

Birger Baug

PUNISHMENT



Kris is an ordinary 13-year-old, except for two things: He has no friends and he has no father.

This is enough to make him the victim of some of the most horrid acts a child can be exposed to.



Police inspector Halvor Heming (39) is torn between his family, the crime division and his own past, as the most intricate case of his life falls into his lap. What originally appears to be a heart attack at a health resort suddenly becomes a whole lot more than that. Traces at the crime scene point towards one of Oslo's most hard-boiled criminals, but where on earth has the man disappeared to? After two days of intense searching, another murder is committed, and Halvor is beginning to fear he is chasing a ghost. Until he starts to unravel the 24 years old story about Kris.

Punishment is a crime novel with a plot that evolves on several levels, with bullying as an important topic. Halvor Heming is an atypical investigator for crime literature. With three children and a wife who works high up in the health department, he has got challenges everywhere. When, in addition to this, he discovers obvious parallels between the case he is investigating and his own life, he is seized by fear.



BIRGER BAUG



Birger Baug (born 1969) has a background in political science, literary science and journalism. After seven years as a journalist and head attendant in a newspaper, he became public relations manager in the aid agency Plan Norge in 2000. Now, Baug works full time as a consultant and author.

PUNISHMENT is his first novel.

SAMPLE TRANSLATION BY JOHN IRONS (c)



Chapter 1

Monday, 18 September 2006

Half of one lower leg was sticking out from underneath the dark-brown walls of the changing room cubicle. It was naked, and the golden hairs gleamed in the light from the small window high up on the wall. He cautiously pushed the door further open and could see a broad bench with deep-red upholstery that looked like leather and a tall cupboard with a key in the lock. The rest of the man's dead body lay on the floor, partially wrapped in a dark-blue bathrobe and with one arm resting on the bottom part of the bench.

'Heart attack?'

'No idea. He was only 37.'

The dead man's features were slack, dull, as if he had died while highly intoxicated. Inspector Halvor Heming knew, however, that the facial expression of a corpse had no connection with the cause of death. Even so, it all felt a bit strange. It was as if the man in front of him could not have had a muscle in his body that worked even when he was alive. And that was even odder, since so many hours had passed since the body had been found that rigor mortis ought normally to have set in. He looked over his shoulder at Sergeant Kristine Holm. She was apparently thinking the same thing. 'Odd,' she said quietly.

The doctor was on his way into the closet again. 'I've more or less finished what I can do here. The rest is up to forensics,' he said.

The photos had been taken. A technician stuck his head in to say that he was taking the camera back with him to the station and would upload the photos into Photodock. He could find them there in a couple of hours.

'Have you seen the small cut on his lower arm, next to the big birthmark,' he asked the doctor, who had started to pack his things.

'Yes. I've no idea so far what can have caused it. Perhaps he caught against something sharp when he fell, but it's quite deep. You must keep your eyes open when you search the room, but it could be several hours old. If it's completely new, I can't explain the swelling round the wound. You'll have to wait for the autopsy report,' he said, tightening the straps of his classic doctor's bag. 'See you.'

A suspicious death didn't normally lead to much fuss. It was nearly always a false alarm, but this time it was different. It wasn't every day that someone died at the Vestkant baths, especially not at the age of 37. This was one of the few public baths in Oslo that worked more or less as intended. Water in the pools and heating in the saunas was the exception rather than the rule. Furthermore, the baths lay in one of the best districts of the city, only a stone's throw or two from the Royal

Palace on the one side and the chestnut trees of Bygdøy avenue on the other.

The clientele also bore witness to its location to a certain extent. Heming could easily imagine the shock the business lawyer from Aker Brygge had been exposed to when he caught sight of the naked lower leg at exactly seven o'clock. The doctor was immediately summoned. Since the cause of death was unclear, he had contacted the police, which was the normal procedure. The legal expert at the violent crime section had already made it clear that 'general considerations' called for an autopsy. The first announcement has been on an open network, so the inspector knew there would be people from the press outside. For all he knew, the Norwegian News Agency could have already released the story. In that case, the whole mob would be there, maybe even the TV news. There were not all that many murders in the course of a year, not even in Oslo. Even a suspicious death could cause a lot of interest – at any rate until a natural death was eventually established.

'Do you want to talk to the man who found the body?' Holm asked.

'No, you can do that. I can deal with the receptionist.'

Halvor Heming gave his six-foot body a stretch, left the cloakroom and took off his plastic overshoes. It looked more like a natural death than a murder. Even so, the technicians would have to do their job, so he left the cubicle to them. They had already finished collecting evidence in their plastic bags.

'Shall we vacuum the place?' one of them asked. The leader of the investigation nodded.

