

# **DIE TATEN DER TOTEN**

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Crime

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## PROLOGUE

She pedalled with all her might, feeling the warm air rush against her freckled face. The airflow gripped her pigtails and tugged at them; her slender ribcage strained with exertion and pride. Pippi – that’s what the other children called her – had learnt to ride without stabilisers the previous year, and now felt safe on the blue, three-speed bicycle. She was no longer one of the babies – the bogey-eaters and scaredy-pants who weren’t allowed to leave their gardens, driveways, or the section of the street which could be seen from their homes. Pippi was finally one of the big kids. Her parents had allowed her to spend the long summer days in the nearby forest with the other children from the neighbourhood; she knew the password for the treehouse; and was given pocket money on weekends, with which from time to time she could buy an ice lolly or a handful of cola sweets. After summer came to an end, she would be starting school. Mama had already bought her a satchel; it stood at the ready by her bed, and sometimes, before she lay down to sleep, she stroked her hand over the grooved, orange artificial leather in anticipation.

Using the incline of the forest path, she gathered speed once more before the long bend. She shot around the curve and concentrated on steering past the tree roots, waiting for the familiar tingling in her stomach that always set in once she had mastered the tricky spot, then let the bicycle slow down and eventually come to a standstill at the clearing. Leaving the dense forest behind her was like coming out of a tunnel into the light. She climbed off and let the bicycle fall into the grass. The sun was high in the sky and made her blink – twice, three times, then her eyes grew accustomed to the brightness. As she walked towards the

sprawling oak tree in the heart of the clearing, the home of the treehouse, she noticed that there were no other bicycles besides hers in the grass. Neither Victoria's *Monark* with the missing spokes, nor Daniel's BMX, nor any of the other kids' bikes. Was she really the first to have come out here after lunch today? She glanced uncertainly at the new quartz watch on her wrist. The digits showed 12:55, which meant five to one, but whether that was early or late, she wasn't sure. She had never been the first to arrive at the clearing before; the situation was as new and exciting as many other things had been this summer. She decided to wait for the others. After all, what other option did she have? Remembering that she had left an old pack of cards up in the treehouse, she decided to practice the magic tricks Papa had shown her and perform them for the others later. *Curtain up for the great, the unique, Pippilotta!*

The silhouette of a man appeared from the shadow of the oak tree. She froze, her heart pounding in shock. Where had he come from so suddenly? What was he doing here? This was their spot, a place for kids, the gang's treehouse. Grown-ups didn't belong here. Something was wrong, she felt that intuitively, and with an urgency that made her afraid.

“Hey,” said the man, raising his hand with a smile.

“Hey,” she replied, studying him. He was old, certainly older than Papa or the other kids' fathers, but he didn't look unfriendly. There was a shyness to the way he stood several metres away from her and waved awkwardly. Nonetheless, she stayed on her guard.

“My name is Rune,” said the man, smiling more broadly, then letting his hand sink and disappear into his trouser pocket. “And who are you, if I may ask?”

He could even smile with his eyes. She relaxed a little.

“Pippi,” she said. For some reason that she couldn’t have put into words, it felt right to only reveal her nickname.

The man called Rune laughed.

“Of course,” he said, “the colour of your hair, the pigtails, the freckles: I should have guessed. And?” he asked mischievously, “do you have your monkey and horse with you?”

“Just my bicycle,” she answered earnestly. “It’s over there.” She turned and gestured vaguely towards the edge of the clearing. When she turned back around to the man, he was standing only half as far away as he had been a moment ago. “Anyway, my friends are about to arrive,” she added hurriedly.

Rune’s eyes laughed once more. How did he do that?

“Tommy and Annika, right?”

She shook her head emphatically.

“No, Victoria and Daniel, Malin and Linda, Henrik, and maybe his little brother too,” she listed.

“I was just being silly,” said Rune. “Given that your name’s Pippi, I mean.”

She wondered whether she should tell him her real name after all. Then another thought occurred to her.

“Are you lost?” she asked.

“Yes, that’s right, I went for a walk in the forest and lost my way,” said Rune, scratching his head in embarrassment. Then he pulled a folded map from his back trouser pocket and began to open it. “Look, maybe you can show me the path.”

She was unsure whether she could help him. She knew, of course, what a map was, Mama sometimes used them to give directions to Papa when they all went out in the car together. But how you were supposed to figure out which way to go from the tangle of colourful lines, she wasn't sure.

“I don't know...” she said, eyeing the map, then looking back up at him. She searched for and found the smile in his eyes, before finally taking a few steps towards him.

His hand, which had just been holding the map, suddenly snatched for her arm. She let out a cry. The map sailed to the floor. The man whose name was Rune pulled her towards him. The smile in his eyes had disappeared. In his other hand, out of nowhere, an open penknife had appeared. The short blade glinted in the sun.

“Quiet!” he hissed.

She bit her teeth together, her body trembled. She felt the tip of the blade against her neck. *I'm going to die*, she thought, *I'm going to die, because he's going to make a hole in me and all the blood will flow out of me until I'm dead.*

Then everything happened quickly, in a single, flowing movement. He let go of her wrist, and in the same moment grabbed one of her pigtails. The knife disappeared from her neck and cut through her hair. There was a crunching sound, directly above her left ear. It hurt for a moment, then it was over. She stared at the pigtail now swinging from his fist. How strange, how alien it looked, there in his hand. Completely and utterly wrong. The man had cut off a piece of her. He was grinning. She swallowed. Her throat felt choked with fear; he still had the knife in his hand. But now there was another feeling too.

