone down along Selvikveien, right to the bottom where the road suddenly ended in two large gardens. Where the secret short cut began.

She had gone in between the gateposts and rung the bell of the brown house where the old lady lived, the one the police said was the last to have seen him. But no one opened. There was only a white cat on the doorstep licking its paws. She had talked to those who lived in the yellow house with the large trampoline. Patrik had talked about the trampoline, that he and Klaus and Tobias had sneaked it and tried it out once, but had been chased away by

the girls who lived there. Patrik was afraid of older girls. He had been afraid of so many things, of the doctor and the dentist. Of angry grown-ups and Severus Snape in the Harry Potter films. And he was afraid of strange dogs. And of dangerous men. *She* had taught him that.

She had always been afraid of her son falling out of tall trees. Patrik loved to climb trees. She had imagined him lying lifeless on the ground, or in the water, floating with his head down and his white hair like waving grass around his head.

But no one could tell her what had happened on the third of June. Patrik was just gone, had disappeared somewhere or other on the small gravel path between the two gardens. The police said that someone must have enticed or forced him into a car. She saw him in her mind's eye in clear flashbacks. His white hair. His face, the way he laughed. She had given the police the photograph that had been taken of him the previous August, on his first day at school.

The evening before he disappeared, Patrik and Klaus and Tobias had argued about the football. She had heard them through the verandah door. Patrik wanted to be in goal, but one of the others had wanted to too. They had shouted heatedly at each other, and then the two friends had left. Patrik hadn't wanted to go to bed that evening. He was bad-tempered and tired. When she finally got him into bed, she had thought about reading something for him, but hadn't the energy. She had just run her hand through his white hair and said it was time for him to go to sleep.

The following morning, he had come round again. She had rinsed her coffee cup under the tap as usual, and called out to him to hurry up, otherwise he would come too late to school. That was *The-last-morning*. Everything was fixed for ever in her memory – the open window, the summer air that felt like a thin silver thread when it swept through the rooms. And then she drove Patrik to school.

11 June (9.15)

The Frydendal housing estate in Asker was without a trace of kids. The children had long since disappeared to school and kindergarten. Inspector Cato Isaksen swung out from the parking lot in the civil police car. The warm summer air rushed in through the half-open car window. He took a look in the rear mirror, took in his craggy face with its two-day-old stubble. Reaching fifty was not all that simple. Although he didn't look all that bad. His eldest son, Gard, though was already twenty-two. The middle son, Vetle, had left for school an hour previously, and Bente had disappeared on her bike with the shocking-pink basket at the back. She had early shift at the nursing home where she worked and felt sure of getting home in plenty of time to cook dinner.

On the passenger seat lay a copy of the day's *Aftenposten*, neatly folded. Once again, half the front page was covered by a photo of the seven-year-old boy who had disappeared from Høvik in Bærum eight days earlier. Cato Isaksen glanced down at the boy's sweet face. He was glad he wasn't on the case. Someone must have abducted the poor lad. If he was ever found, it would probably not be alive.

Cato Isaksen swung out onto the E18 and took the outside lane. He was late, but had decided to take things cautiously the first week he was back at work. He had had six weeks of sick leave after having punished himself ruthlessly for a long while. First, his colleague Preben Ulriksen had drowned in Thailand, after which his youngest son, Georg, had been involved in a serious case that he himself had investigated. A killer had decided to hate him when he managed to solve the case and had invaded his family life in a horrible way. He had taken his seven-year-old son from school in revenge. It all ended with the killer taking his own life, and Georg finally being found in a small cabin in the Sogn allotment. All of it had been a nightmare, and had finally resulted in him for the first time in his career having to take time-out.

No sooner had he started work again than new worries had cropped up. While he had been away, the chief inspector, Ingeborg Myklebust, had appointed a new investigator to his team – a replacement for Preben Ulriksen. And she had done so without consulting him. Marian Dahle was the name of the new arrival. She had been adopted from Korea, appeared to be introspective and was somewhat overweight. Dahle had previously been in the uniformed branch, where she had worked in the office for the calling of witnesses. From a daily routine where she served writs on witnesses she had been virtually whisked off to the murder squad. That in itself... And on greeting her for the first time, he knew for sure that there was trouble in store. But he had to give her a chance. The team was undermanned and really need a new broom.

Although it was almost half-past nine, there were the beginnings of a traffic jam at Lysaker. Cato Isaksen looked at himself in the rear mirror. How angry he looked. He heaved a deep sigh. The first thing he had done on returning to work was to burst straight into the head of department's office and complain about the new arrival. Ingeborg Myklebust had excused herself by saying that she didn't want to disturb him during his period of sick leave, which was why she hadn't contacted him. It was a good excuse of course, but he saw through it. He knew it suited her very well not to have to take account of his opinion. Especially as his opinions often differed from hers.

The team had functioned optimally before Marian Dahle came on the scene. Cato Isaksen had been chief investigator for Roger Høibakk, Asle Tengs, Randi Johansen and Ellen Grue for several years. They respected him and listened to him and did their job.

He had always felt a hundred per cent sure of them, but now *that* too was in danger of collapsing. For Asle Tengs had refused to discuss Marian Dahle with him. And Randi Johansen was clearly uneasy about it when Cato Isaksen took the matter up with her. Randi had always loyally supported him in everything. So Dahle had already managed to split the team, he thought, braking behind the car in front. He could feel a sharp pain in his left temple.

Roger Høibakk was the only one who had supported him. A hormonal, pre-menstrual bomb he had called the new arrival, who had already made a statement to the press in connection with the fact that the Police Department had announced that they no longer could contribute financially to the analysis of biological clues – as if *she* knew all about it. Randi had admittedly made excuses for her and said she had been told to do so, but even so. The cheek of the devil was something Marian Dahle was clearly in possession of, Cato Isaksen thought, blinking left at the large interchange junction at Oslo Central

Station. The new opera house towered up in glass and concrete, overlooking the lake.