The receptionist was sitting in a chair behind the counter. She was a young woman, with blond hair and a well-trained body – 25 year old, possibly. For a moment, Heming saw his own wife of 15 years ago in front of him, before he asked permission to have a talk with her. They went into an office a bit further inside the building. He closed the door, but did not have time to sit down before the receptionist started by asking a question:

'It's not murder, is it?'

'Probably not. But we're not sure yet.'

'When do you think we can open again?'

'As soon as the last of the technical experts has left. We will possibly have to insist on the actual cubicle being closed for a day or two more, but you'll be informed about that.' Heming sat down on the other small spindleback chair in the office and took out a small recorder. He told her of her responsibilities as a witness, that he was now only going to take down a preliminary statement, but that she would probably have to come down to the station to make a complete statement later.

'What is your name?'

'Eva Beate Fosen.'

'Did you know him, Eva?'

'Yes, he came an hour before our usual opening time every Monday,' the receptionist replied.

'Is that usual?'

'No, but I told him it was OK as long as he told me in advance if there was a day he wasn't coming.'

'Did that mean you had to be here an hour earlier on Monday mornings to let him in?'

'Yes.'

The receptionist pressed hard and often on a pen she was holding in her hand. Most witnesses normally said too much the first time they met the police after something like this.

It was a way of dealing with the shock. Furthermore, there were many people who were afraid of leaving something out the police might need to know. Nearly always, investigators got a lot of useless information. Heming thought he knew why there was something different about this time.

'Are you paid for turning up an hour earlier?'

'Nooo ... Not really.'

'He paid you?'

'Yes. But only 300 kroner,' she quickly added.

'It that allowed according to the municipal regulations?'

'Don't think so.' She pressed away at the pen. It was not until Heming pointedly let his gaze rest on the pen that she stopped and placed it on the table in front of her.

'You're sure to have to tell your boss about it after what's happened. I see no reason to tell the local authorities about it, but it would probably be a good idea if you did so. That's hardly a reason for firing you.'

The receptionist made no comment. Heming smiled: 'If you haven't made yourself guilty of any other infringements of the law, I'd like you to tell me now what you know about him.'

She looked relieved. Settled herself more comfortably in her chair.

'As I said, he usually came here every Monday at 6 o'clock. I think he came here one day during the week, but that was only for massage, and I wasn't on duty then. He told me at any rate that he used to have massage.'

'Did you often talk to him?'

Normally, he was waiting for me when I came to open at 6 o'clock. We used to chat a bit then. Nothing special, just until I had opened up for us and he went off to the changing room. Then I didn't see him for an hour. Meanwhile, I got things ready, read some newspapers, listened to my iPod. He always left just after the first regular guests arrived at seven o'clock.

'Did he turn up as usual today?'

'Mm. He was waiting for me. Said something about the weather, I think.'

'Was the outer door locked between six and seven?'

'Yes, there's a latch, so I don't have to think about that.'

'Did you hear it shut properly?'

'I don't remember. But I had to unlock it as usual at seven o'clock, at any rate.'

'Did he ever talk about himself?'

'Not really. Generally, he commented on what I was wearing, said it looked nice and things like that, or that it was a beautiful morning – something along those lines. Though I think he told me once that he was managing director of a quite large company.'

'Can you remember which company?'

'Yes, because it had a special name. Duvetland & Co., or something like that.'

He decided not to ask for any more details. There was sure to be someone already delving into that back at the station.

'How did you start this agreement? Was it a long time ago?'

'Early the winter before last, I think. Eighteen months ago, perhaps. He used to come at seven o'clock, but then he asked me one day if we could come to an agreement. He said he had something to do with him having such early meetings on Mondays.'

'OK. Thanks very much. I'll write a report of our conversation, and we'll contact you later, so you can come down to the station,' Heming said. 'There's absolutely nothing to be afraid of,' he added when he noticed the anxious expression on her face.

He got up and went out.

'Did your witness have anything interesting to say?' he asked Kristine Holm, who was waiting at reception.

'Precious little we haven't seen for ourselves,' she replied.

'OK. Let's be off.'

Outside, it was full of cars, photographers and young people with microphones or notebooks. It was obvious that the press liked the location. This part of town wasn't Plata, Galgeberg or Grønland. This was class, this was the pinnacle of Norwegian industry, this was the Palace Park, the Nobel Institute, the Foreign Ministry, the American Embassy and several other key institutions. The prestige was spread thick on every other street corner, and he knew that those outside were hoping that the victim would have the same touch of glamour. If he was to judge by the clothes the technical staff had found in the cubicle, there was much to suggest that the journalists' expectations would be fulfilled. But Bjarne Rossvik, the name they had found in his driving licence, didn't say anything to them for the time being.