Something strong.

A blazing white rage.

“No!” she screamed and kicked against him as hard as she could.

“No!”

The blow to her temple hit her so hard that she lost consciousness.

## **DAY X**

The guesthouse was a dump. The mattress was worn out, the curtains threadbare, the linoleum floor dull and cracked. The man had noted it all with indifference, but slept well. Now he shovelled down his breakfast mechanically: porridge with milk and cranberry jam, and watery coffee. As he ate, he flicked through a magazine that was several weeks old, studying the other guests in the dining room over the top of it. They were all men, labourers in sturdy overalls and salesmen in badly-fitting suits. He doubted that anyone would remember him later. He finished his coffee, closed the magazine, laid it next to his breakfast crockery and returned to the small bedroom. After he had shaved, washed and brushed his teeth, he fetched a leather case from his duffel bag and sat down with it at the wobbly table. He opened the case and took out the gun. It rested heavy in his hand; the metal shimmered in the glow of the ceiling light. The man reached for a cleaning rod with a brush attachment, spraying it with a special oil. Carefully, he inserted the round brush into the barrel, then slowly pushed and pulled it back and forth. It was nothing more than a ritual; he had already cleaned the gun thoroughly the day before, after doing the final target practice in the forest. Once he was done, he

loaded the gun. Its firepower – a combination of model and ammunition – was highly effective; not even a bullet-proof vest would withstand it. He placed the gun back in its leather case and washed the oil from his hands. Then he took off his shoes, trousers and pullover and got back into bed. Even though he couldn't fall back to sleep, it felt pleasant to simply lie there, staring at the water stain on the ceiling. At times it reminded him of the many-petalled bloom of a rose; at others, of a disembodied human head.

He dozed like this for an hour, then eventually got up. It was cold outside, well below freezing, and the day was almost certain to be long. He pulled on woollen socks, long johns, jeans, a Norwegian jumper and padded winter boots. He would wear a loose quilted coat too, which concealed both the gun in the shoulder holster and the walkie-talkie. Just to be sure, he checked the battery before putting it in. It was full; it had been charging all night long. He stowed the radio set and replacement battery in the inside pocket of his coat, then put on the holster and placed the bulky gun inside it. Everything he wouldn't need during the course of the day went into the duffel bag. Last of all, he pulled on the coat, leather gloves, and a hat with ear flaps. Using a hand towel, he wiped all the surfaces and door handles, a measure that was probably unnecessary – but the less traces he left, the better. He walked out of the room, locked the door, crossed the narrow hallway, laid the room key on the counter of the unmanned reception and left the guesthouse.

At 11:17, he took the metro to the train station, where he stowed the duffel bag in a locker. In a nearby café, he drank coffee and ate a pastry standing at the counter, then smoked a cigarette and flicked through a paper that someone had left behind. He was no more interested in the politics and economy sections than he was in the cultural supplement. He immersed himself in the ice hockey results and a report on doping in the Eastern bloc countries. Afterwards, he went for a walk.

He headed northeast, strolling through the Vasaparken. It was still early; the operation was planned for the evening. Nonetheless, he had to be on stand-by from midday. As there was no-one nearby, he paused in front of one of the rimy Gottfrid Larsson sculptures and pulled out the walkie-talkie. During a brief exchange, he received confirmation that the situation was still calm. The target was unlikely to leave his workplace during the afternoon. He put the walkie-talkie away again and looked at his watch. It was 13:24. His breath formed clouds in the damp air. He decided to spend the afternoon in the cinema. It was warm there, and no one would take notice of him. Not far from the park, he found a cinema that was showing “Out of Africa” at 14:00. He hadn’t seen the film yet, and Robert Redford was in it, so why not? It was almost empty; besides two elderly women, he was the only person in there.

When he stepped out of the Kenyan heat back into the Swedish winter, it was 17:02, and getting dark. The traffic was busier now, the pavements filling with the crowds that had been spat out of the office towers in the city centre. He retreated to the Vasaparken once more, where he only crossed paths with a few walkers and the occasional jogger undeterred by the snow and ice. In the shadow of a tall tree, he took out the walkie-talkie and inserted the ear piece, the cable vanishing completely beneath the ear flaps of his hat. Once he connected to the channel, he could follow the radio communication unnoticed by passers-by. He announced his position and requested a situation report. There was good news: during the course of the afternoon, the situation had developed positively. The target, codename “Zinnober”, had sent his bodyguards home early. In addition, it seemed that an evening cinema visit was being contemplated. He was to stand by; further details would follow. That sounded very promising. An open-air attack – and at a target without bodyguards – had numerous advantages over breaking into an apartment, the most significant of which was clarity. He would be able to choose the exact location and time of the attack himself.



Clarity meant control. Over the behaviour of the target, possible witnesses, possible escape routes. In an apartment, on the other hand, there were so many unknown factors. However well prepared you were, any closed door could conceal an unpleasant surprise. So he hoped that the cinema visit would take place, and kept the radio channel open. He was ready. Leaving the park, he headed slowly and in a roundabout way towards Gamla stan, where Zinnober lived.

