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Marked for Life

Written by Emelie Schepp

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MARKED FOR LIFE

Emelie Schepp



ONE PLACE. MANY STORIES



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To H.

CHAPTER ONE

Sunday, 15 April

'112, WHAT IS YOUR EMERGENCY?'

'My husband's dead . . .'

Emergency operator Anna Bergström heard the tremor in the woman's voice and glanced at the clock in the top corner of her computer screen: 19.42.

'Could you give me your name, please?'

'Kerstin Juhlén. My husband is Hans. Hans Juhlén.'

'How do you know he is dead?'

'He isn't breathing. He's just lying there. He was lying there like that when I came home. And there's blood . . . blood on the carpet,' the woman sobbed.

'Are you hurt?'

'No.'

'Is anybody else hurt?'

'No, my husband is dead.'

'I understand. Where are you now?'

'At home.'

The operator took a deep breath.

'Can I have your address please?'

'Östanvägen 204, in Lindö. It's a yellow house. With large decorative urns outside.'

Anna's fingers raced across the keyboard as she zoomed in on Östanvägen on the digital map.

'Help is on the way,' she said in a calming voice. 'And I want you to stay on the line until they get there.'

Anna didn't get any answer. She pressed the headset to her ear, straining to listen.

'Hello? Are you still there?'

'He's dead.' The woman sobbed again. Then the sobs became hysterical, until all that could be heard was a long anguished scream.

Detective Chief Inspector Henrik Levin and Detective Inspector Maria Bolander stepped out of their Volvo in Lindö. The cold sea air from the Baltic caught Henrik's flimsy spring jacket. He pulled the zipper up to his neck and put his hands in the pockets.

On the paved driveway there was a black Mercedes together with two police cars and an ambulance. Some distance from the cordoned-off area were two parked cars emblazoned with the logos of the town's two rival newspapers. Two journalists, one from each paper, were straining against the police tape in an effort to get a better view.

'Nothing I hate worse than an upmarket crime scene.' Detective Inspector Maria Bolander, or Mia as she preferred, shook her head in irritation. 'This one's even got statuary.' She stared at the granite lions, then caught sight of the huge urns next to them.

Henrik Levin offered no response as he set off up the pathway to Östanvägen 204. Discreet lighting illuminated the snow

that had settled on the grey edging stones. He nodded to the uniformed officer, Gabriel Mellqvist, who stood sentry at the front door, then he stamped the snow off his shoes, opened the heavy door for Mia, and they both went in.

The house was a hive of activity as Forensics systematically examined the scene. Judging by the coating of powder on various surfaces, including the door handles, they had already dusted for fingerprints. A couple of technicians were collecting and bagging evidence while others checked for signs of blood spatter on the walls. Every few moments the flash of a camera lit up the tastefully furnished living room where a dead body lay sprawled on the striped carpet.

'Who found him?' Mia asked.

'His wife, Kerstin Juhlén,' Henrik said. 'She apparently found him dead on the floor when she came home from a walk.'

'Where is she now?'

'Upstairs. With Hanna Hultman.'

Henrik Levin looked down at the body. The dead man, Hans Juhlén, was head of the department dealing with asylum cases at the Migration Agency's local office. Henrik stepped around the body, then leaned down to study the victim's face – the powerful jaw, the weather-beaten skin, the grey stubble and greying temples. Hans Juhlén's name often cropped up in the news, and based on the photos that accompanied those articles, Henrik had been expecting a younger man. The deceased was wearing neatly pressed trousers and a light-blue striped cotton shirt, now saturated with blood from the wounds to his chest.

'Look, but don't touch,' forensic expert Anneli Lindgren cautioned Henrik from her vantage point next to the large window.

'Shot?'

'Yes, twice. Two entry points from what I can tell.'

Henrik glanced around the room, which was dominated by a sofa, two leather armchairs and a glass coffee table with chrome legs. Paintings by Ulf Lundell hung on the walls. The furniture didn't appear disturbed. Nothing was knocked over.

'No signs of a struggle,' he said and turned toward Mia, who was now standing behind him.

'No,' said Mia, her gaze focused on an oval sideboard. On it lay a brown leather wallet with three five-hundred-kronor bills sticking out. She felt a sudden urge to pull them out – or at least one, but she stopped herself. Enough, she told herself; pull yourself together.

Henrik's eyes wandered to the windows which looked out on to the garden. Anneli Lindgren was still checking for fingerprints.

'Find anything?'

Anneli Lindgren looked up at him from behind her spectacles.

'Not yet, but according to the victim's wife, one of these windows was open when she came home. I'm hoping I'll find something other than her prints on it.'