'Is it a murder case!?' A number of the press people swarmed round Heming and Holm. There were a couple of TV cameras there too, but so far only TV 2 and TV Norge, as far as he could see. He answered automatically that it was too early to arrive at any conclusions as yet and that the name would be released as soon as the relatives had been informed. Someone wondered why the police reckoned on it being a suspicious death.

'Because the cause of death hasn't been ascertained yet. But so far no visible, external injuries have been found on the man, not any that we see as being immediately related to the cause of death, at any rate.'

'Why are you treating it as a suspicious death, then?' someone asked.

Heming pretended not to hear and sat down in the passenger seat next to Kristine Holm. She drove the car round Solli square and made for Grønland. His mobile rang. It was Birgitte, who wondered if he could manage to fetch Hans from nursery school, as she had a meeting that might take a long time.

'I'll do what I can.'

Halvor Heming could tell from Kristine Holm's little smile that she knew who he was talking to. Most people's voices went up when they talked to their partner, and he was clearly no exception. For his colleague's sake he deliberately deepened his voice a bit as he tried to end the conversation with his wife.

Instead of saying 'Bye', Birgitte asked: 'Put out about that, Halvor?'

'No, it's fine. We can talk about it as soon as I'm back at the police station,' he answered, as formally and neutrally as possible.

Birgitte hung up, and Halvor took a quick look at his colleague. Even though she was still looking at the road in front of her, her smile now filled half her face.

Chapter 2

April 1982

There! The narrow passage between the outhouse and the storehouse. Watch the legs, big stones. Chest like bellows, heart pounding away. Can't think. He slipped through, out onto the plot of farmland on the other side. The clods of earth flew as he pumped his legs faster and faster. He discovered the hard snow in the shadow cast by the spinney just a fraction too late. Oh no! He slid, fell on the slippery surface. He got to his feet again – soon he would be in amongst the trees.

He could hear them behind him, on the farmland already. Threw a quick glance over his shoulder. Why were there only four of them? Weren't there always five? He got in among the trees, the branches and pine needles seemed to prick his face. Keep going.

Ten metres further on a branch moved. He changed direction, and clambered up the knoll. His reward was a snow-drift almost a metre deep. His left leg sank in above the knee. He heaved all he could, but his boot was stuck. He turned round, could make out movements at the edge of the wood. And then – a shadow to his left, the crunch of snow. The fifth one! Run! He pulled up his foot with all his might, and let the boot stay where it was. But before he had time to put the freed foot down in front of him, he felt a hand on his shoulder. He was pulled down into the snow again.

'Got him! Chris is here! Come on!'

It was Andy, the bastard. Chris could vaguely make out his eager mug to the left. Then he felt two hands round his head, which was turned, pushed down into the snow. Hard, cold. He lost his breath. Began to panic. Twisted and turned.

'Quickly! I can't hold him much longer!' Andy leant on him even harder. Chris could hear the others arriving. He gave up, still couldn't breathe, felt giddy. Then the pressure lessened, he got his breath back.

'Crusher and Andy take his arms. Stephen and Nicko his legs. Turn him over first. Come on!' That was Bubble. In charge as usual. Went up the knoll first, through the snow. His broad backside sent shudders through his trousers, and he was breathing heavily beneath his blond angelic locks. Chris twisted, tried half-heartedly to free himself, even though he knew it was impossible.

'Lie still! Otherwise I'll break your arm,' Crusher hissed.

They reached the top. Just behind the knoll there was a small grassy area that the sun had shone on long enough for it to be completely snow-free. Chris saw four poles, about a metre and half apart, all of them with a piece of rope. He began to squirm once more, but then remembered what Crusher had said.

'Tie him up!' Bubble sat on his stomach. The four others each took a piece of rope. Bound him tightly, much too tightly. Chris felt his circulation was cut off. His fingers went warm and thick.

'Come on, let's go.'

Was that it? Chris didn't understand a thing. He knew, despite everything, that he wouldn't have to lie here all that long. Some would pass by fairly soon. He could shout. But not yet. He could still see their backs, on their way down the other side of the knoll. He started pulling and tugging at the ropes. Not a hope in hell. Although he did manage to loosen his

bonds enough for it not to hurt so bloody much any more.

The lads had disappeared. He would wait five minutes more, until they were out of earshot.

Everything around him was quiet now. He looked up – the clouds were scudding across the blue sky. The sun warmed his face. He felt tears in the corners of his eyes. Gunnar! Gunnar often went past here. When did he finish? Didn't he have an extra lesson on Wednesdays? He could manage to wait an hour.

Then he heard something again. Giggling. Suppressed laughter. A few metres away. Should he call out, or was it Bubble and the gang? He waited a little longer. Then he heard steps behind him. They went round him. Crusher and Stephen took up their positions on his left side, Andy and Nicko on the other side. Silence. Once again, Bubble wasn't there. Then he heard new footsteps, heavier this time.

