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Opening Extract from...

Frozen Out

Written by Quentin Bates

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FROZEN OUT

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Author's Note

The village of Hvalvík is fictional, but not entirely imaginary.

My imagination has placed it on the south-west coast of Iceland, a dozen or so kilometres east of the fishing port of Grindavík, which Hvalvík resembles up to a point. Hvalvík is real enough in that it is a combination of the features of many of the quiet villages dotted around the coast of Iceland, where most people make their living from the land or the sea in one way or another. The place is fictional to avoid giving offence to a real police officer, mayor, taxi driver or petrol pump attendant by choosing a real location. Other locations are genuine, although a few liberties have been taken with place names.

With thanks to everyone who provided help and encouragement – you know who you are. Particular thanks are due to Bylgja for her patience in answering even the most obvious questions.

1

Tuesday, 26 August

Water gurgled between the piles of the dock and the car's tyres juddered over the heavy timbers. Somewhere a generator puttered on board one of the longliners tied up at the quay.

The driver turned off the engine and killed the lights before stepping out of the car and taking a deep breath of fragrant summer air, still and laden with the tang of seaweed. He looked about him carefully and walked along the quay, watching the boats for any sign of activity.

Satisfied, he opened the passenger door. He lifted the passenger's legs out and then stooped to drape an arm over his shoulders. Grunting with exertion, he hauled the passenger to his feet.

'Waas goin' on?' the passenger slurred as the driver steadied himself, planting his feet wide. He half supported, half dragged the passenger the few metres towards the gangplank of the nearest boat.

'Come on. Almost there.'

The passenger staggered against the driver. 'W-w-where's this?'

'Nearly there,' the driver muttered to himself as much as to his passenger.

He braced one booted foot on the heavy timber parapet running the length of the quay, and quickly straightened his back as he tipped the passenger headlong into the blackness below. The splash competed for a second with the muttering generator on board a nearby boat and the driver stood still, listening intently. Hearing nothing from below, he nodded to himself and padded back to the car.

A moment later the engine whispered into life and the car vanished into the night.

The phone buzzed angrily. Gunna fumbled for the handset in the dark and barked into it.

'Gunnhildur.'

'Good morning. Sorry to wake you up. I did wake you up, didn't I?' asked a familiar voice as she cast about for the face that went with it.

'You did,' she yawned. 'Who is this?'

'Albert Jónasson.'

Gunna stretched a hand to the curtain and twitched it aside to let in a glare of early morning sunlight.

'And what can I do for you at this ungodly hour?' she asked, knowing that Albert Jónasson was not a man to trouble a police officer without good reason, especially one who had arrested him only a few weeks before.

'Thought you'd be the best person to talk to. There's a bloke down by the quay.'

'You woke me up to tell me there's a stranger by the dock?' Gunna growled.

'Yeah. A stranger who's dead.'

She snapped awake and swung her feet on to the cold floor. 'Where?'

'On the beach by the pontoons. Saw something in the waves and went to have a look.'

'Right. Stay where you are. I'll be right there.'

Gunna drove past the half-dozen longline boats tied up at the quay and slowed down as the car rumbled on to the black gravel that made up the track leading to the small boat dock. She could make out a solitary figure standing next to the only boat there, a bearded bear of a man in orange oilskin trousers pacing the pontoon dock next to a spotless fishing boat that puttered with its engine idling.

She parked at the top of the dock among the fishermen's pickup trucks and Albert Jónasson strode to meet her, pointing at a bundle

lying among the waves lapping on the black sand of the beach a few metres away.

'Down there,' he said grimly, following behind as Gunna trod gingerly, wary of disturbing anything.

'Have you been down here, Albert?' she called over her shoulder.

'No fear. Leave well alone, I thought.'

'You haven't had a look? How did you know it was a body?'

'I got here a bit late. All the others were away before daybreak. I was just starting up and saw something floating, so I had a look with the binoculars and saw what it was. So I thought I'd better give you a call.'

Gunna ripped a pair of surgical gloves from the pouch on her tool belt and snapped them on before she squatted by the bundle and gently smoothed matted red hair back from a face that looked peaceful but lost. She pressed the button on her Tetra communicator and spoke into the tiny microphone on her collar.

'Nine eight four one, nine five five zero. Are you there, Haddi?'

She retreated and pulled her phone from her pocket.

