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Opening Extract from...

Buzz

Written by Anders de la Motte

Translated from the Swedish by Neil Smith

Published by Blue Door

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BUZZ

ANDERS DE LA MOTTE

Buzz

Translated from the Swedish by Neil Smith



blue door

This novel is entirely a work of fiction.
The names, characters and incidents portrayed in it are
the work of the author's imagination. Any resemblance to
actual persons, living or dead, events or localities is
entirely coincidental.

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1

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Buzz [b^z]
To leave, to get away from your current situation
Something that creates excitement, hype or a thrill!
A rush or feeling of energy, excitement, stimulation or slight intoxication
The verb used when posting something (mainly on Google buzz)
To clip, to cut, to shave, to remove, to mow
A method of obtaining immediate attention
Being overly and unnecessarily aggressive
A continuous noise, as of bees; a confused murmur, as of a general conversation in low tone
A whisper; a rumour or report spread secretly or cautiously
Making a call

www.wiktionary.org
www.dictionary.com
www.urbandictionary.com

‘The speed of communication is wondrous to behold. It is also true that speed can multiply the distribution of information that we know to be untrue.’

Edward R. Morrow

‘Nothing travels faster than light, with the possible exception of bad news, which follows its own rules.’

Douglas Adams

From: Mail Delivery Service
To: Badboy.128@hotmail.com
Subject: Delivery Status Notification
Date: 26 July, 23:44

Failed; 6.2.12.12 (rerouted)

Original message
From: badboy.128@hotmail.com
To: undisclosed recipients
Subject: the Game
Date: 26 July, 23.43

Dear newsdesk/TV station/blog

About four weeks ago I found a mobile phone on the train. A nice, shiny one – brushed steel with a glass touch-screen. It pulled me into a chain of events that came to an end out in Torshamnsgatan a few days ago, and I'd like to tell you about it.

My name is Henrik Pettersson, HP to my friends, and I'm 31 years old. (I don't really see what my age has got to do with anything, but you lot seem obsessed with how old people are, so there you go.)

By now the mention of Torshamnsgatan should have set a few alarm-bells ringing, seeing as that was where the bomb went off. The bomb that was actually intended for someone else entirely. (I'm not going to write their name, you know who I mean and you never know what sort of surveillance filter might pick up this email . . .)

Back to the mobile phone on the train:

It invited me to play an Alternate Reality Game, where the boundaries between fantasy and reality had been blurred. Little tasks you had to carry out, and film them with the phone at the same time. And those tasks earned you points, giving you a ranking on a high-score list, where your performance could be judged by people watching online. And you got money if you succeeded.

It all sounded cool, so I signed up pretty quickly.

But this particular Game turned out to be way more real than I had imagined.

And way more dangerous . . .

Try googling the weird shit that's been going on in the last few weeks!

That police car that crashed at Lindhagensplan, an abandoned house going up in flames out in Fjärdhundra, not to

mention what happened to the royal procession in Kungsträdgården . . .

It's all linked to the Game.

And now you're wondering how I know that . . .

Easy – I was responsible for it all.

I got off on the buzz, the feeling that I had an admiring audience out there in cyberspace. Giving me cred for all the things I was doing. And like the sad little approval-junkie that I am, I let myself get dragged into it without protest. I shifted the boundary of what I thought was acceptable so far that I couldn't actually see it anymore. I even managed to harm those closest to me . . .

Pathetic, isn't it? How the hell could anyone do something like that, just to get a bit of public recognition? But take a look at yourselves. How many of you have got Facebook, Twitter or Instagram open in another window as you're reading this email? Running them as apps on your mobiles and checking them compulsively from the moment you wake up until you fall asleep? My guess is: all of you.

The whole damn lot of you.

So you're not exactly in a position to judge me!

I'm sure you'll do your job properly, so I might as well tell you now: I've got a sister, Rebecca Normén, she's a bodyguard with the Security Police. Yes, THAT Rebecca

Normén . . . You've probably written loads about her in the last few days. What with the medal and everything.

Becca's good at her job, she's a good bodyguard. A fucking good one, actually. Which isn't all that surprising, seeing as she's been in training her whole life, since we were little. She always looked after me. Except for one time when I stepped in and saved her life. Took a bullet for her.

But that's a long time ago now, we don't talk about it . . .

Somehow the Game Master managed to take advantage of our fucked-up relationship, and got me to subject Becca to things I'd rather forget.