'Can you hold him alright?' Nicko asked.

'Sure thing.' Bubble went behind the others and took up his position in front of Chris' legs. He was holding something in his hands, it looked like more rope, perhaps a metre and a half long. Chris strained to see better. Then he knew what it was. He felt giddy, his fear pulled at the ropes. How had they managed that?

'Just lie still, you can't get free.' Bubble smiled.

'This little bloke's been in my cellar all winter. I've fattened it up on mice and sausages. Just in your honour. You ought to feel proud! Stephen, pull up his sweater.'

'Why?'

'Well it might not be able to bite through his clothes.'

Stephen made a narrow opening between Chris' sweater and his trousers.

'Wider!'

Stephen did as he was told. Bubble held the squirming adder in an underarm-throw position. Smiled once more. Threw.

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Bubble made one, big mistake. Instead of opening both hands at exactly the same moment, he let go of the tail a tenth of a second before the head, just as the snake was making a desperate attempt to wriggle free with its rear end. So when Bubble let go, the tail swished out at full strength and was already on its way out when he opened the other hand. This miscalculation gave the snake exactly enough time to open its jaws and sink its fangs into the fleshy area between Bubble's thumb and first finger. It hung there for almost a second before letting itself fall into the grass, where it quickly slithered away into the heather.

'It's bitten me! It's bitten me!'

Bubble howled. The other lads stood frozen there and gawped. Then Crusher came to himself and ran over to Bubble.

'Keep calm, so the poison doesn't spread to the rest of your body!' He turned to the others:

'Andy, run home and phone for an ambulance. The rest of us must try and carry him down to the road.'

Andy was already off like a shot. The three others each took hold of Bubble and tried to lift him. It was hopeless. Almost 100 kilos was too much, even with Crusher as one of the team.

'OK. Stephen. Cut him free. He'll have to help carry.'

Chris had his ropes cut through. He got up without a word, took hold of one of Bubble's legs. Then they half carried, half dragged him down the slope to the road.

'It hurts! It hurts!'

Bubble howled even louder, and Chris could see that his hand was beginning to swell.

Andy came running back:

'They'll be here any minute,' he panted.

Chris made off for home. No one tried to stop him. He didn't look back. Started to run. That hurt with only one boot.

*

It was peaceful for over a week. Bubble wasn't at school. Chris had stopped going home through the wood, apart from the days he finished school at the same time as Gunnar. It felt safe to be together with someone from class eight. Gunnar was no tough guy, either, but he had enough friends for no one feeling like trying anything.

Chris hadn't said anything. Felt it was a bit embarrassing that the gang had picked him out of all people as their victim. He wanted Gunnar to believe that he was popular – or at least not so unpopular that no one wanted to be with him. But, Gunnar wasn't stupid. He must have noticed that Chris stood there on his own break after break. He had even rescued him a couple of times. Without knowing it – so Chris believed Gunnar simply had a tendency to turn up at the right moment.

When he had arrived home that day, his mother still had a couple of hours more at work. He had used the time to do a wash in the washing machine. His clothes had been wet through and full of moss, earth and dirt. The next day he had skipped maths and gone home before the others so he could fetch his boot from the snowdrift.

The snow was now completely gone, though it still gurgled when he placed the boot on the ground. Something in his left knee didn't work properly after what had happened. He limped as best he could alongside Gunnar.

'Was it up there Bubble got bitten?' Gunnar asked and pointed.

'Yes. And he hasn't been at school since it happened.'

'Shall we go and see if we can find any more? We've both got boots on.'

'Don't think so – promised mum I'd been home early and put the potatoes on. Anyway, Bubble got bit on the hand,' Chris said.

He noticed that Gunnar was looking at him.

'It's OK if you don't want to come along, but you don't have to pretend it's got something to do with your mother. I'd have been scared too, myself, if someone in the class had been bitten by an adder. I'm taking a look, anyway. See you tomorrow.'

Gunnar grinned.

'If you don't see me tomorrow, at least you'll know where to look.'

He turned round and disappeared up the slope. Chris continued his journey home. He ran as soon as Gunnar could no longer see him. That was the first time he had ever asked if they should do something together. He almost regretted saying no. But he didn't see anyone, at any rate, on his way home.

Chapter 8

May/June 1982

Revenge was slow in coming. During the school breaks Chris always stayed within sight of the teacher on playground duty, on his way home he made sure he stayed close to Gunnar or some of the others he could rely on. At home, he spent his time reading.

Gradually, he relaxed a bit more. It seemed as if Bubble and the others had forgotten him. His knee got better, and Chris began to play football again during the breaks. But he was still the last one to be chosen for the team.

