



**AN EARLY
HARRY HOLE
CASE**

Cockroaches

JO NESBO

OVER 20 MILLION BOOKS SOLD WORLDWIDE

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About the Book

HARRY IS ON A SPECIAL MISSION

Detective Harry Hole arrives in a steaming hot Bangkok. The Norwegian ambassador has been found dead in a seedy motel room, and Harry has been sent to investigate. It's clear that the ambassador's family are hiding some secrets of their own, but few people are willing to talk.

HE NEEDS TO SOLVE A CRIME AND AVOID A SCANDAL

When Harry lays his hands on some incriminating CCTV footage, things only get more complicated. The man who gave him the tape goes missing, and Harry realises that failing to solve a murder case is by no means the only danger that faces the unwary.

BUT IN AN UNFAMILIAR CITY, WHO CAN YOU TRUST?

About the Author

Jo Nesbø is a musician, songwriter, economist and author. His first crime novel featuring Harry Hole was published in Norway in 1997 and was an instant hit, winning the Glass Key Award for best Nordic crime novel (an accolade shared with Peter Høeg, Henning Mankell and Stieg Larsson). Never before published in English, *Cockroaches* is the second novel in the Harry Hole series. Check out www.jonesbo.co.uk.

ALSO BY JO NESBO

The Bat
The Redbreast
Nemesis
The Devil's Star
The Redeemer
The Snowman
The Leopard
Phantom
Police

Cockroaches

Translated from the Norwegian by Don
Bartlett

Jo Nesbø



Harvill Secker
LONDON

Among Norwegians living in Thailand there is a rumour circulating that one of their ambassadors, who died as a result of a car accident in Bangkok, was actually murdered under extremely mysterious circumstances. There is no evidence to support this, but it makes for a good story.

No persons or events mentioned in this book should be confused with real persons or events. Reality is far too strange for that.

Bangkok, 23 February 1998

PART ONE

1

Tuesday 7 January

THE TRAFFIC LIGHTS changed to green, and the roar from lorries, cars, motorbikes and tuk-tuks rose higher and higher until Dim could see the glass in Robinson's department store vibrating. Then the queues started moving and the shop window displaying the long, red silk dress was lost behind them in the darkness.

She took a taxi. Not a packed bus or a tuk-tuk riddled with rust but a taxi with air conditioning and a driver who kept his mouth shut. She leaned back against the headrest and tried to enjoy the ride. No problem. A moped shot past and a girl on the pillion clinging to a red T-shirt with a visor helmet gave them a vacant look. Hold on tight, Dim thought.

On Rama IV Road the driver pulled in behind a lorry spewing exhaust fumes so thick and black she couldn't see the number plate. After passing through the air-conditioning system the exhaust was chilled and almost odourless. Almost. She wafted her hand discreetly to show her reaction, and the driver glanced in his mirror and moved into the outside lane. No problem.

This was how her life had always been. On the farm where she had grown up she had been one of six girls. Six too many, according to her father. She had been seven years old when they stood coughing in the yellow dust and waving as the cart carrying her eldest sister trundled down the country road alongside the brown canal water. Her sister had been given clean clothes, a train ticket to Bangkok and

an address in Patpong written on the back of a business card, and she had cried like a waterfall, even though Dim had waved so hard it felt as if her hand would fall off. Her mother had patted her on the head and said it wasn't easy, but it wasn't that bad, either. At least her sister wouldn't have to wander from farm to farm as a *kwai*, as her mother had done before she got married. Besides, Miss Wong had promised she would take good care of her. Her father had nodded, spat betel juice from between black teeth and added that the *farangs* in the bars would pay well for fresh girls.

Dim hadn't understood what her mother meant by *kwai*, but she wasn't going to ask. She knew, of course, that a *kwai* was a bull. Like most people on the farms around them, they couldn't afford a bull, so they hired one of the ones that circulated the district when the rice paddy had to be ploughed. It was only later she found out that the girl who accompanied the bull was also called a *kwai* as her services formed part of the deal. That was the tradition. She hoped she would meet a farmer who would have her before she got too old.

When Dim was fifteen her father had called her name as he waded across the paddy field with the sun behind him and his hat in hand. She hadn't answered at once; she had straightened up and looked hard at the green ridges around the small farm, closed her eyes and listened to the sound of the trumpeter bird in the leaves and inhaled the smell of eucalyptus and rubber trees. She had realised it was her turn.

