

• CHAPTER 1 •

Niklas Blomqvist had slept badly. He'd been away too long. His body clock was out of sync with Stockholm in June. He'd forgotten what it was like. Endless daylight just made things worse.

He padded through the apartment to the kitchen area. No need to switch on the light, even with the blinds closed. 5 a.m. Prickly eyes found the tin of fresh coffee. He ran the tap, rinsed the least dirty cup and stifled a yawn.

With Ingmar away, he was left in charge. Henning Wireless Technologies pretty much ran itself. Of course, there was day-to-day pressure. A troublesome account was threatening legal action over their satellite network. And another was in the final testing phase. But things were on track. The lack of sleep derived from something far more important.

Der Sangerbund. The text message had been a warning. The call could come at any time.

He sipped a mouthful of coffee. There was a bitter aftertaste; he poured the rest away. He felt the walls watching him. Too many questions, the space in his head was getting tighter and tighter. Questions but still no answers. He'd been through it a thousand times.

He checked his watch again. There was time. He had to get out, to run, get his legs moving, blood pumping; he needed to clear his mind. The streets would be empty. He would take the device with him, just in case. No time difference with Geneva. Unlikely he would call at this hour but with the Choirmaster,

you never knew. Insomnia didn't upset him. People upset him. And Niklas knew he was dangerously close to being one of those people.

Two circuits of the harbour. Three would be better. Still have time to get a shower. Rehearse what he was going to say. Must get this right. It could turn ugly. Yet this whole thing had started so well. Right place, right time. The Cantata were pleased. A commendation had been mentioned. Even a seat at the table. *You might become a Voice, Niklas.* He'd waited years to hear those words.

Now this. Despite all his enquiries, no one seemed to know. Midsummer's Day. The majestic Great Hall at Uppsala University. Just a few days away. The biggest scientific breakthrough in centuries, the media heralded. Global TV coverage. World leaders and the rock stars of the scientific world all coming to town, yet Niklas remained ignorant, and had no idea what this breakthrough could be. Codename Project Amrita. The only people who knew for sure were in India. And they weren't talking.

He closed the front door quietly and zipped the device into his inside pocket. He would feel the vibration if the call came in. The street air was cool and fresh. There had been no rain for weeks. Rubber soles squeaked on dusty cobbles as he set off at a brisk pace towards the harbour bridge. He didn't need to set the monitor. His heart rate was already off the charts. If anything, the adrenalin surging through him would help bring it under some kind of control.

Without thinking, his feet took the familiar route. From Gamla Stan he would cross to the main shopping centre, then follow the waterfront down to the Strombron Bridge, back over to the old town, sharp right along Slottskajen, then round again.

He quickened the pace down Stora Nygatan. No need to wait for the lights at this hour. He skipped across Riddarhustorget and on towards the main Vasabron Bridge. He wiped the first beads of sweat from his face, shielding his eyes from fingers of sunlight that poked out between the far buildings across the harbour.

Did Ingmar know? If he did, why didn't he say? They trusted each other, no secrets between them. But maybe Ingmar had signed a personal guarantee, something Niklas wasn't even aware of? It was plausible but didn't make any sense. *Why keep this a secret?*

He had nearly completed the first circuit and was powering down Slottskajen towards Myntgatan. He had only seen a couple of taxis in the old town. A few tourists were standing around admiring the ornate buildings of the Royal Palace. He would veer off right onto Riddarhustorget, then right again at the lights and back across the Vasabron. Three circuits, he decided. It would need three circuits.

He sidestepped a middle-aged tourist taking a selfie and nearly tripped over a high kerbstone. Suddenly he felt his chest vibrating. It could only be one caller. No other member of the Cantata would be using the secure line at this hour.

He slowed to a jog and saw a quiet alcove set back from the main street. He took deep breaths, tried to find some composure, flicked away the sweat, came to a halt and unzipped the pocket.

"You've been running, Niklas." The voice was clipped, quietly spoken. A familiar face filled the tiny screen. Dark lines were etched under eyes hidden in shadow. He was not the only one lacking sleep, Niklas thought.

"It helps me think." He noticed the tourist had moved away and crossed the deserted street.

“We are past thinking.” Irritation in the voice. “I want this stopped. Uppsala must not happen. Do you understand me, Niklas?”

“I understand, Choirmaster, but it won’t be easy. The whole world will be watching.” Niklas saw the shadows deepen on the screen.

In the silence that followed, Niklas could hear gulls shrieking high above him. He looked up to see ghostly white figures circling in the pale-blue sky. The noise level was too great. He followed a passageway under a sign saying “Brantingtorget”, and found himself in a courtyard where a fountain was playing around the statue of a water nymph. The plaque said “Morgen”. This was a morning he wouldn’t forget.

