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Opening Extract from...

Bubble

Written by Anders de la Motte

Translated from the Swedish by Neil Smith

Published by Blue Door

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BUBBLE

ANDERS DE LA MOTTE

Bubble

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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Bubble [ˈbLbəl]
A small quantity of air or gas within a liquid body
A small, hollow, floating bead or globe
Anything that is more spacious than real; a false show
A cheat or fraud; a delusive scheme; an empty project; a dishonest speculation
A person deceived by an empty project; a gull
A small spherical cavity in a solid material
To cheat, to delude (verb)
A (usually temporary) state of existence, in which what you see, touch, hear, feel, and smell are under close control either by those around you or a system
When an electronic device or person is remotely under surveillance (bubbled)
A fantasy/dream that is so far-fetched it couldn't ever be true

www.brainyquote.com
www.urbandictionary.com
www.wiktionary.com

'In a personalized world, we will increasingly be typed and fed only news that is pleasant, familiar, and confirms our beliefs and because these filters are invisible, we won't know what is being hidden from us. Our past interests will determine what we are exposed to in the future, leaving less room for the unexpected encounters that spark creativity, innovation, and the democratic exchange of ideas.'

Eli Pariser

'Knowledge is power. Information is power. The secreting or hoarding of knowledge or information may be an act of tyranny camouflaged as humility.'

Robin Morgan

'It is not so important who starts the game, but who finishes it.'

John Wooden

Outbox: 1 pending message.

From: goodboy.821@gmail.com
To: magnus.sandstrom@farookalhassan.se
Subject: the Game

Fuck it, Manga, how did things end up like this?

It was all so easy back at the start. So innocent.

A mobile phone someone left behind on the train.

A phone that knew who I was, called me by my name.

Do you want to play a Game, Henrik Pettersson?
YES or NO?

To start with everything went like clockwork. The tasks they gave me were pretty simple. Nick an umbrella, loosen the wheel-nuts on a flash car, stop the clock on top of the NK department store.

The film clips looked good, the fans liked what they saw and I started climbing the high-score list. Soaking up their praise and approval, aiming for the top, and trying to depose Kent Hasselqvist a.k.a. player number fifty-eight from his throne.

At almost any price. . .

That grass in Birkagatan whose door I spray-painted, followed by his face. The attack on the royal procession. The stone I dropped on those police cars from the Traneberg Bridge. . .

I didn't even blink, Manga, I didn't hesitate for a single fucking second. . .

I just did all I could to get to the top, to get the audience to love me. To get a bit of recognition.

But then I blew it. I broke rule number one:

Never talk about the Game to anyone.

First they chucked me out, then they gave me a warning. Set fire to my flat, and tried to do the same to your computer shop. Not to mention Erman the nutter, the hermit who got too involved and was now trying to live a low-tech life out in the sticks.

Didn't do him much good, did it. . .?

You are always playing the game, whether you like it or not.

So I fought back, big time. Blew their server-farm sky-high. Emptied their bank account and took off. Lived the easy life on Asian beaches like everyone dreams of doing, really tried to enjoy my early retirement.

It was kind of okay. . .

You have to be careful about what you wish for. . .

I managed to lie low for fourteen months, until they caught up with me down in Dubai. They framed me for the murder of Anna Argos, and I ended up getting locked up and tortured. But I managed to wriggle out of their trap. And I decided to find out who wanted Anna dead. And me too, for that matter. . .

The answer seemed to lead back to her company, Argoseye.com, and their undeniably shady business practices. Bribed bloggers, thousands of fake internet identities, all making comments and giving scores that suited the company's clients. All the different technological tools they used to suppress things and keep them hidden. Making certain things on the net seem invisible.

Like the Game, for instance. . .

But we beat them as well, even if it was at a cost. The trojan you designed that I planted in their computer system did exactly what it was supposed to.

It dragged the trolls out into daylight, and they burst. And shafted Philip Argos, the creepy bastard,

and gave the rest of his little gang what they deserved.

Everything would have been fine.

If it hadn't been for him.

Tage Sammer, or Uncle Tage as Becca calls him.