'Albert, are you going to sea today?' she asked as the dialling tone buzzed.

'I was going to.'

'All right. Ah, Haddi, that took a while,' she said, switching her attention to the phone. 'Look, shelve everything, we have an unidentified body floating in the small boat dock. You'd better get the cavalry out.'

Albert watched Gunna nodding as she paced back and forth, admiring her solid frame inside the uniform that didn't do it justice.

'No,' she continued. 'Ambulance and the technical division, discreetly if that's at all possible. Get Bjössi over from CID in Keflavík if he's not too busy with the Baltic mafia. OK?'

She ended the call and looked over to where Albert was waiting patiently for her.

'Am I all right to go to sea today, then?'

'When will you be back?'

'Three. Four, maybe.'

'Go on then. But I'll need you to make a statement when you've finished landing your fish.'

'No problem,' Albert said gratefully, already making his way along

the pontoon and throwing off the boat's mooring ropes in the process. 'See you later, Gunna,' he called out as the boat surged from the quay.

And I'll stay here and wait for the professionals to turn up, Gunna thought, opening the squad car's boot to get out a roll of tape to cordon off the area. She wondered if the tape had ever been used before in Hvalvík, a village where a speeding ticket or an uncooperative drunk were the most serious crimes she or Haddi normally had to deal with.

26-08-2008, 0944

Skandalblogger writes:

You can't keep a good blog down!

So, we're back and once again the Icelandic scandal blog has a brand-new home! We've been tarred and feathered and run out of town on a rail one more time, so this time we're back stronger than ever in a delightful part of the world where they respect the power of Mr Visa to overrule the pathetic attempts of those-who-run-things to silence free speech. Hurrah for the Tiger economies! Free speech is there for those willing to pay for it!

Making friends and influencing people!

But anyway, folks, and we mean that most sincerely, our favourites are still up to their old tricks. Gunni Benedikts at the trade ministry, no doubt after a looong lunch with his old chum Óli at agriculture, has just decided to block imports of New Zealand lamb to our fair country. Now, some of you may find this a bit hard to stomach, what with all the claptrap these guys have been spouting over the years about free market economics, going for the most competitive bid, and all that shit. But let's remember which party holds trade? And agriculture? Of course, it's our old friends the Progressives, and we can't go upsetting the farmers, or at least the half-dozen who are still in business and who vote for them, just by letting them be undercut by cheap foreign imports. That wouldn't be fair, would it?

(Private) Power to (a few of) the People!

As for everyone's favourite minister . . . ! Bjarni Jón, now just who are your new friends? And we don't mean the guys at InterAlu, it's

their friends from further east we're interested in this time. From what a little bird whispers in our ear, these are oil people. Energy people. Money people. Powerful people. Watch your back, BJB, and when you've shaken hands with them, you'd better count your fingers, just to make sure.

We've heard the rumours circulating around environment and trade, and the PM's office, and we're not going to believe it, as we know what a great guy you really are. We're absolutely certain that you'd never sideline the National Power Authority by inviting a foreign company to build and run a private power station to sell electricity to InterAlu. So, please, BJB, tell us it ain't true?

Watch this space, there'll be more tomorrow!
Bæjó!

Haddi firmly believed that a whirlwind of unwarranted attention had descended on Hvalvík and its tiny police station. By mid-morning the station's older, but junior, police officer would have preferred to be making his accustomed tour of the village in the station's better Volvo, taking in coffee, gossip and a doughnut or three with the lads at the net loft or maybe with one of his cousins in the saltfish plant's canteen. Instead he found himself fending off a flood of questions through the phone and from the huddle of newspaper and television people outside.

Outside on the grass verge a serious young woman in a thick parka over a smart city suit presented take after take with the little harbour and Hvalvík's pastel-painted houses in the background, as if to make sure that Reykjavík viewers understood this was a report from outside their city limits.

Teams from *Morgunbladid*, *DV*, *Fréttabladid*, state TV and radio, Channel 2, Channel 3, and a few more that Haddi had never heard of had all demanded information, been told there was no statement yet and they'd just have to wait. Haddi was putting the phone down from telling the local paper the same thing when a young man with a mess of gelled fair hair that appeared to defy both gravity and the breeze outside pushed his way through the door into the station's reception area.

'Yes?' Haddi asked brusquely, arms folded on the counter.

