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The Nightmare

Written by Lars Kepler

Translated from the Swedish by Laura A. Wideburg

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THE NIGHTMARE

LARS KEPLER

Translated from the Swedish by Laura A. Wideburg



blue door

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the work of the author's imagination. Any resemblance to
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The word ‘music’ comes from the ‘art of the muses’ and reflects the Greek myth of the Nine Muses. All nine were daughters of the powerful god Zeus and the titan Mnemosyne, goddess of memory. Euterpe, the muse of music, is often portrayed holding a double flute to her lips. Her name means ‘Giver of Joy.’

The gift of musicality does not have a generally agreed-upon definition. There are people who lack the ability to hear differing frequencies in music while, on the other hand, there are people born with an exact memory for music and perfect pitch so they can reproduce a specific tone without any external reference.

Throughout the ages, a number of exceptional musical geniuses have emerged, some of whom have achieved lasting fame—Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, who began to tour the courts of Europe at the age of six; Ludwig van Beethoven, who wrote many of his masterpieces after becoming totally deaf.

The legendary Niccolò Paganini was born in 1782 in the Italian city of Genoa. He was a self-taught violinist and composer. To this day, very few violinists have been able to perform Paganini’s swift, complicated works. Until his death, Paganini was plagued by rumours that to gain his musical virtuosity he’d signed a contract with the Devil.

In the light of the long June night, on becalmed waters, a large pleasure craft is discovered adrift on Jungfrufjärden Bay in the southern Stockholm archipelago. The water, a sleepy blue-grey in colour, moves as softly as the fog. The old man rowing in his wooden skiff calls out a few times, even though he's starting to suspect no one is going to answer. He's been watching the yacht from shore for almost an hour as it's been drifting backwards, pushed by the lazy current away from land.

The man guides his boat until it bumps against the larger craft. Pulling in his oars and tying up to the swimming platform, he climbs the metal ladder and over the railing. There's nothing to see on the afterdeck except for a pink recliner. The old man stands still and listens. Hearing nothing, he opens the glass door and steps down into the salon. A grey light shines through the large windows over the varnished teak brightwork and a deep blue cloth canvas sofa. He continues down the steep stairs, which are panelled in more shining wood. Past a dark galley, past a bathroom, into the large cabin. Tiny windows near the ceiling offer barely enough light to reveal an arrow-shaped double berth. Near the headboard a young woman in a jean jacket sits slumped at the edge of the bed. Her thighs are spread; one hand rests on a pink pillow. She looks right into the old man's eyes with a puzzled, frightened expression.

The old man needs a moment to realise the woman is dead.

Fastened to her long black hair is a clip shaped in the form of a white dove: the dove of peace.

As the old man moves towards her and touches her cheek, her head falls forwards and a thin stream of water dribbles from her lips and on down to her chin.

foreboding

A cold shiver runs down Penelope Fernandez's spine. Her heart beats faster and she darts a look over her shoulder. Perhaps she feels a sense of foreboding of what's to come as her day progresses.

In spite of the television studio's heat, Penelope's face feels chilled. Maybe the sensation is left over from her time in makeup when the cold powder puff was pressed to her skin and the peace-dove hair clip was taken out so they could rub in the mousse that would make her hair fall in serpentine locks.

Penelope Fernandez is the spokesperson for the Swedish Peace and Reconciliation Society. Silently, she is being ushered into the newsroom and to her spotlighted seat across from Pontus Salman, CEO of the armaments manufacturer Silencia Defense AB. The news anchor Stefanie von Sydow is narrating a report on all the layoffs resulting from the purchase of the Bofors Corporation by British BAE Systems Limited. Then she turns to Penelope.

“Penelope Fernandez, in several public debates you have been critical of the management of Swedish arms exports. In fact, you recently compared it to the French Angola-gate scandal. There, highly placed politicians and businessmen were prosecuted for bribery and weapons smuggling and given long prison sentences. But here in Sweden? We really haven’t seen this, have we?”

“Well, you can interpret this in two ways,” replies Penelope. “Either our politicians behave differently or our justice system works differently.”

“You know very well,” begins Pontus Salman, “that we have a long tradition of—”

“According to Swedish law,” Penelope says, “all manufacture and export of armaments are illegal.”

“You’re wrong, of course,” says Salman.

“Paragraphs 3 and 6 of the Military Equipment Act,” Penelope points out with precision.

“We at Silencia Defense have already got a positive preliminary decision.” Salman smiles.

“Otherwise this would be a case of major weapons crimes and—”

“But, we *do* have permission.”

“Don’t forget the rationale for armaments—”

“Just a moment, Penelope.” Stefanie von Sydow stops her and nods to Pontus Salman, who’s lifted his hand to signal that he hadn’t finished.

“All business transactions are reviewed in advance,” he explains. “Either directly by the government or by the National Inspectorate of Strategic Products, if you know what that is.”