11 June (20.54)

Elna Druzika unlocked and let herself out of the empty warehouse and stood waiting for a moment, key in hand. Over her shoulder she had the mustard-yellow shoulder-bag that her mother had woven for her. She dropped the key into the small side-pocket. Her wrists hurt. She could still hear the echo of rattling plates in her head, and the smell of food clung to her clothes and her hair. She always felt uneasy when she was alone in the catering room in the evening, but this evening had been extra scary. Throughout the afternoon fear had caught at her throat, first while she made the nougat cakes with vanilla, then when serving in the canteen and afterwards while she rinsed the white china, threw out the uneaten food and cleaned the work unit. The images from the cold-storage room had frozen hard in her brain and caused her breathing to change.

It was quiet in the open space outside. The sheets of corrugated iron fastened to the bottom part of the wall to protect it from the lorries and fork-lift trucks made clicking sounds. The sun that had heated them up and caused them to expand during the daytime had now set behind the warehouses. The sheets were in the process of cooling down. There was not a soul in sight, only the industrial buildings that loomed up next to each other, forming a square where only two cars stood parked. One of them was from the security company, she recognised it, but behind it stood a red car. She recalled having seen it once before, but could not remember where.

She tentatively started down the steel ladder. It made a ringing sound each time she put her foot on a new rung. She had to get home to Inga.

The sight that had confronted her a few hours earlier, when she pulled out the deep-frozen package from under the innermost shelf in the cold-storage room had almost taken her breath away. Someone had tried to hide a kind of refuse sack under the shelf, behind some empty polystyrene boxes. She had squatted down and pulled out the bag and squeezed it, but stopped in mid-movement. She opened the bag and looked inside. There was a small body lying there. The sight burned itself into her consciousness. She turned round quickly, got up and shoved the black refuse bag back under the shelf with her foot. At precisely that moment, a plane had thundered over the building, and then suddenly Noman Khan was standing there, right behind her. She had babbled something or other, talked frenziedly about not having measured the ingredients yet, but that the cakes had to be ready on time. All of them, and that she still needed to cover a couple of them with marzipan and decorate them with bits of chocolate to make them extra-fine. Yes, yes, yes, he had said and thrown his arms out. He had looked at her with an irritated expression and asked her to finish the honey cakes first. Then he had gone.

Suddenly, the door of the chauffeurs' dining room had opened, and the noise of their voices and laughter lay like a distracting carpet over her certainty.

And suddenly he was there, behind her. Close to her. She had turned round. She had seen too much, she understood from the expression on his face. She didn't manage to say anything, not even to whisper. 'You *mustn't...*' he had

said and grabbed hold of her. 'No,' she had replied. '*Not even to Inga.*' But she knew that he knew she would end up telling Inga about it. She talked to Inga about everything.

He pulled her towards him and pushed her behind the shelf. She twisted free, but he followed her and flung her hard against the wall. Seized her upper arms and shook her. She tried to break free and succeeded, but just as she was about to run, he pulled her back. Then he started to squeeze her neck. Suddenly the double door opened with a loud clatter, and someone drove a fork-lift truck into the cold-storage room. He let go of her and retreated, disappeared out into the sun and was gone.

Afterwards, when she was back at her sink, she began to realise fully that something dangerous had changed things. What was she to do? Where she came from, people had life and death closer to hand than in Norway. When she buried the cats back home, the expression on her younger sisters' faces had been relaxed. There were plenty of cats, mother always said. But animals and humans were two different things.

Afterwards, Noman had left for a meeting, and Ahmed had gone on working with the fork-lift truck out in the warehouse. She could hear the noise from the engine right into the catering kitchen. She and Milly were the only ones still there. Milly had talked away as she always did. But it was difficult to concentrate. She had learnt that self-control was a virtue, but this was something else. She *had* to talk to Inga. But Inga was serving at the summer holiday party for a large computer firm at Sjølyst. She couldn't talk to her before she got home.

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Elna Druzika clasped the bag from her mother tightly against her body, as if it was a lifebuoy. She quickly crossed the square, making for the door that was let into the large metal door. Soon she would be outside the area. She glanced at her watch. The bus was due in ten minutes.

At the same moment, she caught a movement from the corner of her eye. The certainty shot up her spine right up to her neck. She heard someone turn the ignition key of one of the parked cars. The engine started. It took a little while before she started to run. It was as if she was somewhere else. She heard the car accelerate behind her. She didn't turn round but ran, her eyes fixed on the large door, which was only a few metres away. Someone drove slowly up alongside her and opened the passenger door, but she didn't want to get in. She thought: Walk slowly and normally as if nothing is going to happen. But in a split second the roar of the engine made her realise for certain that she was wrong. This was no game. He was so desperate that he was going to kill her. She was going to die. She opened her mouth to scream.

As the car drove into her, a stream of images flooded past: The old horse and the dilapidated cart in front of the house back home in Bene. The wooden walls, grey with age, warm from the sun. And the stamped earth outside. The flowers along the wall and the ice on the window-panes in winter. Her mother Fanja and her sisters. And her brother. The clouds that lay like white silk above the roof. The stillness, and the moon against the black sky in autumn. The road that curved and ended at the cattle grid where the field started. Everything ran through her consciousness for a brief instant before death, almost like the short pause between two heartbeats.

Her sequence of thoughts came to an end. Her hearing ceased and the rough asphalt disappeared into a bright white light.

MARIAN DAHLE STOOD LEANING FORWARDS, HER ARMS FOLDED AND HER SHOULDERS SLIGHTLY HUNCHED. She had a narrow mouth, small nose and high cheekbones. Her jet-black hair was gathered into a thin ponytail. She was thirty years old, but looked as if she was eighteen.

Behind the sooty windows of the police station the sun had already created a heavy, static heat. It was 12 June, and she was to appear in court at 10 o'clock. She quickly leafed through the case files lying on the work desk in front of her. She had been working in the homicide department for exactly a month now. It had been most instructive. It was exciting and challenging to have been included in Cato Isaksen's investigating team, for she was tired of serving writs on witnesses. This was much more exciting. It was *this* she had wanted – to work with people who were on the edge of *something*, who had come out too far. She was particularly good at putting pieces of a puzzle together – tactical pieces. She had grown up always having to be on guard, always having to anticipate what could happen to her. That was why she had developed a negative thought-pattern that triggered her imagination in a destructive direction. The distance between her and the killers, male and female, she would be working with would not necessarily be all that great. That was a considerable asset. The only fly in the ointment was that the chief investigator was still there – and *he* had turned out to be a great comedown. Cato Isaksen wasn't at all the accommodating, pleasant person the others had said he was. Not towards her, at any rate. But he had clearly pulled himself together and said that she was welcome.