At a food stall in Sveavägen, he stopped and ordered himself two small boiled sausages with potato mash and a cup of tea. The sustenance revived him and helped against the biting cold. He walked on, crossed Lilla Värtan on the Riksbron bridge, passed the Parliament building and reached the old town over the Stallbron bridge. It was plain to see that it wasn't just Friday evening, but payday too: the bars and restaurants were filling up with people looking to have a good time. He drifted down the narrow cobblestone streets, making sure not to stray too far from the Västerlånggatan. A report came through on his walkie-talkie: the cinema visit had been confirmed. Zinnober and his wife would be attending the 21:00 showing of “The Mozart Brothers” in the Grand, and were meeting their son and his fiancée in front of the cinema. He thought for a moment. Ideally, the attack should take place on the journey there or back. It took about thirty minutes to reach the Grand from the old town on foot, and just fifteen with the metro. If the couple decided on the latter, he would only have the route between the apartment and the station, or the station and the cinema, each a few hundred metres. That was just a few minutes. On a busy weekend evening in the heart of Stockholm. It was fair to say there were more favourable circumstances. But if the alternative was breaking into the apartment... He decided to try the open-air attack. If no suitable opportunity arose, or if the target should order a taxi, there was always the apartment at night as a Plan B. He looked at his watch. It was 18:21, so he still had around two hours, if he could rely upon the information he had been given. But what if the

couple had decided to go out for a meal before the cinema? He knew there were sources in their security team, and that telephone calls around the target were being tapped. But it was impossible to intercept calls made by Zinnober himself; the risk of exposure was too great with a person of his importance. The apartment wasn't bugged either. Deciding to err on the side of caution, he set off towards Västerlånggatan. If the couple decided to do something before the cinema, he wanted to be nearby. In truth, Västerlånggatan was more of a lane than a street, lined with small shops and restaurants, tightly packed in one after the other. Pedestrians passed to his left and right. Number 31 was a yellow-painted building with green lattice windows. His hands tucked into his pockets, he walked past slowly, on the hunt for a suitable lookout position. His gaze rested on an unlit shop entrance, located on the other side of the street, a little further up. The dark recess would be perfect, he thought to himself, if only it weren't for all the passers-by. He almost overlooked the man who was standing far back in the shadows of the entrance. For a moment, their gazes met. Motionless, the man stared out at him, wearing an expression of shock. No, he realised, not of shock, but of having been caught in the act. He swiftly turned away and strode on. Thoughts rattled around inside his head. It was obvious. The man was watching the entrance to the target's building. Were they both part of the same operation? If so, why didn't he know anything about him? According to his knowledge, the apartment was being staked out from one of the houses opposite. The other possibility: the security team was better than they had thought, and maybe even Zinnober himself didn't know how efficiently he was being guarded; his unease where bodyguards were concerned was well-known.

He took a left turn, quickened his pace, then turned again and again until he found himself in an unlit rear courtyard. Here he dared to take out his walkie-talkie and report what he had seen. He was told to wait. The earpiece crackled and rustled. One minute passed, two

minutes. Then came the surprising order: Retreat! He was to leave the area immediately and make his way instead to the Grand. He hesitated. Opposing the order was out of the question. But he had been assured he would have free rein within the parameters of the mission. Instead he was being sent out of the red zone and told to wait. That wasn't what he regarded as control. The room for manoeuvre within his plan had been halved, and merely because mission control had gotten nervous. The look-out in the Västerlånggatan must be a bodyguard whom no one had had on their radar. The only possible conclusion was that the operation hadn't been planned anywhere near as well as he'd been told, and that was unprofessional. He felt rage surge within him. After all, his own safety was a factor too. Deciding that he'd had enough of walking around in the cold, he took the metro to Rådmanngatan. From there, it was about a hundred metres to the cinema. If Zinnober were to take the metro too, in all probability he would get out here and not at Hötorget, from where the walk was five minutes longer. *If*. He spat on the pavement. There were too many variables. If he wanted to catch the target before the cinema visit, he would have to wait directly in front of the Grand. He checked out the locale. There were just a few people standing in the foyer. He studied the showtimes in a display case – the next film didn't start for just over an hour; that was why it was so empty now. But the 21:00 showings would be full on a Friday night, and the place heaving with people. Too many witnesses, too many incalculables, he decided. So, it would have to be on the return journey after all. “The Mozart Brothers” wouldn't finish before 23:00, he calculated. He wandered around the neighbouring streets for over an hour. Even though he knew the area already, it couldn't hurt to re-familiarise himself with the surroundings. A report came in over the radio that Zinnober and his wife had left their apartment and were making their way on foot, most likely to Gamla stan metro station. You fools, he thought, you should have given me free rein. The labyrinth of alleyways in the old town was

ideal for an attack. And he could have easily taken care of the supposed bodyguard.

In a side street, three blocks away, he found a bustling bar. He hesitated for a moment, then stepped inside, something which wasn't really in keeping with his self-imposed protocol. I have a nondescript face, he reassured himself, no one will remember me. I'm just some man drinking a beer. And no one seemed to pay any attention to him; he had to wave to the bartender several times before he was able to order. Just one beer, he persuaded himself, to ward off the cold. He sat down on a barstool in the corner, keeping his coat and cap on. He wasn't the only one to do so; the bar was draughty and poorly-heated, the door continually opening and closing, a relentless coming and going. Revellers, couples, small groups, a work outing, and the habitual drunkards staring into their glasses. He knew exactly how they felt. He took a long gulp of his beer and lit a cigarette.