She isn't involved in the Game, at least not the way I am. In fact she even doubts that the Game really exists. But like Verbal Kint says in The Usual Suspects:

The greatest trick the devil ever pulled was convincing the world he didn't exist.

Anyhow, I've given you enough, so get digging.

Check out who really owns that pile of ruins out on Torshamnsgatan. ACME Telecom Services Ltd is just a front. The set-up out there was used to control the Game. Collecting information, sending out tasks, and letting other people bet on the outcome.

Start by finding out what happened to

Erman, the IT genius who installed the servers. It's not a pretty story . . .

But once you've been dragged in there's no way out.

You're always playing the game!

Talk to my old BFF, Magnus Sandström, who almost had his computer shop burned out (but call him Farook or he'll get upset). Then throw in all the weird stuff that keeps happening. Computer systems that just shut down, sabotage, unexplained thefts. People vanishing – or being killed . . .

Put the pieces of the puzzle together, think big! Then even bigger!

You've got a lot of work ahead of you, but once you've got to the bottom of this you won't believe your eyes.

They've been playing for years, poor Erman told me. And I'm sure that's true.

Be careful – the Game Master's got eyes and ears everywhere, and will do everything in his power to stop you.

Dig deep, join the dots and – most important of all – don't trust anyone!

/HP

ps. Don't waste time trying to find me. I'm long gone by now. Somewhere no-one will ever find me.

Not even the Game Master.

This message did not reach its intended recipients.
It was rerouted and removed by the administrator on July 26 at 23:43

She had been awake just a few seconds when she realized that the man was behind her. Something told her that he had been standing there for a long time under the scorching sun while he waited for her to come round.

She had been dreaming about an al-ghourab – a scrawny little desert raven with shimmering, blue-tinged feathers that had been sitting not far from her on the sand. The bird had tilted its head and looked at her curiously with its peppercorn eyes, almost as if it was wondering what she was doing out there all on her own.

She didn't actually know if she had imagined it, or if a real raven had chosen to take a closer look at her inert body.

But, real or not, the bird was gone now – possibly scared off by the man's silent presence.

The man's return could mean only one thing.

Suddenly she was wide awake – her pulse was pounding against her eardrums.

She took a deep breath before slowly twisting her head to look in the man's direction.

The sun was reflecting off the object in his hand, blinding

her and making her instinctively raise one arm to her sunburned forehead.

And at that moment she realized that the Game was over.

1

Neverlands

He was on her in two quick strides.

She didn't even have time to react before he had dragged her out of her chair. Her back was against the wall, one of his hands in an unshakeable stranglehold round her throat – so hard that the tips of her toes began to lift from the soft carpet – while he fumbled for the object on the table with the other.

There were gasps of horror from the other diners, a clatter of porcelain – but he didn't care. The lounge was on the sixth floor and it would be at least three minutes before the security staff got here. Three minutes were more than enough for him to do what he had to.

She was gurgling, desperately trying to ease his grip, but he tightened it further and felt her resistance drain away. In a matter of seconds the colour of her immaculately made-up face dropped from bright red to chalk white, suddenly matching her little pale suit.

Blonde businesswoman – my ass!

He released his grip enough to let a small amount of blood reach her brain. A sudden badly aimed kick at his crotch made him jerk, but she'd lost her shoe and without

Jimmy Choo's help the kick wasn't hard enough to make him loosen his grip. He tightened it again and pressed his face right next to hers. The terror in her eyes was oddly satisfying.

'How the fuck did you find me?' he hissed, holding the mobile up in front of her eyes. A shiny silvery object with a glass touch-screen.

Suddenly the phone burst into life. Out of reflex he held it further away from him, and to his surprise saw his own face reflected in the screen. Staring, bulging eyes, sweaty, bright-red face. The mobile must have a camera on the other side because when he moved his hand her terrified, pale face moved into shot. Beauty and the fucking beast, in podcast!

Totally fucking mad!

What the hell was he actually doing?

He was supposed to be a superhero, a saviour of worlds – but this? Attacking a woman? Had he really sunk so low?

He met her gaze again, but this time the fear in her eyes merely made him feel empty.

He wasn't himself.

He wasn't . . .

'Mr Andersen?'

'Hmm?!' HP came to with a start.

A little man in a uniform was standing next to his table, his soft voice just loud enough to drown out the soporific background noise of the lounge.

'Sorry to disturb you, sir. Your new room is ready.'

The man held out a small envelope containing a key-card.