Marian Dahle didn't particularly like people. Her boxer, Birka, was her only sheet anchor. The dog slept in her bed at night. Birka's regular breathing meant that she slept like a log every night. The most important think was for her to do a good job. Now she was to have a short meeting with the crime scene investigator Ellen Grue, before she took the dog waiting in the car for a walk and drove to the courthouse.

Randi Johansen had confided to her that the reason why Cato Isaksen was so cantankerous was that he had not been invited to be part of the recruitment process. He was easily put out, and then he could appear to be undiplomatic, but Marian was not to say that Randi had used precisely those words. In any case, it had nothing to do with *her*, Randi had continued, so she was not to take it personally. She had added that the chief investigator needed time – but Marian took it personally anyway. She wasn't the type to give people time. She was past that stage. But she hadn't intended to show him that his rejection of her affected her. She wasn't going to give him that satisfaction. She had weathered worse storms than this before.

She felt that the coldness that radiated from Cato Isaksen was of such intensity that to be on the safe side she had immediately adopted an attitude of defence. She had blurted out that her ambition was to be best, and added that she knew she could manage it. Randi Johansen and Roger Høibakk had been there at the time. Randi had smiled encouragingly to her, while Roger had left the room with a reserved expression on his face. Marian had felt a shiver of frost pass through her body, for suddenly, just for an instant, *everything* had come back. *That* feeling, that particular feeling of not being worth anything. She had really been forced to mobilise all her strength of will to look the chief investigator in the eye. Everything in life was easy, as long as you pretended it was, she thought bitterly. That had been her mantra since growing up and finally leaving home. But it frightened her to feel how fragile

everything was, how terribly vulnerable and touchy she was in spite of it all. When the anxious restlessness came over her, she compensated by meeting her surroundings head-on. But life's not all rock 'n roll, she thought, though nobody could see *through* her.

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Crime scene investigator Ellen Grue was standing out in the corridor talking to Roger Høibakk when her mobile phone rang. On the display she saw at once that it was from the Institute of Forensic Medicine. It was none other than Professor Wangen who was phoning. He was the nicest of the pathologists – a grey-haired, sporty man in his early fifties, a training junkie and with an easy, winning way about him. As usual, he got straight to the point. A young woman had been knocked down and killed in an industrial area at Alnabru the previous evening. The traffic police had been informed about nine o'clock, and the body had been brought in for a routine autopsy. But the pathologist now believed that the deceased, apart from injuries caused by having been knocked down, also had clear physical evidence of violence having been inflicted. Would Ellen Grue be so good as to come to the institute at once?

'I'm on my way,' she said, and after having asked Roger to pass on the information to Cato Isaksen, and to tell Marian Dahle that she was to talk to one of the other crime scene investigators about the report to do with the case that was to come up at the courthouse, she hurried into her office and took out a lunch packet from her bag. She hadn't had time to eat any lunch today and felt a bit nauseous. She fervently hoped she wasn't pregnant. The man she had married three years previously was quite a lot older than she was and had grown-up children. Ellen Grue saw no reason to put more people on the planet. She was *never* going to be a mother. If there was one thing this job had taught her it was precisely that.

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The air lay quivering just below the ceiling, where the insect-like steel work of art was bathed in light.

Cato Isaksen glanced at the endless queue of people waiting for passports. There were plings from the queue machines, and a young child screamed as if possessed. He hurried to the left, past reception. Slid his card through the access control reader and took the lift up to the fifth floor. It was almost ten o'clock again today.

Cato Isaksen turned into his office, went over to the window and opened it. A patch of sun flickered to and fro over the wall, landing on the heap of papers that contained information about two cases of stabbing and an assumed case of arson where a young boy had set fire to his stepfather's house.

Even though only a week had past since he was back at work, his desk was already overflowing with documents. Over by the church, on the other side of the street, he could see a gang of young people drifting slowly past. The summer holidays were approaching. In a week's time the school holidays would begin, and Bente and the boys would travel to a cabin in Stavern that they had rented. He was to follow after at the beginning of July.

Roger Høibakk opened the door slightly and stuck his dark head round it. 'Late to work again,' he said sarcastically and smiled. 'Ellen has gone over to forensics. Maybe a new case. A young woman has been knocked down and killed at Alnabru. She has marks on her body that are inconsistent with being hit by a car. Marian Dahle smokes on the quiet, by the way. I saw her a little while ago. She was standing out in the park with her dog.' Roger Høibakk grinned and disappeared again.

A secret smoker, eh. Cato Isaksen had also come across her recently while she was taking the dog for a walk in the middle of office hours. The dog was a boxer, dark with brown patches and white markings. He had asked if she intended to keep on bringing her dog with her to work. She cut him short aggressively and said that she had heard he was considered to be a very good but somewhat difficult person to work for. As long as I do my job, she had said, it can't matter to you whether my dog's sitting in the car. The white van down there in the car park is mine. She sits there most of the time. I use my lunch break to take her for a walk and I don't smoke like many other people, so I don't spend time doing that. Her words slammed away at him. She was outspoken to say the least. And who was it that had called *him* difficult?

The dog had sat down next to her leg, eagerly waiting to see if she was going to ask it to do something. Cato Isaksen wasn't particularly keen on dogs, he himself had a red cat called Marmelade that was lazy, fairly fat and long-haired. Automatically, he had started to tick her off: If she didn't have the right attitude, it would be *very* difficult for her to work as part of his team. We are a team that works together in a positive spirit, and if you want to be an icebreaker, do your own thing, you've come to the wrong place, he had said.

'I *have* got the right attitude.' She had looked seriously at him. 'But I'm not here to play games. And I'm not used to having to deal with a load of old women.'

Cato had looked at her for half a minute without saying a word. His stomach was churning with rage.