Once his watch showed 22:40, he pulled himself together. One beer had turned into three, but to hell with it! He felt alert and focused. As he stepped out of the noisy bar, the cold gripped his face, sharpening his concentration even more. At 22:47, he arrived in front of the Grand. There were still a lot of cars going up and down Sveavägen, even though it wasn't as bustling as three hours before. He crossed over to the other side of the street to get a better view of his surroundings. From beneath the shadow of a billboard, he watched the entrance to the cinema. Was he mistaken, or was the man stood in front of the glass screen of the foyer the same one he had seen in the dark shop entrance in Västerlånggatan? A knot of people emerged from the cinema, obscuring his sight of the man. There was no sign of Zinnober yet either. People were saying their goodbyes, heading off in different directions. The pavement gradually emptied. Still no sign of the target. He tensed. What if Zinnober hadn't gone to the cinema after all? But if that were the case,

an update would have come in over the radio. A second crowd of people came out of the foyer. There! He had sight of the target. He was wearing a dark fur hat and a winter coat. Alongside him was his wife; he recognized her from photographs. The young couple with them must be the son and fiancée. They stood in front of the cinema, chatting to one another. The young woman warmed her hands with her breath, Zinnober laughed at something. Then the two couples said goodbye to one another. The younger pair headed off in the direction of Rådmanngatan metro station, the target and his wife towards Hötorget. He kept pace with them, staying on the opposite side of the street. There were significantly less pedestrians on his side than on theirs. His gaze scanned the street ahead. Several taxis drove past the couple without the man or woman making any move to hail one. So they were planning to get the metro from Hötorget, he thought, or, even better, they were heading home on foot. His pulse quickened. He didn't let them out of his sight. Now they were strolling past the Adolf Fredrik cemetery. Should he cross over? He hesitated as a noisy crowd of partygoers walked in the direction of the couple. Better to wait a little longer. Now they were passing the snack bar at the far end of the cemetery and ... he could hardly believe his luck! It looked as though they were going to cross the road. Right towards him. Now he was level with the Skandia building. He made his plan in a matter of seconds. Now he knew everything would go smoothly. It was about to pay off that he had familiarised himself with the area around the cinema beforehand. He quickened his pace and ran through the escape route in his mind. He couldn't have designed a better plan on a drawing board. He ventured a quick glance over his shoulder. Zinnober and his wife had paused in front of a fashion store and were studying the window display. His distance increased. A man came towards him. Then another. No one took any notice of him. He was just a normal-looking pedestrian in a loose-fitting quilted jacket. At the end of the block, he paused. In front of him was the wallpaper

shop Dekorima; he was shielded from the street by a poster-covered pillar. He opened his coat and the clip of the holster. Just one flick of his wrist and the gun would be ready to fire. He turned towards the display window. Breathed in, breathed out. He watched as the small white cloud in front of his mouth misted up a section of the window. The vein in his temple throbbed. Despite the sound of the traffic from the four-lane road, he could hear footsteps approaching. He turned his head slightly. They were walking past him, the Prime Minister and his wife. He turned and approached them from behind. Reached for his gun, released the safety catch.

Seconds later, a gunshot tore through the icy air, immediately followed by another. Olof Palme fell to the floor, Lisbeth Palme screamed. He put the gun away and ran into the narrow Tunnelgatan, past the building site, up the steps to Malmskillnadsgatan and into David Bagares gatan, until his footsteps were swallowed by the darkness.

## **SWEDEN, 2019**

### **CHAPTER 1**

#### **1**

Shortly after three in the morning, Inspector Stina Forss carefully opened the first-floor window at the rear of the hotel. The gusty autumn wind blew leaves into the room that gleamed wanly against the dark carpeted floor. She heard the waves breaking against the shore of Helga Lake. The treetops rustled. Forss heaved the bag out of the window and let it fall on to the rain-soaked sand, then clambered up onto the windowsill and jumped down after it. The force of the impact left her gasping for air. Her hands moved to her ribcage – it wasn't long since the multiple rib fracture and lung injury had healed. After thirty seconds or so, the pain had subsided enough for her to move. She looked up at the window. It was still dark; the uniformed policeman guarding the corridor in front of her room clearly hadn't noticed her escape. She put the bag over her shoulder and darted along the wall of the building. A quick glance around the corner revealed a squad car in front of the hotel entrance, and the face of the policeman sitting inside it was illuminated with a pale blue shimmer. He was clearly occupied with his phone. Crouching down, she ran through the leafy trees to the street. Doc Martens, black jeans, black leather jacket, a dark woollen hat: her