For the first year they had lived four girls to a room and shared everything: bed, food and clothes. The last of these was especially important, for without nice clothes you wouldn't get the best customers. She had taught herself to dance, taught herself to smile, taught herself to see which men only wanted to buy drinks and which wanted to buy sex. Her father had already agreed with Miss Wong that the

money was to be sent home, so she didn't see much of it during the first few years, but Miss Wong was content and as time went by she kept more back for Dim.

Miss Wong had reason to be content. Dim worked hard, and the customers bought drinks. Miss Wong should be pleased she was still there because a couple of times it had been a close-run thing. A Japanese man had wanted to marry Dim, but withdrew his offer when she demanded money for the plane ticket. An American had taken her along to Phuket, postponed his journey home and bought her a diamond ring. She had pawned it the day after he left.

Some paid badly and told her to get lost if she complained; others reported her to Miss Wong if she didn't comply with everything they wanted her to do. They didn't understand that once they had bought her time from the bar Miss Wong had her money and Dim was her own boss. Her own boss. She thought about the red dress in the shop window. Her mother had been right: it wasn't easy, but it wasn't that bad, either.

And she had managed to retain her innocent smile and happy laughter. They liked that. Perhaps that was why she had been offered the job Wang Lee had advertised in *Thai Rath* under the heading of GRO, or Guest Relation Officer. Wang Lee was a small, dark-skinned Chinese man, who ran a motel some way out on Sukhumvit Road, and the customers were mainly foreigners with special requests but not so special that she couldn't meet them. To tell the truth, she liked what she did better than dancing for hours in the bar. Besides, Wang Lee paid well. The sole disadvantage was that it took such a long time to get there from her apartment in Banglamphu.

The damn traffic! It had come to a standstill again, and she told the driver she would get out, even though it meant crossing six lanes of cars to reach the motel on the far side of the road. The air wrapped itself around her like a hot, wet towel as she left the taxi. She searched for a gap, holding

her hand in front of her mouth, aware that it made no difference, that there was no other air to breathe in Bangkok, but at least she was spared the smell.

She slipped between vehicles, had to sidestep a pickup with the flatbed full of boys whistling, and she almost had her heel straps taken off by a kamikaze Toyota. Then she was across.

Wang Lee looked up as she entered the deserted reception area.

‘Quiet evening?’ she said.

He nodded his displeasure. There had been a few of them over the last year.

‘Have you eaten?’

‘Yes,’ she lied. He meant well, but she was not in the mood for the watery noodles he boiled up in the back room.

‘You’ll have to wait,’ he said. ‘The *farang* wanted to have a sleep first. He’ll ring when he’s ready.’

She groaned. ‘You know I have to be back in the bar before midnight, Lee.’

He looked at his watch. ‘Give him an hour.’

She shrugged and sat down. If it had been a year ago he would probably have thrown her out for speaking like that, but now he needed all the income he could get. Of course, she could go, but then the long journey would have been wasted. Also, she owed Lee a favour; she had worked for worse pimps.

After stubbing out the third cigarette she rinsed her mouth with Lee’s bitter Chinese tea and rose for a final check of her make-up in the mirror over the counter.

‘I’ll go and wake him,’ she said.

‘Mm. Have you got the skates?’

She lifted her bag.

Her heels crunched on the gravel of the empty drive between the low motel rooms. Room 120 was right at the

back, she couldn't see a car outside, but there was a light in the window. So perhaps he had woken up. A little breeze lifted her short skirt, but failed to cool her. She longed for a monsoon, for rain. Just as after a few weeks of flooding, muddy streets and mildew on her washing she would long for the dry, windless months.

She tapped the door lightly with her knuckles and put on her bashful smile with the question 'What's your name?' already on her lips. No one answered. She tapped again and looked at her watch. She could probably haggle a few hundred baht off the price of the dress, even if it was Robinson's. She turned the door handle and discovered to her surprise that the door was unlocked.

He was lying prone on the bed, and her first impression was that he was asleep. Then she saw the glint of the knife's blue glass handle sticking out of the loud yellow jacket. It's hard to say which of all the thoughts racing through her brain appeared first, but one of them was definitely that the trip to Banglamphu had been wasted anyway. Then she finally gained control of her vocal cords. The scream, however, was drowned out by a resounding blast on a lorry's horn as it avoided an inattentive tuk-tuk on Sukhumvit Road.