'Room number 931, Mr Andersen: we've upgraded you to a junior suite. Your luggage is on its way up. I hope

you continue to have a pleasant stay with us, and I can only apologize for the confusion regarding the change of room.'

The man bowed lightly and gently placed the envelope on the table.

'Can I get you a refill, sir?'

'No, thanks,' HP muttered, casting a red-eyed glance at the window table. Yep, the woman was still there, and beside her cup he could still see the little silvery rectangle that had made his imagination go mad.

He closed his eyes again, pinched the bridge of his nose and took several deep breaths.

Apart from the fact that the phone looked familiar, what evidence was there to suggest that they might have caught up with him?

He was on his umpteenth false passport, and none of them had the smallest connection with the previous ones. And he had put on a few kilos, a deep suntan and a long, fair hippie beard to match his even longer hair. He hadn't spoken Swedish for at least a year, not since he left Thailand. In other words, the risk of anyone being able to identify him was pretty fucking small, not to say microscopic. Apart from him, there wasn't a single soul in the whole world who knew where he was.

So your conclusion, Sherlock?

The phone had to be a coincidence. Almost all smartphones on the market looked pretty similar, most of them were probably made in the same Chinese sweatshops. Besides, this was hardly the first time he had imagined he had been found . . .

He'd lost count of the number of times he had panicked and escaped through rear exits and down fire-escapes to get away from imaginary pursuers.

Even if it had been a couple of months since his last dope-trip, his over-heated little brain still played tricks on

him on a fairly regular basis, serving up ghosts in broad daylight, courtesy of the little grey men in the withdrawal department.

His lack of sleep was hardly making things any better.

He had just managed to nag his way to a more comfortable room, further away from the lifts.

But he already knew that wasn't going to help . . .

The woman whose phone it was showed no sign of picking it up.

Instead she was calmly sipping her coffee, glancing out at the sea, and didn't even seem to have noticed him. She was pretty fresh, forty-something, with her hair cut in a tight little bob. Jacket, trousers and low pumps. Now that he was looking more closely, he could see that she had her ankles crossed, and had slipped her heel out of one of her presumably extremely expensive shoes, and was dangling it rather absent-mindedly from her toes.

For some reason this casual act made him feel a bit calmer.

He took a deep breath through his nose and slowly let the air out through his mouth.

The whole of his dreamlike existence had, almost imperceptibly, changed its character and become something completely different.

Fourteen long months in exile. That was four more than he had spent locked up for killing his sister's violent boyfriend, and obviously in many ways a fuck of a lot nicer. Even so, the sense of restlessness was almost the same now, weirdly enough.

The nights were worst. Grass huts, youth hostels, airport hotels, or platinum palaces like this – it didn't really make much difference. His insomnia didn't seem to care about the weave-density of the sheets.

At the start of his tour he'd made sure he always had

company. He'd pulled numerous carefree backpack girls at campfire gatherings, all of them willing to party the night away.

Then, later on, when he was sick of the meaningless pillow-talk and beach-busker versions of 'Oooh baby it's a wild world', he had restricted himself to the pickings in the hotel bars.

But by now it was a long time since he had felt any real human intimacy.

Instead he was left having a doped-up wank to one of the stupid porn-films that his increasingly desensitized sex-drive demanded. Then a bit of lukewarm room-service grub while he surfed through the Thai knock-offs of blockbuster films until he slid into a state that was at least reminiscent of sleep. A grey fug where his imagination ran riot, exploring places he'd sooner forget.

He just had to accept that his dream-life was slowly going to . . .

Hell!

Even though she saw the automatic weapons before the cortege stopped, the smell that hit her when she first stepped from the car was so overpowering that Rebecca almost forgot about them for a couple of seconds.

It was a sweet, sickly pressure wave of scent from tightly packed bodies, rubbish, sewage and decay. She may have noticed the stench the day before when they checked the route, but it was considerably busier and hotter today and the heat seemed to have made the smell exponentially stronger.

The crowd quickly circled their drop-off point, as hundreds of agitated people pressed against the cordon of tape that had been put up to hold them back.

The soldiers exchanged nervous glances. Their hands

were hugging the barrels of their guns as they shuffled their feet anxiously on the red dirt.

There were six assault rifles, and the same number of soldiers in badly fitting, sweat-stained camouflage uniforms and scruffy boots. Their leader, a considerably better-dressed officer in mirrored sunglasses, waved at her to encourage her to offload her charge. His gun was still in its tight leg-holster along his right thigh, which meant seven weapons in total, not counting their own.