“France has similar regulations,” says Penelope. “And yet military equipment worth eight million Swedish crowns landed in Angola despite the UN weapons embargo and in spite of a completely binding prohibition—”

“We’re not talking about France, we’re talking about Sweden.”

“I know that people want to keep their jobs, but I still would like to hear how you can explain the export of enormous amounts of ammunition to Kenya? It’s a country that—”

“You have no proof,” he says. “Nothing. Not one shred. Or do you?”

“Unfortunately, I cannot—”

“You have no concrete evidence?” asks Stefanie von Sydow.

“No, but I—”

“Then I think I’m owed an apology,” says Pontus Salman.

Penelope stares him in the eyes, her anger and frustration boiling up, but she forces it down, stays silent. Pontus Salman smiles smugly and begins to talk about Silencia Defense’s factory in Trollhättan. Two hundred new jobs were created when they were given permission to start production, he says. He speaks slowly and in elaborate detail, deftly truncating the time left for his opponent.

As Penelope listens, she forces aside her anger by focusing on other matters. Soon, very soon, she and Björn will board his boat. They’ll make up the arrow-shaped bed in the forecabin and fill the refrigerator and tiny freezer with treats. She conjures up the frosted schnapps glasses, and the platter of marinated herring, mustard herring, soused herring, fresh potatoes, boiled eggs, and hardtack. After they anchor at a tiny island in the archipelago, they’ll set the table on the afterdeck and sit there eating in the evening sun for hours.

Penelope Fernandez walks out of the Swedish Television building and heads towards Valhallavägen. She wasted two hours waiting for a slot in another morning programme before the producer finally told her she’d been bumped by a segment

on quick tips for a summer tummy. Far away, on the fields of Gärdet, she can make out the colourful tents of Circus Maximus and the little forms of two elephants, probably very large. One raises his trunk high in the air.

Penelope is only twenty-four years old. She has curly black hair cut to her shoulders, and a tiny crucifix, a confirmation present, glitters from a silver chain around her neck. Her skin is the soft golden colour of virgin olive oil or honey, as a boy in high school said during a project where the students were supposed to describe one another. Her eyes are large and serious. More than once, she's heard herself described as looking like Sophia Loren.

Penelope pulls out her mobile phone to let Björn know she's on her way. She'll be taking the underground from Karlaplan station.

"Penny? Is something wrong?" Björn sounds rushed.

"No, why do you ask?"

"Everything's set. I left a message on your machine. You're all that's missing."

"No need to stress, then, right?"

As Penelope takes the steep escalator down to the platform, her heart begins to beat uneasily. She closes her eyes. The escalator sinks downward, seeming to shrink as the air becomes cooler and cooler.

Penelope Fernandez comes from La Libertad, one of the largest provinces in El Salvador. She was born in a prison cell, her mother attended by fifteen female prisoners doing their best as midwives. There was a civil war going on, and Claudia Fernandez, a doctor and activist, had ended up in the regime's infamous prison for encouraging the indigenous population to form unions.

Penelope opens her eyes as she reaches the platform. Her claustrophobic feeling has passed. She thinks about Björn waiting for her at the motorboat club on Långholmen. She

loves skinny-dipping from his boat, diving straight into the water, seeing nothing but sea and sky.

She steps onto the train, which rumbles on, gently swaying, until it breaks out into the open as it reaches the station at Gamla Stan and sunlight streams in through the windows.

Like her mother, Penelope is an activist and her passionate opposition to war and violence led her to get her master's in political science at Uppsala University with a speciality in peace and conflict resolution. She's worked for the French aid organisation Action Contre la Faim in Darfur, southern Sudan, with Jane Oduya, and her article for *Dagens Nyheter*, on the women of the refugee camp and their struggles to regain normality after every attack, brought broad recognition. Two years ago, she followed Frida Blom as the spokesperson for the Swedish Peace and Reconciliation Society.

Leaving the underground at Hornstull station, Penelope feels uneasy again, extremely uneasy, without knowing why. She runs down the hill to Söder Mälarstrand, then walks quickly over the bridge to Långholmen and follows the road to the small harbour. The dust she kicks up from the gravel creates a haze in the still air.

Björn's boat is in the shade directly underneath Väster Bridge. The movement of the water dapples the grey girders with a network of light.

Penelope spots Björn on the afterdeck. He's got on his cowboy hat, and he stands stock-still, shoulders bent, with his arms wrapped closely around him. Sticking two fingers in her mouth, she lets loose a whistle, startling him, and he turns towards her with a face naked with fear. And it's still there in his eyes when she climbs down the stairs to the dock. "What's wrong?" she asks.

"Nothing," he answers, as he straightens his hat and tries to smile.

As they hug, she notices his hands are ice-cold and the back of his shirt is damp.

"You're covered in sweat."

Björn avoids her eyes. "It's been stressful getting ready to go."

"Bring my bag?"

He nods and gestures towards the cabin. The boat rocks gently under her feet and the air smells of lacquered wood and sun-warmed plastic.

"Hello? Anybody home?" she asks, tapping his head.