2

Wednesday 8 January

'NATIONAL THEATRE,' A sleepy, nasal voice announced over the speakers before the tram doors flipped open and Dagfinn Torhus stepped out into the cold, damp darkness. The air stung his freshly shaved cheeks, and in the glow from Oslo's frugal neon lighting he could see frozen breath streaming from his mouth.

It was early January, and he knew it would be better later in the winter when the fjord was frozen over and the air became drier. He started to walk up Drammensveien towards the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. A couple of solitary taxis passed him; otherwise the streets were as good as deserted. The Gjensidig clock shone red against the black winter sky above the building opposite, informing him it was only six.

Outside the door he took out his entrance card. 'Post: Director' it said above a photo of a ten-years-younger Dagfinn Torhus staring into the camera, chin jutting, gaze determined, from behind steel-rimmed glasses. He swiped the card, tapped in the code and pushed open the heavy glass door in Victoria Terrasse.

Not all doors had opened as easily since he came here as a twenty-five-year-old almost thirty years ago. At the Diplomatic School, the Foreign Office institute for aspiring officials, he had not exactly melted into his surroundings with his broad Østerdal accent and rural ways, as one of the posh Bærum boys in his year's intake had pointed out. The other aspirants had been students of politics, economics

and law with parents who were academics, politicians or themselves members of the FO aristocracy to which they were seeking admission. He was a farmer's son with qualifications from the Agricultural High School in Ås. Not that it bothered him much, but he knew that real friends were important for his career. As Dagfinn was trying to learn the social codes, he compensated by grafting even harder. Whatever the differences, they all shared the fact that they had only vague notions of where they wanted to go in life and the knowledge that only one direction counted: up.

Torhus sighed and nodded to the security guard, who pushed his newspapers and an envelope under the glass window.

'Any other . . .?'

The guard shook his head.

'First to arrive as always, Torhus. The envelope's from Communications. It was delivered last night.'

Torhus watched the floor numbers flash by as the lift raised him higher in the building. He had this idea that every floor represented a certain period in his career, and so it was subject to review every morning.

The first floor was the first two years on the diplomatic course, the long, non-committal discussions about politics and history and the French lessons he had hauled himself through by the bootstraps.

The second floor was the placement. He had been stationed in Canberra for two years, then Mexico City for three. Wonderful cities, for that matter, no, he couldn't complain. True, he had put London and New York as his first two choices, but these were prestigious postings that everyone else had also applied for, so he had made up his mind not to regard them as a defeat.

On the third floor he was back in Norway without the generous foreign benefits and housing supplements which had allowed him to live a life of insouciance and plenty. He had met Berit, she had become pregnant, and when it had

been time to apply for a new foreign posting number two was already on the way. Berit was from the same region as he was and chatted to her mother every day. He had decided to wait a little and opted to work like a Trojan, writing kilometre-long reports on bilateral trade with developing countries, composing speeches for the Minister of Foreign Affairs and reaping acknowledgement as he made his way up the building. Nowhere else in the state system is competition as fierce as at the Foreign Office, where the hierarchy is so obvious. Dagfinn Torhus had gone to the office like a soldier to the Front, kept his head down, back covered and fired whenever he had someone in his sights. A few pats on the shoulder came his way, he knew he had been 'noticed' and had tried to explain to Berit that he could probably get Paris or London, but for the first time in their hitherto humdrum marriage she had put her foot down. He had given in.

His upwardly mobile trend had vanished almost without a trace, and suddenly one morning in the bathroom mirror he saw a director shunted into the sidings, a moderately influential bureaucrat who would never manage the leap to the fifth floor, not with him being ten years or so from retirement age. Unless he pulled off a sensational coup, of course. But while that kind of stunt could lead to promotion, it could just as easily lead to the boot.

Nevertheless, he continued as before, trying to keep his nose in front of the others'. He was first in the office every morning so that he could read the newspapers and faxes in peace and quiet, and already had his conclusions to hand at morning meetings by the time the others sat rubbing sleep out of their eyes. It was as though striving had entered his bloodstream.