He claims he's an old colleague of Dad's from the military.

The old man might have fooled my sister, but I know who he really is. The Game Master. The brains behind the whole thing.

He's given me a task, Manga.

One last task that will make me famous.

I'm trying to figure out a plan to get out of it.

To free both me and Becca from his grasp.

If you get this email, it'll mean I've failed.

That they forced me to carry out the task.

And that I'm very probably dead. . .

It's quiet at the moment. Too quiet.

But I know they're out there, watching every step I take.

Soon it's all going to kick off.

The question is: am I prepared to play one last game?

What do you think?

YES or NO?

Your old friend,

HP

This message is set to send at a future date

Like a punch in the chest – that was pretty much what it felt like. In a weird way the blow seemed to slow everything down even more. All of a sudden he could appreciate the tiniest details around him. The gun aimed at his chest, the drawn out, panic-stricken screams from the surrounding crowd. All around him, bodies crushed together in slow motion. Trying to get as far away from him as possible.

But in spite of the evidence, in spite of the gunpowder stinging his nostrils and the shot still reverberating in his eardrums, his brain refused to accept what was happening. As if it were fending off the impossible, the unthinkable, the incomprehensible . . .

This simply couldn't be happening.

Not now!

She had shot him . . .

SHE

HAD

SHOT

HIM!!!

The pistol was still pointing straight at his chest. The look on her face behind the barrel was ice-cold, completely emotionless. As if it belonged to someone else. A stranger.

He tried to raise his hand towards her, opened his mouth to say something. But the only sound that passed his lips was a sort of whimper. Suddenly and without any warning time speeded up and returned to normal. The pain spread like a wave from his ribcage, out through his body, making the tarmac beneath him lurch. His knees gave way and he took a couple of stumbling steps backwards in an attempt to keep his balance.

His heel hit the edge of the kerb.

A second of weightlessness as he fought the law of gravity.

Then a dreamlike sensation of falling freely.

And with that his part in the Game was over.

1

A whole new Game?

The moment he woke up HP knew something was wrong. It took him a few seconds to put his finger on what it was.

It was quiet.

Far *too* quiet . . .

The bedroom faced out onto Guldgränd and he had long since got used to the constant sound of traffic on the Söderleden motorway a few hundred metres away. He hardly ever thought about it any more.

But instead of the usual low rumble of traffic interspersed with the occasional siren, the summer night outside was completely silent.

He glanced at the clock-radio: 03.58.

Roadworks, he thought. Söderleden, Söder Mälarstrand and the Slussen junction closed off for yet another round of make-do-and-mend . . . But besides the fact that Bob the Builder would have to be working in stealth mode, it was also slowly dawning on him that there were other noises missing. No-one rattling doors as they delivered the morning papers, no drunks shouting down on Hornsgatan. In fact hardly any sound at all to indicate

that there was actually a vibrant capital city out there. As if his bedroom had been enclosed in a huge bubble, shutting the rest of the world out. Forcing him to live in his own little universe where the usual rules no longer applied.

Which, in some ways, was actually true . . .

He noticed that his heart was starting to beat faster. A quiet rustling sound from somewhere inside the flat made him jump.

A burglar?

No, impossible. He'd locked the high-security door, all three locks, just like he always did. The door had cost a fortune, but it was worth every single damn penny. Steel frame, double cylinder hook-bolt locks, you name it – so, logically, no-one could have broken into the flat. But the umbrella of paranoia wasn't about to let itself be taken down so easily . . .

He crept out of bed, padded across the bedroom floor and peered cautiously into the living room. It took a few seconds for his eyes to get used to the gloom, but the results were unambiguous. Nothing, no movement at all, either in the living room or the little kitchen beyond. Everything was fine, there was no sign of any danger. Just the unnatural, oppressive silence that still hadn't broken . . .

He crept carefully over to the window and looked out. Not a soul out on the street, not that that was particularly surprising given the time. Maria Trappgränd was hardly a busy street at any time of day.

Closed off for roadworks, that had to be it. Half of Södermalm already looked like some fucking archaeological dig, so why not go for a complete overnight shut-down? All the little Bobs were probably just having a coffee break.