She stayed silent. The dog sat hunched beside her, as if it understood that the mood was not all that good.

Old women, she'd called them a load of old women. Afterwards, he was irritated with himself for having played all his cards at one go. Marian Dahle had come into the section from the side, without his approval, and presumably he would have to live with that. Preben Ulriksen had been irritating enough. Preben from Bærum, but, to be honest, he missed him. He had said things to him, encouraged a form of friendship. Which he had not accepted. And then he had gone and got drowned. It hurt to think about it.

THE DRIVE TO THE STATE HOSPITAL TOOK JUST UNDER FIFTEEN MINUTES. Ellen Grue parked in the multi-storey car park. She took a look at her face in the rear mirror and straightened her dark hair before locking the car and taking the stairs up to the main entrance. She checked in at the counter and then went along the light corridor towards the door that led to the Institute of Forensic Medicine, which was on the lower floor.

The special sickly sweet smell of death and decay met her as soon as she was in the cloakroom, where she took off her own clothes before putting on the green cotton trousers and top of the same material. The white tiles on the walls had been scrubbed until they shone. Here and there almost invisible lanes of scouring powder could be seen on the smooth surfaces. She took out the soft slippers from her locker and finally pulled a pair of blue plastic socks over them.

Inside the door of the autopsy room she put on the yellow coat, plastic headcover and gloves.

Professor Wangen was waiting for her at the table furthest away. He put down the blue note holder on the edge of the washbasin. 'Hello, Ellen, how are things?'

'Fine.' Ellen Grue looked over at the corpse on the autopsy table. The matt windows that overlooked the back of the hospital building allowed grey light to filter into the room. The neon lighting on the ceiling was on.

'Elna Druzika. Latvian,' the pathologist began by saying, then listed her place of birth and birth details. 'So she's 23 years old. A Latvian friend of hers, who apparently works at the same place as the deceased, was here with a uniformed policeman yesterday and made a positive identification. You'd better ask the tacticians from the murder squad to get in touch with her, of course. Her boyfriend didn't want to see her.'

Ellen Grue nodded and noted that she was feeling sick again. She broke out in a cold sweat. Professor Wangen looked at her concernedly. 'Are you not feeling all that good?' he asked.

'No,' she said, 'I've been feeling a bit sick all day.'

'Something going around?' he asked.

'Hope it's something that will go *over*, at any rate,' she replied sarcastically and gave a wan smile.

Professor Wangen nodded understandingly and started to tell her what he had found. The preliminary post mortem report would be ready as early as the same afternoon, he said.

'There are no signs of rape, and she is probably not pregnant.'

Ellen Grue made no comment. The young, naked woman on the table had quite a neutral appearance. Her brown, mid-length hair had been drawn back from the bloodless face. The body was white, the skin waxen, as dead people's always is. The small breasts had pale nipples.

The victim had considerable damage to the left side of the body, and to the head. She had been cleaned up and her wounds were now distinct. The pathologist pulled on his gloves better. 'She is ready to be photographed and the injuries have been defined. We have collected scraps of car paint and glass from the headlamps in numbered bags. It was a red car that knocked her down.'

'Fine,' Ellen Grue said. 'We'll have the paint scraps sent to Germany for analysis and hope they can find out what type of car it was.'

'She has all the typical injuries we usually get from knockdowns – leg fractures, wounds to the face, bad grazing on the body, etc.' Ellen Grue nodded and noted that the victim also had distinct pressure marks round her upper arms and bluish rings round her wrists.

'Yes, and take a look at this,' Professor Wangen continued, bending forward over the body.

'Point bleeding and extravasations round the neck. Someone has taken hold of her by the neck and squeezed hard. You can see the imprints of finger-marks on the side here where the skin of the neck is thinnest. But the marks on her neck were inflicted *before* she died and were not fatal. She has also been held hard by the upper arms. The marks are so pronounced that my guess is it was a man who held her. She has presumably tried to wriggle free. Then the other person grabbed hold of her wrists to stop her from escaping. This must have taken place a few hours before she was knocked down, for the marks aren't fully developed. They would have looked even darker if they had had a day or two to develop.'

THE SUN WAS ON HIS WINDSCREEN, SO HE HAD TO PULL DOWN THE SHADE SO AS NOT TO STRAIN HIS EYES. It was so hot in the car that he was having trouble breathing. The unpleasant feeling worked its way through his body. Wiggo Nyman pressed the button that opened the window, and looked at himself in the small mirror on the back of the sun-shade. He had a thin face with alert blue eyes. On one of his cheeks he had three large acne scars. His hair was light and bristly under his blue cap. He was wearing jeans and a white singlet. He sighed deeply and rubbed his eyes tiredly, indicated and turned off close to the primary school at Lysejordet, parking in his usual place, where the town houses started.

The asphalt verge was beginning to crumble. The grass in the ditches bred mosquitoes. A few metres away, some children were busy with a cake lottery from a small red table. Two of them ran over towards the ice-cream van. Wiggo Nyman put on the hand brake, leant out the window and asked the children to wait for a bit. He needed a break before beginning. They slowly went back to the red table.

There was a smell of grease from the oil he had topped the engine up with earlier that day. He had the van with the coolest stereo. Johnny Cash was singing *Run softly, blue river*. Wiggo Nyman was so stiff in the neck that he could hardly turn his head. He leant his head back against the neck-rest and sat staring vacantly out the windscreen.

If only he'd been able to avoid driving today, he would have done so. But *that* was not how they did things, his boss had said. Even though Elna had been knocked down and killed the previous evening, he wasn't ill. Who else could do the driving for him? He knew all the regular stops like the back of his hand.

He could remember exactly the colour of each house, whether it was red, blue or had a green door. And which mothers came with which pram at the various stops. The houses were identical and lay on identical roads.

He took the pack of cigarettes from the dashboard and knocked a cigarette up out of the pack. He lit it and held it out of the open window while he straightened his cap.