He unlocked his office door and hesitated for a moment before switching on the light. That, too, had a history. Unfortunately it had leaked out, and he knew it had attained legendary status in Ministry circles. Many years ago the

then American ambassador in Oslo had rung Torhus early one morning and asked what he thought about President Carter's remarks the previous night. Torhus had just come in the office door; he hadn't read the newspapers or the faxes and was lost for an answer. Needless to say, that had ruined his day. And it was to get worse. The next morning the ambassador had rung as he was opening the newspaper and asked how the events of the night would affect the situation in the Middle East. The following morning the same thing happened. Torhus, undermined by doubts and lack of information, had stuttered an incoherent response.

He had started to arrive at the office even earlier, but the ambassador appeared to have a sixth sense, for every morning the telephone rang just as he was settling into his chair.

It was only when he discovered that the ambassador was staying at the small Aker Hotel, directly opposite the Foreign Office, that he worked out the connection. The ambassador, who everyone knew liked to get up early, had of course noticed that the light in Torhus's office came on before the others and wanted to tease the zealous diplomat. Torhus had gone out and bought a head lamp, and the next morning he had read all the newspapers and faxes before switching on the office light. He did this for almost three weeks before the ambassador gave up.

At this moment, however, Dagfinn Torhus couldn't give a damn about the fun-loving ambassador. He had opened the envelope from Communications, and on the decoded paper copy of the cryptofax stamped TOP SECRET there was a message that caused him to spill coffee over the notes strewn around his desk. The short text left a lot to the imagination, but the essence was basically this: Norway's ambassador in Thailand, Atle Molnes, had been found with a knife in his back in a Bangkok brothel.

Torhus read the fax once more before putting it down.

Atle Molnes, former Christian Democrat politician, former chairman of the Finance Committee, was now a former everything else as well. It was so incredible that he was forced to glance over at Aker Hotel to see if anyone was standing behind the curtains. Reasonably enough, the sender was the Norwegian Embassy in Bangkok. Torhus swore. Why did this have to happen now of all times, in Bangkok of all places? Should he inform Secretary of State Askildsen first? No, he would find out soon enough. Torhus looked at his watch and lifted the telephone receiver to call the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Bjarne Møller tapped gently on the door and opened it. The voices in the meeting room fell quiet, and the faces turned towards him.

‘This is Bjarne Møller, head of Crime Squad,’ said the Police Commissioner, motioning him to take a seat. ‘Møller, this is Secretary of State Bjørn Askildsen from the Prime Minister’s office and HR Director Dagfinn Torhus from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.’

Møller nodded, pulled out a chair and tried to manoeuvre his unbelievably long legs under the large, oval oak table. He thought he had seen Askildsen’s sleek young face on TV. The Prime Minister’s office? It had to be serious trouble.

‘Great you could make it at such short notice,’ the Secretary of State said, rolling his *rrrs* and drumming the table nervously with his fingers. ‘Commissioner, could you give a brief résumé of what we’ve been discussing.’

Møller had received a call from the Police Commissioner twenty minutes before. Without any explanation, she had given him fifteen minutes to make his way to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

‘Atle Molnes has been found dead, probably murdered, in Bangkok,’ the Police Commissioner began.

Møller saw Director Torhus roll his eyes behind his steel-rimmed glasses, and after he had been given the rest of the

story he understood his reaction. You would definitely have to be a policeman to state that a man who had been found with a knife protruding from one side of his spine, through a lung and into the heart, had 'probably' been murdered.

'He was found in a hotel room by a woman—'

'In a brothel,' the man with the steel glasses interrupted. 'By a prostitute.'

'I've had a chat with my colleague in Bangkok,' the Police Commissioner said. 'A fair-minded man. He's promised to keep a lid on the matter for a while.'

Møller's first instinct had been to ask why they should wait before going public with the murder. Immediate press coverage often produced tip-offs for the police, as people's memories were clear and the evidence was still fresh. But something told him this question would be regarded as very naive. Instead he asked how long they counted on being able to keep a lid on this sort of matter.

'Long enough for us to establish a palatable version of events, I hope,' the Secretary of State said. 'The present one won't do, you see.'

The present one? So the real version had been considered and rejected. As a relatively new *politiavdelingssjef* - or PAS - Møller had so far been spared any dealings with politicians, but he knew the higher up the service you went, the harder it was to keep them at arm's length.

'I appreciate that the present version is uncomfortable, but what do you mean by it "won't do"?''

The Police Commissioner gave Møller an admonitory look.

The Secretary of State looked unimpressed. 'We haven't got much time, Møller, but let me give you a swift course in practical politics. Everything I say now is of course strictly confidential.'

