

'TURNS TELEVISION GOLD INTO LITERARY GOLD . . .'

DAILY TELEGRAPH



THE
KILLING

THE NOVEL BY

DAVID HEWSON

BASED ON THE ORIGINAL SCREENPLAY BY

SØREN SVEISTRUP

DAVID HEWSON

THE KILLING

BASED ON THE BAFTA AWARD-WINNING TV SERIES

WRITTEN BY SØREN SVEISTRUP

MACMILLAN

Non nobis solum nati sumus.
We are not born for ourselves alone.

Cicero, *De Officiis* (Book I, sec. 22)

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Jan Meyer – *Vicekriminalkommissær, Homicide*

Hans Buchard – *Chief Inspector, Homicide*

Lennart Brix – *Deputy/Acting Chief, Homicide*

Svendsen – *Detective, Homicide*

Jansen – *Forensic Officer*

Büløw – *Investigations Officer*

Birk Larsen family

Theis Birk Larsen – *father*

Pernille Birk Larsen – *mother*

Nanna Birk Larsen – *Theis and Pernille's daughter*

Anton Birk Larsen – *Theis and Pernille's son*

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Lotte Holst – *Pernille's younger sister*

Rådhus (City Hall) politicians and employees

Troels Hartmann – *leader of the Liberal Group and Mayor of Education*

Rie Skovgaard – *Hartmann's political adviser*

Morten Weber – *Hartmann's campaign manager*

Poul Bremer – *Lord Mayor of Copenhagen*

Kirsten Eller – *Leader of the Centre Group*

Jens Holck – *Leader of the Moderate Group*

Mai Juhl – *Leader of the Environment Party Group*

Knud Padde – *chair of the Liberal Group*

Henrik Bigum – *committee member of the Liberal Group*

Olav Christensen – *a civil servant in the Education Department*

Gert Stokke – *a civil servant heading Holck's Environment Department*

Frederiksholm High School

Oliver Schandorff – *a pupil, Nanna's former boyfriend*

Jeppe Hald – *a pupil*

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Rektor Koch – *the headmistress*

Rahman Al Kemal – *a teacher, popularly known as Rama*

Henning Kofoed – *a teacher*

Others

Hanne Meyer – *Jan Meyer's wife*

Carsten – *Lund's former husband*

Bengt Rosling – *a criminal psychologist, Lund's current boyfriend*

Mark – *Lund's son*

Vagn Skærbæk – *Birk Larsen family friend and long-term employee*

Leon Frevert – *taxi driver and part-time Birk Larsen employee*

Amir El' Namen – *son of an Indian restaurant owner, Nanna's childhood friend*

John Lyngé – *a driver for Troels Hartmann*

One

Friday, 31st October

Through the dark wood where the dead trees give no shelter Nanna Birk Larsen runs.

Nineteen, breathless, shivering in her skimpy torn slip, bare feet stumbling in the clinging mud.

Cruel roots snag her ankles, snarling branches tear her pale and flailing arms. She falls, she clambers, she struggles out of vile dank gullies, trying to still her chattering teeth, to think, to hope, to hide.

There is a bright monocular eye that follows, like a hunter after a wounded deer. It moves in a slow approaching zigzag, marching through the Pinseskoven wasteland, through the Pentecost Forest.

Bare silver trunks rise from barren soil like limbs of ancient corpses frozen in their final throes.

Another fall, the worst. The ground beneath her vanishes and with it her legs. Hands windmilling, crying out in pain and despair, the girl crashes into the filthy, ice-cold ditch, collides with rocks and logs, paddles through sharp and cutting gravel, feels her head and hands, her elbows, her knees, graze the hard invisible terrain that lurks below.

The chill water, the fear, his presence not so far away . . .

She staggers, gasping, out of the mire, clambers up the bank, splays her naked, torn and bleeding feet against the swampy ground to gain some purchase from the sludge between her toes.

At the ridge ahead she finds a tree. Some last few leaves of autumn brush against her face. The trunk is larger than its peers and as her arms fall round it she thinks of Theis her father, a giant of a man, silent, morose, a staunch and stoic bulwark against the world outside.

She grips the tree, clutches at it as once she clutched him. His strength with hers, hers with his. Nothing more was ever needed, ever would be.

From the limitless sky falls a low-pitched whine. The bright, all-seeing lights of a jet escaping the bounds of gravity, fleeing Kastrup, fleeing Denmark. Its fugitive presence dazzles and blinds. In the unforgiving brilliance Nanna Birk Larsen's fingers stray to her face. Feel the wound running from her left eye to her cheek, vicious, open, bleeding.

She can smell him, feel him. On her. In her.

Through all the pain, amidst the fear, rises a hot and sudden flame of fury.

You're Theis Birk Larsen's daughter.

They all said that when she gave them reason.

You're Nanna Birk Larsen, Theis's child, Pernille's too, and you shall escape the monster in the night, chasing through the Pentecost Forest on the fringes of the city where, a few long miles away, lies that warm safe place called home.

She stands and grips the trunk as once she gripped her father, arms round the splintering silver bar, shiny slip stained with dirt and blood, shivering, quiet, convincing herself salvation lies ahead, beyond the dark wood and the dead trees that give no shelter.

A white beam ranges over her again. It is not the flood of illumination falling from the belly of a plane that flies above this wasteland like a vast mechanical angel idly looking for a stray lost soul to save.

Run, Nanna, run, a voice cries.

Run, Nanna, run, she thinks.

There is one torchlight on her now, the single blazing eye. And it is here.

Two

Monday, 3rd November

‘Around the back,’ the cop said. ‘Some homeless guy found her.’

Seven thirty in the morning. Still dark with the rain coming down in straight and icy lines. Vicekriminalkommissær Sarah Lund stood in the lee of the dirty brick building near the docks, watching the uniform men lay out the Don’t Cross lines.

The last crime scene she’d ever see in Copenhagen. It had to be a murder. A woman too.

‘The building’s empty. We’re checking the block of flats opposite.’

‘How old is she?’ Lund asked.

The cop, a man she barely knew, shrugged his shoulders then wiped the rain from his face with his arm.

‘Why’d you ask?’