He thought he knew what was wrong with him. He was too small, too bad at playing football, too good at school and too much the teacher's favourite. Occasionally, he wrote wrong answers in tests or was cheeky to Dalberg, but after he had to take a note home he stopped doing that. His mother's eyes had glazed over when she read what the teacher had written.

Gunnar fell ill. Pneumonia. Chris regularly took the path alongside the road home. It was almost twice as long, but there were normally quite a lot of the others at the school who took it. The only thing he dreaded was the last 300 metres, where there was seldom anyone else. It was there he had to pass the spinney.

It happened on the fourth day Gunnar was away. All five of them suddenly jumped out onto the road from the spinney, three in front of him and two behind. Chris did not even have time to think about escaping. Crusher and Andy took a firm hold of his arms and pulled them up behind his back. Bound him. Bubble stuffed a mitten in his mouth. There was no one else to be seen. Then they took him into the spinney again and up the slope. Up on the plateau Chris saw a wooden stool beneath the massive old pine tree they used to climb in. Above the stool hung a rope, with a noose at the end.

Chris refused to budge. He felt his trousers grow wet, but almost managed to wriggle loose. Three of them sat on top of him, forcing him to the ground.

'Hell, he's pissed himself. Ugh!'

Crusher held Chris from behind in a iron grip. Together, they heaved him up onto the stool and into the noose. Chris squirmed as much as he could until he felt the noose against his neck. Then he stood absolutely still. Crusher let go, and Bubble kicked away the stool.

Chapter 26

Tuesday, 26 September 2006

‘Yes!’ Halvor almost roared into the phone. It was the same police guard. He sounded somewhat hysterical.

‘We’ve found them, I mean... we’ve found one of them. Steffensen’s hanging from the ceiling in the basement, and Pedersen’s gone. My colleague’s trying to resuscitate him now. The ambulance is on its way.

Just then, Halvor heard the faint noise of a car engine over the phone.

‘Is that him?’

He got no reply. The policeman had clearly started to run. He could hear his footsteps in the gravel and heavy breathing. Halvor started his GPS on the dashboard.

‘Yes, that’s him,’ he heard a breathless voice say. ‘He’s driving along Marstranderveien towards Vollsveien. Have you got a map?’

‘The GPS is switched on. What kind of car?’

‘His own. A dark-blue Volkswagen Sharan, Delta Bravo 23672.’

‘OK, he’s just left the E18, so I’m very close. If I’m lucky, I’ll meet up with him. Put out a search on the car, in Oslo, Asker and Bærum, and get the helicopter up. If anyone hesitates about giving this top priority, tell them to phone Andersen. Then go back to your colleague, and make sure Steffensen survives. Do you hear me?’

‘We’re doing all we can, but he looks a goner...’

Halvor couldn’t face hearing any more and pressed the off button on his mobile, which he had placed in the handsfree cradle. He couldn’t face thinking about how Steffensen’s ill son would tackle hearing his father was dead. Instead, he removed the blue police lamp – no point in telling Pedersen he had been discovered – and concentrated 100 per cent on his driving. He caught sight of the Sharan at the sharp bend just before the bridge over the railway. It was travelling in the opposite direction at full speed. Pedersen was behind the wheel, but didn’t seem to be aware of anything except the road in front of him. There were plenty of roads he could take from the one he was on now, and Halvor could only see one chance for himself. Just before the bridge there was a cul de sac up to the left. He flung the car up it, slammed on the brakes and reversed the car back out onto the road. Incredibly, not a single car was between him and Pedersen, as far as he had registered. The other car was out of sight.

Nor could he see it when he got to the first roundabout. But he thought he could just make out something blue even so on the exit road towards Fornebu, and followed his intuition. When he had got round the curve and reached the road that ran parallel with the E18, he was sure. It had to be a dark-blue Sharan about 200 metres ahead of him. It was travelling fast, too. Halvor pushed his car up to 130 kph, but still failed to close in on the other car. Soon he would have to decide whether to put the blue lamp back on or not.

On his way through the tunnel, Pedersen zigzagged between the cars in the four lanes. Halvor gave up, put the blue lamp back on the roof and started the sirens at full blast. People began to flash their indicators and pull in to the side and he had a clear path to the traffic lights. There was still some distance to go, but Pedersen had already reached them and looked as if he had speeded up as he passed through them, even though it was against the lights. Cars that had started to cross slammed on their brakes and crashed into each other. The advantage

of this was that they stood still until Halvor had passed them too.

They hurtled past Fornebu like two planes about to take off several years after it had closed down. Where the hell is he making for, Halvor thought. This is a dead certain way of being caught – there’s no way out of this peninsula. He pressed the button with the short number of the operations leader, explained where he was and asked them to block the road back from Snarøya.