His clear blue eyes are childlike and his straw-coloured hair sticks out in tight dreadlocks from under the hat. "I'm here," he says. But he looks away.

"What are you thinking about? Where's your mind gone to?"

"Just that we're finally heading off together," he answers as he wraps his arms around her waist. "And that we'll be having sex out in nature."

He buries his lips in her hair.

"So that's what you're dreaming of," she whispers.

"Yes."

She laughs at his honesty.

"Most people . . . women, I mean, think that sex outdoors is a bit overrated," she says. "Lying on the ground among ants and stones and—"

"No. No. It's just like swimming naked," he insists.

"You'll have to convince me," she teases.

"I'll do that, all right."

"How?" She's laughing as the phone rings in her cloth bag.

Björn stiffens when he hears the signal. Penelope glances at the display.

"It's Viola," she says reassuringly before answering. "*Hola, Sis.*"

A car horn blares over the line as her sister yells in its direction. "*Fucking idiot.*"

"Viola, what's going on?"

"It's over. I've dumped Sergei."

"Not again!" Penelope says.

"Yes, again," says Viola, noticeably depressed.

"Sorry," Penelope says. "I can tell you're upset."

"Well, I'll be all right I guess. But . . . Mamma said you were going out on the boat and I thought . . . maybe I could come, too, if you don't mind . . ."

A moment of silence.

"Sure, you can come, too," Penelope says, although she hears her own lack of enthusiasm. "Björn and I need some time to ourselves, but . . ."

the pursuer

Penelope stands at the helm. An airy blue sarong is wrapped around her hips and there's a peace sign on the right breast of her white bikini top. Spring sunlight pours through the windscreen as she carefully rounds Kungshamn lighthouse and manoeuvres the large motorboat into the narrow sound.

Her younger sister, Viola, gets up from the pink recliner on the afterdeck. For the past hour, she's been lying back in Björn's cowboy hat and enormous sunglasses, languidly smoking a joint.

Five times she tries to pick up a matchbox from the floor with her toes. Penelope can't help smiling. Viola walks into the cockpit and offers to take the wheel for a while. "Otherwise, I'll go downstairs and make myself a margarita," she says, as she continues down the stairs.

Björn is lying on the foredeck, a paperback copy of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* put to use as his pillow. Penelope notices that the railing near his feet is rusting. The boat was a present from his father for his twentieth birthday, but Björn hasn't had the

money to maintain it. It was the only gift his father ever gave him, except once when his father paid for a trip. When Björn's father turned fifty, he invited Björn and Penelope to one of his finest properties, a five-star hotel called Kamaya Resort on the east coast of Kenya. Penelope endured the resort for two days before she took off to join Action Contre la Faim at the refugee camp in Kubbum, Darfur.

Penelope reduces speed from eight to five knots as they reach the bridge at Skuru Sound. They've just glided into the shadows when Penelope notices the black rubber boat. Pressed against the concrete foundation, it's the same kind the military uses for their coastal rangers: an RIB with a fibreglass hull and extremely powerful engines. Penelope has almost passed beneath the bridge when she notices a man hunched in the darkness, his back turned. She doesn't know why her pulse starts to race at the sight of him; something about his neck and the black clothes he wears bothers her. She feels he's watching her even though he sits turned away.

Back into sunshine, she starts to shiver; goose bumps cover her arms. She guns the boat to fifteen knots. The two inboard engines drone powerfully, and the wake streams white behind them as the boat takes off over the smooth surface of the water.

Penelope's phone rings. It's her mother. For a moment Penelope fantasises that she's calling to tell Penelope how wonderful she'd been on TV earlier, but she snaps back to reality.

"Hi, Mamma."

"Ay, ay."

"What's wrong?"

"My back. I'll have to go to the chiropractor," Claudia says, loudly filling a glass with tap water. "I just wanted to know if you've talked to your sister."

"She's on the boat with us," Penelope replies, listening to her mother gulp the water down.

"She's with you . . . how nice. I thought it would be good for her to get out."

"I'm sure it is," Penelope says quietly.

"What do you have to eat?"

"Pickled herring and potatoes, eggs—"

"Viola doesn't like herring. What else do you have?"

"I've made a few meatballs," Penelope says patiently.

"Enough for everyone?"

Penelope falls silent as she looks out over the water. "I can always skip them myself," she says, collecting herself.

"Only if there aren't enough . . ." her mother says. "That's all I'm trying to say."

"I understand."

"Am I supposed to be feeling sorry for you now?" her mother demands with irritation.

"It's just that . . . Viola is not a child—"

"I remember all the years I made you meatballs for Christmas and Midsummer and—"

"Maybe I shouldn't have eaten them."

"All right then," her mother says sharply. "If that's the way you want it."

"I'm just trying to say—"

"You don't have to come for Midsummer," Claudia snaps.

"Oh, Mamma, why do you have to—"

Her mother has hung up. Penelope shakes with frustration. The stairs from the galley creak and a moment later Viola appears, a margarita in hand. "Was that Mamma?"