chances of being seen were minimal. Reaching Evedalsvägen, she turned southwards, towards the heart of the city. It was unlikely there would be any traffic on the tranquil peninsula at this time of night. She covered a few hundred metres at a running pace, passing the nature reserve and the nursery school, until she reached the two-storey old peoples' home. The decrepit Volvo she had noticed over the past few days was still in the car park, probably it belonged to a no-less-decrepit inhabitant. If it was a collector's item, she was sorry, but she had to be ruthless. The boxy V740 ideally suited her purposes, because it was easy to break into, but not so old that it would draw attention on the road. It took less than a minute for her to open the door with her tools and hotwire the ignition. The engine roared to life. She put it into gear and drove down Evedalsvägen. Only after two kilometres did she turn on the headlamps and join the ring road which encircled the Smolandian city of Växjö. She kept southwards on the L27. Numerous heavy-goods vehicles passed her in the opposite lane, and on one occasion the Volvo's headlights revealed a snuffling badger by the side of the road. After a good half hour, she reached her destination. According to her watch, it was shortly after four in the morning. One kilometre away from her house, she stopped the car and got out. Better to play it safe, she thought. She stood there in the tall spruce forest. It was pitch-black, but she didn't need a torch to find her way; she knew the gravel path between the country road and her isolated house like the back of her hand. She pulled out the *SIG Sauer*. It was hard to judge whether the house was still under surveillance – it was unlikely, but what did that say? She also hadn't considered it likely that, eight and a half weeks ago, she would have been attacked in her sleep by a seven-man death squad. And yet it had happened. She had survived the attack, albeit heavily injured, and hadn't been home since. Not a single hour had passed in which she hadn't wondered whether it was still there: *the only proof*.



With both hands on the automatic, her arms bent, she walked along the snaking path towards the house, which lay beside the forest lake. Her father had left the house to her years ago. The house, the scars on her neck, and a burden which threatened to pull her down into the abyss.

*Papa, really? You? Of all the people in the world, you?*

She still didn't want to believe it, even though there was so much proof – and not only the attack on her.

The house came into sight. Even though the sky was still filled with cloud and she couldn't see any stars, it seemed lighter now. She knew this effect. It was as though the lake emitted some of the light that it had collected over the course of the day. The driveway was empty; her BMW was presumably still in the garage. She came closer. No sign of any surveillance. But if someone were sat in the forest with infrared binoculars, she would have no hope of spotting them. The dawn light was just enough to reveal the traces of widescale destruction. The front door had been forced open, all the windows shattered, the wooden façade scarred with bullet holes. Seven men, armed to the teeth. Assault rifles, machine guns, and they'd even had a goddamn grenade launcher with them, to exile her from the house with teargas and stun grenades. All of it futile; Forss had killed them one after the other. Shot them, slit their throats, blown them into the air. She had been incredibly lucky. And probably the men had underestimated her: a petite woman with a visual impairment. She tugged on her eyepatch, paused in the doorway and listened. Nothing. It was completely silent inside the house. Nonetheless, she hesitated to go in any further. An invisible barrier was stopping her. She felt the hairs on the back of her neck go up. There was something bad here that she hadn't noticed before. Not a living person, not someone waiting for her with their gun at the ready. Perhaps it was death itself she could sense, the echo of violence. This was no longer a

good place, she thought, and maybe it never had been. She turned around in the doorway. There was nothing inside the house she really needed.

The thing she had come back for, if it was still there, was somewhere else. Her colleagues and a forensic team had searched the house from top to bottom after the attack, of course, and the Department for National Security had been there with their own people. And God knows who else. She could only hope they hadn't looked too thoroughly. She went over to the well which lay between the house and the tool shed. It was a classic brick draw well with a wooden crank handle. Long ago, her father had mounted various Roman-looking cast-stone figures onto it: a horse's head, a bust of a field general, a female statue à la *Venus de Milo*. She had always wondered about the lapse in taste. Perhaps her father's admiration for Julius Caesar and anything connected to the Roman Empire had found its expression in the strange well decoration. Several months ago she had strengthened the old crank handle and replaced the original rope with a chain. Forss reached for her torch now after all. She jangled the chain. It led down tautly into the metre-deep well shaft, then disappeared into the blackness of the water. So far, so good, she thought. She went into the shed and hauled down a nondescript-looking box from a shelf in the work area. Nestled among a collection of old spare car parts was a powerful electric winch. Inside a warped old headlight casing, she found a key. She pocketed the key, took out the winch, plugged in an extension cable then went back over to the well with the unwinding cable drum in one hand and the winch in the other. She detached the end of the chain from the old wooden pulley and fastened the final loop onto the electric winch with a trigger hook, which she then fastened to the old wooden pulley with two steel loops and more hooks. She connected the electric winch to the extension cable and switched it on. Over a thousand watts launched into action, whirring and crackling. The wood groaned under the weight. In slow motion, the

chain wrapped itself link by link over the drum of the winch. She shone the torch down into the well. Squelching and dripping, the small safe was released by the water. Two minutes later, once the metal box was swinging on a level with the rim of the well, she stopped the winch, took the key out of her trouser pocket, bent down between the horse's head and Caesar and opened the dripping safe. Seeing the leather case still in its place, she breathed a sigh of relief. The idiots clearly hadn't searched thoroughly enough. She took out the case, closed the safe again and lowered it back down into the well. She got out her mobile phone and sent a text: *Bingo*, then let the mobile drop down into the shaft. She dismantled the winch and carried it and the extension cable back to the shed. There were more things she wanted to take with her, but for that she needed the car. She walked back along the path into the forest, fetched the Volvo and parked it with the boot up against the shed door. In an adjoining room was an old outhouse that had been out of action for decades and which her father had used as storage space. It was full of old, overflowing shoeboxes stuffed with papers. Decades-old photocopies, handwritten notes, files of bank statements, faded holiday photos. Perhaps it was all just junk, or maybe there really were clues somewhere amongst it all. *Answers*. She counted the boxes as she packed them up: twenty-two. Sweating now, she closed the car boot. She took one last glance at the vague silhouette of the house. This had been her home for a while.