The eager children's voices from the cake lottery table streamed in through the window. He saw Elna in his mind's eye and could hear the *sound* of her. The clattering of the knives and forks in the cutlery drawer. The water from the tap when she wrung the cloth. He glanced at his watch, he had already done ten minutes of overtime. Best to get started. He stubbed out the cigarette against the pack and threw it out the window, pressed the button that activated the bell sound and jumped down from the van. The piercing jingling noise jarred your whole body. The kids at the red table squealed with delight and ran over to him again.

They shouted happily when he opened the double back doors and climbed into the van. That ringing sound got on his nerves. He must get the volume adjusted so it was possible to stand *inside* the van without it hurting his ears. The cold and sickly smell of raspberries and honey wafted towards him. The small children stood outside, jumping up and down so they could get a look inside. He lifted down three cartons of ice cream. The 'Happy Star' labels on each carton was printed in blue and pink, with small yellow stars here and there. He didn't check the flavours, just tipped the cartons against his chest and deposited them on the floor. Whenever he thought about what had happened to Elna, he got shivers down his spine. Dead, she was dead. Things

had suddenly changed. He had to learn to push it all away from him. The earlier moments had to be replaced by new ones. He must not think about it. Towards all other people he was like iron. It was like being in water. Like seeing people through water.

The adult customers started to arrive, first two young mothers with prams, then small groups of young people on their way home from school, some younger boys, four girls and a lone old man with a stick. 'Good heavens, how hot it is,' the old man said and took his tie off.

Wiggo Nyman jumped out of the van, went to the front and turned off the ringing sound. Images flashed through his brain. He noticed that he was agitated and irritable. If only the customers could get a move on, he could slam the back doors and drive off and unload the van. Then he would go straight over to his mother and brother in Maridalen and tell them what had happened to Elna. He couldn't face telling them over the phone. All he could think of right now was of going home to his mother and brother. He thought of the white house with its flaking paintwork, the two red barns and the cat enclosure, the kitchen and the wicker furniture under the oak tree. He had to hold onto that image to survive. He saw the forest road with its dry sand and all the wild flowers in the ditches alongside. The green fields lay like a spread-out patchwork quilt, full of golden rape. And the tall maple trees where the forest began. Most of all he just wanted to sleep and escape from his thoughts.

When one of the young mothers asked him what flavour he would recommend, he didn't bother to answer at once. If people couldn't decide, too bad. When she repeated her question, he said that the raspberry ice cream was good, but the woman just stood there even so, looking at the pictures of the ices printed on the door without being able to make up her mind. He asked the next customer to step forward.

CATO ISAKSEN STARED IN IRRITATION AT A BUZZING FLY THAT WAS SPUTTERING BACK AND FORTH ON THE WINDOW SILL. The door opened with a crash. It was Roger. 'Ellen's phoned,' he said. 'It *is* presumably murder, the young woman up at Alnabru.'

Cato Isaksen nodded and asked him to come in. 'What's your real opinion about her?' he began.

'The woman at Alnabru?'

'No.'

'About Ellen?'

'No, about Marian Dahle of course.'

Roger gave a wry smile and flopped onto the chair.

'As I've said before, she is a hormonal bomb.' He smiled, took a comb out of his pocket and ran it through his hair.

'The others like her – Randi and Asle. Yes, Ellen too, I think.'

'But *you're* right, *guv*, the effect she has on me is of some indefinable disturbance.'

'She called us a load of old women.' Cato Isaksen threw down the pen he was holding, so it rolled across the table.

'She'll end up ruining the entire working atmosphere here.'

A smile flitted across Roger Høibakk's lips. 'But she's right about precisely *that* – the homicide section's become a woman's preserve. Just wait until salaries reach a decent level, then the lads'll be back. I put in an offer for a flat yesterday, by the way, but didn't get it.'

'Salaries won't ever reach a decent level.' Cato Isaksen got up. A ray of sunlight warmed his hand. 'How much did you offer?'

'Two point two million.'

Cato Isaksen looked at his colleague and sighed. He opened the window and let the buzzing fly out. 'I've been away just a few weeks, and when I get back, everything's bloody changed here, but I must try and take things a bit easy.'

Roger Høibakk looked at him. 'Yes, you'd better take things a bit easy. I forgot to say, by the way, that there are rumours of another person being added to the team.'

'Who the hell's said that?'

'There are rumours,' I said. Roger shrugged. At that instant, his mobile phone rang. He turned half round on his chair and took the call.

Cato Isaksen could feel the frustration tingling up and down his spine. That really took the biscuit. 'I really don't know what the chief's up to,' he muttered. 'If Ingeborg Myklebust wants to get rid of me, she can have it her way.'

Roger Høibakk stared at him in amazement as he disappeared through the door and along the corridor at top speed.

Was she thinking of demoting him? Cato Isaksen hurried past two colleagues without greeting them. Enough's *enough*. The air in the corridor was hot and dry. The nauseating smell of cleaning fluid was in the process of being let out of the open windows. If that was her little plan, he was ready to quit, he thought sourly. She could have her way.

Cato Isaksen rapped on the chief inspector's door, flung it open and marched in. Ingeborg Myklebust swivelled round in her chair, straightened her red hair, took off her glasses and looked quizzically at him. 'Sit down,' she said, but Cato Isaksen remained standing. 'Not necessary,' he said, 'I've just a

quick question. There are rumours that we're going to have one more on the team, is that correct?'

Ingeborg Myklebust nodded. 'Yes, we've been given an extra grant.'

'So it's correct?'

'It's correct. I've just received confirmation, and it suits us well now that the summer holidays are upon us and everything. I was actually on my way to you. Just had a case to look at first. There are three candidates – and two of them can start right away. It's up to you, Cato.'

He heaved for a breath of air. 'So it's sort of up to me, then?' He had to make sure he didn't get out of line. As far as possible, he had to appear to be professional. Even so, he couldn't resist it:

'So, who have you chosen *this* time, then?'

Ingeborg Myklebust chose to ignore the jibe. 'It's up to you, as I just said. Two of the three candidates are male, the other female. I really don't mind who you choose.'

'Fine,' he said. 'Who do you suggest?' He went a bit further:

'We've got enough women,' he said caustically. He knew he was being provocative. 'How about possibly swapping with Marian Dahle?'