The officer's gestures became more impatient the longer she hesitated, but Rebecca ignored him. She remained standing with the car door open, while Karolina Modin, her driver, waited behind the wheel with the engine running.

She heard the doors of the car behind open and cast a quick glance over her shoulder. Göransson and Malmén were coming up behind her. Neither of the men said anything, but the expressions on their faces behind their sunglasses told her what they thought of the situation.

The crowd was getting noisier. The feeble plastic poles that were holding the cordon tape started to buckle as they pressed against it. Rebecca could make out a few random words in English.

Help us. No food, no doctor.

The soldier standing closest to her licked his lips nervously as he fingered the safety-catch of his rifle.

Click, click.

Safe, unsafe.

Not dangerous, dangerous.

A drop of sweat ran slowly down her spine.

Then another.

'Well, what are we waiting for, Normén?'

Gladh, the desiccated embassy counsellor, had evidently let himself out of the other side of the car and had come up behind her.

‘The press are waiting, time to get going. We’re already late.’

He reached for the handle of the rear door of the car to let the Minister for International Development out, but Rebecca beat him to it.

‘Don’t touch that door!’ she snarled as she slapped the door window with the palm of her right hand.

The embassy counsellor kept hold of the handle, and for a few seconds they stood there exchanging hostile glances. Then Gladh let go, straightened up and, insulted, adjusted the knot of his tie.

‘How long are you thinking of making us stand out here in the heat, Normén?’ he whined, slightly too loudly, so that the minister would hear him through the tinted glass.

‘Can’t you see that these people are getting more agitated the longer we hesitate? They’re waiting for us – for the minister, don’t you understand that?’

Oh yes, she understood all right, but there was something about the whole situation that didn’t feel right.

When they reconnoitred the site the day before they had been able to drive right up to the office of the refugee camp where the meeting was to take place. But today the road was blocked off two hundred metres from the building, even though she could see plenty of vehicles there already.

Walking the minister two hundred metres through the crowd with six nervous government soldiers as their escort didn’t feel like a particularly good idea.

Anyway, why so few?

The previous day the place had been crawling with soldiers, armoured vehicles and even a helicopter hovering above. The refugees had mostly stayed inside their flimsy little tents, hardly daring to come out.

But today the situation was suddenly the complete reverse.

'Come on, let's go! All is good, all is good . . .' the officer called, sunglasses flashing, waving eagerly at them to go over to him, while a couple of his soldiers made a feeble attempt to hold back the more eager members of the crowd pushing against the cordon. But still Rebecca hesitated. The sound of the mob was getting louder, yet she still imagined she could hear the metallic sound of the soldiers' safety-catches.

Almost like a second-hand counting down.

Click . . .

Click . . .

Click . . .

Unconsciously she moved her right hand to the pistol in the holster on her belt.

'We need to move now,' Gladh whined, and she noted the sudden fear in his voice.

Göransson and Malmén exchanged glances across the roof of the car.

'How do you want to do this, Normén?'

Her deputy was right. She had to make a decision.

Dangerous?

Not dangerous?

Make a decision, Normén!

Obviously she ought to open the door and let the minister out. But she still couldn't shake the feeling that something wasn't right – something more than just an agitated crowd, a blocked road and an embassy counsellor who needed the toilet.

The rubber handle of her pistol felt clammy against the palm of her hand.

Click . . .

Click . . .

Then suddenly she saw him. A man in the crowd to her right. He was dressed the same as all the screaming

black people around him. A long white shirt, dark middle-eastern trousers and a length of cloth covering his head. But still he stood out, something about him . . .

To start with, he was calm. He wasn't shouting, he wasn't waving his fists or trying to get her attention.

Instead he was moving steadily forward, slipping calmly between his agitated brothers in misfortune, getting closer and closer.

The man was holding something in his hand and it took her several seconds to see what it was.

A plastic bag, and, to judge by its uniformly bright yellow colour, it was still too new to have been bleached by the sun and creased like everything else in the camp.

What was something as new and clean as that doing in the midst of all this overwhelming misery?

She shaded her eyes with her left hand and tried to focus her gaze. The bag kept moving in and out of her field of vision, hidden by the crowd only to reappear shortly afterwards in a small gap. Bright yellow, smooth, and definitely out of place.

For a moment she thought she could just make out a dark object at the bottom of it.

And suddenly her decision was made.

'Get back in!' she roared, glancing quickly at her two colleagues to make sure they'd understood her order.