*You left it to me, Papa.*

*Then you took it away again.*

A thought came into her mind. Didn't that apply to her whole life too? No, she decided. Not as long as she could still fight.

*I learned that from you too.*

A bitter lesson. She swallowed. Her ribcage hurt from the exertion. It was time to go. She got into the car, turned on the engine and stepped on the accelerator.

She followed the L27 to Tingsryd, then veered onto the L29 and, a little later, onto the highway towards Malmö. As she passed through Scania, the sun began to rise. A gently sloping landscape beneath clouds tinged with a warm-red glow; under different circumstances, she might have found the sight spectacular. In Lund, she took the exit onto the country route to Trelleborg. She didn't get the feeling she was being followed.

As agreed, Oleg was waiting for her in the car park of the supermarket. He was an old friend from Berlin. A long time ago she had arrested him for fraud, and later on, he became her informant and grass dealer for a while. At some point, they had become friends. It was years now since they had seen one another. But he was always there when she needed him. He gave her a hug in greeting. She realised how long it had been since she'd felt any physical touch. She clumsily freed herself from the embrace. It was good to see him. Oleg had a beard now, and looked like a seaman.

“Michaela sends her best. The children too.”

“Thank you.”

She smiled uncertainly. She had completely forgotten Oleg was married now. She hadn't accepted the invitation to the wedding; hadn't even written a card. Nurturing social relationships wasn't exactly one of her strong points.

They loaded the shoeboxes into Oleg's van. Once they were done, he climbed back in and drove off, while she went across the car park to the supermarket and got herself a coffee and a roll. Once she had finished her breakfast, she strolled back to the stolen car and set off to

the nearby ferry terminal. The woman behind the hut window checking tickets and passports glanced at her only briefly. Ever since Forss had needed to wear an eye patch, people tried not to stare at her for too long. Nonetheless, she was sure the employee had gotten a good look at her face. Good. She drove the Volvo on board, left the car deck and went to her cabin.

The *Nils Holgersson* set sail at ten. Forss took a hot shower and put on a fresh change of clothes. Then she went to the on-board shop and bought a bottle of vodka. She was sure that the shop assistant took notice of her too; it wasn't often you saw a woman in her late 30s with an eye patch. Back in her cabin, she lay down on the bed and fell asleep. When the alarm went off, which she had set for an hour before their arrival, she got dressed once more, tucked her rebellious reddish-brown curls beneath a blonde wig, slipped into a pair of high heels, took off the eyepatch and put on reflective sunglasses. She poured half the bottle of vodka down the sink, scattered some pieces of clothing around the cabin and laid an empty packet of Diazepam next to the half empty bottle. Then she listened at the door, slipped out into the empty corridor and reached the car deck just as the ferry was pulling into Rostock harbour, where she climbed into the van with Oleg. They disembarked amid a train of heavy goods vehicles, and customs didn't stop them. In Güstrow, Oleg drove onto the parking lot of a building supplies store. OBI. The sight of the orange-black beaver on the sign unleashed something in her that she hadn't expected: Homesickness. It was over two years since she had last been in Germany, and yet she had spent the majority of her life here. She had come here with her German mother as a seven-year-old girl. *On the run from you and your fists, Papa.* Some years ago, she had returned to Sweden, the land of her early childhood, leaving behind her Berlin life and a career in the homicide squad. *Because you were dying, Papa.*

The relationship between Stina Forss and her father had been extremely difficult, and she'd had the vague and – as it turned out – futile hope of ironing things out between them. *And now I'm on the run again, and once again it's because of you.*

“Everything okay, Stina?”

She held back the tears.

“Yes,” she said, giving a crooked smile. “Thank you. For all of this. I really appreciate it.”

“Don't mention it. It was one of my easiest missions.” He gave her a wink. “The eyepatch really suits you, Tanja Petrov.” He handed her the fake passport, a credit card and a mobile phone.

They got out of the van. Oleg had parked next to a rusty Passat. He unlocked it and opened the boot. Together, they transferred the boxes one more time, then he passed her the car key.

“It's not much to look at, but the engine's very reliable.”

“Thank you so much, Oleg.”

“It was nothing, seriously.”

They hugged one another goodbye, then he climbed into the van and drove off into the misty autumn evening, while she set off with the Passat towards Travemünde. Oleg had booked her into a hotel on the outskirts of Lübeck. At the hotel reception, she tried out her new name. It crossed her lips easily, as did most lies. “Are you in town on business?” asked the young man at reception.

“I'm a stripper, sweetie,” she answered.

His leering smile was a sign that he bought it, just as he did the peroxide-blond wig and reflective sunglasses. In her room, she took a long bath, then ordered room service: Schnitzel with fries and a large

beer. Afterwards, out of nostalgia, she spent a while flicking through German TV channels. The ferry to Helsinki was set to depart at three in the morning.

## 2

Before leaving the house, Superintendent Ingrid Nyström examined her reflection in the mirror. Her short hair was in place. It always was, in fact, which was why she wore her hair in this style; she was a pragmatic person through and through. Her fifty-eight years could be clearly seen on her slim face, something that no longer bothered her. What did bother her, however, and greatly, were the traces the past six months had left behind. An undeniable varnish of melancholy and bitterness had settled over her otherwise gentle and brown eyes – which had now retreated deep into the sockets, giving her a worried and emaciated look that was completely at odds with her nature. That, at least, was her first thought. But she had to admit that her current appearance was probably a relatively accurate representation of what was on the inside. In other words, a mess. And it would have been surprising, wouldn't it, if the tragic events of the past months had passed over her without leaving a trace? Nonetheless, she'd clearly needed until now to admit that to herself.