Ingeborg Myklebust sized him up indulgently. 'No, of course not. Marian Dahle you must learn to live with. When I appointed her, I didn't know if you were planning on coming back. That's just how it is. I am well aware that she is an extremely verbal and idiosyncratic person, but she's got guts.'

'Verbal, that's one way of putting it. The fact that she takes her dog to work I'm simply not prepared to put up with.'

'No, alright. I can quite well understand that.'

'So you agree with me that we can't allow it?'

'If the dog impairs her capacity to work, then I agree with you.' Ingeborg Myklebust adjusted her necklace. 'You must simply put her in her place, Cato. You've just got a new case, I hear.'

'Yes, Ellen's on her way back from Wangen.' Cato Isaksen could feel his rage subsiding. 'A young woman has been knocked down and killed up at Alnabru. There are probably marks of violence on her body. So we assume that it wasn't a chance hit-and-run motorist.'

'Fine,' she said, 'here, take a look at the three candidates.' She pressed a button on her computer.

Cato Isaksen made his decision on the spot. He went for Tony Hansen, 28 years old. He was just under six feet tall, with blond hair and a ring in one ear. He was no beauty, but looked OK and athletic – and came from Groruddalen. According to the information, he didn't seem to be a *marker*. The last thing he needed was a *marker*. 'Hansen's the right man for the team,' he stated. Ingeborg Myklebust agreed with him.

Cato Isaksen called an emergency meeting. The tactical investigators gathered in the hot meeting room. Asle Tengs and Randi Johansen had already sat down. Roger Høibakk and Cato Isaksen entered the room at the same time, each holding a paper mug. Marian Dahle was still at the courthouse. The waited for Ellen Grue. She was to present the finds so far.

'We're going to have one more on the team by the way,' Cato Isaksen began by saying. He sat at the head of the table and took a sip of his hot coffee. 'Tony Hansen, he's in with Myklebust right now, but will come here afterwards.'

'He's probably gay, then,' Roger Høibakk sniggered, 'that means we've got the lot – a female boss and an adopted child. That would really complete the picture, having one of *them* in the team.'

Randi Johansen looked resignedly at him. 'Give it a break.' Cato Isaksen stifled a smile. 'It's a genuine little police lad we're getting,' he said contentedly.

Tony Hansen was definitely a good choice, unlike that of Marian Dahle, who had a dog, smoked on the quiet and lived in pretentious Grünerløkka. An irritating combination, Cato Isaksen had decided.

Asle Tengs cut into the conversation: 'Suits us perfectly. I hope he's not counting on having a holiday this year. I'm off to France in two weeks' time.'

'But that name,' Roger Høibakk continued, 'Tony Hansen, sounds like a jail-bird.'

'He's got all the right qualifications,' Cato Isaksen remarked, 'he'll blend with the team in no time. Which is what we need. He's from the uniformed branch and has quite special qualities, a small child and lives with someone who works at 7-Eleven. A completely normal person. I can't spend the whole time carrying on and arguing with Dahle. You'll have to help me a bit,' he said, looking inquiringly at Asle Tengs.

'Help you, in what way?'

'Support me, agree with me. That sort of thing.'

'Agree with you?' Asle Tengs blew air out the corner of his mouth.

'Dahle was quite OK, until you came back.' He leant back in his chair.

Cato Isaksen stared at him in irritation. 'Yes, but that mutt of hers, it's got to go at any rate.'

'Birka doesn't do any harm.' Now Asle Tengs was annoyed. 'To be quite honest, I actually think that boxer has added something to the department. It's nice to have it around the place.'

'Nice,' Cato Isaksen repeated sarcastically. 'Well, really, Asle.'

Randi Johansen also defended the dog. Cato Isaksen could see that there was a rapport between Marian Dahle and most of those in the team – something that was hard to swallow. If only he had been there from the start, everything would probably have been much easier. Now Marian had gained some sort of head start, and she took up too much space. It felt as if *he* was the alien element.

Suddenly, she was standing in the doorway. Cato Isaksen pulled himself together and smiled at her. For there *was* something or other about Marian – she radiated quality. But it was too early, he thought, for she hadn't shown yet that she was capable of anything.

Ellen Grue came into the room, eating a banana, along with the newly appointed constable, Tony Hansen. He was given a extremely good reception by the rest of the team. He smiled proudly and sat down next to Randi Johansen. He thanked Marian Dahle for the cup of coffee she handed him.

'You're going to be thrown into the thick of things right away,' Cato Isaksen began by saying, 'but that's perhaps just as well. It looks like we won't be out of work for while at least. Welcome aboard.'

The chief investigator straightened himself up. 'We've got a new case and might as well get going right away. A young woman, knocked down and killed at Alnabru. She has injuries that do not come from being knocked down. The

police were called yesterday evening, at about 21.00 hours, by a security guard who happened to be in the vicinity. Ellen, please continue.'

Ellen Grue cleared her throat and gave Tony Hansen a quick smile. She noted the childlike attentiveness that came from him. This put her in a good mood. 'We're busy vacuuming and safeguarding all evidence at the industrial area.' She turned and threw the banana skin into the wastepaper basket in the corner. Spot on, as intended. 'The victim was Latvian, Elna Druzika, 23 years old. We have already got a *highly provisional* post mortem report. It doesn't look all that good,' she continued. 'The collision took place on Tuesday evening, 11 June, yesterday in other words. The deceased has injuries that are typical for someone hit by a vehicle. Leg fractures, injuries to the face, major grazing, etc. But in addition she has injuries that do not come from being knocked down – bruising round both wrists, pressure marks on her upper arms and also some faint extravasations round the neck. To begin with, it all looked as if she had been killed by a random car-driver who fled the scene of the crime, but evidence gained from the deceased's body has meant we have been included in the case. I have already arranged for the scraps of paint from the car and glass fragments from the headlamps to be sent immediately to Germany for analysis. In about a week's time we ought to have got an answer as to what kind of paint and glass it is, so that we can then get in touch with car dealers and find out what make of car it was. We've got a job to do,' she said.

Roger Høibakk fiddled with his mobile phone. 'The front of the car that hit her must have sustained considerable damage,' he muttered.