“Easy is not a word we recognise in Der Sangerbund.” Burning dark eyes emerged from the shadows, set in a face of pure rage. “I want you in my office, at eight tonight. Clear?”

The screen had already gone dead before Niklas could mouth a reply.

• CHAPTER 2 •

“So you’re saying slavery was a good thing? Jeeze.”

“You’re twisting my words again.” Lawrence passed her the suntan lotion for a liberal dousing over raspberry-ripple skin. A faint hint of coconut oil mixed with the fading charcoal aromas from the hotel kitchens nearby.

The morning mist had burned off long before the conference had finished. They had the pool to themselves. Hannah soon realised why; thirty-eight degrees was proving too much even for her olive-toned skin. A fierce sun was beating down from a sky more grey than blue. They’d retreated to sunbeds under a poolside parasol.

“Excuse me. You just said – and I quote – ‘the economic argument for slavery is a sound one’. Or did I just dream that?” Hannah retorted.

“No, you didn’t dream it. That’s exactly what I said. I think you’re mixing up economics and ethics – two very different things. The economic argument for free labour is unquestionable. It was ethics, not economics, that brought down slavery,” Lawrence explained.

She peered at him over the top of her sunglasses. “Your British Empire was built on slavery. Even here in India, that’s why they kicked you out.”

“Every empire’s built on slavery. Indians were slaves for centuries before we arrived. Anyway, they didn’t kick us out; we decided to leave. But not before we educated them in speaking English and playing cricket, which reminds me . . .” Lawrence

tried to rise elegantly from the sunbed, but still managed to stumble out onto the burning hot tiles.

"Don't change the subject. There's no excuse for slavery." Hannah folded her sunglasses, got up and squinted as she emerged from the shade. She skipped over to the pool and dived gracefully into its inviting depths. She luxuriated in the nothingness, her mind drifting in the cool water as she kicked out with mermaid strokes.

She surfaced, treading water, pulling handfuls of long, dark hair out of her eyes and plastering them behind her ears. She watched in comical fascination as the new man in her life attempted a triple salchow with tucked pike. His corpulent silver-haired figure and total lack of technique proved a deadly combination.

"Only a four point eight from the Russian judge," she spluttered as he struggled to the surface next to her.

"There's still time before the next Olympics," he replied.

"Not for you, lover boy."

She could feel his hands exploring the one-piece swimsuit. They kissed again, slower this time, the chlorine water pooling around them. Just for that moment, that very moment, time stopped. She hadn't been this happy in years. Maybe she'd never been this happy.

The last twelve months had flown by and yet, like a tiled mosaic or a page of fine newsprint, it seemed to be a collection of moments, little fragments pieced together, blurring into each other, a collage of awkward adjustments that needed to be made. She realised the glue holding it all together was the joy of sharing, the joy of laughter. Hannah was falling in love. She wanted to fall in love.

Before Lawrence and his faithful friend Trigger had moved in, she hadn't realised how inert her life had become. She'd

created a sterile apartment, overlooking the Brooklyn Bridge, a place bereft of warmth or emotion; a place where she ate and slept and displayed meaningless objects that someone else classified as art; a place to be alone and to be lonely. Her world had become so dry, so brittle. Dull routines filled the space outside work.

After the initial shock, she'd surprisingly enjoyed the disruption of living with another human being again. Little things created pressure points, yet it was those pressure points, she could see now, that had brought about the much-needed change. Sleeping on the other side of the bed; indeed not occupying the whole bed. The distinctive smell of his Earl Grey tea over breakfast; finding dirty socks on the bathroom floor; the toilet seat being up; not to mention sharing dinner with the mournful eyes of Trigger, a golden retriever in a permanent state of gnawing starvation.

And Lawrence himself? He wasn't the best lover she'd ever known, but at least he was caring and so wanted to please her. He was work in progress, she decided. This long weekend conference could only help. She'd always wanted to visit India. He'd only been once before on a business trip, many years ago, before his divorce. He couldn't remember if it had been to Delhi or Mumbai.

The New Delhi Nirvana International Hotel & Conference Centre was enormous and the perfect setting for the 3-day Global Diabetes Conference, accommodating nearly three thousand delegates. Hannah hadn't appreciated the extent of the diabetes epidemic across India, the numbers having swollen to over 70 million sufferers in recent years. The conference had jarred her into wanting to do more.

By appointing Lawrence as her new Head of Diabetes Research at the Klinkenhammer Institute, she had attracted

much criticism. He did lack the medical training. He hadn't won the hearts and minds of his team. Eyebrows had even been raised about them living together. *Sleeping with a subordinate, Hannah, it never works, you know that.*

Sleep, she pondered, sleep, the greatest healer. A gentle snoring drifted across from the sunbed beside her. He had slept all the way from JFK. They both needed a break but she could see now how difficult the last year must have been for him. The complete change in lifestyle from his monochrome existence in London had been stressful enough. But the knives had been well and truly out for him at work. Getting him away for a few days was the right thing to do. They should plan a proper holiday soon.