A nightmare she wanted to say. One that woke her at six thirty that morning, screaming bolt upright in an empty bed. When she got up Bengt, kind, thoughtful, calm Bengt, was padding round the place finishing the packing. Mark, her son, lay fast asleep in front of the TV in his room, didn’t even stir when, very quietly, she peeked in. That night the three of them would catch the flight to Stockholm. A new life in another country. Corners turned. Bridges burned.

Sarah Lund was thirty-eight, a serious woman, staring endlessly at the world around her, never once herself. She was starting her final day in the Copenhagen police. Women like her didn’t have nightmares, terrors in the dark, fleeting glimpses of a frightened young face that might, once upon a time, have been hers.

They were fantasies for others.

‘No need for an answer,’ the cop said, scowling at her silence as he lifted up the tape and walked her to the sliding metal door. ‘I’ll tell you something. I’ve never seen one like this.’

He passed her a pair of blue forensic gloves, watched as she put them on, then put his shoulder to the rusting metal. It opened squealing like a tortured cat.

‘I’ll be with you in a minute,’ he said.

She didn’t wait, just walked ahead the way she always did, alone, staring, this way then that, bright eyes wide open, always looking.

For some reason he rolled the sliding door shut the moment she was inside, so rapidly the cat squealed an octave higher than before. Then fell silent with the metallic clatter of the heavy iron slamming out the grey day behind.

Ahead lay a central corridor and a chamber like a meat store hung with hooks at intervals along the rafters. A single set of bulbs in the ceiling.

The concrete floor was damp and shining. Something moved in the shadows at the end, swinging slowly like a gigantic pendulum.

There was the clatter of an unseen switch and then the place was as dark as the bedroom that morning when a savage unwanted dream shook her awake.

'Lights!' Lund called.

Her voice echoed round the black and empty belly of the building.

'Lights, please.'

Not a sound. She was an experienced cop, remembered everything she was supposed to carry, except for the gun which always seemed an afterthought.

She had the torch though, safe in her right pocket, took it out and held it the way cops did: right hand upright, wrist cocked back, beam ahead, searching, peering into places others didn't look.

The light and Lund went hunting. Blankets, discarded clothes, two crushed Coke cans, an empty packet of condoms.

Three steps and then she stopped. By the right wall, visible at the point it met the floor was a puddle of liquid, scarlet and sticky, two horizontal lines along the peeling plaster, the way blood smeared when a body was dragged along the floor.

Lund reached into her pocket, took out the packet of nicotine gum, popped a piece in her mouth.

It wasn't just Copenhagen getting left behind. Tobacco was on the hit list too.

She bent down and placed a blue gloved finger in the sticky puddle, lifted it to her nose and sniffed.

Three more steps and she came upon a woodman's axe, the handle clean and shiny as if it had been bought from a store the day before. She placed two fingers in the pool of red liquid that ran around the blade, tested it, sniffed and thought.

She'd never learn to like the taste of Nicotinell. Lund walked on.

The thing ahead was getting clearer. It swung from side to side. An industrial tarpaulin so smeared with red it looked like the shroud of a slaughtered beast.

What lay inside had a familiar, human shape.

Lund changed the position of the torch, held it close to her waist, beam upwards, checking the fabric, looking for something to grip.

The material came away in one swift movement and what lay beneath swung slowly in the beam. The frozen face the light caught was male, mouth open in a perpetual O. Black hair, pink flesh, a monstrous plastic penis erect and winking. And over its head a vivid blue Viking helmet with silver horns and gold braids running down.

Lund cocked her head and, for their sake, smiled.

Tied to the chest of the sex toy was a notice: *Thanks boss, for seven great years. The boys.*

Laughter from the shadows.

The boys.

A good prank. Though they might have got real blood.

The Politigården was a grey labyrinth on reclaimed land near the waterfront. Bleak and square on the outside, the interior of the police headquarters opened up to a round courtyard. Classical pillars stood in a shadowy arcade around the edge. Inside spiral staircases led to winding corridors lined with striated black marble running round the perfect circle like calcified veins. It had taken her three months to find her way around this dark and maze-like complex. Even now, sometimes, she had to think hard to work out where she was.

Homicide was on the second floor, north-east. She was in Buchard's room, wearing the Viking helmet, listening to their jokes, opening their presents, smiling, keeping quiet beneath the cardboard horns and the golden braids.

Then she thanked them and went to her office, began to clear her belongings. No time for fuss. She smiled at the photo of Mark she kept in a frame on the desk. Three years before, back when he was

nine, long before he came home with the ridiculous earring. Before – just – the divorce. Then along came Bengt to tempt her to Sweden and a life across the bleak, cold waters of the Øresund. Young Mark, unsmiling then as now. That would change in Sweden. Along with everything else.

Lund swept the rest of the desk, her three-month supply of Nicotinell, the pens, the pencil sharpened in the shape of a London bus, into a flimsy cardboard box then placed the photo of Mark on top.

The door opened and a man walked in.

She looked, she judged, the way she always did. A cigarette hung from the corner of his mouth. His hair was short, his face severe. Big eyes, big ears. Clothes cheap and a little too young for a man who wasn't far off her own age. He was carrying a box much like hers. She could see a map of Copenhagen, a kid's basketball net for the wall, a toy police car and a pair of headphones.

'I'm looking for Lund's office,' he said, staring at the Viking helmet perched on the new pair of skis they'd given her at breakfast.

'That's me.'

'Jan Meyer. Is that uniform around here?'

'I'm going to Sweden.'

Lund picked up her belongings and the two of them did a little dance around each other as she struggled to the door.

'For the love of God . . . why?' Meyer asked.

She put down the box, swept back her long brown wayward hair, tried to think if there was anything left that mattered.

He took out the basketball net, looked at the wall.

'My sister did something like that,' Meyer said.

'Like what?'

'Couldn't keep her life in one piece here so she moved to Bornholm with a guy.' Meyer stuck the net above the filing cabinets. 'Nice guy. Didn't work.'

Lund got sick of her hair, pulled an elastic band from her pocket and tied it in a ponytail.

'Why not?'

'Too remote. They went mad listening to cows fart all day long.' He took out a pewter beer tankard and turned it in his hands. 'Where are you going?'

'Sigtuna.'

Meyer stood stock still and stared at her in silence.

'It's very remote too,' Lund added.

He took a long draw on his cigarette and pulled a small child's football out of the box. Then he put the toy police car on the desk and started running it up and down. When the wheels moved the blue light burst into life and a tiny siren wailed.