'Get in at once, we're aborting!' she yelled at Malmén, who didn't seem to have heard her over the noise of the crowd.

At first her deputy didn't react, then he nodded curtly and signalled with his hand to the driver of the third car to reverse and clear their path.

'What the hell are you doing, Normén?!' the embassy counsellor shrieked, grabbing her right arm.

She shook him off easily.

‘Inside the car, Gladh, unless you want to get left behind!’ she snapped as she gestured to her driver to get ready to leave.

Gladh carried on shouting in her ear but she wasn’t listening.

The man with the plastic bag had vanished but she was sure he was somewhere in the crowd – and that he was still heading towards them.

The Landcruiser behind them reversed a few metres, and without taking her eyes off the crowd she banged on the roof of the car to signal to Modin to follow suit.

Slowly their car began rolling backwards over the uneven road surface.

The passenger door was still wide-open, waiting for her to jump in.

At the same moment as the cortege began its retreat the noise of the crowd rose to a furious roar and the feeble cordon holding it back gave way.

The soldier closest to them didn’t even have time to raise his gun before he was swallowed up by the mob.

In just a couple of seconds their car was surrounded. Hands banging on the bonnet and windscreen – tugging at her clothes, trying to pull her away from the open door.

She stumbled and for one panic-stricken moment thought she was about to fall.

Her pulse was racing as she struggled to pull herself free, but she was being attacked from all sides.

Hands were roaming over her belt, towards the pistol in her firmly clenched right hand. She smashed her left hand into someone’s face, kneed another man in the crotch and rammed her head back towards a voice that was yelling in her ear, but her attackers were too numerous and she was likely to fall at any moment, and then everything would be over.

Suddenly the car jolted and the heavy door swung back, clearing enough of her attackers out of the way for Rebecca to be able to pull her right arm free and draw her pistol.

Barrel in the air, squeeze the trigger!

The weapon jerked in her hand – once, then several more times, and suddenly the roar switched from fury to fear and panic. And suddenly she was free. The people closest to her tried to flee and collided with others who were still pushing forward. Screams blended into the sound of bodies thudding together. She heard shots from directly in front of her. Short salvoes of automatic rifle fire, probably aimed directly into the crowd. A bullet buzzed past her head like an angry bee, but she hardly noticed it. Modin revved the engine and the spinning wheels threw up clouds of dust that quickly filled the whole of her field of vision with red fog.

The car began to pick up speed. She stumbled but eventually managed to grab hold of the swinging door. Her fingers were still clutching her trigger, the barrel pointing up at the sky.

The man came straight out of the cloud of dust. Right in front of the bonnet, maybe six, eight metres away. He leaped nimbly over the prostrate bodies and zigzagged through the fleeing crowd, heading straight for the car. He had one hand halfway out of the plastic bag. The object was clearly visible now.

Rebecca lowered the arm holding her pistol, trying to aim at his legs, but it was impossible to hold the gun steady. The car was speeding up, throwing up yet more red dust, then hit the front of the vehicle reversing behind them. The sudden stop sent the car door swinging back to hit Rebecca on the chin, and once again she almost fell. For a few seconds all she could see were stars and red fog.

When her vision cleared the revolver was pointing straight at her.

She was riding him like a bucking bronco.

Her perfect silicon breasts were bouncing in sync as she ground her hairless crotch against his pelvic bone. She had one hand on the frame of the bed and the other wound in a tight grip of his long hair, so hard that he could hear the roots groan as she pulled him to her. The heels of her shoes were digging painful grooves in the outside of his thighs.

But he really didn't give a shit, because the businesswoman was giving him the ride of his life.

He certainly wasn't an inexperienced pilot in the bedroom – quite the contrary! In fact he had always regarded himself as something of a Top Gun in that area.

But by God, could she fuck!

This year's Gonzo at the Adult Awards, with a double nomination for *Female Performer of the Year*. The experience was so intense that he had to keep reminding himself to breathe.

His groin began to twitch – the tension transmitted itself to the rest of his body as he tried in vain to think about something that would put him off. But it was impossible.

'I'm coming,' he gurgled in warning, but she made no attempt to get off. Instead she let go of the headboard, moved her hand down her back towards his groin, and, just as he started to come, she dug her nails into his scrotum. He thought he was dying! His orgasm was so intense that he arched his back as far as it would go, and, to judge by her screams, she was using his movements to her own advantage.

It took him several minutes to come to his senses again,

during which time she had rolled off him and lit a cigarette.