Plausible – sure! But the uneasy feeling still wouldn't let go.

Only the hall left.

He tiptoed across the new floorboards over to the front door, taking care to avoid the third and fifth ones because he knew they creaked.

When he was about a metre away he thought he saw the letterbox move. He froze mid-step as his pulse switched up a gear.

Two years ago someone had poured lighter fluid through his door and set fire to it. A seriously unpleasant experience, and one which had ended with him lying in Södermalm Hospital with an oxygen mask over his face. It wasn't until much later that he had realized the whole thing was just a warning shot to remind him about the rules of the Game.

He sniffed carefully at the stagnant air, but couldn't smell paraffin or anything similar. But by now he was quite certain. The sounds had come from the front door.

Maybe someone delivering papers after all?

He crept a couple of steps closer to the door and carefully put his eye to the peephole.

The sudden noise was so violent that he staggered back into the hall.

Fuck!

For a few seconds he saw stars, and his heart almost seemed to have stopped.

Then another violent crash jolted him out of the shock.

Someone was smashing his door in!

The steel frame was already starting to bow, so whoever it was basically had to be stronger than the Hulk. A third crash, metal against metal, no bastard Bruce Banner but probably a serious sledgehammer – if not more than one.

The frame moved another few centimetres and he could suddenly see the bolts of the locks in the gap. A couple more blows was all it would take.

He spun round, stumbling over his own feet, and fell flat on the floor. Another crash from the door sent a rattling shower of plaster over his bare legs.

His feet slid on the floor as his hands tried to get a grip.

He was up.

Quickly into the living room, then the bedroom.

Another crash on the door!

He could taste blood in his mouth, and his heart was pounding fit to burst.

His hands were shaking so much he had trouble turning the key in the lock.

Whatinthenameofholyfucksgoingon . . .?

A further blow from the hall, this time followed by a splintering sound that almost certainly meant that the door frame had given way.

He grabbed the chest of drawers, and almost fell over when it glided easily in front of the bedroom door.

Fucking chipboard crap!

If the steel door out there hadn't been able to stop his attackers, then a bit of self-assembly furniture from the other side of the Baltic wasn't going to win him more than a couple of seconds at most. He leapt at the bed and fumbled about on the bedside table, which was covered with magazines and paperbacks.

The phone, where the hell was the phone?

There! No, shit, that was the remote for the television . . .

He heard rapid steps in the living room, gruff voices shouting to each other, but he was concentrating too hard on his search to hear what they were saying.

Suddenly his fingers hit the phone, so hard that it fell to the floor.

Fucking hell!

The door handle rattled, then a rough voice shouting: 'In here!'

HP threw himself on the floor, fumbling wildly with his arms.

There it was, right next to his left hand.

He grabbed the phone, scrabbled at the buttons. His fingers were twitching as if he had Parkinson's.

One, one, two is easy to do . . . like fuck it was!

A crash from the door and the Ikea chest of drawers almost fell over.

'Hello, emergency services, how can I help you?' a dry, professional voice said.

'Police!' HP yelled. 'Help m . . .'

A sudden flash of light blinded him, burning onto his retina.

Then a blow that was so strong he was left gasping for air.

And then they had him.

'It's back.'

'The van,' she added when he didn't react immediately.

He glanced quickly in the rear-view mirror.

'The same one as yesterday?'

'Mmh,' she said, without taking her eyes off the extra mirror fixed to the windscreen above the passenger seat.

What else would it be? she wondered quietly to herself.

'Four cars behind us. It's been there a while now . . . Just like yesterday, and in almost the same place.'

'Are you sure it's the same one? There are plenty of white vans in the city . . .'

'I'm sure,' she said abruptly. 'Slow down a bit and let him get closer.'

'But then I'll lose the VIP . . .' He gestured towards the open-topped sports car in front of them.

'Just forget the Security Police handbook, Kjellgren, and

try to be a bit flexible,' she snapped with unnecessary sharpness.

He took his foot off the accelerator more abruptly than he needed to. The car behind blew its horn angrily, and then overtook them a little too closely. Another car followed it.