‘The helicopter’s in the air and will be out with you in ten minutes at the most. Shall we get the boats out too?’ the operations leader asked. Halvor confirmed, and discovered he was beginning to lose sight of Pedersen, who had already reached the built-up area of Snarøya. Halvor realised he would lose him unless he soon reduced speed. To drive through a residential area so young people had to leap for dear life was not an exercise Halvor could defend.

But Pedersen did not slow down and drove in the west- and east-going lanes according to where the cars ahead of him were. Approaching cars hardly had time to hoot before being forced off into the ditch. It was a miracle no collision took place. Halvor braked and slowed down, but kept the blue lamp and sirens on, so people would at least be more aware of what was going on far ahead of him.

With a heavy heart he had to watch the Sharan disappear out of sight.

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Nicko nodded in satisfaction in the rear mirror. The car with the blue lamp was no longer to be seen. If he could just manage to keep out of sight until he reached the park in front of the villa, it wouldn’t be easy for the police to find him. He also knew that for every metre he drove, the sea and freedom were getting closer. He continued straight ahead, only slightly more slowly, until he found the cul de sac on the left. He turned off, drove slowly forwards and tried to remember where the next turn was.

There! The tall fence and the avenue looked exactly as he remembered them from 14 years earlier. The magnificent brick villa lay so far inside the park area that it was almost invisible from the road, and there was still no gate at the entrance. He drove slowly up the avenue before swinging out onto the well-kept grass after 20 metres. He kept on for about 50 metres before he found the tree he was looking for. The enormous oak tree was just as impressive as it had been then. The leaves were still on the tree, even though they now had taken on most of the colours of the rainbow.

He jumped out, pulled out the bag in which he had packed his sleeping bag and enough food for five days, and pressed the door shut behind him as quietly as he could. It would be virtually impossible to spot the car from above if the police should decide to use a helicopter. If they came by the main road, they would have to drive quite a way onto the premises before they could see the car. As far as the old lady who owned this magnificent property was concerned, she hardly ever went out unless there was plenty of sunshine – and that only left the gardener. Nikko reckoned, however, that he would be on the other side of the house taking up bulbs; he had done so himself at this time of year, at any rate.

It had been the perfect job alongside his studies. He was allowed to live in the basement flat free of charge, and in return he made the old lady feel safe and kept the property in good shape. He had lived here for four years while majoring in comparative literary history. The long way to the university at Blindern had been a price well worth paying.

He hurried along the path he knew so well and arrived at the building complex and the

two red boathouses. As expected, there was no one to be seen. He went out onto the jetty and over to one of the large stones that lined it. He bent down over a slightly pink-coloured stone and lifted. The key of the boathouse lay in exactly the same place as before.

He unlocked, and found the chain behind the door. Then he opened the doors facing the fjord, jumped into the small G14 boat and pulled out the choke. The 30 hp engine started first time, and slowed to its well-known chugging. Nikko thanked his successor, who was apparently as good at maintenance as he himself had been – and in addition had made sure the tank was full.

Now came the most dangerous part of the escape. He pulled over to the left as soon as he was out of the boathouse, but knew that he now could be seen from the top floor. It was, however, unlikely that anyone was there, and the advantage was that he could not be seen from the front of the house, where the gardener probably was.

He began a large sweeping curve, but had to shorten it almost immediately. Far out on the horizon, apparently over the town, he could see and hear a helicopter. It was definitely making for Snarøya, and he was in no doubt what it was up to. They would probably begin to look for his car on the mainland – and they were welcome to do that. Hopefully, that would give him enough time to make the short crossing to Steilene.

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The speedometer needle showed around 20 kph while Halvor took a look at all the side-roads he passed by. So far, there was no sign of the dark-blue Sharan. He was afraid he would have to rely on the police helicopter. Via the operations centre he established direct contact with the pilot. They were already over Snarøya.

‘You still haven’t seen anything of the car?’

‘No, but we haven’t started a systematic search until now.’

It struck Halvor that the escape route could also have been well-planned, like everything else Nikko had undertaken. Maybe he wasn’t even contemplating hiding out on Snarøya. ‘Are there a lot of boats on the fjord?’

‘No, it’s not exactly chockablock. I can only see two or three from where I am right now.’

‘OK. I want you to start by making a sweep over the coastline when you get there. If you see any boats that might have set out from Snarøya during the past few minutes, take a closer look. Look for a lone man, balding and with a bulging midriff.’

The pilot confirmed, silence descended and Halvor continued to keep a look-out. He came to Kongshavn, where he decided to stop of a while and walk down to the boats. He bucked up when he discovered a man in a speedboat right by the edge of the jetty, but Halvor could see at once that it wasn’t Pedersen.

He was just about to go back to the car when his mobile rang once more. It was the helicopter pilot.

‘I’ve got a man that could fit your description on his way over towards Nesodden. I’ve flown down low, but he doesn’t look up.’

