

'A TRULY
GREAT WRITER'

JO
NESBO

Karin FOSSUM

In the
Darkness



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About the Book

Eva is walking by the river one afternoon when a body floats to the surface of the icy water. She tells her daughter to wait patiently while she calls the police, but when she reaches the phone box Eva dials another number altogether.

The dead man, Egil, has been missing for months, and it doesn't take long for Inspector Sejer and his team to establish that he was the victim of a very violent killer. But the trail has gone cold. It's as puzzling as another unsolved case on Sejer's desk: the murder of a prostitute who was found dead just before Egil went missing.

While Sejer is trying to piece together the fragments of a seemingly impossible case, Eva gets a phone call late one night. A stranger speaks and then swiftly hangs up. Eva looks out into the darkness and listens. All is quiet.

Gripping and thought-provoking, *In the Darkness* is Karin Fossum's first novel featuring the iconic Inspector Sejer. The prizewinning series has been published around the world to great acclaim.

About the Author

Karin Fossum began her writing career in 1974. She has won numerous awards, including the Glass Key Award for the best Nordic crime novel, an honour shared with Henning Mankell and Jo Nesbo, and the *Los Angeles Times* Book Prize. Her highly acclaimed Inspector Sejer series has been published in more than thirty countries

Also by Karin Fossum

Don't Look Back
He Who Fears the Wolf
When the Devil Holds the Candle
Calling Out For You
Black Seconds
Broken
The Water's Edge
Bad Intentions
The Caller

To my father

In the Darkness

KARIN FOSSUM

Translated from the Norwegian by James Anderson



Harvill Secker

LONDON

It was a Wendy house.

A tiny house with red sills and lace curtains in the windows. He halted a short distance from it, listened, but heard nothing except the dog panting by his side and a gentle rustle from the old apple trees. He stood there a moment longer, feeling the dampness of the grass seep through his shoes, and listening to his heart, which had changed its pace after the chase through the garden. The dog looked up at him and waited. Condensation poured from its great jaws, it sniffed the darkness tentatively, its ears quivered, perhaps it could hear sounds from within that he couldn't detect. He turned and looked back at the detached house behind them, its lit windows, its warmth and cosiness. No one had heard them, not even when the dog barked. His car was down on the road with two wheels on the kerb and the door open.

She's frightened of the dog, he thought with surprise. Bending down, he grabbed him by the collar and approached the door with slow steps. There certainly wouldn't be a rear exit in a little house like this, or even a lock on the door. It must be plaguing her now, if it hadn't the moment she'd shut herself in, the thought that she'd fallen straight into a trap. No way out. She hadn't got a chance.

Chapter 1

THE COURTHOUSE WAS a gently curving, grey concrete building of seven storeys, and an effective windbreak for the town's main street, taking the sting out of the driving snow from the river. The Portakabins at the rear were sheltered, a blessing in the winter, in summer they stewed in the stagnant air. The facade above the entrance was adorned with an ultra-modern Themis and her scales, which at a distance, from down by the Statoil depot for example, looked more like a witch on a broomstick. The police service and the county jail occupied the top three floors, as well as the Portakabins.

The door swung open with an ill-tempered groan. Mrs Brenningen started and placed a finger on her book, after the phrase 'the balance of probability'. Inspector Sejer came into reception with a woman. She looked as if she'd been in the wars, her chin was grazed, her coat and skirt were torn, her mouth was bleeding. Mrs Brenningen didn't normally stare. She'd been the receptionist at the courthouse for seventeen years, she'd seen all sorts come and go, but now she gawped. She snapped the book shut, her place marked with an old bus timetable. Sejer laid a hand on the woman's arm and led her to the lift. She walked with her head down. Then the doors closed.

Sejer's face was impassive, it was impossible to tell what he was thinking. It made him look severe, though in reality he was merely reserved, and behind the stern features dwelt a soul that was kindly enough. But he wasn't given to warm smiles, employing them only as ice-breakers when he

wanted to gain access to people, and his praise was reserved for a select few. He closed the door and nodded towards the only chair, pulled a handful of tissue out of the dispenser above the wash-basin, moistened it with hot water and offered it to her. She wiped her mouth and looked around. The office was rather bare, but she studied the child's drawings on the wall and a small plasticine figure on his desk, which bore witness to the fact that he did indeed have a life outside these spartan surroundings. The figure was supposed to represent a rather prolapsed policeman in a violet-blue uniform, with his stomach on his knees and wearing oversized boots. It didn't much resemble the original, who was now sitting looking at her with grey, earnest eyes. There was a tape recorder on the desk and a Compaq computer. The woman peered furtively at them and hid her face in the wet tissue paper. He left her in peace. He got an audio cassette from the drawer and wrote on the white label: Eva Marie Magnus.