'Er. Hi. I'm Skúli Snædal from *Dagurinn*.'

Haddi rolled his eyes ceilingwards. 'Look, son, I've told all of you that there'll be a statement this afternoon. Yes, we have found an unidentified person. No, I can't tell you where. No, I can't tell you any more than that.'

'But I'm—'

'Sorry. That's all I can say right now.'

'But that's not what I'm here for. I've come to see Gunnhildur. I'm shadowing her for a while. For *Dagurinn*,' he added.

Haddi took a deep breath 'So you're not here because of the body?'

'No. What body?'

'Never you mind. The chief's not here right now, and I don't suppose she'll be back for an hour or two.'

'Couldn't you call her up? I'm expected.'

Haddi pulled his glasses down from among his curls and peered over them.

'If it was something important, then I could call her up,' he agreed. 'But on a day like today, then it would have to be something more than usually important.'

Skúli tried again. 'It's all arranged. I can call the press representative at police headquarters and confirm with them again.'

'Sorry. Not now. Look, we have a very serious incident to deal with, so I'd appreciate it if you'd call Reykjavík and sort it out with them. We're a bit busy right now. Hm?'

Haddi's frown and raised eyebrows made it plain that this was not a matter for discussion and the young man appeared to concede defeat.

'All right then. But do you know when she's going to be back?'

'Normally, about now. Today . . .' Haddi shrugged his shoulders.

The young man nodded glumly and made for the door. The look of disappointment on his face aroused a sudden pang in Haddi's heart and he called across as the young man had the door half open.

'Not from round here, are you?'

'No. Reykjavík.'

'D'you know Hafnarkaffi?'

'What's that?'

'It's the shop down by the dock. It's getting on for lunchtime and odds are that's where the chief'll be. But you didn't hear that from me, all right?'

The young man grinned in delight. 'Thanks. That would be great. How do I recognize her?'

'Gunna? Can't miss her. She's a big fat lass with a face that frightens the horses.'

Hafnarkaffi stands between the fishmeal plant and Jói Ben's engineering shop. Originally a shed used for storing tarred longlines through the summer, Hafnarkaffi has grown gradually since it was turned into a drive-in kiosk thirty years ago, then expanded into a shop and had an extension built to add a small café for harbour workers and fishermen. The final addition was the petrol pumps outside, but by now hardly anything of the original corrugated iron shed is to be seen and the place has become an enduring nightmare for council planners who have visions of it spreading across the road.

Skúli looked through the steamed-up glass panels of the door and made out figures sitting at tables. Pushing it open, he ventured in, thought for a moment and decided that he really was hungry anyway.

At the end of the long counter he collected a tray and pushed it in front of him, picking up bottled water on the way and stopping before the row of steaming steel bins.

'Fish or meat?' a grey-faced woman behind the counter asked.

'Er – what do you have?'

'Fish or meat.'

'What sort are they?'

'It's Tuesday. Salted fish or salted meat.'

Skúli's heart sank and he began to wish he hadn't bothered with a tray.

'Saltfish, please,' he decided, knowing that he would regret it.

The woman ladled fish and potatoes on to a plate. 'Fat?'

'Sorry? What?'

'D'you want fat on it?'

'Oh, er, no. Thanks.'

She dropped the spoon back into the dish of liquefied fat and pointed to a pot. 'Soup?'

'Oh, no thanks.'

'It's included.'

'No, thanks anyway.'

'Up to you. It's there if you change your mind. Coffee's included as well. That's eight hundred. Receipt?'

Skúli handed over a note and received change and receipt. He scanned the room and quickly located a bulky figure in uniform at the far side, hunched over a table. At a distance it wasn't easy to see if the figure was man or a woman, but Skúli hoped he had found the right person. He edged between tables, forcing a row of blue-overalled workmen to haul in their bellies and chairs for him to pass, before planting his tray on the table.

'May I sit here?'

The figure looked up and Skúli saw that, in spite of the broad shoulders, the solid woman with the short fair hair was not the bruiser Haddi had given him to expect. Although she would never be a beauty, she had an angular, handsome face that radiated authority. He wondered briefly if this was natural, or the product of a police career.

'Help yourself,' she said, between spoonfuls of colourless soup.

'You must be Gunnhildur?'

She nodded, scraping the bottom of the soup plate. 'Known to every man and his dog as Gunna the Cop,' she corrected. 'And you must be the lad from *Dagurinn*. I suppose Haddi told you I'd be here, did he?'