Halvor had already turned round. He held up his police card and hailed the man in the speedboat. The young man was beginning to move towards the jetty Halvor was pointing at.

‘Sorry, but I’m in pursuit of a killer out there and I’m going to have to requisition your boat,’ he shouted. Without saying a word, the young man jumped up onto the jetty and handed the boat over to Halvor.

The helicopter was clearly visible now. Halvor set his sights on it, and threw the throttle forwards. He could only just manage to stay upright as all the horsepower kicked in.

*

The noise of the helicopter everywhere filled his head, but Nikko had no thought of giving up. He was fairly sure that those in the helicopter had recognised him, since they were clearly concentrating on his boat. What was more, they were so close that the rotors were whipping up the surface of the sea round him on all sides. His plan of sinking the boat and hiding in the former brickworks until the worst of the police hunt was over would have to be revised.

Improvise. Think! That wasn’t easy in that infernal racket, but gradually an alternative plan began to form in his mind. The mistake people being followed often made was to move from place to place, whereas they really ought to have found an unlikely hiding place where they could stay put for several days without risking being discovered. He knew of such a place. He decided to make for the mainland as fast as possible. The first possibility was Alværn, just inside Steilene.

As far as he could see, there were no boats steering in his direction. He started to believe he was going to make it. Then he turned round one more time, and immediately felt uneasy. A boat was approaching him from behind at high speed. But by now he had no other choice – he simply had to try.

He was close enough to be able to make out the details of the many small boathouses when he turned round again. The other boat was only a hundred metres behind him. Even so, he concentrated 100 per cent on where he was trying to get to. At any moment he expected to see the other boat in the corner of his eye. There! Out to his left he saw a white bow with spray on either side. He turned round – and recognised Halvor.

*

Halvor swore like a trooper when the engine began to misfire. Bloody engine! So near and yet so far. He looked at the petrol gauge. Empty. Was there an extra jerry can anywhere? He began to search inside the bows methodically. Nothing. He went up again and looked out. Pedersen had already moored and had begun to race up the slope that lined the road. The helicopter was still following his movements, but from farther off now, as the pilot was afraid of getting too close to power lines and flagpoles. Pedersen didn’t look back.

Halvor kicked the planking in front of him out of sheer desperation. A hollow sound! He bent down, and caught sight of yet another cupboard. He opened it and there lay a red extra can of fuel.

*

There was precious little time if he was to make it before the first police car was on the scene, and Nikko ran faster than he had done for many a year. If he could get through the wood, he knew a bus stop right next to the road. If only he could be lucky with the bus times!

The sound of the police helicopter was still above him somewhere, but they clearly did not know where he was any more. The sound grew stronger and weaker in turns. Now he could see that the trees were beginning to thin out, and gradually he could make out the grey asphalt in front of him. He started to look for the bus stop. There! Fifty metres on his right. He

ran closer, making sure to keep in the shelter of the trees. A police car passed at high speed, but not so fast that Nicko could not register that the back windows of the car were painted white. The dog patrol! Now he had little time left. He found a large fir tree just five metres from the road, and lay down beneath it.

*

A car with a familiar appearance was driving much too fast down through the sharp curves leading to the jetty. Halvor was glad that his colleagues in the Follo police district were well aware that time was precious. The car stopped right down by the water's edge, roughly where Pedersen had moored, and two armed policemen got out at roughly the same time. One of them opened the back door, and an Alsatian leapt down eagerly onto the ground.

'His boat's lapping out there just below you,' Halvor shouted.

The policemen nodded and got the dog to jump down into the boat. It sniffed hard at the throttle and seat before jumping up again onto dry land. Soon both the two policemen and the dog had vanished into the wood.

*

There it was. Nicko immediately got up and went out to the bus stop. He bought a ticket to Fagerstrand before sinking into an empty seat next to the rear exit. He made sure to keep as much out of sight of the driver as possible. It didn't seem he had roused much attention, even though he could feel the sweat running down over his jaws. He fervently hoped the police hadn't got around to warning the bus companies yet.

Two stops later, a young lad with a satchel on his back got up. Nicko waited until the door had opened and the lad was almost out before quickly disappearing the same way. If he was lucky, the driver wouldn't have seen him when he got out. The lad disappeared in the opposite direction, and there was no one else in sight. He could no longer hear the police helicopter.

*

Halvor phoned the inspector and informed him he intended to cruise along the west side of Nesoddlandet, in case Pedersen should try to put out to sea again. He didn't expect this to lead to anything, but anyway he did not have any formal role in the manhunt now taking place, and could just as well do that as something else. He slowly chugged along the coast of Nesoddlandet, while he looked up at the steep mountain slopes that plunged down into the sea.