As she went back to her slow, painstaking work, Henrik turned to Mia.

'Shall we go upstairs and have a few words with Mrs Juhlén?'

'You go up. I'll stay down here and keep an eye on things.'

Upstairs, Kerstin Juhlén sat on the bed in the master bedroom with a cardigan draped around her shoulders, staring vacantly ahead of her. Officer Hanna Hultman, who had been keeping an eye on her, withdrew as soon as Henrik entered, closing the door behind her.

On his way up the stairs, Henrik had imagined the victim's

wife as delicate and elegantly dressed. Instead he found a heavyset woman dressed in a faded T-shirt and dark stretch jeans. Her blonde hair was styled in a blunt bob; the dark roots were showing through, suggesting she was overdue for a visit to the hairdresser. Henrik's eyes scanned the bedroom, taking in the chest of drawers and then the wall of photographs. In the middle of the wall hung a frame with a large faded photo of a happy bride and groom. He was aware that Kerstin Juhlén was watching him.

'My name's Henrik Levin, and I'm the Detective Chief Inspector,' he said softly. 'I'm sorry for your loss. I realize it's a difficult time, but there are a few questions I need to ask you.'

Kerstin dried a tear with the sleeve of her cardigan.

'Yes, I understand.'

'Can you tell me what happened when you came home?'

'I walked in and . . . and . . . he was just lying there.'

'Do you know what time it was?'

'About half past seven.'

'Are you sure?'

'Yes.'

'When you entered the house, did you see anybody else?'

'No. No, only my husband, he . . .'

Her lip quivered and she buried her face in her hands.

It was obvious an in-depth interrogation would be pointless at this stage, so he decided to keep it brief.

'Mrs Juhlén, we've sent for victim support, but in the meantime there are questions I must ask.'

Kerstin removed her hands from her face and rested them on her lap.

'Yes?'

'I understand that a window was open when you came home.'

'Yes.'

'And it was you who closed it?'

'Yes.'

'You didn't see anything amiss outside as you closed it?'

'No . . . no.'

'Why did you close it?'

'I was afraid someone might try and come back in.'

Henrik put his hands in his pockets and pondered for a moment.

'Before I leave you, is there anyone you'd like us to call? A friend? Relative? Your children?'

She looked down, her hands trembling, and whispered something in a barely audible voice.

'I'm sorry, could you repeat that?'

Kerstin shut her eyes, then raised her tear-stained face toward him. She took a deep breath and answered him.

Downstairs in the living room, Anneli Lindgren adjusted her glasses. 'I think I've found something,' she said. She was examining a handprint she'd captured on the window frame. Mia went up to her and noted the very clear form of a palm with fingers.

'There's another one here,' Anneli pointed out. 'They belong to a child.'

She reached for her Canon EOS and adjusted the focus. By the time Henrik returned she was busily snapping a series of photos to document her find.

Anneli beckoned him over. 'We've found some fingerprints,' she said, raising the camera in front of her face again to zoom in and take another shot. 'They're small,' she added.

'So they belong to a child?' Mia clarified.

Henrik looked surprised and leaned close to the window to get a better look. The prints made an orderly pattern. A unique pattern. Clearly from a child-sized hand.

'Strange,' he mumbled.

'Why is it strange?' said Mia.

Henrik looked at her before he answered.

'The Juhléns don't have children.'

CHAPTER TWO

Monday, 16 April

THE TRIAL WAS OVER, AND PROSECUTOR JANA Berzelius was satisfied with the result. She had been absolutely certain the defendant would be found guilty of causing grievous bodily harm.

He had kicked his own sister senseless in front of her four-year-old child and then left her to die in her apartment. No doubt it was an honour crime. Even so, the defendant's solicitor, Peter Ramstedt, looked rather surprised when the verdict was announced.

Jana nodded to him before she left the courtroom. She didn't want to discuss the judgement with anybody, especially not with the dozen or so journalists waiting outside the court with their cameras and mobile phones at the ready. Instead, she made her way towards the emergency exit, pushed the white fire door open and ran down the steps.

Avoiding journalists had become a matter of routine for Jana Berzelius. Three years earlier, when she started in the prosecutor's office in Norrköping, it had been different. Then she had appreciated the coverage and praise the media gave

her, revelling in articles that celebrated her 'meteoric rise' and dubbed her 'the next prosecutor-general'. Her mobile phone vibrated in the pocket of her jacket, and she paused in front of the entrance to the underground car park to look at the display before answering. As she checked the caller ID, she noticed the clock was showing 11.35.

'Hello, Father,' she said, passing through the door to the heated car park.

'Well, how did it go?'