Skúli picked at the saltfish on the plate in front of him. This kind of traditional food had never been on the menu at home and he wasn't ready for the overpowering salt flavour of the first forkful.

'So. Now that you're here, what is it you're after?'

'Nothing special, really. The idea is a series of feature articles in the Saturday magazine about the work of rural police. I'm not looking for anything out of the ordinary – just the opposite, actually.'

'Not because of what's been going on this morning?'

'No . . .' Skúli said slowly.

'So you don't know,' she said with slow satisfaction and a broad smile that lit up her face. 'Well, you must be the only reporter in Iceland who hasn't heard that an unidentified corpse was found just round the corner this morning. You must be the only one, because practically every other hack in the country has either turned up here or else phoned the station to demand a statement. Poor old Haddi's been going spare.'

'Oh. I see.'

Skúli dropped his cutlery and dived into his coat pocket to bring out a mobile phone. He switched it on and within seconds it was buzzing angrily with a series of voice and text messages.

'Shit. I forgot to switch it on when I left this morning, and I didn't even have the radio on in the car,' he admitted. 'Sorry, I didn't know anything.'

'Anyway, now that you're here, I suppose you'd better have a story to take back with you.'

'That would be . . . great.'

'You mean it would save your sorry arse from being fried?'

'Er, yes, probably.'

'There'll be a statement this afternoon, so you can have it half an hour before it comes out officially. I don't suppose that'll do any harm.'

'Thank you. That's brilliant.'

'Right. But you'll owe me a favour there straight away. How old are you?'

'Twenty-five.'

'What are you on this paper, then, a junior reporter, or what?'

'No. I'm the crime editor.'

'What? There's a whopping story here and you didn't even know about it, Mr Crime Editor?' Gunna asked with a second sly smile.

Skúli shuffled fish about on his plate. 'Actually I've only been the crime editor for a week. And that was because someone put the by-line as a joke on something I wrote about a woman who had been caught shoplifting from the shopping centre at Kringlan. It stayed in by mistake, so I'm the new crime editor.'

'How long have you been working for *Dagurinn*?'

Skúli was starting to resent Gunna's quickfire questions, reminding himself that he should be the one asking. 'A couple of months. *Dagurinn* only started up in January.'

'What were you doing before that?'

'I finished my master's last year and then I was at *Jyllands Posten* as an intern for a few months until I came home.'

'Denmark. Where?'

'In Århus. How long have you been in the police?' he asked, trying to wrench the conversation around so that he could ask the questions.

'Far too long. And who are your people?'

'The Snædal family.'

'Oh. Top people, I see.'

'My uncle was in the government years ago.'

'I know. I might even have voted for him.'

'That's nice to know. I'll tell him.'

'I'm not quite that old,' Gunna replied coldly. 'Now, get that down you and we'll make a start. I have masses of things to do and if you're going to tag along you'll have to keep up and preferably keep quiet. All right?'

'That's fine,' Skúli replied, laying down his knife and fork with a premonition of failure. He realized that, for a reporter, he had asked no questions and found out almost nothing about the person he was supposed to be profiling, while she had found out practically everything about him. 'We can go, if you want. I don't really like saltfish,' he admitted.

'Then you won't grow up to have curly hair. Come on then,' she said with a grin, rising to her feet and pulling a phone from her jacket pocket as it began to chirrup.

'Hi, sweetheart, just a moment,' she answered it in a gentle tone.

'You'd better take your tray back to the counter, and you can take mine while you're at it. I'll see you outside in a minute,' she instructed Skúli, marching towards the door with the phone at her ear. Skúli wondered who she could be addressing as sweetheart.

'So, what does a crime editor actually do?'

The second-best Volvo bumped off the tarmac and rumbled on to the track leading to the pontoon dock. Skúli sat in the passenger seat, laptop on his knees, getting down as much of the story as Gunna was prepared to give him.

'Mostly I just check the police websites every morning. Unidentified, you say? A man or a woman?'

'Male.'

'Age?'

'Too early to say.'

'What else can you tell me?'

'That's all for now,' Gunna replied, bringing the car to a halt with a crunch of gravel behind a white van. Skúli followed her as she picked her way easily between rocks to the foreshore, while he found his feet slipping from under him.