He was still playing with it when Buchard walked in, a piece of paper in his hand.

'You've met,' the chief said. It wasn't a question.

The bespectacled uncle figure she'd sat next to at breakfast had vanished.

'We had the pleasure—' Lund began.

'This just came in.' Buchard handed her the report slip. 'If you're too busy clearing up . . .'

'I've got time,' Lund told him. 'All day . . .'

'Good,' Buchard said. 'Why not take Meyer with you?'

The man with the box stubbed out his cigarette and shrugged.

'He's unpacking,' Lund said.

Meyer let go of the car, picked up the football and bounced it in his hand.

He grinned. Looked different, more human, more rounded that way.

'Never too busy for work.'

‘A good start,’ Buchard said. There was an edge to his voice. ‘I’d like that, Meyer, and so would you.’

Window down, looking round from the passenger seat, Lund scanned the Kalvebod Fælled. Thirteen kilometres south of the city, near the water. It was a bright clear morning after a couple of days of rain. Probably wouldn’t stay fine for long. Flat marshland, yellow grass and ditches, stretched to the horizon, with a bare dark wood to the right. Faint smell of sea, closer stink of dank decaying vegetation. Moisture in the air, not far from freezing. A hard cold winter stirring.

‘You can’t carry a gun? You can’t make arrests? What about parking tickets?’

An early morning dog walker had found some girl’s clothes on wasteland near a patch of silver birch woodland known as the Pinseskoven. The Pentecost Forest.

‘You’ve got to be Swedish to arrest people. It’s a . . .’ Lund wished she’d never answered his questions. ‘It’s how it works.’

Meyer shoved a handful of potato crisps into his mouth then balled the bag into the footwell. He drove like a teenager, too fast, with little thought for others.

‘What does your boy think?’

She got out, didn’t check to see him follow.

There was a plain-clothes detective by the find, a uniform man wandering through the hummocks of grass, kicking at the dying clumps. This was all they had: a flowery cotton top, the kind a teenager might wear. A card for a video rental store. Both inside plastic evidence bags. The top had bloodstains on it.

Lund turned three hundred and sixty degrees, her large and lustrous eyes looking for something the way they always did.

‘Who comes here?’ she asked the uniform man.

‘During the day nursery school kids on nature trips. At night hookers from the city.’

‘Some place to turn a trick,’ Meyer said. ‘Where’s the romance these days? I ask you.’

Lund was still going round slowly on her heels.

‘When was this stuff left here?’

‘Yesterday. Not Friday. There was a school trip then. They’d have seen it.’

‘No calls? No hospital reports?’

‘Nothing.’

‘No idea who she is?’

He showed her the bag with the top.

‘Size eight,’ the detective said. ‘That’s all we know.’

It looked cheap, the flowers so garish and childlike they might be ironic. A teenager’s joke: childish and sexy too.

Lund got the second bag and examined the video rental card.

It had a name: Theis Birk Larsen.

‘We found that near the track,’ the cop added. ‘The top here. Maybe they had a fight and he threw her out of the car. And then . . .’

‘And then,’ Meyer said, ‘she found her shoes and coat and purse and pack of condoms and walked all the way home to watch TV.’

Lund found she couldn’t stop looking at the woods.

‘You want me to talk to this Birk Larsen guy?’ the uniform asked.

‘Do that,’ she said and glanced at her watch.

Eight hours and it was over. Copenhagen and the life that went before.

Meyer came round and she found herself swamped in smoke.

‘We can talk to him, Lund. Leaving a hooker out here. Beating her up. My kind of customer.’

‘Well it’s not our kind of work.’

The cigarette went into the nearest ditch.

‘I know. I just . . .’ A pack of gum came out of his pocket. This man seemed to live on crisps and sweets and cigarettes. ‘I just want to have a little talk with him.’

‘About what? There’s no case. The hooker never complained.’

Meyer leaned forward and spoke to her the way a teacher might address a child.

‘I’m good at talking.’

He had prominent, almost comical ears and a good day’s stubble. He’d do well undercover, she thought. And maybe had. She remembered the way Buchard spoke to him. Street thug. Cop. Meyer could play either.

‘I said . . .’

‘You should see me, Lund. Truly. Before you go. My gift to the Swedes.’

He took the card from her fingers. Read it.

‘Theis Birk Larsen.’

Sarah Lund turned one more circle and took in the yellow grass, the ditches and the woods.

‘I’ll drive,’ she said.

Pernille perched above his big chest laughing like a child.

Half-dressed on the kitchen floor in the middle of a working morning. That was Theis’s idea, like most things.

‘Get dressed,’ she ordered and rolled off him, rose to her feet. ‘Go to work, you beast.’

He grinned like the tearaway teenager she still remembered. Then climbed back into his bright-red bib overalls. Forty-four, ginger hair turning grey, mutton-chop sideburns reaching down to his broad chin, face ready to switch from hot to cold then back to its usual immobile in an instant.

Pernille was one year younger, a busy woman, still in shape after three children, enough to catch his eye as easily as she had twenty years before when they first met.

She watched him clamber into his heavy uniform then looked around the little apartment.

Nanna had been in her belly when they moved to Vesterbro. In her belly when they married. Here, in this bright, colourful room, pot plants in the window, photographs on the wall, full of the mess of family life, they raised her. From squawking baby to beautiful teen, joined, after too long an interval, by Emil and Anton, now seven and six.

Their quarters stood above the busy depot of the Birk Larsen transport company. The place downstairs was more ordered than the cramped rooms in which they lived, five of them, forever in each other’s way. A jumbled mess of mementoes, drawings, toys and clutter.

Pernille looked at the herbs on the window, the way the green light shone through them.

Full of life.

‘Nanna’s going to need an apartment soon,’ she said, straightening her long chestnut hair. ‘We can put down a deposit, can’t we?’

He grunted with laughter.

‘You choose your moments. She can choose hers. Let Nanna finish school first.’

‘Theis . . .’

She wound herself back into his burly arms, looked into his face. Some people were scared of Theis Birk Larsen. Not her.

‘Maybe it won’t be needed,’ he said.

His rough face creased in a crafty, teasing grin.

‘Why?’

‘Secret.’

‘Tell me!’ Pernille cried and punched his chest with her clenched fist.

‘Then it wouldn’t be a secret.’