Nyström looked around the cloakroom. She felt the strong urge to offset her depressing appearance in some way. And her own clothes clearly weren't up to the job. Neither the light grey cotton pullover nor

the dark grey pleated trousers, and especially not the brown quilted jacket. What she found was a vibrantly patterned scarf from *Marimekko* which belonged to her daughter Anna. She draped it around her neck. The touch of colour really did make a difference, she noted as she looked in the mirror once more. Or maybe it was just that it felt good to wear something of Anna's. In any case, the cheerfully-coloured fabric gave her the small boost she had needed. Even if it was silly. Something within her felt lifted. She thought back to the long conversation with Stina Forss. To the decision they had made. The pact. It was time to wake up out of the nightmare they were both trapped in. It was time to leave the death, the fear and the bitterness behind.

It was time to fight.

At the police headquarters, she was the first to arrive in her department, the Department for Serious and Violent Crime. She put coffee and tea on to brew and placed on the large oval table in the meeting room a plate filled with cinnamon buns and cheese rolls, which she had picked up at the bakery on her way into town. By 8 o'clock, three quarters of her team had arrived punctually: her long-time colleague Lars 'Lasse' Knutsson, who was almost the same age as her; a bearlike, stout man with a full beard. Anette Hultin, a former soldier and professional athlete who was currently pregnant with her second child. And the clever, IT-savvy Hugo Delgado, who as usual had a sarcastic smile on his lips.

Knutsson sank down into a chair, rubbing his hands together.

“Second breakfast! You're an angel, Ingrid!”

He poured himself some coffee and took a generous helping of the buns and rolls.

“What happened to your Paleo diet, Stone Age man?” asked Delgado.



Knutsson waved his hand dismissively.

“Dietary restrictions are no good long term, sooner or later everyone cracks. It’s been scientifically proven. Exercise is the name of the game. Better a healthy fat man than an unhealthy thin one, that’s what my doctor says.”

“And which one are you?”

“Go ahead and laugh all you want!” Knutsson retorted to his colleague, who was twenty years his junior, as he chewed away. “One day I’ll be dancing on your grave. With my Nordic walking poles in my hand.”

“Well, I could eat non-stop right now,” said Hultin as she grabbed a cinnamon bun. “And I only had breakfast an hour ago.”

“The extra pounds suit you,” said Delgado, making a dig.

Hultin shot him an irritated look.

“Hold your mouth for once, okay?”

“Si señora.”

“You really are an idiot!”

The squabbling between Delgado and Hultin was a regular component of their meetings. Over the past years, they’d been in a relationship with one another numerous times.

Knutsson grinned.

“Truer words have never been spoken, Anette.”

Delgado bit enthusiastically into a cheese roll.

“These are really delicious, Ingrid, thank you. To what do we owe the honour? Did I forget your birthday? Or a work anniversary?”

Nyström, the only one to content herself with just a cup of tea, put the palms of her hands together. She searched for the words. The previous night, before going to sleep, she had worked out a speech, but the carefully-formulated sentences seemed to have evaporated into thin air.

“Well...” Where to start? She looked at each one of her three co-workers in turn, feeling their expectation, their trust, their loyalty. Her hand moved towards Anna’s neck scarf. As though it were a talisman, she thought, pulling herself together. “Well, I’ve had the honour of leading our team for over five years now, and that’s something which makes me very proud. Getting up each day and being able to work alongside you all. When I think of what we’ve achieved together, what we’ve been through. Cases that have pushed us to our limits and beyond. Ongoing structural reforms that have worsened our working conditions again and again...” She broke off, reached for her cup, took a sip and moistened her vocal cords. Why did she sound so stilted? “My goodness, this really does sound like an official speech, sorry.”

Knutsson smiled blissfully.

“I think it’s nice, and I definitely feel in a celebratory mood.”

“But that’s not where I’m going with this, Lasse. I’m not trying to butter you all up. I’m not trying to depict myself as a great boss. I’m trying to...”

“What are you trying to do, Ingrid?” asked Hultin gently, folding her hands over her slightly curved belly.

“You can speak openly with us,” said Delgado encouragingly.

Nyström looked up and into the three trusting faces once more, one after the other. She hesitated, then sighed.

“I wanted to ask you all something that I’m not allowed to ask you. It’s not my place, because it violates every one of an employer’s duties of care. It would be inappropriate and an abuse of your trust. The fact that I’ve brought it up it despite all that ... I’m sorry, hopefully it’s just down to my despair and a resulting lack of good judgement.”

“Ingrid, please!” droned Knutsson’s deep voice.

“Out with it!” demanded Hultin.

“Spit it out already,” said Delgado.

“It contravenes service regulations, and in some circumstances would even put your careers at risk,” said Nyström, making a further attempt to backtrack.

“If Half-three Erik hates it, I’m in,” declared Delgado.

He meant Erik Edman, the police chief for the region of Kronoberg. Three-thirty was the time he usually left the headquarters to go to the golf course.