Two people in white overalls crouched on the sand where the falling tide had left the man's body, while a tall uniformed officer stood and watched as a photographer systematically took pictures of the area. Gunna lifted the Do Not Cross tape and ducked under it.

'Hi, Snorri, what's new?' Gunna asked the man in uniform.

'Nothing yet. They've not long been here.'

'And Björssi?'

'Been and gone for a snoop around. Said he'd see you at the station in a while.'

'Fair enough. Oh, by the way, that's Snorri,' she announced, looking at Skúli and jerking a thumb at the uniformed officer. She used the same thumb to point at Skúli. 'This is Skúli. He's my shadow. From the newspapers, so be careful what you tell him.'

Skúli saw her smile again while Snorri looked doubtful.

'Camera?' she asked Skúli.

'What?'

'Do you have a camera?'

'No – well, only the one in my phone.'

'All right. Take any pictures and I'll lock you up.'

Gunna moved closer to the white-overalled pair crouched around the body and hunched down next to them. Skúli caught a glimpse of a young face, lifeless eyes half-open, and he felt himself engulfed in a sudden deep sadness at the sight.

'Gunnhildur,' Gunna introduced herself brusquely.

'Sigmar. That's Selma,' the man replied absently, while the woman did not look up.

'Anything useful?'

'Not really. He's not been here long, I'd say. Nothing to indicate any injuries. More than likely a case of falling in the water followed by hypothermia or drowning.'

'Any identification?'

'Nothing so far. Nothing in his pockets. No rings, no jewellery. We'll know more when we've had a proper look at him on the slab.

If he's Icelandic, then we'll probably have an identity in a day or two, sooner if he has a record of any kind. If he's a foreigner . . .'

He shrugged, scratched at the stubble on his chin and yawned.

'Makes a change to get out into the country once in a while,' he observed with a thin smile.

'Taking him away, are you?'

'Yup. Almost finished, actually. We'll probably be off in an hour and we should have a report for you in a day or two. There's no sign of any violence, so how urgent do you want this to be?'

'Sooner the better, as far as I'm concerned. This kind of thing doesn't happen every day round here.'

'All right. We'll do what we can,' Sigmar said, pulling a mask back up over his mouth and nose.

'Are you all right, lad?' Gunna asked Skúli kindly. 'Not seen a dead person before?'

Skúli's face had gone from pale to white. He shook his head.

'It's all right. You'll get used to it. But if you're going to puke up, please don't do it over anything that might be used as evidence.'

The young man had departed in an ambulance to the National Hospital's mortuary in Reykjavík before the inshore boats began to appear in the afternoon and the pontoon dock became a hive of activity. Gunna could see plenty of curious faces and knew that Albert Jónasson must have been chatting over the VHF while he steamed out that morning.

'Nothing to see, people,' she muttered to herself as she and Skúli were the last to drive away, leaving the beach to be reclaimed by the rising tide.

'I'd best be getting back to town,' Skúli said as Gunna parked in the mayor's space outside the police station.

'All right. I hope today was useful, but it's quite unusual to have a body. In fact, it hasn't happened for years. So that's a bit of excitement for you.'

'Do you know who it is?'

'No idea. Might be a seaman, could be a foreigner. But whoever he was, my guess is he had a bit too much to drink and fell into the water trying to get on board a boat.'

'When do you think you'll know?'

Gunna shrugged. 'Anybody's guess, I'm afraid. Now, you're not going to write any of this, are you? There'll be a statement this afternoon with everything in it that we can say before he's been identified. Things get a bit delicate with relatives and whatnot. You understand?'

'No, of course not. I mean, yes. I'll be back later in the week if that's all right.'

'Fine by me. It won't be so interesting, though. Most of what we do here is traffic. There's bugger all happens in Hvalvík, so I really don't know why they wanted to send you here.'

Gunna opened the car door and swung her legs out. 'Give me a call when you want to come over. Shouldn't be a problem.'

'Haddi!'

'In here.'

Gunna put her head round her own office door to see Haddi in one chair and the morose figure of Björssi from CID sitting behind her desk with his feet perched on the window sill.

'Ah, Björssi. So that's where you've got to. Make yourself comfortable, will you?'

Björssi languidly put his hands behind his head. 'Will do, Gunna. Two sugars for me, if you don't mind, and a few doughnuts wouldn't do any harm.'