"Yes, it was."

"Worried I wouldn't get enough to eat?" Viola can't hide a smile.

"Believe me, we have food on board," Penelope says.

"Mamma doesn't believe I can take care of myself."

"She worries about you."

"She never worries about you," Viola points out.

"I can take care of myself."

Viola takes a sip of her drink and looks out through the windscreen.

"I saw you on TV," she says.

"This morning? When I met Pontus Salman?"

"No, it was . . . last week," Viola replies. "You were talking to that arrogant man with the aristocratic name—"

"Palmcrona," Penelope says.

"Palmcrona, right."

"You can't believe how angry he made me! I could feel my face turning bright red, and the tears started coming and I couldn't stop them. I felt like jumping up and reciting Bob Dylan's 'Masters of War' to his face, or like running out and slamming the studio door behind me."

Viola's only half listening. She watches Penelope stretch as she opens the roof window. "I didn't realise you've started to shave your armpits," she says.

"Well, these days I've been in the media so much that—"

"Vanity, pure vanity!" Viola says with a laugh.

"I didn't want people to dismiss me as a dogmatist just because I have some pit hair."

"What about your bikini line, then?"

"Well, that's not going so well . . ."

Penelope pulls aside her sarong and Viola laughs out loud.

"Björn likes it," Penelope says with a little smile.

"He can't talk, not with those dreads of his."

"I imagine you shave everywhere you have to," Penelope says sharply. "Just to please your married men and your big-muscled idiots and—"

"I know I have bad taste in men."

"You have good taste in most other areas."

"I've never amounted to much, though."

“If you’d just finished school, got good grades . . .”

Viola shrugs. “I actually got my equivalency.”

The boat ploughs gently through the water, green now, reflecting the surrounding hillsides. Seagulls follow overhead.

“So, how did it go?”

“I thought the exam was easy,” Viola says, licking salt from the edge of her glass.

“So it went well?”

Viola nods and puts her glass down.

“How well?” Penelope nudges her sister in her side.

“One hundred percent.” Viola looks down modestly.

Penelope laughs with happiness and hugs her sister hard.

“Do you realise what this means? Now you can be anything you want! You can go to whichever university you want and study anything you like! You can pick anything at all! Business, medicine, journalism!”

The sisters laugh and their cheeks flush. Penelope hugs her sister so hard that the cowboy hat falls off. She smooths Viola’s hair and pats it into place just as she used to do when they were small. She removes the clip with the peace dove from her hair and slides it into her sister’s, smiling contentedly.

a boat adrift in jungfrufjärden bay

With roaring engines, Penelope steers towards the bay. The bow arches up; white, frothy water parts behind the stern.

“You’ve lost your mind, girl!” Viola yells as she pulls the hair clip loose, just as she used to do when she was little and her mother *almost* had her hair done.

Björn wakes up when they stop at Goose Island for an ice cream. Viola insists on a round of miniature golf, too, so it’s late in the afternoon when they set out again.

On their port side, the bay spreads out like a grand stone floor. It is breathtaking. The plan is to anchor at Kastskär, a long, uninhabited island with a narrow waist. On the southern side, there is a lush cove where they’ll anchor the boat and swim, grill, and spend the night.

Viola yawns. “I’m going below to take a nap.”

“Go ahead.” Penelope smiles.

Viola walks down the companionway as Penelope stares ahead. She reduces the speed and keeps her eye on the depth

sounder as they glide in towards Kastskär. The water is shoaling quickly from forty metres to five.

Björn enters the cockpit and kisses Penelope's neck.

"Would you like me to start dinner?" he asks.

"Viola needs to sleep for an hour or so."

"You sound just like your mother right now," he says softly. "Has she called you yet?"

Penelope nods.

"Did you have a fight?"

Tears spring to her eyes and she brushes them from her cheeks with a smile.

"Mamma told me I wasn't welcome at her Midsummer celebration."

Björn hugs her.

"Ignore her."

"I do."

Slowly and gently, Penelope manoeuvres the boat into the innermost part of the cove. The engines rumble softly. The boat is so close to land now that she can smell the island's damp vegetation. They anchor, let it drag, and go in towards the shore. Björn jumps onto the steep, rocky ground holding the line, which he ties around a tree trunk.

The ground is covered in moss. He stands and looks at Penelope. A few birds in the treetops lift off as the anchor winch clatters.

Penelope pulls on her jogging shorts and her white sneakers, jumps on land, and takes Björn's hand.

"Want to check out the island?"

"Isn't there something you want to convince me about?" she asks hesitatingly.

"The advantages of our Swedish general-access rights," he says.

She smiles and nods as he pushes her hair off her face

and lets his finger run over her high cheekbone and her thick black eyebrows.

“How can you be so beautiful?”

He kisses her lightly on the mouth and begins to lead her inland, until they reach a small meadow surrounded by tight clumps of high wild grasses. Butterflies and small bumblebees flit over the wildflowers. It’s hot in the sun and the water shimmers between the trees on the north side. Björn and Penelope stand still, hesitate, study each other with shy smiles, then turn serious.