He walked down the stairs into the depot. She followed.

Trucks and men, pallets and shrink-wrapped goods, inventory lists and timetables.

The floorboards always creaked. Maybe she’d cried out. They’d heard. She could see it in their grinning faces. Vagn Skærbæk, Theis’s oldest friend, who pre-dated even her, tipped an imaginary hat.

‘Tell me!’ she ordered, taking his old black leather coat from the hook.

Birk Larsen put on the jacket, pulled out the familiar black woollen cap, set it on his head. Red on the inside, black on the out. He seemed to live inside this uniform. It made him look like a truculent red-chested bull seal, happy with his territory, ready to fight off all intruders.

A glance at the clipboard, a tick against a destination, then he called Vagn Skærbæk to the nearest van. Scarlet too, and like the uniforms it had the name Birk Larsen on the side. Like the red Christiania tricycle with the box on it that Skærbæk kept running eighteen years after they bought it to ferry Nanna round the city.

Birk Larsen. Patriarch of a modest, happy dynasty. King of his small quarter in Vesterbro.

One clap of his giant hands, barked orders. Then he left.

Pernille Birk Larsen stood there till the men went back to work. There was a tax return to finish.

Money to be paid and that was never welcome. Money to be hidden too. No one gave the government everything if they could help it.

We need no more secrets, Theis, she thought.

Beneath Absalon’s golden statue, beneath the bell-tower turret and castellated roofline, against the red-brick, turreted fortress that was the Rådhus, Copenhagen City Hall, stood three posters.

Kirsten Eller, Troels Hartmann, Poul Bremer. Smiling as only politicians can.

Eller, the woman, thin lips tight together in something close to a smirk. The Centre Party, forever stuck in a philosophical no man’s land, hoping to cling to one side or the other then catch the crumbs that slip from the master’s table.

Below her Poul Bremer beamed out at the city he owned. Lord Mayor of Copenhagen for twelve years, a plump and comfortable statesman, close to the Parliamentarians who held the purse strings, attuned to the fickle opinions of his shiftless party troops, familiar with the scattered network of backers and supporters who followed his every word. Black jacket, white shirt, subtle grey silk tie, businesslike black spectacles, Bremer at sixty-five wore the friendly disposition of everyone’s favourite uncle, the generous bringer of gifts and favours, the clever relative with all the secrets, all the knowledge.

Then Troels Hartmann.

The young one. The handsome one. The politician women looked at and secretly admired.

He wore the Liberal colours. Blue suit, blue shirt, open at the neck. Hartmann, forty-two, boyish with his Nordic good looks, though in his clear cobalt eyes a hint of pain escaped the photographer’s lens. A good man, the picture said. A new generation vigorously chasing out the old, bringing with it fresh ideas, the promise of change. Part way there since, thanks to the voting system, he ran with energy and vision the city’s Education Department. Mayor already, if only of its schools and colleges.

Three politicians about to fight each other for the crown of Copenhagen, the capital city, a sprawling metropolis where more than a fifth of Denmark’s five and a half million natives lived and worked, bickered and fought. Young and old, Danish-born and recent, sometimes half-welcome, immigrant. Honest and diligent, idle and corrupt. A city like any other.

Eller the outsider whose only chance was to cut the best deal she could. Hartmann young, idealistic

Naive his foes would say, bravely hoping to knock Poul Bremer, the grandee of city politics, from the perch the old man called his own.

In the chill November afternoon their faces beamed at the camera, for the press, for the people in the street. Past the smoke-stained ornamental windows of the red-brick castle called the Rådhus, in the galleried corridors and cell-like chambers where politicians gathered to whisper and plot, life was different.

Behind the fixed and artificial smiles a war was under way.

Shining wood. Long slender leaded windows. Leather furniture. Gilt and mosaics and paintings. The smell of polished mahogany.

Posters of Hartmann stood everywhere, leaning against walls, ready to go out to the city. On the desk, in a wooden frame, a portrait of his wife on her hospital bed, placid, brave and beautiful a month before she died. Next to it a photograph of John F. Kennedy and a doe-eyed Jackie in the White House. A band played in the background admiring them. She was smiling in a beautiful silk evening dress. Kennedy was talking to her, saying something private in her ear.

The White House, days before Dallas.

In his private office Troels Hartmann looked at the photos, then the desk calendar.

Monday morning. Three of the longest weeks of his political life ahead. The first of an endless succession of meetings.

Hartmann's two closest aides sat on the other side of the desk, laptops before them, going through the day's agenda. Morten Weber, campaign manager, friend since college. Committed, quiet, solitary intense. Forty-four, unruly curly hair beneath a growing bald patch, a kind, intense and neglected face, roving eyes behind cheap gold-rimmed glasses. Never knew what he looked like or cared. For the last week he'd seemed to live in the same shabby creased jacket that didn't match his trousers. Happiest in the minutiae of committee paper and cutting deals in smoke-filled rooms.

Sometimes he'd roll his office chair away from the table, propel himself into a quiet corner, take out his needle and insulin, pull his shirt from his waistband and jab a shot into his flabby white belly. Then slide back into the argument, tucking himself back in without losing a single thread.

Rie Skovgaard, the political adviser, always pretended not to notice.

Hartmann's mind wandered from Weber's tally of the appointments. He found himself torn from the world of politics for a moment. Thirty-two, angular, intense face, attractive more than beautiful. Combative, strident, always elegant. Today she wore a tightly cut green suit. Expensive. Her dark hair she seemed to take from that photo on Hartmann's desk. Jackie Kennedy around 1963, long and curving into her slender neck, seemingly casual though not a strand was ever out of place.

The 'presidential-funeral cut' Weber called it, but only behind her back. Rie Skovgaard hadn't looked that way when she arrived.

Morten Weber was the son of a schoolteacher from Aarhus. Skovgaard came with better connections. Her father was an influential backbench MP. Before she moved to the Liberals she was an account executive with the Copenhagen office of a New York-based advertising agency. Now she pitched him, his image, his ideas, much the way she once sold life insurance and supermarket chains.

An unlikely team, awkward sometimes. Did she envy Weber? The fact that he preceded her by two decades, working his way up the Liberal Party secretariat, the backroom man while Hartmann's handsome smile and fetching ways brought in the publicity and votes?

Rie Skovgaard was a newcomer, scenting opportunity, bored by ideology.