'Yes, and the car was probably red,' Ellen Grue went on.

'I've also checked a bit,' Randi Johansen said and read out from a document. 'The security guard who was inside the area when the accident occurred, has stated that there was a red car standing outside when he arrived. But he didn't pay any special attention to it, neither the make nor the number. It was just a red car that happened to be standing there, he said. If it had been a foreign car, he is pretty sure he would have registered the fact, so he thinks it was a Norwegian-registered car. He heard the car start and the woman scream. He ran over to the window and saw the car disappearing round the corner and the deceased lying on the ground. He's the only witness. He was the one who rang the emergency number.'

Randi Johansen looked round, then continued: 'Elna Druzika came from a small town that lies a hundred kilometres south of Riga. It's called Bene. She has no family in Norway, but a boyfriend and a close female friend, Inga Romulda. She comes from Latvia as well, and is about the same age as the deceased. She has been here for two years, whereas Elna Druzika came to Norway one year ago. Both work for a catering company that lies inside the industrial area already mentioned. The two of them share a flat at Karihaugen. Since Druzika came from a EU country, she did not need a residence permit, just a work permit. She didn't have one, though.'

Marian Dahle took over. 'I have already talked on the phone with the tax authorities – she's not registered there, so it looks as if she was working illegally.'

'Cato Isaksen looked irritatedly at her. 'Haven't you been in court today?'

'Yes, but I checked it from the car on my way here. I talked to Randi on the phone.'

For a moment, Randi looked unsure. Roger Høibakk gave a wry smile. Tony Hansen followed the course of events with interest.

'So there were no other witnesses?' Roger Høibakk leant forwards over the table and looked at Randi Johansen, who shook her head. 'It's a closed industrial area, but the brother of the man who owns the catering business was in the next room and fetched some papers half an hour before she was knocked down.'

ÅSA NYMAN BENT DOWN AND EMPTIED DRY-FOOD PILLS INTO THE BOWLS. The cats flocked around her as soon as they heard the plinging sound. She was bleeding from her lower leg. One of the tiger-striped prissy animals from Frogner had suddenly got into a fight with one of the other cats. She had shooed and kicked at it, and then it had latched onto her calf with its claws and torn her brown stockings to pieces. Finally, it had hidden under one of the chairs. There it had curled into a ball and stared up at her with its amber eyes while it hissed and bared its sharp predator's teeth in a furious smile.

Åsa Nyman felt she was worn out. She had grown so thin this last year. But even so it was too early to retire. She was only 63, in spite of everything. What annoyed her most was that she had to turn down so many people during the summer – some of them booked already a year in advance. It apparently worked to advertise with *'a home for pussy in the forest'*.

At nighttime the cats were shut in their separate small cages. The cages were homemade boxes that stood on top of each other, with chicken wire between them. In the daytime most of them roamed freely around the enclosure, except for the most voracious fighters, or the cowards and scared ones, who slid in terror and with frozen movements along the netting fence and who preferred to seek protection in their small cubicles all day long.

The cats varied a great deal. Some resembled sweet toy animals that scurried all over the place and could not get enough fooling around and mischief. Others lay curled up in the old armchairs that stood under the corrugated iron superstructure, withdrawn and with a depressed look. Perhaps they resented their owners having abandoned them to strangers while they themselves romped around on some holiday in the south of Europe.

The sound of an approaching car made her straighten up. Åsa Nyman quickly ran a hand through her short grey hair and put a hand up to shade her eyes from the low evening sun. It was Wiggo. Because of the open countryside on either side of the road the white Volvo was visible from a long distance.

She stumped out of the enclosure. Took a piece of kitchen roll out of her pocket and carefully closed the wire-netting gate after her. It was important that no cats escaped. It had only happened very rarely. Only a week ago a cat had disappeared. It had got out under the fence and eaten some rat poison in the barn. Lay on the filthy wooden floor with straw in its coat and blood out of its mouth. The body of a rat lay beside the cat. Traces of the smell of death and decay sat in the warm panelling of the walls. Wiggo had stuffed the body of the animal in a refuse sack and taken it with him when he left. He said he would get rid of it in some refuse skip or other. The owners mustn't be told the truth. It was better to tell them the cat had escaped. Once, a few years back, they had had an insurance claim against them. As if money could help when you've lost your pet. Such people didn't understand all that much. She did as best she could, but animals are animals. You could never know what might happen.

The Volvo turned into the courtyard and stopped next to her. It had a tail of whirled-up road-dust behind it. Her son jumped out and slammed the car door noisily. In one hand he was clutching a pack of cigarettes. Åsa Nyman could see at once that something was wrong. Wiggo looked grim and his face was pale and drawn. The grey dust was starting to drift away from the courtyard.

'Mum,' he said, staring at her bleeding calf.

'What is it, dear? I've been working in the cat run for several hours.' Åsa Nyman brushed the road-dust off her blue-flowered apron and bent down to press the piece of kitchen roll against the wound on her lower leg. Two of them started to scarp a little while back. Almost looks as if I'll have to call the vet. One of them got a nasty bite on one of its rear legs.'

Wiggo Nyman looked at his mother. Her skin had been weathered by the sun. She had large bags under her eyes.

'Elna's dead,' he said.

Åsa Nyman straightened up. His words shot through her. It was one of those moments that would be indelibly printed on her mind for ever.

'She was knocked down by some hit-and-run idiot. The police want to talk to me.'

A gust of wind caused the boughs of the trees rock gently, so that the afternoon sun made sudden blinks, like danger signals in the small, colourless stream on the far side of the house.

'When?' Åsa Nyman clenched the piece of bloody paper in her hand.

'Tomorrow morning, at the police station.'

'No, when did she die?'

'Yesterday evening.'

She closed her eyes, felt how the shock was working its way through her body. She couldn't face all this, was so tired. Her older son, Henning, didn't make demands of life in the right way. He just sat here and home and wasted his time with her – even though he was almost thirty. But Wiggo... and Elna. When Wiggo came home with Elna, *something* had fallen into place. What she wanted for her sons wasn't all that much, never had been. What was going to happen now?