'Bugger off. I don't want your clogged-up arteries on my conscience. But I'm sure Haddi has some coffee on the go somewhere?'

'All right,' Haddi grumbled, standing up. Gunna waved Björssi to Haddi's vacated seat and planted herself behind her desk.

'Right then. What have we got?'

Björssi sighed. 'Dead bloke. Late twenties to mid-thirties by the look of him. Been in the water a few hours, but not long. Not a thing in his pockets. No rings, no watch, nothing round his neck, no piercings that we could see. No visible injuries.'

He took a deep breath and carried on. 'Clean-shaven probably yesterday, I'd say. Ginger hair, nails clipped, no shoes, black jeans and a black shirt with long sleeves. That's it, in a nutshell. He's probably

on the slab at the morgue right now being looked at carefully. With any luck we might get something more tomorrow.'

'He's not a local, but he must have gone into the water here. The tide wouldn't have washed him into the harbour from anywhere else, surely?'

'Nope. Hasn't been in the drink long enough for that. If he'd been rolling around in the water for long enough to drift along the coast, he wouldn't be in such good condition.'

Haddi returned with a thermos and mugs.

'I suppose you want milk, Bjössi?' he grumbled.

'Black's fine with me.'

'That's just as well, because we don't have any milk anyway. Need me, do you?'

'No, you'd best knock off now, Haddi,' Gunna replied. 'I'll see you in the morning.'

Haddi waved as he let the door swing shut behind him and Gunna heard him greet the woman reading the morning's paper at the post office counter next door as he left the building.

'Bjössi, how much help with this can I get from CID?'

'Not a lot, I'm afraid. Looks pretty clear to me. Once he's identified, inform the relatives and get on with the rest of it. There'll have to be an inquiry, but I'd be surprised if it came up with anything other than death by misadventure, either drowning or hypothermia.'

'Seems reasonable enough to me,' Gunna agreed. 'No sign of foul play, not yet at any rate. I'll check the missing persons list before I finish today and get on to pathology in the morning and see what they can tell us.'

She yawned.

'Been a long day?' Bjössi asked.

'It has. And I'd better be off in a minute. How's Dóra, anyway?'

'Ach, she's fine. Moaning, but nothing unusual about that. How about your kids?'

'Laufey should be back from school soon, so I'd better be there when she gets home. Gísli's at sea, been on *Snæfugl* since January and says he likes it, or he likes the money anyway.'

'He's got his head screwed on, your boy has.' Bjössi grinned. 'Don't know where he gets that from.'

'From his mother, of course,' Gunna said stoutly. 'There's no bloody sense in his father's family.'

'Ah, I wouldn't know about that. But I reckon if things keep going the way they are, fishing's about the best place your lad could be. Interest rates and prices going up all the time. You know, it doesn't seem right.' The furrows across Björssi's brow deepened.

'Yup, it stinks. But fishermen and coppers will be fine, just you see,' Gunna assured him.

Björssi refilled his mug from the thermos. He wedged a hard lump of sugar between his teeth and sipped his fresh coffee through it.

'I hope somebody's going to be fine,' Björssi mumbled with the sugar lump still between his teeth. 'The exchange rate's up and down. I don't care what the government tries to tell us, I can see prices of everything going up and Dóra says it's dearer just to live now. Half of the Poles and whatnot have already left, except the ones running lucrative dope businesses.'

'You're probably right, but what's going to change? Nothing. Anyway, what's keeping you so busy over at Keflavík that you can't help an old colleague out for a few hours?'

'Dope, dope and more dope.' Björssi sighed. 'It's just never-ending and I'm sick of it. It's dealing with these bloody low-lifes that I'm fed up with, day in, day out.'

'Well, you shouldn't have joined the police in that case.'

'Probably right,' Björssi said, standing up. 'But I reckon we're both stuck with it now, Gunna. Come and find me if you're in Keflavík tomorrow. By the way, who's the toyboy?'

'What?'

'Your young man.'

'Oh, him. He's a journalist on *Dagurinn*, says he's here to write a profile of a country police station.'

'Fun for you.' Björssi sniggered while Gunna glowered.

'It was wished on me,' she said. 'Shit, that reminds me.'

'Of what?'

'I've just remembered I had a meeting with Vilhjálmur Traustason this morning.'

'Don't worry about it, sweetheart. I told our glorious leader that you were a bit busy today.'