Askildsen instinctively adjusted the knot of his tie, a movement Møller recognised from his television interviews. 'Well, for the first time in post-war history we have a centre party with a reasonable chance of survival. Not because

there is any parliamentary basis for it, but because the Prime Minister happens to be on the way to becoming one of the country's least unpopular politicians.'

The Police Commissioner and the Director from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs smiled.

'However, his popularity rests on the same fragile foundation that is the stock-in-trade for all politicians: trust. The most important thing is not to be likeable or charismatic, it is to enjoy trust. Do you know why Gro Harlem Brundtland was such a popular prime minister, Møller?'

Møller had no idea.

'Not because she was a charmer, but because people were confident that she was the person she claimed to be. Trust, that's the key word.'

The others around the table nodded. This was clearly part of the core curriculum.

'Now, Ambassador Molnes and our current Prime Minister were closely connected, through friendship as well as their political careers. They studied together, rose up through the party ranks together, battled through the modernisation of the youth movement and even shared a flat when they were both elected to Storting at a very young age. Molnes voluntarily stepped out of the limelight when they were joint heirs apparent in the party. He gave the Prime Minister his full support and hence we were spared an agonising party duel. All this obviously means that the Prime Minister owed Molnes a debt of gratitude.'

Askildsen moistened his lips and looked out of the window.

'In other words, Ambassador Molnes didn't have any diplomatic training and wouldn't have got to Bangkok if the Prime Minister hadn't pulled strings. Perhaps this sounds like cronyism, but it's an acceptable form of it, introduced and given general currency by the Socialist Party. Reiulf Steen didn't have any Foreign Office experience when he was made ambassador in Chile.'

The eyes refocused on Møller, a playful glint dancing inside somewhere.

'I'm sure I don't need to emphasise how this could damage trust in the Prime Minister if it comes out that a friend and party comrade, whom he appointed himself, was caught in flagrante in a brothel. And murdered into the bargain.'

The Secretary of State motioned to the Police Commissioner to continue, but Møller couldn't restrain himself.

'Who hasn't got a pal who's been to a brothel?'

Askildsen's smile curled at the edges.

The Foreign Office Director with the steel glasses coughed. 'You've been told what you need to know, Møller. Please leave the judgements to us. What we need is someone to ensure that the investigation of this matter does not take . . . an unfortunate turn. Naturally, we all want the murderer, or murderers, to be apprehended, but the circumstances surrounding the murder should remain under wraps until further notice. For the good of the country. Do you understand?'

Møller looked down at his hands. For the good of the country. Bloody hell. They had never been much good at doing what they were told in his family. His father had never risen through the police ranks.

'Experience tells us that the truth tends to be hard to conceal, herr Torhus.'

'Indeed. I'll take responsibility for this operation on behalf of the Foreign Office. As you appreciate, this is a somewhat delicate matter which will demand close cooperation with the Thai police. As the embassy is involved we have some leeway - diplomatic immunity and all that - but we're walking a tightrope here. Therefore, we wish to send someone with honed investigative skills and experience of international police work and who can produce results.'

He stopped and looked at Møller, who was wondering why he felt an instinctive lack of goodwill towards the diplomat with the aggressive chin.

‘We could put together a team with—’

‘No team, Møller. Too conspicuous. Besides, your Commissioner thinks that a whole division would hardly be conducive to good relations with the local police. One man.’

‘One man?’

‘The Commissioner has already suggested a name, and we consider it a good suggestion. Now we’d like to hear your opinion of him. According to conversations the Police Commissioner has had with his colleague in Sydney, he did remarkable work down there last winter in connection with the Inger Holter murder.’

‘I read the story in the papers,’ Askildsen said. ‘Impressive stuff. Surely he has to be our man?’

Bjarne Møller swallowed. So the Police Commissioner had suggested they should send Harry Hole to Bangkok. He had been summoned to assure them that Hole was the best the force had to offer, the perfect man for the job.

He glanced round the table. Politics, power and influence. This was a game he couldn’t begin to understand, but he realised that in some way or other it would work out in his favour, that whatever he said now would have consequences for his career. The Police Commissioner had stuck her neck out by suggesting a name. Probably one of the others had then asked to have Hole’s qualifications endorsed by his immediate superiors. He looked at his boss and tried to interpret her expression. Of course, everything might turn out fine with Hole. And if he advised them not to send him, would that not cast the Commissioner in an unfortunate light? He would be asked to suggest an alternative and then *his* head would be the one on the block if the officer concerned messed up.