“What if someone comes?” she asks.

“We’re the only ones on this island.”

“Are you sure?”

“How many islands exist in Stockholm’s archipelago? Thirty thousand? Probably more,” he says.

Penelope slips out of her bikini top, kicks off her shoes, and pulls off her shorts and bikini bottom at the same time so that she’s standing completely naked in the grass. Her initial feeling of embarrassment gives way to pure joy. There’s something remarkably arousing about the cool sea air against her skin and the warmth that simultaneously rises from the earth.

Björn looks at her and mumbles that he’s not sexist, but he does want to just look at her for another second. She’s tall; her arms are muscular yet still have a soft roundness to them. Her narrow waist and sinewy thighs make her look like a playful ancient goddess.

Björn’s hands shake as he pulls off his T-shirt and his flower-patterned swimming trunks. He’s younger than she is. His body is still boyish, almost hairless.

“Now I want to look at you,” she says.

He blushes and walks over to her with a smile.

“So I can’t look at you?”

He shakes his head and hides his face in her neck and hair.

They begin to kiss standing still. They hold each other tightly. Penelope is so happy she has to force a huge grin from her face so that she can keep kissing. She feels Björn's warm tongue in her mouth, his erection, his heart beating faster and faster. They find a spot between the tufts of grass and stretch out. With his tongue he searches for her breasts and their brown nipples. He kisses her stomach, he opens her thighs. As he looks at her, it strikes him that their bodies have begun to glow in the evening sun, as if illuminated. Everything now is gentle. She's wet and swollen as he licks her slowly and softly until she has to move his head away. She whispers to him, pulls him to her, steers him with her hand until he slides inside her. He's breathing heavily into her ear and she stares straight up at the rosy sky.

Afterwards, she stands up, naked in the warm grass, and arches towards the sky. She takes a few steps and peers between the trees.

"What is it?" Björn asks, his voice thick.

She looks back at him, sitting naked on the ground and smiling up at her.

"You've burned your shoulders."

"Happens every year."

He gently touches the pink spots.

"Let's go back—I'm hungry," she says.

"Let me swim for a bit."

She pulls her bikini bottom and shorts back on, puts on her sneakers, then stands with her bikini top in her hand. She allows her gaze to wander over his hairless chest, his strong arms, the tattoo on his shoulder, his careless sunburn . . . and his light, playful look.

"Next time, *you're* on the bottom," she says.

"Next time," he repeats cheerfully. "You're crazy for me—I knew it!"

She laughs and waves at him dismissively. She hears him

whistle to himself as she walks through the forest towards the tiny, steep beach where they've anchored.

She stops for a moment to put on her bikini top before she continues down to the boat.

On board, Penelope wonders whether Viola is still sleeping in the aft cabin. She thinks she should start a pot of fresh potatoes and some crowns of dill and then wash up and change for the evening. Strangely, the deck near the stern is totally damp as if from a rain shower. Viola must have swabbed the deck for some reason. The boat feels different somehow. Penelope can't say what it is, but all at once she has goose bumps. The birds suddenly stop singing and everything is silent. Penelope is now aware of every one of her movements. She walks down the stairs. The door is open to the guest cabin and the lamp is lit, but Viola is not there. Penelope notices her hand shaking as she knocks on the door to the tiny toilet. She peers inside and returns to the deck. Looking ashore, she can see Björn walking down to the water. She waves to him, but he's not looking her way.

Penelope opens the glass doors to the salon.

"Viola?" she calls softly.

She goes down to the galley, takes out a pot, puts it on the element, and returns to the search. She peers into the large bathroom, then the main cabin where she sleeps with Björn. Looking around in the dark cabin, at first she thinks that she sees herself in a mirror.

Viola is sitting on the edge of the bed, her hand resting on the pink pillow from the Salvation Army.

"What are you doing in here?"

As Penelope hears her own voice, she's also realising that nothing is as it should be. Viola's face is cloudy white and wet; her hair hangs down in damp streams.

Penelope takes Viola's face in her hands. She moans softly,

then screams right into her sister's face, "Viola? What's wrong? *Viola!*"

But she already understands what's out of place and what's wrong. Her sister is not breathing, her sister's skin is not giving off warmth. There is nothing left of Viola. The light of life has been snuffed out.

The narrow room tightens around Penelope. Her voice is a stranger's. She wails and stumbles backwards, knocking her shoulder hard on the doorjamb as she turns to run up the stairs.

Up on the aft deck, she gulps down air as if she's suffocating. She glances about, ice-cold terror filling her bones. One hundred metres away on the beach, she spots a man in black. Somehow Penelope understands how things fit together. She knows this is the man who was underneath the bridge in the military inflatable. This was the man who had his back turned when she passed by. And she knows this is the man who killed Viola—and is not finished.

From the beach, the man waves to Björn, who's now swimming twenty metres from shore. He's yelling something to Björn. Penelope rushes to the steering console and rummages in the tool drawer. She finds a Mora knife and races back to the stern.