Rebecca opened the glove compartment and took out the camera. She held it low and close, so that the van-driver wouldn't see it through the rear window.

Another glance in the rear-view mirror.

The zoom lens was pretty good, but the van was still two cars away and partially obscured.

'A bit more,' she muttered to Kjellgren, getting the camera ready in her lap.

She was fighting the urge to look round.

Suddenly the VIP in front of them changed lane, crossing a solid white line, and headed up towards Kungsgatan.

Kjellgren had no choice but to follow it.

She swore quietly to herself – so much for that chance. But a couple of seconds later she realized that the van was still following them. Another of the cars between them was gone and it was much closer now. Considerably closer than she would have been if she was tailing someone.

The sudden change of lane must have taken the driver by surprise. Forced him into making a mistake.

She slowly turned her upper body, pressing her left elbow against the seat and holding herself in place with her legs. The van's licence plate was still hidden by the car between them, but she could see the top halves of the two people in the driver's cab through the tinted windscreen. Long-sleeved, pale-coloured clothing, some sort of overalls, just like yesterday. But last time she hadn't managed to get the

camera out quickly enough. She was planning to make up for that mistake today.

The car directly behind them suddenly indicated to change lane and she saw her chance. She turned round in a flash, raised the camera and aimed at the point where the licence plate was about to become visible.

She pressed the button halfway down. The car between them pulled out. There was a short bleep as the automatic focus adjusted the image.

Button down. She fired off a couple of pictures. Perfect!

Then she quickly raised the camera towards the cab of the van. She focused on the driver and pressed the button. The telephoto lens whirred and the fuzzy shape behind the wheel suddenly became much sharper. But just as the automatic focus bleeped, Kjellgren suddenly accelerated hard and the rapid movement threw her off balance.

By the time she got the cab back into view, the van was already a long way behind them.

'What the hell are you playing at, Kjellgren?' she snapped as she took a series of shots, almost at random, of the diminishing silhouette in the van.

'The VIP, Wennergren junior.' He pointed ahead at the little sports car which was almost out of sight. 'He suddenly took off like a scalded troll. Didn't want to risk losing him.'

She lowered the camera and sank back into her seat.

Shit!

A quick glance in the mirror, but she already knew what it would tell her. The van was gone.

She clicked through the pictures on the little screen of the camera. The licence plate was clearly visible, but just as she suspected the images of the cab were pretty much useless.

Bloody hell!

Call it police intuition or whatever the hell you liked, but there was something about that van that worried her.

As soon as she got back to the office she'd check the licence plate, maybe even make a couple of calls and double check with Surveillance if the Highways Agency didn't come up with anything . . .

She suddenly regretted snapping at Kjellgren. His priorities had been totally correct. The VIP was the most important thing, after all, and she would have done exactly the same if she had been the one driving.

Kjellgren was an excellent driver, which was one of the reasons why she'd brought him across from the Security Police. He had already made up the distance to the VIP's car and they were in their customary position immediately behind him.

'You made exactly the right call, Kjellgren,' she said, doing her best to sound neutral.

He merely nodded and for a few minutes they sat in silence as they took it in turns to check their rear-view mirrors.

'So when did you say we'd be going up to the Fortress?' Kjellgren said eventually, in a rather too-friendly voice.

'That depends a bit on Black's schedule.' She made an effort to return his smile.

'Okay. By the way, did you see that article in *Dagens Nyheter*? A big piece about the new uses people have found for old military installations. Apart from using underground bunkers as server rooms, they've also fixed the old communication tunnel to the coast so it brings in water for the cooling system. Seriously advanced stuff.

'The security up there's supposed to be quite something as well.'

He pulled closer to Wennergren's car and did a quick

swerve to scare off a car that was trying to squeeze in between them.

'Apparently PayTag want to retain its status as a high security installation, which is pretty understandable. Because then their security staff up there can be armed . . .'

Kjellgren looked away from the car in front to give her a quick sideways glance.

She could hear the question coming before he had opened his mouth.

'By the way, how are things going for us on the weapons front, boss . . .?'