'Two years' prison and ninety in damages.'

'Are you satisfied?'

It would never occur to Karl Berzelius to congratulate his daughter on a successful court case. Jana was accustomed to his taciturn ways. Her mother, Margaretha, was much the same. Though she'd been warm and loving during Jana's childhood, housework had always won out over playing games. She'd fold laundry rather than read stories, or clean the kitchen rather than tuck her daughter into bed. Now Jana was thirty and she treated both parents with the same unemotional respect with which they had raised her.

'I am satisfied,' Jana answered emphatically.

'Your mother wonders whether you're coming home on the first of May? She wants to have a family dinner.'

'What time?'

'Seven.'

'I'll come.'

Jana ended the call, unlocked her black BMW X-6 and sat down behind the wheel. She threw her briefcase on to the leather-upholstered passenger seat and put her mobile on her lap.

Jana's mother was also in the habit of phoning her daughter

after a court case. But never before her husband did. So when Jana felt her mobile vibrate as she was expertly manoeuvring her car out of the tight parking space, she answered without checking the display.

'Hello, Mother.'

'Hello, Jana,' said a male voice.

Jana braked and the car jerked to a halt. The voice belonged to Chief Public Prosecutor Torsten Granath, her superior. 'Well?' he prompted.

Surprised that he should be so eager to hear how the case had gone, Jana gave a swift recap.

'Good. Good. But I'm actually calling about another matter. I want you to assist me on an investigation. A woman has been detained in connection with the death of her husband. He was the official in charge of asylum cases in Norrköping. According to the police, he was shot dead. Murdered. You'll have a free hand in the investigation.'

Jana remained silent, so Torsten continued:

'Gunnar Öhrn and his team are waiting at the police station. What do you say?'

Jana looked at the dashboard: 11.48 a.m. She put the car in gear and got moving again.

'I'll drive straight there.'

Jana Berzelius strode in through the main entrance of Norrköping police station, and took the lift up to the third floor. The sound of her heels echoed in the wide corridor. She looked straight ahead, acknowledging the two uniformed officers she passed en route with the briefest of nods.

The head of CID, Gunnar Öhrn, was waiting for her outside

his office. He ushered her into a conference room overlooking the Norrtull roundabout, which was already clogged with lunchtime traffic. The opposite wall was taken up by a vast whiteboard and a screen. A projector hung from the ceiling.

Jana approached the oval table where the team sat waiting. She exchanged greetings with DCI Henrik Levin, then acknowledged the others present – technician Ola Söderström, Anneli Lindgren and Mia Bolander – before sitting down.

Mia Bolander gritted her teeth, folded her arms and leaned back in her seat as Gunnar Öhrn welcomed the new arrival. She'd been seething since the moment it was announced that Berzelius was to oversee the preliminary investigation of the Hans Juhlén case. Though the two women were contemporaries and had worked together in the past, Mia considered the prosecutor a rival rather than an ally. There was no camaraderie with Jana Berzelius; she was too stiff, too formal. Most people made an effort to be social, to get to know their colleagues, perhaps share a beer or two after work. But Jana rebuffed even the most casual enquiries about her private life and showed no interest in anyone else's affairs.

In Mia's opinion, Jana Berzelius was an arrogant fucking diva, looking down her nose at everyone. She represented everything Mia detested: old money, privileged upbringing, no idea what it was to be mortgaged to the hilt – the antithesis of Mia with her working-class background and mounting debts. Unfortunately, nobody else seemed to share that view. On the contrary, they were all nodding appreciatively as Gunnar congratulated Jana on her latest triumph.

Out of the corner of her eye, Jana noted the hostile stare of the female inspector on the team but chose to ignore it. She opened her briefcase and pulled out a notepad and pen.

Gunnar Öhrn drank the last few drops from a bottle of mineral water, then handed out folders containing copies of all the data they had gathered so far: the initial report; photos of the crime scene and the exterior of the house; a floorplan of the Juhlén house and diagrams showing where the victim, Hans Juhlén, had been found; along with a physical description of Juhlén and a few biographical details. There was also a log recording the investigative steps that had been taken since the victim's body was discovered.

Gunnar pointed to the timeline on the whiteboard as he summarized the report filed by the two officers in the patrol car dispatched to the scene in response to Kerstin's 112 call. They had been the first to interview the victim's wife – or at least, they had attempted to interview her. When they arrived at the house she was screaming hysterically. Apparently incapable of speaking coherently, she started to hyperventilate when questioned and kept repeating over and over that she didn't kill her husband, she just found him in the living room. Dead.

'So do we suspect her?' said Jana, aware that Mia was still glaring at her.