'The debate this lunchtime. We need posters at the school,' she said in a calm, clear professional voice. 'We need—'

'It's done,' Weber replied, waving his fingers at the computer.

It was a dull day. Rain and cloud. The office gave out onto the front of the Palace Hotel. At night a blue neon sign cast an odd light on the room.

‘I sent a car out there first thing.’

She folded her skinny arms.

‘You think of everything, Morten.’

‘I need to.’

‘What’s that supposed to mean?’

‘Bremer.’ Weber muttered the name as if it were an expletive. ‘He didn’t own this city by accident.’

Hartmann came back to the conversation.

‘He won’t own it for much longer.’

‘Did you see the latest poll numbers?’ Skovgaard asked.

‘They look good,’ Hartmann answered with a nod. ‘Better than we hoped for.’

Morten Weber shook his head.

‘Bremer’s seen them too. He won’t sit on his comfy arse and let his kingdom slip through his fingers. This debate at lunchtime, Troels. It’s a school. Home ground. The media will be there.’

‘Talk education,’ Skovgaard cut in. ‘We’ve asked for extra funds to put in more computers. Better access to the net. Bremer blocked the allocation. Now absenteeism’s up twenty per cent. We can throw that at him . . .’

‘Blocked it personally?’ Hartmann asked. ‘You know that?’

A subtle, teasing smile.

‘I managed to get hold of some confidential minutes.’

Like a guilty schoolgirl Skovgaard waved her delicate hands over the documents in front of her.

‘It’s there in black and white. I can leak this if I have to. I’m finding lots we can throw at him.’

‘Can we avoid this kind of crap, please?’ Weber asked with an ill-disguised peevishness. ‘People expect better of us.’

‘People expect us to lose, Morten,’ Skovgaard replied straight away. ‘I’m trying to change that.’

‘Rie . . .’

‘We’ll get there,’ Hartmann interrupted. ‘And we’ll do it properly. I had a meeting with Kirsten Eller over breakfast. I think they want to play.’

The two of them went silent. Then Skovgaard asked, ‘They’re interested in an alliance?’

‘With Kirsten Eller?’ Weber grumbled. ‘Jesus. Talk about a deal with the devil . . .’

Hartmann leaned back in his chair, closed his eyes, felt happier than he had in days.

‘These are different times, Morten. Poul Bremer’s starting to lose support. If Kirsten throws her not inconsiderable weight behind us . . .’

‘We’ve got a coalition that holds the majority,’ Skovgaard added brightly.

‘We need to think this through,’ Weber said.

His phone rang. He walked to the window to take the call.

Troels Hartmann skimmed the papers she’d prepared for him, a briefing for the debate.

Skovgaard moved her chair next to his so they could read them together.

‘You don’t need my help, do you? You came up with these ideas. We’re just reminding you what you think.’

‘I need reminding. I lost my watch! A good watch. A . . .’

Skovgaard nudged him. The silver Rolex was in her hand, held discreetly beneath the table so no one else could see.

She opened his fingers and pressed it into his palm.

‘I found it under my bed. I can’t imagine how it got there. Can you?’

Hartmann slipped the Rolex onto his wrist.

Weber came back from the window, phone in hand, looking worried.

'It's the mayor's secretary. Bremer wants to see you.'

'About what?'

'I don't know. He wants to see you now.'

'Fifteen minutes,' Hartmann said, checking the time. 'I'm not at his beck and call.'

Weber looked puzzled.

'You told me you'd lost your watch.'

'Fifteen minutes,' Hartmann repeated.

The hallways ran everywhere, long and gleaming, frescoes of battles and ceremonies above them, grand figures in armour staring down at the figures beetling along beneath.

'You don't look happy,' Hartmann said as they walked to the Lord Mayor's quarters.

'Happy? I'm your campaign manager. We're three weeks from an election. You're forming alliances without even telling me. What do you want? A song, a dance and a joke?'

'You think Bremer knows? About Kirsten Eller?'

'Poul Bremer can hear you mumbling in your sleep. Besides, if you're Kirsten Eller trying to cut a deal . . . do you only offer it to one side?'

Hartmann stood outside the council chamber door.

'Leave this to me, Morten. I'll find out.'

Poul Bremer was in shirtsleeves standing on the podium by the ceremonial chair he'd occupied these past twelve years. Jovial on the phone.

Hartmann walked ahead and picked up the book on the table by the mike. A biography of Cicero. And listened, as he was meant to.

'Yes, yes. Hear me out.' That deep and generous laugh, Bremer's breathy blessing on those he favoured. 'You'll be in the government next. A minister. I predict it and I'm never wrong.' A glance his visitor. 'Sorry . . . I must go.'

Bremer took the deputy's seat. Not the Lord Mayor's.

'You've read the book, Troels?'

'No. Sorry.'

'Take it. An instructive gift. It reminds us the one thing we learn from history is . . . we learn nothing from history.' He had the voice and manner of a genial schoolmaster, honed across the years. 'Cicero was a fine man. Would have gone far if he'd bided his time.'

'It looks heavy going.'

'Come and sit with me.' Bremer beckoned to the seat beside him. The Lord Mayor's. The throne. 'Try it for size. It doesn't belong to anyone. Not even me, whatever you think.'

Hartmann went along with the joke. Fell onto the hard polished wood. Smelled the mahogany, the scent of power. Looked around the chamber with its semicircle of empty councillors' seats, flat-screen monitors and voting buttons in front of them.

'It's just a chair, Troels,' Bremer said, grinning at him.

He always spoke and moved like a younger man. That was part of the image.

'Rome liked Cicero, appreciated his ideas. Ideas make pretty rhetoric. Not much more. Caesar was dictator but a rogue the Romans knew and loved. Cicero was impatient. Pushy. An upstart. You know what happened to him?'

'He went into TV?'

'Very funny. They slaughtered him. Put his hands and head on show in the Forum for everyone to laugh at. We serve an ungrateful bunch of bastards sometimes.'

'You wanted to see me?'

‘I saw the polls. Did you?’

‘I did.’

‘You’ll make a fine Lord Mayor. You’ll run this city well.’ Bremer smoothed down the sleeves of his black silk jacket, pulled out the cuffs of his smart white shirt, took off his glasses and checked the lenses. They were clean, ran a hand through his silver hair. ‘Just not this time around.’