She sees Björn's slow swimming strokes and the water rings around him. He's looking at the man in confusion. The man is waving, motioning for him to come over. Björn smiles an uncertain smile and begins to swim towards land.

"Björn!" Penelope screams as loud as she can. "Swim to seal!"

The man on the beach turns towards her and begins to run towards the boat. Penelope cuts off the rope, slips on the wet stern deck, leaps back up, and runs to the steering console and starts the motor. Without looking around, she raises the anchor and engages the gear in reverse at the same time.

Björn must have heard her, because he turns away from land and starts to swim towards the boat instead. As Penelope steers in his direction, the man in black changes course and starts running towards the other side of the island. Intuitively, she knows that's where he's pulled his inflatable ashore, at the northern inlet.

And she knows without a doubt that there is no possible way for them to speed away from it.

Motor rumbling, she steers towards Björn, and as she gets closer, she slows and stretches a boat hook towards him. The water is so cold, and he looks exhausted and so frightened. His head keeps bobbing under the surface. She jabs the boat hook his way and accidentally strikes his forehead. He starts to bleed.

"Hold on to it!" Penelope cries out.

The black inflatable is rounding the island. She can clearly hear the roar of its motor. Björn grimaces in pain, but after several attempts, he finally manages to wrap his elbow around the boat hook, and Penelope hauls him as quickly as she can to the swimming platform. He reaches the edge and holds on. She lets go of the boat hook and it drops into the water and drifts away.

"Viola is dead!" she screams, and hears the panic and despair in her own voice.

As soon as Björn grabs the ladder tight she runs back to the steering console and hits the gas.

He climbs over the railing and she hears him yell that she should steer straight across to the island of Ornö and its spit.

She can hear the rubber boat draw closer. She turns in a tight curve and the boat thuds heavily underneath the hull.

Penelope can't speak, she can only whimper. "That man killed Viola!"

"Watch out for the rocks!" Björn warns through chattering teeth.

The inflatable has rounded Stora Kastskär and is now picking up speed on the smooth open water.

Blood runs down Björn's face.

They are swiftly reaching the large island. Björn turns to see that the rubber boat is now only three hundred metres behind.

"Head for the dock!"

She hits reverse, and shuts off the motor as the prow of the boat slams the dock with a crunching sound. The waves of their wake race towards the rocky shore and roll back, making the boat tip to the side. Its ladder breaks to pieces. Water sloshes over the railing. Penelope and Björn jump off and race across the dock towards land as the rubber boat roars closer. Behind them they can hear the hull knock against the dock in the swells. Penelope slips and steadies herself with her hand, then clambers up the steep rocks that edge the forest. The motor of the rubber boat falls silent and Penelope knows their head start is insignificant. She rushes into the trees with Björn. They head deeper into the woods as her thoughts whirl in panic and her eyes dart back and forth for a place where they can hide.

the swaying man

Paragraph 21 of the police law states that a police officer may enter any building, house, room, or other place if there is reason to believe that a person has died, is unconscious, or is otherwise unable to call for help.

The reason Criminal Assistant John Bengtsson has received the assignment to examine the top-floor apartment in the building at Grevgatan 2 on this Saturday in June is that Carl Palmcrona, the general director of the National Inspectorate of Strategic Products, has not appeared at work and has missed an important meeting with the foreign minister.

This is certainly not the first time that John Bengtsson has had to enter buildings to search for deceased or injured persons. He remembers silent, fearful parents waiting in the stairway while he enters rooms to find young men barely alive after heroin overdoses, or worse, murder scenes: women in their living rooms, battered to death by spouses as the TV drowns out the sound.

Bengtsson carries his breaking-and-entering tools through the entry door and takes the lift to the top floor. He rings the bell and waits. He examines the lock on the outer door. After a while, he hears shuffling. It sounds as if it is coming from the stairwell one floor below. It sounds as if someone is sneaking away.

Bengtsson listens for a moment, then tries the door handle. The door swings open silently.

“Anyone home?” he calls out.

Nothing. He drags his bag over the threshold, wipes his feet on the doormat, closes the door behind him, and steps into a large hallway.

Gentle music can be heard from one of the rooms so he continues in that direction, knocks at the door, and enters. It’s a large drawing room, sparsely furnished—three Carl Malmsten sofas, a low glass coffee table, and a tiny painting of a ship in a storm on the wall. An ice-blue sheen comes from a music system with a modern flat, transparent design. Meandering, melancholy music comes from the speakers.

Across the room is a set of double doors. Bengtsson swings them open to reveal a salon with tall Art Nouveau windows. The late-spring light is broken by the multiple small panes at the top.

A well-dressed man swings in the middle of the white room.

John Bengtsson stands quietly in the doorway and stares at the dead man for an eternity before he notices the laundry line fastened to the ceiling-lamp hook.