*

He kept to the edge of the road, his ears pricked. There was no sign of life anywhere. Not surprising, considering this was a summer cabin area – hardly the place for very many people, if any, to be there on a late autumn day. He finally left the road, passing between the small pine trees on the ridge above the fjord. There he tried to re-find the path from that time so many years ago when he had been invited to the strangest area of cabins he had ever seen so far. It would make the perfect hiding place and was only accessible from the sea. The 30-

metre-high cliffs that towered up from the back of the cabins made sure of that.

The boat he had hoped would take him round the headland to the six small cabins wasn't there. That was a blow, but something Nicko had been prepared for. He waded straight out into the water. It was hardly more than 10 degrees centigrade, but the swim was a short one. When he had rounded the headland, he came to a jetty staircase up to the first cabin on the bricked-up plateau. There were no signs of life. He ran towards the far cabin, and squeezed in behind it and the mountain. There he picked up a stone, broke a pane in the front door, and was relieved to feel the catch on the lock inside.

Once inside, he quickly got his bearings and took off his clothes in the tiny bathroom. He dried himself with towel from the rack in front of him before wrapping himself in a duvet he found in one of the two bedrooms. Hopefully, the hiding place would give him enough time to do what he had planned and thereby put a final end to the story of Chris.

He began to warm up again, and looked around for some electric wall heaters he could switch on. There was one under the window facing the fjord. He ran over, turned it on full blast, got up again and caught a glimpse of the sea. Dammit! He threw himself flat on the floor.

*

Halvor passed a point and was struck by a strange sight on the other side. At the water's edge, where the cliffs dropped sheer into the waters of the fjord, a small group of cabins had been established. They were only slightly larger than what you might find in an allotment, and there was no way of reaching them from the land. It was a fascinating sight.

He studied the cabins a little longer before starting to look southwards over the sea once more. He then noticed a slight movement inside the large window of the farthest cabin. Was it the reflection of something? He looked around. No, nothing that could explain the slight movement he was sure he had seen. He glided closer, and was about to take out his mobile when he thought he could see a tiny fluttering of the curtains.

Halvor shut off the engine and let the boat glide in towards the second cabin. He fastened the boat to the rings in the jetty and clambered up. It was ebb tide, and the boat lay so far below the edge of the jetty that it could hardly be seen from cabin number six. He went right over to the rock face, and slunk behind the cabins. At the entrance to number five he stopped, listened and leaned forwards. No, he couldn't see the entrance to the last cabin from here, either. Very cautiously, he advanced the last few metres, stopping up when he saw the broken glass on the raised porch in front of what must be the front door. There were two wet marks there, too.

He carefully took out his mobile to send a message to Bastian. Just when he was about to press, he cursed himself for not having switched the mobile to mute. The beeps would give him away. There was only one thing to be done: try on his own and hope that Pedersen wasn't armed. But what was he going to do if he managed to overpower him? Modern CIDs didn't go around with police radios, far less handcuffs.

*

The duvet stayed lying on the floor behind him when he slowly and with extreme caution stuck to the skirting board as he stole over to the sofa in the corner. From there he couldn't be seen from the windows. He sat up and wondered what he ought to do. The noise of the engine had

suddenly died, which could only mean the boat had stopped. On the small table next to the arm of the sofa there was a solid wooden candlestick. Nicko picked it up, took out the candles, got up and waited, with the candlestick in his right hand.

*

Halvor picked up a stone the size of a fist from beside the raised porch before very cautiously pressing down the door handle. So far, he hadn't made any noise. Suddenly, there came that small click he had been afraid of. He threw open the door with a bang and stormed into the cabin with the stone raised, ready to strike. He saw the duvet under the window, ran a couple of metres into the main room and suddenly saw a shadow rushing at him. He managed to throw himself to the floor, and whatever-it-was only grazed his shoulder. Halvor turned in the air and flung the stone he had in his hand with all his strength at where he thought his attacker must be.

Nicko got the stone in the crutch, and doubled up. By that time, Halvor was already on his feet and he brought up his knee. Nicko staggered backwards and landed up on the sofa. Halvor flung himself at him again, got him over onto his stomach and straddled him while he pulled off his belt. Nicko twisted and squirmed, so it was impossible to tighten it. Finally, Halvor lay on top of him and held him in a vice, with his arms under Nicko's and a solid grip round the back of his neck.

'Lie still, or I'll break your arm,' Halvor hissed.

Nicko lay still. Halvor slowly sat up, placed Nicko's arms behind his back, and tightened the belt as much as he could. Then he got off. 'Lie there,' he commanded.

He gradually moved back while keeping his eyes on the man on the sofa, took out his mobile and began to press the number to the operations centre. Then Nicko opened his mouth for the first time: 'I don't really think I'd do that if I were you,' he said.



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