Hartmann sighed and looked at his silver Rolex.

‘I retire in four years. What’s the hurry?’

‘I believe it’s called an election. Third Tuesday in November. Every four years.’

‘I’ve an offer for you. A seat around my table. Running more than schools. There are seven mayors, one Lord Mayor and six for the departments. You’ll get any of the six you want. You’ll learn how this city runs. When the time comes you’ll be ready for the job and I’ll happily hand it on.’

Bremer turned that swift smile on him.

‘I guarantee no one will stand against you. But you can’t have it now. You’re not ready.’

‘That’s not your decision, is it?’

The smile was gone.

‘I’m just trying to be friendly. There’s no need for us to be enemies . . .’

Hartmann got up to leave. Poul Bremer strode in front, stopped him with an outstretched hand. He was a burly man, still fit. There were stories about how he’d strong-arm for support when he was young. No one knew whether they were true. No one had the courage to ask.

‘Troels.’

‘You’ve overstayed your welcome,’ Hartmann said curtly. ‘Go quietly. With dignity. Maybe I could find you a job somewhere.’

The suave old man stared at him, amused.

‘Does one tiny promise from the Centre Party inspire such confidence? Oh please. They’re the house pets. That fat bitch Eller will suck the cock of anyone then let you piss on her. So long as she gets a subcommittee after. Still . . .’ He straightened his gold cufflinks.

‘They know their place. A wise politician does.’

Bremer picked up the book, held it out to him and said, ‘Read about Cicero. You might learn something. No one wants to end up torn to pieces for the public to gloat over. It’s best these transitions are managed. Quietly. Efficiently. With some—’

‘You’re going to lose,’ Hartmann cut in.

The old man chuckled.

‘Poor Troels. You look so impressive on the posters. But in the flesh . . .’

He reached out and touched the collar of Hartmann’s silk suit.

‘What’s under here, I wonder? Do you even know yourself?’

Meyer was out before she’d time to kill the engine, flashing his ID at a woman packing the boot of an estate car.

Red.

Everything here seemed a vivid shade of scarlet. The workmen in their bib overalls. The vans. Even a shiny Christiania trike with a box on the front for taking kids to school, bringing back the shopping, riding a lazy dog around town.

All the same colour, all with the name Birk Larsen on them.

Lund walked over, half-listening to Meyer, mostly looking around.

Two sliding doors opened to a depot-cum-garage. Beyond the crates and cases and machinery she could see an office behind glass windows in the corner, stairs at the back with a sign that read ‘Private’. This was Birk Larsen’s home address. He had to live above the job.

‘Where’s Theis Birk Larsen?’ Meyer asked.

‘My husband’s working. And I’m going to the accountants.’

A woman in her forties, smart, good-looking with chestnut hair just a touch better tended than Lund’s own. She wore a fawn gaberdine coat and a harassed, preoccupied air. Kids, Lund thought. She owned the badge. And she didn’t like the police. Who did?

‘You live here?’ Lund asked.

‘Yes.’

‘Is he upstairs?’

The woman walked back into the garage.

‘Is this about the vans again? We’re a transport company. We get in the way.’

‘It’s not about the vans,’ Lund said as she followed a couple of steps behind. More scarlet and uniforms. Hefty men heaving around crates, checking clipboards, looking her up and down. ‘We just want to know what he did at the weekend.’

‘We went to the seaside. With our two boys. Friday to Sunday. Took a cottage. Why?’

Tarpaulins and ropes. Wooden chests and commercial pallets. Lund wondered what she’d meet as not-quite-cop in Sweden. She’d never really asked herself that question. Bengt wanted to go. She wanted to follow.

‘Maybe he came back to town on business?’ Meyer said.

The woman picked up an accounts ledger. She was getting sick of this.

‘But he didn’t. First weekend off we’ve had in two years. Why would he?’

Untidy office. Papers everywhere. Big companies didn’t work this way. They had systems. Organization. Money.

Lund walked outside and looked in the woman’s boot. Papers and folders. Kids’ toys. A small football, much like the one Meyer had left in the office. A battered Nintendo. She wandered back into the office.

‘What did he do when you got home?’ Meyer was saying.

‘We went to bed.’

‘You’re sure.’

She laughed at him.

‘I’m sure.’

While they talked Lund strolled around the office, looking at the mess, searching for something personal in all the bills and receipts and invoices.

‘I don’t know what you think he did . . . and I don’t care either,’ the woman was saying. ‘We were at the seaside. Then we came home. That’s it.’

Meyer sniffed, looked in Lund’s direction.

‘Maybe we’ll come back another time.’

Then he went outside, lit a cigarette, leaned against one of the scarlet trucks and stared at the stark, pallid sky.

At the back of the office, behind some rickety, old-fashioned filing trays, was a set of photographs. A beautiful teenage girl smiling with her arms round two young boys. The same girl close up, bubbly blonde hair, bright eyes, a little too much make-up. Trying to look older than she was.

Lund took out her packet of nicotine gum and popped a piece in her mouth.

‘You’ve got a daughter?’ she asked, still looking at the girl, the fetching smile. Both photos, alone too old, and with the young boys when she played big sister.

The mother was walking out of the office. She stopped. Turned, looked at her and said, her voice quiet and small, ‘Yes. And two boys. Six and seven.’

‘Does she borrow her dad’s video rental card sometimes?’

The Birk Larsen woman was changing as Lund watched. Face falling, getting older. Mouth open. Eyelids twitching as if they had a life of their own.

‘Maybe. Why?’

‘Was she here last night?’

Meyer was back inside, listening.

The woman put down the papers. She looked troubled now, and scared.

‘Nanna spent the weekend at a friend’s house. Lisa. I thought . . .’ Her hand went up to her chestnut hair for no real reason. ‘I thought she might phone us. But she hasn’t.’

Lund couldn’t take her eyes off the photographs, the face there, happy, staring out at the camera without a care.

‘I think you should ring her now.’

Frederiksholm High School in the city centre. Where the money was. Not Vesterbro. Morning break. Lisa Rasmussen phoned again.

‘This is Nanna. I’m doing my homework. Leave me a message. Bye!’

Lisa Rasmussen took a deep breath and said, ‘Nanna. Please call me.’