'The licensing authority is still looking at our application . . .'

. . . *again*, she almost added, but her mobile started to vibrate in her jacket pocket. Number withheld. Probably another marketing call, or some former police colleague fishing for a job . . .

She moved her thumb towards the red icon to reject the call, but changed her mind at the last moment. Kjellgren kept glancing at her, evidently keen to carry on the conversation about weapons licences. And he wasn't alone in that.

Pretty much all of the new recruits to her bodyguard team had taken the job on the assumption that they'd be able to bear arms in the course of their duties. So if the application got rejected . . .

She quickly pressed the green icon on her phone.

'Sentry Security, Rebecca Normén,' she said, in an exaggeratedly businesslike tone.

'Personal Protection Unit, Detective Superintendent Ludvig Runeberg,' her old boss said at the other end.

'Hi, Ludvig, it's been a while. Good to hear from you . . .'

'I'm not sure you're going to think that by the time we've finished, Normén . . .'

Something in his tone of voice made her straighten up unconsciously.

'You should probably come up here to Police Headquarters, right away if you can manage that . . .'

The connection crackled and his voice vanished for a few seconds. But part of her had already worked out what he was going to say. Her stomach contracted into a hard little lump.

No, no, no . . .

'. . . your younger brother.'

2

Opening

His body was slumped motionless across the table. His eyes were shut and it almost looked like he was asleep.

The last time she had seen him his hair had been cropped short, but now it had grown again and was hanging in greasy clumps over his chalk-white face. The fluorescent lighting in the claustrophobic little room made the rings under his eyes look darker than ever against his pale, yellowish skin. As if she were really looking at a wax doll rather than an inert human body through the large glass window.

She had been worried that this would happen. Ever since Henke threw a rock through her windscreen two years ago and almost killed her and Kruse, her colleague, she had been dreading this moment. Well, longer than that, really. Much, much longer . . .

'He was brought in last night,' Runeberg said somewhere behind her right shoulder, but she hardly heard him.

'I was only informed an hour or so ago. I called you at once. Not quite going by the rules, but I thought you'd want to know straight away. I know I would if it was my brother . . .'

She tore her eyes away from the glass and turned to look at him.

'Thanks, Ludvig, I appreciate it . . .' The words caught in her throat.

They stood in silence for a while.

'Terrible business,' he said eventually.

He put his hand clumsily on her arm.

Suddenly and without warning the door opened and a skinny man in his sixties with thinning hair walked in. He was carrying a file of papers under one arm and, even though it was summer, he was wearing a dark three-piece suit topped off with a perfectly centred tie. The man nodded curtly to Runeberg, then turned to Rebecca.

'You must be the sister.'

'Rebecca Normén,' she said, holding out her hand.

But instead of taking her hand, the man pulled out a pair of narrow reading glasses from the pocket of his waistcoat, planted them firmly on the end of his nose and then opened the file.

'You said she used to work for the Firm, Runeberg?'

'She still does, at least officially, Stigsson,' her former boss replied in an ingratiating tone that she didn't recognize at all.

'Normén is on leave of absence until the end of the year,' he explained. 'Then she has to make up her mind which she prefers, the Security Police or private enterprise . . .' Runeberg attempted a smile, but the other man's face didn't move a muscle.

'I see . . .' Stigsson turned his head and looked at Rebecca over his glasses.

'Since you're still employed by the Security Police, Normén, your security clearance holds, as does the oath of confidentiality you signed when you first joined. Whether or not you're his sister, everything you hear in

here is confidential, and any attempt to communicate it to anyone else is strictly forbidden, is that understood?'

'Yes,' she nodded.

'Of course,' she added when he didn't seem happy with her response. 'So, what's this all about, then?'

In the room on the other side of the glass a door suddenly opened and two people, a man and a woman in dark suits, entered. For a few seconds no-one in the room moved. Then Henke opened his eyes.

He raised his head, sat up in the chair. Slowly and elaborately he stretched, as if he had just woken up. He said something that she couldn't hear through the glass, and she was seized momentarily with an urge to burst in and give him a good slap.