Møller looked at the painting above the Police Commissioner: Trygve Lie, the UN Secretary General, gazed

down at him imperiously. A politician as well. Through the windows he saw the roofs of the apartment buildings in the low winter light, Akershus fortress and a weathercock shivering in the icy gusts on top of the Continental Hotel.

Bjarne Møller knew he was a competent police officer, but this was a different game, and he didn't know the rules. What would his father have advised him to do? Well, Officer Møller had never had to deal with politics, but he had known what was important if he was to be taken at all seriously and had forbidden his son to start Police College until he had completed the first part of a law course. He had done as his father said, and after the graduation ceremony his father had kept clearing his throat, overcome with emotion, while slapping his son on the back until he'd had to ask him to stop.

'A great suggestion,' Bjarne Møller heard himself say in a loud, clear voice.

'Good,' Torhus said. 'The reason we wanted an opinion so quickly is that, of course, all this is urgent. He'll have to drop everything he's working on; he's leaving tomorrow.'

Well, perhaps it's just the sort of job Harry needs right now, Møller hoped.

'Sorry we have to deprive you of such an important man,' Askildsen said.

PAS Bjarne Møller had to stop himself bursting into laughter.

3

Wednesday 8 January

THEY FOUND HIM at Schrøder's in Waldemar Thranes gate, a venerable old watering hole located at the crossroads where Oslo East meets Oslo West. It was more old than venerable, to be honest. The venerable part was largely down to the authorities' decision to put a preservation order on the smoke-filled brown rooms. But the order did not include the clientele: old boozers, a hunted and extinction-threatened bunch; eternal students; and jaded charmers long past their sell-by date.

The two officers spotted their man sitting under a painting of Aker Church as the draught from the door allowed a brief glimpse through the curtain of smoke. His blond hair was cropped so short the bristles stood up straight and the three-day beard on the lean, marked face had a streak of grey even though he could hardly be older than his mid-thirties. He sat alone, straight-backed, wearing his reefer jacket, as if about to leave any minute. As if the beer in front of him on the table was not a source of pleasure but a job that had to be done.

'They said we would find you here,' said the older of the two and sat down opposite him. 'I'm Waaler.'

'See the guy sitting in the corner?' Hole said without looking up.

Waaler turned and saw a scrawny old man gazing into his glass of red wine while rocking backwards and forwards. He seemed to be freezing cold.

'They call him the last Mohican.'

Hole raised his head and beamed. His eyes were like blue-and-white marbles behind a network of red veins, and they focused on Waaler's shirt.

'Merchant seaman,' he said, his diction meticulous. 'Used to be lots of them here a few years back apparently, but now there are hardly any left. He was torpedoed twice during the war. He thinks he's immortal. Last week, after closing time, I found him sleeping in a snowdrift down in Glückstadsgata. The streets were empty, it was pitch black and minus eighteen. When I'd shaken some life into him he just looked at me and told me to go to hell.' He laughed.

'Listen, Hole—'

'I went over to his table last night and asked if he remembered what had happened - I mean, that I'd saved him from freezing to death. Do you know what he said?'

'Møller wants to see you, Hole.'

'He said he was immortal. "I can put up with being an unwanted merchant seaman in this shit country," he said. "But it's a sorry business when even St Peter doesn't want anything to do with me." Did you hear? "Even St Peter"—'

'We've got orders to take you to the station.'

Another beer landed on the table in front of Hole with a thud.

'Let's settle up now, Rita,' he said.

'Two hundred and eighty,' she answered without needing to check her slips of paper.

'Jesus Christ,' mumbled the younger officer.

'That's fine, Rita.'

'Oh, thanks.' She was gone.

'Best service in town,' Harry explained. 'Sometimes she can spot you even when you haven't been waving both arms in the air.'

The skin on Waaler's forehead tightened and a blood vessel appeared, like a blue, knobbly worm.

'We haven't got the time to sit here and listen to your drunken ramblings, Hole. I suggest you give the last beer a

miss . . .’

Hole had already put the glass carefully to his lips and started drinking.