Stupid, she thought. Third time that morning she’d left the same message. Now she was sitting in school, listening to Rama the teacher talk about citizenship and the coming election. No one knew where Nanna was. No one had seen her since the Halloween party downstairs in the school hall the previous Friday.

‘Today,’ Rama said, ‘you’ll have the opportunity to decide who to vote for.’

There was a photo on the whiteboard. The semicircle of seats in the Rådhus. Three politicians, one good-looking, an old man, a smug fat-faced woman. She couldn’t care less.

Out came the phone again and she typed one more message. *Nanna, where the hell are you?*

‘We’re lucky to live in a country where we have the right to vote,’ the teacher went on. ‘To decide our own future. To control our destiny.’

He was thirty or so, from the Middle East somewhere, not that it showed in his voice. Some of the girls fancied him. Tall and handsome. Nice body, cool smart clothes. Always helpful. Always had time for them.

Lisa didn’t like foreigners much. Even when they smiled and looked good.

‘So let’s hear the questions you’ve prepared for the debate,’ Rama said.

Class full, the rest of them seemed interested.

‘Lisa.’ He had to pick her. ‘Your three questions. Are they on your phone?’

‘No.’

She sounded like a petulant kid and knew it. Rama cocked his head and waited.

‘I can’t remember them. I can’t . . .’

The door opened and Rektor Koch walked in. Scary Koch, the stocky middle-aged woman who used to teach German before she rose to run the school.

‘Excuse me,’ Koch said. ‘Is Nanna Birk Larsen here?’

No answer.

Koch walked to the front of the class.

‘Has anyone seen Nanna today?’

Nothing. She walked over to talk to the teacher. Lisa Rasmussen knew what was coming next.

One minute later Lisa was outside with the pair of them, Koch glaring at her with those fierce black eyes and asking, ‘Where’s Nanna? The police are looking for her.’

‘I haven’t seen Nanna since Friday. Why ask me?’

Koch gave her that ‘you’re lying’ look.

‘Her mother told the police she spent the weekend at your house.’

Lisa Rasmussen laughed. ~~People used to think she and Nanna were sisters sometimes. Same height same clothes, blonde hair too though Nanna’s looked better. And Lisa was always heavier around the middle.~~

‘What? She didn’t stay with me.’

‘You don’t know where she is?’ Rama asked a little more gently.

‘No! How could I?’

‘If she calls tell her to ring home,’ Koch said. ‘It’s important.’ She glanced at Rama. ‘They need your classroom for the debate. Be out of there by eleven.’

When she was gone Rama turned, took Lisa Rasmussen’s arm and said, ‘If you’ve any idea where she is you must say so.’

‘You’re not supposed to touch me.’

‘I’m sorry.’ He took his hand away. ‘If you know—’

‘I don’t know anything,’ Lisa said. ‘Leave me alone.’

Lund and Meyer were upstairs in the Birk Larsen flat. It was as cluttered as the office but in a pleasant way. Photos, paintings, plants and flowers. Vases and mementoes from holidays. *Decorated*, Lund thought. She never got round to that herself. The woman she now knew to be Pernille Birk Larsen worked at being a mother. Seemed good at it. As far as Lund could judge.

‘She’s not at school,’ Lund said.

Pernille still wore her raincoat as if none of this was happening.

‘She must be at Lisa’s. They’re friends. Lisa rents a flat with a couple of boys. Nanna’s always there.’

‘Lisa’s at school. She says Nanna never stayed with her.’

Pernille’s mouth hung half open. Her eyes were wide and blank. On the kitchen wall Lund saw the same two photos from the office: Nanna with the boys, Nanna on her own looking beautiful and too old for nineteen. Fixed to a cork-board alongside a timetable for school sports events. The easy, casual air of domesticity hung around this place. Like the smell of a dog, unnoticed by the owner, apparent to a stranger from the outset.

‘What’s happened to her? Where is she?’ Pernille asked.

‘Probably nothing. We’ll do our best to find her.’

Lund walked into the tiny hall and phoned headquarters.

Meyer took Pernille out of earshot and began asking about photos.

Through to Buchar, Lund said, ‘I need everyone we can spare on this.’ The old man didn’t even ask a question, just listened. ‘Tell them we’re looking for nineteen-year-old Nanna Birk Larsen. Missing since Friday. Send someone here for the photos.’

‘And you?’

‘We’re going to her school.’

Hartmann and Rie Skovgaard had an empty classroom to prepare. She went through the numbers about the education allocation again. He paced round nervously. Finally she closed the laptop, came and checked his clothes. No tie, blue shirt. He looked good. But still she fiddled with his collar, came close enough so he had to hold her.

Hartmann’s hands slipped round her back. He pulled Skovgaard to him, kissed her. A sudden passion. Unexpected. She wanted to laugh. He wanted more.

‘Move in with me,’ he said and pushed her against the desk. She fell on it, giggling, wrapped her long legs round him.

‘Aren’t you too busy?’

‘Not for you.’

‘After the election.’

His face changed. The politician returned.

‘Why the big secret?’

‘Because I’ve got a job to do, Troels. And so have you. We want no complications.’ Her voice fell tone. Smart eyes flashing. ‘And we don’t want Morten jealous.’

‘Morten’s the most experienced political aide we have. He knows what he’s doing.’

‘So I don’t?’

‘I didn’t say that. I don’t want to talk about Morten . . .’

Her hands were on his jacket again.

‘Let’s deal with this when you’ve won, shall we?’

Hartmann was reaching for her again.

The door opened. Rektor Koch was there. She looked embarrassed.

‘The Lord Mayor’s arrived,’ she said. A confidential smile. ‘If you’re ready.’

Hartmann buttoned his jacket and walked out into the corridor.

Poul Bremer was beaming beneath a poster of a half-naked pop singer. Skovgaard left them alone and went to check out the room.

‘I hope the Centre Party likes your ideas, Troels. A lot of them are good. Very like your father’s.’

‘Is that so?’

‘They have his vigorous energy. His optimism.’

‘Conviction,’ Hartmann said. ‘They came from what he believed. Not what he thought might win a few votes.’

Bremer nodded at that.

‘It’s a shame he was never quite good enough to see them through.’

‘I’ll think of him. When I’ve got your job.’

‘I believe you will. One day.’ Bremer pulled out a handkerchief and cleaned his spectacles. ‘You’re more robust than he was. Your father was always . . . How should I put it?’ The glasses went back on, those icy eyes looked him up and down. ‘Fragile. Like porcelain.’