'Isn't this a non-smoking room?' was the first thing he managed to say when he regained the power of speech.

'Who are you – the smoking police?' she grinned, blowing a long plume of smoke towards the ceiling.

Quite. Who the fuck cared? What a total dweeb he could be sometimes!

'What . . . what's your name?' he stammered, in the absence of anything better to say.

'Anna – Anna Argos.'

She put the cigarette out in one of the glasses on the bedside table, then slid down the bed.

'Erm . . . nice to meet you, Anna.'

But she didn't answer. Her mouth was already fully occupied trying to wake the dead.

The gun was pointing straight at her, but Rebecca still couldn't move.

Her arms were hanging over the car door while her feet dragged on the ground rushing past below her. She was still clutching the pistol in her right hand, but because the whole of her bodyweight was resting on her lower arms, she couldn't move it more than a centimetre or so. She tried to get a foothold, so she could redistribute her weight and free up her pistol-arm.

But the running man had already raised his own gun and she realized she didn't have time. The dust was flying up from the car wheels, swirling round her and narrowing her field of vision to a red tunnel, until all she could see was the barrel of the shiny revolver at the far end. She waited for the shot.

But it didn't come.

The car suddenly lurched hard to the right, and the

force of the swerve was so great that it threw her halfway inside the vehicle. She got a grip on the seat, managed to brace one leg against the door pillar, and pulled herself in. The car continued to spin, the door slammed shut behind her and suddenly they had performed a 180-degree turn and were heading forward again, back down the road they had arrived on.

The dust from the Landcruiser's wheels billowed around them and Modin had to switch on the windscreen-wipers to see anything.

Rebecca spun round to try to get a glimpse of the man with the revolver through the rear window. She rested her arm on the back of the seat, ready to fire. Her eye was glued to the view along the barrel of the gun, her finger on the trigger . . .

But all she could see behind them was a swirling cloud of red dust that seemed to cover the whole world.

The refugee camp, the mob, the man with the revolver – everything just vanished. After only a couple of seconds it was as if they had never existed at all . . .

Modin was shouting something, and far away she heard the radio crackle, but her pulse was pounding so hard against her eardrums that she couldn't make out any of the words.

Everything around her seemed to be happening in slow motion. She could make out the tiniest details: the smell of the leather seats, the figures huddled on the back seat, Modin's jerky movements as she fought to keep the car on the road.

Her hands were clutching the pistol so tightly that her fingers were beginning to cramp.

The dust was still being whirled up by the airflow behind the car, forming long, hypnotic spirals that captured her attention and made it impossible to look away.

Then Modin must have hit a pothole, because for a few moments it felt as if they were flying, floating free, almost like in a dream.

A couple of milliseconds of weightlessness – then the car hit the ground again. Rebecca's back crashed down against one of the seats, the dreamlike sensation vanished and she was knocked back into reality again.

'Answer the radio!' Modin was shouting, and at the same moment Rebecca realized that her earpiece had fallen out and was dangling on her right shoulder. She quickly poked it back into her ear, lowered her gun and sank back onto the passenger seat.

'Is everyone okay, Normén, over?'

Malmén's voice sounded worried.

She twisted round to glance at her fellow passengers.

The minister and Gladh were huddled on either side of the back seat.

'Are you okay back there?'

No answer, but two chalk-white faces peered slowly up at her.

'Are you okay, Ann-Christin?'

Rebecca leaned back at an angle and prodded one of the minister's knees, which was at least enough to prompt a glassy nod in response.

'The minister's okay, we're returning to the villa,' she said as calmly as she could into the microphone, but the radio somehow seemed to reinforce the tremble in her voice.

'Understood,' Malmén replied curtly.

Rebecca suddenly realized she was still clutching her pistol with her right hand.

She loosened her grip, put the gun back in its holster, then slowly pulled the seatbelt on.

Her pulse had begun to slow down, the adrenalin kick

faded away and she could feel a vague sense of nausea rising in its place.

'That was fucking close . . .'

Without taking her eyes from the road Modin nodded in response.

'I thought I'd had it for a moment there, I don't know why he didn't shoot?'

Modin gave her quick sideways glance.

'He probably didn't have time to get his rifle out before they were on top of him.'

It took a couple of seconds before Rebecca understood.

'No, no, not the soldier – I mean the man with the revolver.'

'Who?' Modin said, shooting her a questioning look.

Before she had time to answer, Gladh leaned forward and spoke into her left ear.

'What the hell do you think you're playing at, Normén?' he hissed.