Waalder leaned forward and tried to keep his voice low. ‘I know about you, Hole. And I don’t like you. I think you should have been booted out of the force years ago. Guys like you make people lose respect for the police. But that’s not why we’re here now. We’ve come to take you with us. The PAS is a nice man. Perhaps he’ll give you another chance.’

Hole belched and Waalder leaned back.

‘Another chance to do what?’

‘To show what you can do,’ the younger officer said with a boyish smile.

‘I’ll show you what I can do.’ Hole smiled, put the glass to his mouth and tipped his head back.

‘Pack it in, Hole!’ Waalder’s cheeks flushed as they watched Hole’s Adam’s apple rise and fall beneath his unshaven chin.

‘Happy?’ Hole asked, putting the empty glass down in front of him.

‘Our job—’

‘I couldn’t give a shit about your job.’ Hole buttoned up his reefer jacket. ‘If Møller wants something he can ring me or wait until I’m at work tomorrow. Now I’m going home and I hope I won’t see your faces for the next twelve hours. Gentlemen . . .’ Harry raised himself to his full 192 centimetres and lurched to the side.

‘You arrogant prick,’ Waalder said, rocking back in his chair. ‘You bloody loser. If only the reporters who wrote about you after Australia had known you haven’t got the balls—’

‘The balls to do what, Waalder?’ Hole was still smiling. ‘Lock up drunken sixteen-year-olds because they’ve got Mohicans?’

The younger officer glanced at Waalder. Rumours had been doing the rounds at Police College last year that some

young punks had been hauled in for drinking beer in public places and beaten in the cells with oranges packed in wet towels.

‘You’ve never understood *esprit de corps*, Hole,’ Waaler said. ‘You just think about yourself. Everyone knows who was driving the car in Vinderen and why a good policeman smashed his skull against a fence post. Because you’re a drunk, Hole, and you drove while under the influence. You should be bloody glad the force swept the facts under the carpet. Had they not been concerned about the family and the force’s reputation—’

The younger officer accompanying Waaler was learning something new every day. This afternoon, for example, he learned it was very stupid to rock on a chair while insulting someone, because you are totally defenceless if the insulted party steps over and lands a straight right between the eyes. As customers often fell over at Schrøder’s there was no more than a couple of seconds’ silence before the buzz of conversation resumed.

He helped Waaler to his feet as he glimpsed the tails of Hole’s jacket disappearing through the door. ‘Wow, not bad after eight beers, eh?’ he said, but shut up when he met Waaler’s gaze.

Harry’s legs strode out casually along the icy pavement of Dovregata. His knuckles didn’t hurt; it would be early tomorrow morning before either pain or regret came knocking.

He didn’t drink during working hours. Though he had done it before, and Dr Aune contended that every new relapse started where the old one finished.

The white-haired, roly-poly Peter Ustinov clone had laughed so much his double chin shook as Harry explained to him that he was keeping away from his old foe Jim Beam and confining himself to beer. Because he didn’t like beer much.

'You've been in a mess, and the moment you open the bottle you're there again. There's no halfway house, Harry.'

Well. He was struggling home on two legs, generally managing to undress himself and getting himself to work the next day. It hadn't always been like that. Harry called it a halfway house. He just needed a few knockout drops to sleep, that was all.

A woman said hello from under a black fur hat as she passed. Was it someone he knew? Last year lots of people had said hello, particularly after the interview on TV when Anne Grosvold had asked him how it felt to shoot a serial killer.

'Well, better than sitting here and answering questions like that one,' he had said with a crooked smile, and it had been the hit of the spring, the most repeated quote this side of one politician's defence of an agricultural policy: 'Sheep are nice animals.'

Harry inserted the key into the lock of his flat in Sofies gate. Why he had moved to Bislett escaped him. Perhaps it had been because his neighbours in Tøyen had started looking at him strangely and keeping their distance, which at first he had construed as showing respect.

Fine, the neighbours here left him in peace, though they would appear in the corridor to check everything was OK if, on rare occasions, he should slip on a step and roll back down to the nearest landing.

The backward rolls hadn't started until October, after he had hit a brick wall over Sis's case. Then the air had been knocked out of him and he had started dreaming again. And he knew only one way to keep the dreams at arm's length.

He had tried to pull himself together, take Sis to the cabin in Rauland, but she had become very withdrawn since the assault, and she didn't laugh as easily as before. So he had rung his father a couple of times, although the conversations hadn't been very long, just long enough to indicate that his dad wanted to be left in peace.