Nyström massaged her temples. She knew she had already said too much to just let it drop. But she regretted even having opened her mouth. She didn’t have the right to drag her co-workers into this. What had she been thinking? She sighed again.

“Okay. This is what we’ll do. I’ll explain what it’s about, and then each one of you can choose to simply stand up, leave the room and sit down at your desk as though nothing happened. Or turn to Edman or the ombudsman and make a complaint about your impertinent boss. None of which would cloud the view I have of you all, which is that you’re the best co-workers anyone could ever ask for.” Knutsson smiled and crossed his arms over his considerable belly. Hultin shifted her weight on her chair. Delgado rubbed his index finger and thumb together. No one stood up. Everyone stayed in their seats. She took a

deep breath. “Okay then. It’s about a special investigation. Which is neither approved nor wanted by Edman nor anyone further up. It would have to take place parallel to our other work, and beneath the radar too. And you would never be able to discuss it with anyone outside of this department.”

“Whoa,” said Hultin.

Knutsson rubbed his nose.

“Don’t leave us on tenterhooks,” demanded Delgado. “As you very accurately said: We’re the best co-workers a person could wish for!”

Nyström sucked at her lower lip. She looked over her colleagues’ heads out of the panoramic window towards Växjö city centre. The ever-present crows that had made their home on the roof of the *Oxgrillen* restaurant were fighting with the gusts of wind. It whirled up the autumn foliage and blew the leaves against the wet windowpane.

“It’s about helping Stina.”

“Where is she anyway?” asked Knutsson. “Should we leave a roll for her?”

“The attack,” said Delgado. “You want us to find out who did it.”

Nyström shook her head. Delgado was close. She would have loved to investigate the attempted murder which Stina Forss had just managed to survive. Nyström herself had been the first on the scene of the crime; she had seen the blood from the seven dead and still unidentified assassins. But the Department for National Security, at the instigation of the Ministry of Justice, had seized jurisdiction over the investigation and booted out her team. For the second time within a brief time span.

“What comes to mind when you think of Olof Palme’s assassination?” she asked.

All of a sudden, complete silence descended on the conference room.

“Are you serious, Ingrid?” asked Delgado eventually.

She nodded.

“Oh,” whispered Hultin, with an audible intake of breath.

Knutsson ran his fingers through his beard.

“Olof Palme’s assassination,” Delgado repeated her words. “Can I ask what the messiest case in Swedish criminal history has to do with Stina?”

Nyström pressed her lips together.

“Olof Palme,” echoed Hultin. She looked gobsmacked.

Knutsson puffed out his cheeks and loudly blew out the air.

“My God, Ingrid, the Palme murder, of all the possible cases.”

Nyström raised her shoulders and let them fall again. She wished she could explain everything to her co-workers. Their loyalty deserved complete openness. But for a number of reasons, this wasn’t the right moment. She knew what she was asking of them. To jump off a ten-metre-high diving board while blindfolded, into a tiny paddling pool. She was asking too much. The expression *blind loyalty* came into her mind. I’m a bad boss, she thought. But do I have a choice?

“You’re pulling our legs,” said Delgado, looking at her with narrowed eyes.

She shook her head.

“Olof Palme,” repeated Hultin once more, making a face as though she was tasting the individual syllables. “So is Stina in on this too?”

“We’ll have to get along here without her for a while, I’m afraid,” she said, evading the question.

Knutsson slapped his hand down on the table. Clearly he had made a decision.

“I don’t have a clue what’s going on, but as always I trust you completely.”

Delgado smiled thinly.

“Miss Forss and Olof Palme, interesting. Of course I’m in. Even if just to help Stina, as you said.”

Hultin was frowning. But she nodded regardless.

A heavy weight fell away from Ingrid Nyström’s heart.

“Thank you,” she said, “it means a great deal to me.”

### 3

The ferry journey from Travemünde to Helsinki took over thirty hours. Stina Forss already had half of it behind her. As night fell over the Baltic Sea, she made herself comfortable on the bed in her cabin with a bottle of red wine. The tension gradually fell away. The ferry company

employee at the counter had only given Stina and her ticket a fleeting glance. Beforehand, Stina had taped over her missing eye with gauze and fabric tape. A woman with a supposed eye injury was less conspicuous than a woman with only one eye. Forss inspected the fake passport more closely. Tanya Petrov, a Russian-German from Leipzig. She smiled to herself. On a drunken night many years ago, she had said to Oleg that she wanted to come back in her next life as a Russian. Clearly he hadn't forgotten her words. The photo she had sent him for the new passport was from the time before she had lost her left eye. How different she'd looked back then. She put the passport down and topped up the wine in the toothbrush beaker. She took long gulps and munched on crisps. Once the bag was empty, she washed her hands and got out the leather case she had retrieved from the well. She opened it. The object inside was compact but heavy. With her arm outstretched, she couldn't hold it steady for longer than a few seconds. She laid it in front of her on the bed. The black metal gave off a dull shimmer in the glow of the artificial light. It looked technical. Cool. Brutal and beautiful all at once. After a while, she put it away and stowed the case back in her travel bag.

She finished off the cheap wine and put the beaker on the nightstand. Pulling off her sweatshirt, she laid down beneath the blanket and turned off the light. Even though she'd been having trouble sleeping for weeks now, the hum of the powerful diesel engines in the belly of the ship gave her a fleeting sensation of security.

[END OF SAMPLE]