Stigsson's bone-dry voice changed her mind.

'Your brother is suspected of conspiracy, and possibly planning a gross act of terrorism.'

'Well, Henrik, I repeat: you are suspected of planning and possibly making preparations for a crime intended to seriously destabilize or disrupt the fundamental political, constitutional, economic and social structures of the country,' said the lead interviewer, a forty-something woman with short, dark hair, as she fixed her eyes on him.

But HP hardly noticed her. His weary brain was still trying to make sense of everything. At least there was one thing he was reasonably sure of. Unlike two years ago, when he thought he had been arrested but was actually the victim of a huge hoax, this time every single detail was right, from the armed unit's break-in to his flat down to the scorched taste of the instant coffee in the brown plastic cup on the table next to him. It all seemed genuine. *Was* genuine, in all likelihood. Which meant . . .?

The subject is conspiracy theories, and here comes your thousand-kronor question . . .

'Mmm . . .' he muttered, seeing as he was evidently expected to say something. He closed his eyes and rubbed his temples to buy himself a bit of thinking time. What the fuck was the woman banging on about? Destabilizing the political what . . .?

'I've already told you at least a dozen times, I want a lawyer present during the interview,' he said quietly.

The woman, whose name was Roslund or Roskvist, something like that, exchanged a quick glance with her colleague.

'Yes, we heard you, Henrik,' the policeman said. HP had already forgotten his name. 'But we've been waiting several hours. At least we can get some of the formalities out of the way before your lawyer shows up.

'He is coming, isn't he – or she? How many law firms have you called?' He tilted his head and smiled in a way that left no room for misinterpretation.

'Of course there's a lawyer coming . . .' Henrik mumbled.

'Well then, how about making a start? To save us all a bit of time,' the policeman added with another smile.

'Unless there's anyone else you'd like to call? Someone close to you . . .?'

'No!' HP interrupted, slightly too loudly, as he sat himself up.

He saw the look in their eyes. *Bollocks*, he'd been trying to play it cool . . .

'I've got all the time in the world, and I'm not going to say anything until I've got a lawyer,' he said as calmly as he could, staring down at the tabletop.

'But by all means – feel free to talk away . . .' he muttered a couple of seconds later, mainly to break the oppressive silence.

'Good suggestion, Henrik.' The male police officer, whose name HP still couldn't remember, pulled out a chair and sat down. He took out a little digital recorder from the pocket of his jacket and put it on the table between them.

'Interview with Henrik Pettersson, known as HP, third of June, time 15.13. Officers present, Police Inspectors Roswall and . . .'

'. . . Hellström.'

Stigsson had pressed a button next to the window and suddenly the lead interviewer's voice could be heard from the speakers.

'So what exactly is Henke supposed to have done?' Rebecca said to no-one in particular, while Hellström went on talking to the recording device.

She was doing her best to sound calm, as if she wasn't that worried about the answer.

'We've received information which suggests that your brother is planning some sort of terrorist attack against the state, possibly connected to the princess's wedding . . .'

'You're kidding!' she exclaimed, unable to stop herself.

Stigsson gave her a quick look and she bit her tongue. Obviously, this was all just a big practical joke, the Security Police were renowned for their sense of humour, and Stigsson here was a brilliant stand-up comedian . . .

Pull yourself together, for God's sake, Normén!

A mistake – this was clearly some sort of huge mistake. They must have got Henke mixed up with someone else and broken into the wrong flat. It would hardly be the first time information was wrong, after all . . .

'We've also been made aware that this is by no means the first time your brother has been involved in this sort of criminal activity . . .'

'You mean that business with Dag,' she cut him off. 'Henke was only trying to protect me. Besides, that was almost fifteen years ago . . .'

Stigsson shook his head.

'No, no, not the incident in which your boyfriend was killed, even if that isn't entirely without interest as part of the bigger picture . . . This is about something else entirely. See for yourself.'