Lawrence stirred, turning towards her. "I'm hearing the words *gin and tonic*."

Shadows had crawled across the pool from a row of impossibly tall palm trees. A swarm of brightly coloured kites was playing in a light breeze high above them, the strings leading down like fishing lines into a slum area at the back of the hotel. Hannah could hear the laughter of children coming from the crowded streets nearby.

"Churchill once said," he continued, "that gin and tonic saved more Englishmen than all the doctors in the Empire. It was their way of taking quinine to prevent malaria. We've just time for a swift one before the Gala Dinner. But no ice, remember." Lawrence wagged a finger.

Raspberry ripple was softening into rich mocha with hints of peach and chocolate. Hannah applied more suntan lotion to her face and arms just in case, before slipping on a T-shirt with New York Yankees emblazoned across it. She tucked her hair up into a baseball cap and gathered her things.

"The guidebook says there's an old gin distillery on the

way to the cricket ground." Lawrence slipped on his hotel Havaianas. "If we leave early, we could call in, pay homage to my British ancestors. Maybe take a bottle home?"

"We need to talk about this cricket thing over dinner." Hannah pulled open the heavy door leading back into air-conditioned splendour.

"Well, you can blame Paul Revere for that. We gave you guys a chance – and look what happened? Now Americans have to play sport all on your own. It must be the only World Series that doesn't involve anyone else." He smiled as he avoided a jab to his shoulder.

"Not true. The Japanese play baseball," Hannah retorted, following him towards the lifts.

"My dear girl, I'm talking about Sir Garfield Sobers, Don Bradman, Sachin Tendulkar, Jack Hobbs, Brian Lara and Dr W G Grace," he corrected. "You can't talk about baseball in the same breath. It's sacrilege."

Hannah relented; the argument would keep. Right now something else was on her mind: the inner glow she used to get on holidays, coming off the beach . . . a delicious tingle deep inside. Minibar, not lounge bar, she decided. Lawrence got the hint, smiled and offered no resistance. She took his hand as they waited for the lift. The appearance of a hotel waiter prevented her taking hold of anything else, for now at least.

As they stepped into the corridor on the 22nd floor, Hannah noticed a beautiful young girl walking towards them with flaming auburn hair and a beach bag slung over her right shoulder. She was soon joined by an older man wearing a colourful T-shirt, carrying hotel towels.

They'd only taken a few strides when Lawrence stopped abruptly. Hannah could see puzzlement playing across his face.

"I know him."

Hannah carried on walking. The corridor wasn't wide enough for all four of them to pass. She could tell Lawrence was struggling to remember the man's name; the urge for devilment was obviously too strong for her to ignore.

"That can't be his wife. She's just a bit of fluff," he whispered, his pace slowing.

"You're always jumping to conclusions. It may be perfectly innocent," she surmised.

"A man his age, he should know better. Why can't men grow old gracefully?"

"You should know. Well, who is he then?" She could almost taste the gin now, each step taking her closer.

"Not sure. Must be a long time ago. Funny how he's gone all wrinkly while I'm just as handsome as ever."

"Remind me to put Trigger in for guide dog training." She went to punch his shoulder but missed.

"My God, Lawrence, is that you?" The T-shirt bellowed out in a rich Geordie accent. "What are you doing here?"

"I might ask you the same question, you old devil. And who is this charming young lady?"

Hannah watched Lawrence as he squirmed, the name still eluding him. It was an impressive display of playing for time.

"Lawrence, this is my beautiful daughter, Octavia."

"Oh Pops, you're making me blush. Please call me, Okki; everyone does."

"Okki," her father said, "this is my good friend and fellow Rotarian, Lawrence McGlynn. We go back a long way. Weybridge East, in fact."

Hannah saw Lawrence's eyes light up; he'd remembered.

"Toby, may I introduce the love of my life, Dr Hannah Siekierkowski, the pride of New York City. Hannah, meet Toby

Stanton, one of Rotary's finest, and his beautiful daughter Okki." Lawrence beamed.

"Toby, it's great to meet you at last. Lawrence has told me so much about you." She couldn't resist.

After the handshakes, Hannah toyed momentarily with the idea of joining them after their swim for a drink in the bar. Toby could fill in some blanks in Lawrence's earlier life. Okki seemed charming and was certainly worth getting to know. Thankfully the idea was short-lived when she discovered Toby was also a delegate at the conference. They agreed to meet up at the Gala Dinner.

When they got to the room, Lawrence poured the drinks and went to make the call to change the table booking. Hannah had other ideas.

He never reached to the phone.