The body seems poised at the moment of a jump into the air. His ankles are stretched and his toes point to the ground. He’s hanged—but there’s something that does not fit. Something is not as it should be.

Bengtsson cannot step through the double doors; he must keep the crime scene intact. His heart pounds and he feels

the heavy rhythm of his pulse. He finds he cannot look away from the swaying man in the empty room.

The whisper of a name begins to echo in Bengtsson's brain: *Joona. I have to talk to Joona Linna immediately.*

There is no furniture in this room. Just the hanged man, who, in all probability, is none other than Carl Palmcrona, the general director of ISP.

The rope is fastened to the centre of the lamp hook emerging from the rosette in the centre of the ceiling.

There's nothing for him to climb on, Bengtsson thinks.

The ceiling height must be at least three and a half metres.

Bengtsson calms himself, collects his thoughts, and registers everything he sees. The hanged man's face is as blanched as damp sugar and John Bengtsson can see only a few blood spots in the wide-open eyes. The man is wearing a thin overcoat, a light grey business suit, and black leather-soled oxfords. A black briefcase and a mobile phone lie on the parquet floor a short distance from the pool of urine that has collected directly underneath the body.

The hanged man suddenly shakes.

Bengtsson takes a sharp breath.

A heavy thud from the ceiling above. The sounds of a hammer in the attic. Someone walks across the attic floor. Another thud and Palmcrona's body shakes again. The sound of a power drill. Silence. Someone calling for more cable: "Cable reel."

Bengtsson notices how his pulse begins to slow as he turns to walk away from the salon. He sees the outer door is open and he stops, sure he'd closed it. He knows he could be wrong. He leaves the apartment, but before he reports to his department, he picks up his mobile phone and calls Joona Linna at the National Criminal Investigation Department.

the national homicide squad

First week of June. For several weeks the people of Stockholm have been waking up much too early. The sun rises at three thirty a.m. and remains bright almost the entire night. The weather has been unusually warm. The exuberant bird cherries and lilacs bloomed at the same time. Dense sprays of buds spread their aroma from Kronoberg Park all the way to the entrance of the National Police Board headquarters.

The National Police Board, Sweden's only centrally operating police organisation, is responsible for combating serious crime at both a national and international level.

The head of the National Criminal Investigation Department, Carlos Eliasson, is standing by the low window on the fifth floor scanning the view over Kronoberg Park while pressing the phone to his ear and dialling Joona Linna's number. Once again, he hears his call connect to voicemail. He sets the phone down and glances at the clock.

Next door, a tired voice tries to deal with a European arrest warrant and the Schengen Information System.

Petter Näslund enters Carlos's office and, clearing his throat carefully, leans against a streamer that declares: WE MONITOR, MARK THE SPOT, AND DISTURB.

"Pollock and his guys will be here soon," Petter says.

"I can tell the time," says Carlos.

"The sandwiches are ready," Petter says.

Carlos suppresses a smile and asks, "Have you heard they're recruiting?"

Petter's face turns red as he looks at the floor, collects his thoughts, and looks up again. "I would . . . Can you think of anyone better who would work well in the National Homicide Squad?"

There are five experts who make up the National Homicide Squad. The Commission, as they're known, works systematically using a methodology known by its initials, PIGC, Police Investigation of Grave Criminality. The burden they carry is enormous. They are in such demand, they barely have time to get to the police station for a meeting.

The paradise fish in Carlos's aquarium calmly make their turns. As he reaches for fish food, the phone rings.

"They're on the way up," says Magnus in reception.

Carlos tries one last time to reach Joona Linna by phone, then gets up, checks himself quickly in the mirror, and goes to welcome his guests. Just as he reaches the lift, the doors soundlessly slide open. Seeing the entire Commission together makes an image flash in his mind: a Rolling Stones concert he attended a few years back with some of his colleagues. The band on the stage looked like relaxed businessmen, and just like the National Homicide Squad, they were all dressed in dark suits and ties.

Nathan Pollock steps out first, his distinctive silver hair in a ponytail. Following him is Erik Eriksson. He likes glasses decorated with diamonds, hence the nickname 'Elton.' Behind him saunters Niklas Dent, next to P. G. Bondesson,

and walking behind all of them is Tommy Kofoed. Kofoed is the forensic technician. He's hunchbacked, and stares sullenly at the ground.

Carlos shows them to the meeting room, where Operating Commander Benny Rubin is already sitting at the round table, waiting for them, a cup of coffee before him. Tommy Kofoed takes an apple from the fruit basket and bites it loudly. Nathan Pollock looks at him with a smile and shakes his head slightly. Kofoed stops right in the middle of a chew.

"Welcome," Carlos begins. "It's good we can get together. There are several serious issues on the agenda."

"Shouldn't we wait for Joona Linna?" asks Tommy Kofoed.

"Well . . ." drawls Carlos.

"That man does just what he pleases," Pollock says quietly.

"Hey, come on now," Tommy Kofoed says defensively. "Give the man his due. The Tumba murders last year? He had them all figured out and I still don't know how he did it."