He gestured towards the interview room, where one of the officers had just switched on a video projector. A recording from a shaky hand-held camera appeared on one wall, blue sky and some dark buildings. Then slender trees and a row of pavement cafés. Kungsträdgården, more specifically: Kungsträdgårdsgatan. In the background there was a clattering sound that was getting louder and louder. It took her a few moments before she suddenly realized what it was. Horses' hooves . . . A lot of horses' hooves on tarmac. When the royal cortege appeared in shot she noticed she was trembling . . .

He recognized the film at once. Kungsträdgårdsgatan, exactly two years ago, the cortege with the royal couple and the Greek president.

The soldiers bobbing along on their horses, the spectators on the pavements fiddling with their mobiles. He'd seen it on film hundreds of times, recognized every face, every expression. The guy with the dog, the woman in the white hat, the German tourists with their huge rucksacks . . . He knew the rest of it by heart. Any moment now a flash would bleach the image, and a bang like the one he had experienced in his flat would make the hand holding the camera shake. Then complete chaos, galloping horses, soldiers on the ground, people screaming in panic.

But instead of focusing on the cortege as he had

expected, the camera suddenly began to pan round. It wavered for a few seconds, then slid along the crowd lining one side of the road.

And it came to rest on a familiar figure, then zoomed in slowly until the person filled almost the entire screen.

HP couldn't help squirming. Suddenly he felt a bit sick.

A man dressed in black sitting on an EU moped. The tinted helmet might be obscuring his face, but Rebecca had no trouble recognizing him. His posture, jerky movements, the way he held his head slightly tilted. There was no doubt at all . . .

She had suspected it at the time, but had deliberately not asked because she hadn't wanted to know the answer . . .

The man on the screen reached into a plastic bag that was hanging from the handlebar, pulled out a cylindrical object and started to fiddle with it. The noise of horses' hooves got steadily louder as the cortege approached. The camera zoomed in even closer. The man looked up, waiting for a moment with the object in both hands. Then he suddenly jerked one hand and raised his arm. She already knew what he was about to throw.

The blast from the grenade made this film shake as well, but the cameraman didn't shift his focus from the moped. According to the timer in one corner of the screen, he sat there impassively for ten seconds, watching the effects of what he had done, before putting the bike into gear, making a sharp u-turn and disappearing down Wahrendorffsgatan.

The film stopped abruptly and the room fell silent. HP shifted on his chair and swallowed uneasily a couple of times. A couple of clicks on the computer and suddenly

a still of him covered the whole screen. A freeze-frame image of the precise moment when he threw the grenade.

His arm in the air, his body coiled like a spring. When you added the tinted helmet, he looked pretty alarming, to put it mildly.

'So, Henrik,' Hellström began, in a considerably less friendly tone of voice than before. 'Is that . . .'

'. . . your brother on the screen?'

Stigsson and Runeberg were both looking at her now, and for a few seconds her head was completely blank. Her blouse was sticking under her jacket, and the air in the little room suddenly felt stale and difficult to breathe. Their eyes seemed to be boring right through her.

She glanced into the interview room, but there was total silence in there as well. She had to try to gain a bit of time, get a chance to think things through . . . But to judge from the looks on both men's faces they were expecting an immediate answer.

So what was she supposed to do? Lie, or tell the truth?

Make a decision, for God's sake!

She gulped a couple of times to clear the lump in her throat.

'Well . . .' she began.

'You don't have to answer, Henrik!'

The door to the interview room opened and a tall man with slicked back grey hair walked in. With a flourish the man undid the gold buttons on his blazer and sat down on the empty chair beside Henke. At that moment Rebecca realized that she knew him.

'My client declines to answer that question,' the man said, this time looking at the police officers as he lifted his briefcase onto the table and snapped it open. He took out a folder.

‘Well, now I’d like to know why this interview has already started even though my client clearly stated that he wished to have his legal representative present. As I’m sure you are aware, this is in breach of chapter twenty-one of the Penal Code . . .’

‘Johan Sandels!’

Runeberg’s surprised exclamation drowned out the rest of the lawyer’s speech.

‘How the hell did your brother manage to get hold of a heavyweight like that at such short notice?’

‘I’ve got no idea,’ she replied with a shrug.

That much was completely true.

What the hell was going on?