Åsa Nyman turned and took the few steps over to the green garden furniture that stood at the foot of the big oak tree. The endless feeling of disaster was getting a grip on her. She fell into one of the weather-beaten wicker chairs and thought that this summer, which had hardly started yet, was going to be a short one. She was still squeezing the piece of paper in her hand. Wiggo sat down in the other chair.

'She was knocked down by some hit-and-run idiot,' he repeated. 'Right outside catering. In the car park area.'

Wiggo had changed after Elna had come into the picture. She hadn't expected all that much of him. You never really knew for certain where you had him. Only a couple of months ago he had brought Elna home for the first time. She was a marvellous girl, a bit older than him, but age didn't mean anything. The girl had been wearing a green frock, and a headscarf. She seemed a straightforward sort of person, had looked Åsa in the eye. Maybe she looked a bit old-fashioned, as if she came from another age. Her hands were working hands, with short nails and rough skin. Åsa had noticed that at once. She had no rings on her fingers. The first thing that had struck Åsa was that she looked so Polish, but she was actually Latvian. Åsa had been proud of her intuition. Not so strange, perhaps, that she had picked up the Eastern European signals, as *she* had grown up in Finland in the forties and fifties and had Lemikki as a middle name.

'It's just terrible,' she whispered, looking up at him. 'Give me a ciggy. Just let me collect myself a bit – I don't want any of this to be true. I had been

hoping ... There are so many miserable girls.' The tears ran down her cheeks. 'But the police will find him, won't they?'

'Yes,' Wiggo said sullenly, 'I know that...' He put a cigarette in his mouth and lit his mother's before lighting his own. 'Sure they'll find him.'

He stirred at his mother. The warm-yellow evening sun shone on her light-grey, short spiky hair. She was wearing brown stockings and large grey woollen socks inside her red worn-out court shoes, even though it was so hot.

Wiggo took a deep drag on his cigarette and looked at her torn stocking.

His mother stroked one of her arms. 'Elna told me once that she was frightened. That there was a man...'

'That's no news to me...' Wiggo took a new drag on his cigarette. He had been jealous of the man from Latvia. A grown man of over forty, not a stripling like himself. Elna had been in love with him to start with. He had probably completely captivated her, but then she became frightened of him. Wiggo had forced her to tell him about the man time and time again. He had tortured himself by seeing him in his mind's eye. She had once asked him if he was jealous. He had flatly denied it, but it wasn't true. He had been jealous. He had forced away those thoughts, tried to shove them in under all the other layers of thoughts.

His mother suddenly flung out a hand. 'You know, Henning... it's as if we lie dormant here. Practically nothing happens. And Elna... I liked her so much.'

'It's not my bloody fault Henning can't manage to get himself a woman.'

'No, it's not your fault,' she said quickly, 'and that wasn't what I meant either. She began to fiddle with the loose strands of raffia on the arm-rest. She had thought about asking Elna to bring along her Latvian friend next time she came. But now there wouldn't be any next time.'

THE PHOTOS OF THE DECEASED, ELNA DRUZIKA, FROM THE CRIME SCENE LAY SCATTERED ACROSS THE TABLE. She lay with her arms flung out, and her legs close together. She looked like a cross. Her fingers were ringless with nails cut short, and the pool of blood lay like a small lake round her head. In one hand she was desperately clutching a mustard-yellow, hand-woven bag.

The photos had been taken from various angles – some were close-ups, while others had been taken from further away.

Tony Hansen and Marian Dahle each picked up one of the photos. Marian Dahle stared at her bag. It was not difficult to see that it was home-made. You could just make out the name of the deceased, which had been woven into the topmost section, along the light edge.

Tony Hansen looked at the lack of any expression of the woman's face, the wide-open eyes that stared vacantly into the air, the half-open mouth. One side of the skull was crushed. Smashed and squeezed together like a can of beer. Tony Hansen began to realise what he was going to be working with from now on. Something completely different, this, that the cases the uniformed police dealt with.

He threw down the photo and looked across at Cato Isaksen. He was scrutinising the close-ups from the autopsy table that had been pinned up on one of the walls. Death gallery, as Roger Høibakk called it. There Elna Druzika lay naked and white on the shiny table, the blood and fragments of asphalt all cleaned off her.

Cato Isaksen had a grim expression on his face. He had had a phone call from Bente, who wondered if he was coming home to dinner today. He was not, of course. He had just spoken to two journalists and tried to convince them that the police did not at the moment have any suspects, and that they had no idea what kind of car had knocked down and killed Elna Druzika, except that it was red. All drivers of red cars who had been in the area at that particular time were wanted for questioning as a matter of routine.

He took down a photo from death gallery and looked at the details. Even now, after all these years, he could not stay indifferent to dead human beings. He had a tendency to recall many of them long after the cases had been closed. Without warning he could at any moment see images of the damaged bodies with stab wounds, shot marks or congealed remains of blood. What imprinted itself on his brain could also be insignificant details. Images of the patterns of their clothes, ruined stockings, jewellery and bags. The details of death. Small things, the sort of thing you could read about in weekly magazines, whole-page spreads described as the marvellous spring or autumn fashions.

Chief Inspector Ingeborg Myklebust suddenly dropped by. 'All systems go, I see.' She was pleased now. The squad was well-balanced, in her opinion. The team headed by Cato Isaksen had all the qualities needed for solving the case they were busy on, and the new cases lying ahead. For it never ended. She herself was going on holiday in ten days' time and it was good to know that things were on course in the section. She hoped Cato's frustration about Marian Dahle's appointment would blow over. He just needed a little time. 'Everything OK?' she asked, looking at Tony Hansen. Roger Høibakk squeezed past her into the room.

'Yes, fine,' Tony Hansen said, slightly embarrassed.

Roger Høibakk pulled out a chair and provided himself with a close-up photo of the dead woman.

'Absolutely marvellous,' Cato Isaksen said sarcastically.
Marian Dahle met Ingeborg Myklebust's look.
'We're on our way to Alnabru right now,' she said.
'Fine,' the chief inspector nodded and withdrew.
Dahle was a fascinating researcher. But it could be she was a bit too much like Isaksen himself – that could be the cause of all the friction.