"Against all fucking logic," Elton says with a smile.

"I'd say I'm fairly well versed in forensics," Tommy Kofoed continues, "but Joona walked in, took a look at the blood spatters . . . He knew right away when each murder had occurred . . . Amazing . . ."

"It's true, it's true. He could see the whole picture," Pollock says. "The degree of violence, the level of force, the stress level, how the footprints found in the apartment lagged more, which showed more exhaustion than those in the locker room."

"Fucking awesome," Tommy Kofoed mutters.

Carlos clears his throat, returns to his informal agenda.

"The Coast Guard called this morning," he tells them. "An old fisherman found a dead woman."

"In his nets?"

"No, he saw a large motorboat drifting with the current

near Dalarö. He rowed out, boarded the vessel, and found her sitting on her berth in the fore."

"That doesn't sound like something for us," Petter Näslund says, and smiles.

"Was she murdered?" asks Pollock.

"Probably a suicide," answers Petter quickly.

"There's no need to make snap judgments," Carlos says as he helps himself to a slice of cake. "But I wanted to bring it up."

"Anything else?"

"We had a request from the police in West Götaland," Carlos says. "The form is on the table."

"I won't be able to take it on," Pollock says.

"I know how busy you are," Carlos says, slowly sweeping crumbs from the table. "Let's skip to the other end of the agenda: recruiting someone for the NHS."

Benny Rubin looks around with a sharp glance and explains that the leadership is aware of the heavy workload, and they therefore, as a first step, have allocated funds for expanding the Commission by one full-time position.

"What does everyone think?" Carlos asks.

"Shouldn't Joona Linna be here?" asks Tommy Kofoed. He leans forwards and takes one of the wrapped sandwiches.

"I'm not sure he'll make it," Carlos says.

"What about a bite before we get into this?" says Elton, reaching for the tray.

Tommy Kofoed methodically unwraps the plastic from his salmon sandwich, peels back the bread, plucks off a sprig of dill, squeezes lemon juice over the salmon, and reassembles his sandwich.

Suddenly the door to the meeting room swings open and Joona Linna steps in. His short-cut blond hair stands straight up.

"*Syö tilli, pojat,*" he says in Finnish.

“That’s right!” Nathan Pollock laughs. “Eat your dill, boys!”

Nathan and Joona grin at each other. Tommy Kofoed’s cheeks turn red and he shakes his head with a smile.

“*Tilli*.” Nathan Pollock repeats the Finnish word and laughs out loud as Joona walks past Tommy and sticks the dill back onto his sandwich.

“Let’s get back to the meeting,” says Petter.

Joona shakes hands with Nathan, then takes an empty chair, slinging his black jacket over the back as he sits down.

“Please pardon my being late,” he says.

“Let me welcome you as a guest of this meeting,” says Carlos. “We were just bringing up recruiting. I believe I’ll hand the floor over to Nathan.”

“All right, and I want everyone to know that I’m not alone in this,” Nathan Pollock begins. “Rather . . . we’re all in agreement. Joona, we’re hoping that you’ll come on board with us.”

The room falls silent. Niklas Dent and Erik Eriksson nod. Petter Näslund is a dark silhouette in the backlight.

“We’d really like to have you,” Tommy Kofoed ventures.

“I appreciate the offer,” Joona answers as he runs his hand over his hair. “You’re hardworking guys, and you’ve proved your mettle. I respect your work . . .”

Everyone around the table smiles.

“But as for me . . . I just can’t be tied down to your strict methodology. To any strict method of investigation,” he explains.

“We know, we understand,” Kofoed says quickly. “The way we work is a little rigid, but it’s shown . . .”

Kofoed falls silent.

“We just wanted to ask,” says Nathan Pollock.

“It’s just not the way I work,” Joona explains.

To a man, they look down at the table; someone nods.

Joona's mobile phone rings and he excuses himself to answer it. He stands up from the table and leaves the room. A minute later he returns and slides his jacket off the chair.

"Sorry. I would like to stay, but—"

"Something serious?" asks Carlos.

"That was John Bengtsson from Routine Patrol," Joona says. "He's just found Carl Palmcrona."

"Found?" asks Carlos.

"Hanged," Joona answers. His eyes gleam like grey glass.

"Who is Palmcrona?" asks Nathan Pollock. "I can't place the name."

"He's the general director for ISP," Tommy Kofoed says quickly. "He makes the final decisions on Swedish arms exports."

"Isn't everything at ISP classified?" asks Carlos.

"True," Kofoed answers.

"So let the guys at Säpo take it."

"I've just promised Bengtsson I'd come in person," Joona answers. "There's something not quite right about the scene."

"What?" Carlos asks.

"He said . . . well, I really have to see it myself."

"Sounds interesting," Tommy Kofoed says. "Can I come?"

"If you want," Joona answers.

"I'll come, too, then," Pollock says swiftly.

Carlos tries to remind them about the meeting in progress but sees it is pointless as the three men get up and walk out into the cool hallway.