'She is certainly of interest. Since she doesn't have a verifiable alibi, we've detained her.'

Gunnar thumbed through the folder.

'OK, to summarize: Hans Juhlén was murdered sometime between 15.00 and 19.00 yesterday. Perpetrators unknown. The forensic experts confirm the murder took place in the house. That is, the body had not been transported from anywhere else. Correct?'

He looked to Anneli Lindgren for confirmation.

She nodded. 'He died at the crime scene.'

'The body was taken to the medical examiner's lab at 22.21 and inspectors continued to go through the house until after midnight.'

'Yes, and I found these . . .'

Anneli spread out ten sheets of paper with a single sentence written on each. 'They were hidden in the back of the wardrobe in the victim's bedroom. They appear to be threatening letters.'

'Do we know who sent them and to whom they were addressed?' asked Henrik as he reached across to examine them. Jana jotted a note in her notepad.

'No. I got these copies from forensics in Linköping this morning. It'll probably take a day or so before they can get us more information,' said Anneli.

'What do they say?' asked Mia. She pulled her hands inside the sleeves of her knitted sweater, put her elbows on the table and looked at Anneli with curiosity.

'The same message is on each one: *Pay now or risk paying the bigger price*.'

'Blackmail,' said Henrik.

'So it would seem. We spoke to Mrs Juhlén. She denies any knowledge of the letters. She seemed genuinely surprised.'

'They hadn't been reported then, these threats?' said Jana and wrinkled her brow.

'No, nothing has been reported by the victim himself, his wife or anybody else,' said Gunnar.

'And what about the murder weapon?' said Jana.

'We haven't found one yet. Nothing was near the body or in the immediate area,' said Gunnar.

'Any DNA traces or shoe prints?'

'No,' said Anneli. 'But when the wife came home, a window

was open in the living room. That could be how the perpetrator gained entry. The wife closed it, unfortunately, which has made things more difficult for us. But we did manage to find two interesting handprints.'

'Whose prints?' said Jana, her pen poised to note down a name.

'Don't know yet, but everything points to these being the prints of a child. The strange thing is, the couple don't have any children.'

Jana looked up from her notepad.

'Is that significant? Surely they know someone who has children. A friend? Relative?' she said.

'We haven't been able to ask Kerstin Juhlén about it yet,' answered Gunnar.

'Well, that must be the next step.' Jana took her diary out of her briefcase and flipped through to today's date. Reminders, times and names were neatly written on the pale yellow pages. 'I want us to talk to her as soon as possible.'

'I'll phone her lawyer, Peter Ramstedt, right away,' said Gunnar.

'Good,' said Jana. 'Get back to me with a time as soon as you can.' She put her diary back in her briefcase. 'Have you questioned any of the neighbours yet?'

'Yes, the nearest ones,' said Gunnar.

'And?'

'Nothing. Nobody saw or heard anything.'

'Then knock on every door in the street and all the surrounding streets. Lindö has many houses with large drawing rooms overlooking the street.'

'Yes, I imagine you would know that,' said Mia sarcastically.

Jana locked eyes with Mia.

'What I am saying is, somebody must have seen or heard something.'

Mia's eyes flashed with anger, then she looked away.

'What more do we know about Hans Juhlén?' Jana went on.

'He lived a fairly ordinary life, it seems,' said Gunnar, referring to the notes in the folder 'He was born in Kimstad in 1953, which makes him fifty-nine. Spent his childhood there. The family moved to Norrköping in 1965, when he was twelve. He studied economics at university and worked for four years in an accounting firm before he got a position in the Migration Agency's asylum department and worked his way up to become the head. He met his wife Kerstin when he was eighteen and they married in a registry office one year later. They have a summer cottage by Lake Vättern. That's all we've got so far.'

'Friends? Acquaintances?' Mia said grumpily. 'Have we checked them?'

'We don't know anything about his friends yet. Or his wife's. But we've started tracing them, yes,' said Gunnar.

'A more detailed conversation with the wife will help fill in the blanks,' said Henrik.

'Yes, I know,' said Gunnar.

'His mobile phone?' Jana wondered.

'I've asked the service provider for a list of calls to and from his number. Hopefully I'll have it tomorrow latest,' said Gunnar.

'And what have we got from the autopsy results?'

'The medical examiner will be sending us a preliminary report later today. In the meantime, all we can say for certain is that Hans Juhlén was shot and died where he was found.'

'I need a copy of the ME's report,' Jana said.

'Henrik and Mia are going to the morgue straight after this meeting.'

'Fine. I'll tag along,' said Jana, and smiled to herself when she heard a deep sigh from Inspector Bolander.