Bremer held up his right hand. A big fist. A fighter’s, in spite of all outward appearances.

‘He was always going to snap.’

The click of his strong fingers was so loud it seemed to echo off the peeling walls.

‘If I hadn’t broken him he’d have broken himself. Believe me. It was a kindness in a way. It’s best not to allow one’s delusions to linger too long.’

‘Let’s get to this debate,’ Hartmann said. ‘It’s time . . .’

When they turned to go Rektor Koch was walking towards them. She looked worried. With her was a woman in a blue cagoule, an odd black and white patterned sweater visible beneath it, hair swept back from her face like a teenager too busy to think about boyfriends.

A woman who thought nothing of her own appearance. Which was odd since she was striking and attractive.

Now she was looking straight ahead, at them, nowhere else. She had very large and staring eyes.

Somehow Hartmann wasn’t surprised when she pulled out a police ID card. It read:

Vicekriminalkommissær Sarah Lund.

Bremer had retreated to the back of the corridor the moment he saw the cop approaching.

‘You have to cancel the debate,’ Lund said.

‘Why?’

‘There’s a missing girl. I need to talk to people here. People in her class. Teachers. I need . . .’

~~Rektor Koch was ushering them into a side room, out of the corridor. Bremer stayed where he was.~~

Hartmann listened to the cop.

‘You want me to cancel a debate because a pupil’s skipping school?’

‘It’s important I talk to everyone,’ Lund insisted.

‘Everyone?’

‘Everyone I want to talk to.’

She didn’t move. Didn’t stop looking at him. Nothing else.

‘We could put back the debate an hour,’ Hartmann suggested.

‘Not for me,’ Bremer cut in. ‘I have appointments. This was your invitation, Troels. If you can’t make it . . .’

Hartmann took a step towards Sarah Lund and said, ‘How serious is it?’

‘I hope nothing’s happened.’

‘I asked how serious it was.’

‘That’s what I’m trying to find out,’ Lund replied then put her hands on her hips and waited for an answer. ‘So . . .’

She looked round, checking the rooms.

‘That’s agreed then,’ Lund added.

Bremer took out his phone, checked some messages.

‘Call my secretary. I’ll try to fit you in. Oh!’ A sudden flash of geniality. ‘I’ve got good news for your inner-city schools. It seems absenteeism is up by twenty per cent.’ He laughed. ‘We can’t have that, can we? So I’ve allocated funds for extra facilities. More computers. Children love those things. That’ll fix it.’

Hartmann stared at him, speechless.

Bremer shrugged.

‘I would have told you in there. But now . . . We’ll put out a release straight away. Good news. I trust you’ll welcome it.’

A long moment of silence.

‘You’re happy, I see,’ Bremer said, then, with a wave, walked off.

Half past three in the afternoon. They were still in the room where the debate was supposed to happen getting nowhere. Nanna had been to the Halloween party in the school hall the previous Friday, dressed in a black witch’s hat and garish blue wig. No one had seen her since.

Now it was the teacher’s turn.

‘What’s Nanna like?’

They all called him Rama. He stood out and not just because of his dark, striking Middle Eastern looks. He was one of Troels Hartmann’s role models, part of an initiative to bring immigrant groups more closely into the fabric of the community. An articulate, intelligent, convincing man.

‘Nanna’s a clever kid,’ he said. ‘Always full of energy. Always wanting to do something.’

‘I saw the photo. She looks older than nineteen.’

He nodded.

‘They all want that, don’t they? Desperate to grow up. Or to feel they have. Nanna’s top of her class in most things. Bright kid. Doesn’t stop her wanting what the rest do.’

‘Which is?’

The teacher looked at her.

‘They’re teenagers. Are you serious?’

‘What happened at the party?’

‘Fancy dress. A band. Ghosts and pumpkins.’

‘Does she have a boyfriend?’

‘Ask Lisa.’

‘I’m asking you.’

He looked uncomfortable.

‘It’s best a teacher stays out of these things.’

Lund went outside, stopped the first girl she found, sat her down, talked to her until she got an answer.

Then she went back to the teacher.

‘Oliver Schandorff. Is he here?’

‘No.’

‘Did you know Oliver was her boyfriend?’

‘I told you. It’s best we keep some distance.’

She waited.

‘I’m their teacher. Not their guardian. Not a parent either.’

Lund looked at her watch. The interviews had run on for more than three hours and this was all they had. All anyone had. Meyer, out in the woods and fields near the airport with a search team, hadn’t found a thing.

‘Shit.’

‘I’m sorry,’ the teacher said.

‘Not you.’

Me, she thought. She could surely have got this out of Pernille in a few minutes if she’d tried. Why was it the best questions only came when she had something – people, evidence, crimes – in front of her?

Two hundred and thirty-five three-storey terraced houses made up the place called Humleby, a tiny estate four streets from Birk Larsen’s home. The colour of slate and gunmetal, they were built in the nineteenth century for workers at the nearby shipyard. Then the Carlsberg brewery expanded and the houses fell into the hands of men who made beer. They came onto the market slowly, sought after even if some needed much expensive restoration. Theis Birk Larsen had bought the cheapest he could find. Squatters had been in before, leaving behind their junk, mattresses and cheap furniture. It needed clearing, a lot of repair work. He’d do most of it himself, quietly, without telling Pernille, not until it was close to time to move in and escape the tiny apartment above the garage.

Vagn Skærbæk was helping. The two had known each other since they were teens, gone through a lot together, including a few appearances in court. To Birk Larsen he’d become almost a younger brother, uncle to the kids, steady employee in the transport company. Reliable, trustworthy, kind to Anton and Emil. A solitary man who seemed to have no life of his own once he took off the scarlet uniform.

‘Pernille’s looking for you,’ Skærbæk said coming off the phone.

‘Pernille’s not going to know about this place. I told you. Not a word until I say.’

‘She’s phoning round, asking where you are.’

There was scaffolding on the outside, sheeting against the rotting windows. Birk Larsen was paying his own men to carry in new floorboards, guttering and piping, making them promise to keep quiet about the place when Pernille was around.

‘The boys can have their own rooms,’ he said, looking at the grey stone house. ‘You see that top window?’

Skærbæk nodded.

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