'Are you frightened of dogs?' he asked kindly.

She glanced up. 'In the past perhaps. But not any more.' She crumpled the tissue into a ball. 'I used to be frightened of everything. Now there's nothing I'm frightened of at all.'

Chapter 2

THE RIVER CASCADED through the countryside splitting the cold town into two shivering grey floes. It was April and still wintry. Just as it reached the middle of the town, somewhere about the District Hospital, it began to roar and grumble, as if the nagging traffic and noisy industry along its banks had disturbed it. It coiled and wreathed in ever stronger currents as it advanced through the town. Past the old theatre and the Labour Party headquarters, by the railway tracks and on past the square to the old Exchange, which was now a McDonald's, down to the brewery - a pretty shade of pink and also the oldest in the country - to the Cash & Carry, the motorway bridge, a huge industrial estate with several car firms and finally the old roadside inn. There, the river could heave a final sigh and tumble into the sea.

It was late afternoon, the sun was setting, and in a short while the brewery would be transformed from a dreary colossus into a fairy-tale castle with a thousand lights that were reflected in the river. The town was only beautiful after dark.

Eva watched the little girl as she ran along the river-bank. The distance between them was ten metres, she was careful not to let it increase. It was a grey day and few people were about on the footpaths, a bitter breeze blew off the swiftly flowing river. Eva kept an eye out for dog-owners, and in that eventuality whether the dog was loose, for she couldn't breathe easily until they'd passed. She saw none. Her skirt flapped around her legs and the wind cut

right through her knitted sweater, forcing her to hug herself with both arms as she walked. Emma skipped along contentedly, if not gracefully, for she was well overweight. A fat kid with a large mouth and an angular face. Her red hair whipped the back of her neck, the moisture in the air giving it an unwashed look. Certainly not a cute little girl, but as she was unaware of the fact she pranced blithely along in her artlessness, and with an appetite for life which only a child possesses. Emma was seven, five months until she began school, Eva thought. One day she'd catch herself reflected in the critical faces of the playground, see her own unlovely person for the first time. But if she were a strong child, if she were like her father, the man who'd packed up and gone to live with someone else, she wouldn't give it another thought. This was what occupied Eva Magnus as she walked. This, and the overcoat that she'd left in the hall at home.

Eva knew every inch of the footpath, they'd walked it countless times. Emma was the one who went on about it, who wouldn't relinquish the old habit of strolling by the river; Eva could have done without it. At regular intervals the child ran down to the water's edge because she'd seen something that had to be inspected more closely. Eva watched her like a hawk. If she fell in there was no one else to save her. The river was fast-flowing, the water icy and the girl heavy. She shuddered.

This time she'd found a flat stone right down by the bank, she waved, shouting to her mother to come. Eva followed. There was just enough room for both of them to sit.

'We can't sit here, it's wet. We'll get cystitis.'

'Is that dangerous?'

'No, but it's painful. It stings, and you've got to wee all the time.'

They sat down anyway, following the eddies with their eyes and marvelled at the movements of the water.

‘Why are there currents in the water?’ Emma asked.

Eva had to think for a moment. ‘Well, goodness, I don’t know. Perhaps it’s got something to do with the riverbed; there’s lots of things I don’t know. When you go to school, you’ll learn about all that.’

‘That’s what you always say when you don’t know the answer.’

‘But it’s true. In any case you can ask your teacher. Teachers know a lot more than me.’

‘I don’t think so.’

An empty plastic container came sailing rapidly towards them.

‘I want it! You got to get it for me!’

‘Yuk no, leave it alone, it’s only rubbish. I’m cold, Emma, can’t we go home soon?’

‘In a little while.’ Emma pushed her hair behind her ears and rested her chin on her knees, but the hair was coarse and unruly, it sprang forward again. ‘Is it very deep?’ She nodded towards the middle of the river.

‘No, not particularly,’ said Eva quietly, ‘eight or nine metres I should think.’

‘That’s really, really deep.’

‘No, it’s not. The deepest place in the world is in the Pacific Ocean,’ she said musingly. ‘Some sort of hollow. It’s eleven thousand metres deep. That’s what I call really, really deep.’

‘I wouldn’t like to go swimming there. You know everything, Mum, I don’t think teachers know all that. I’d like a pink school bag,’ she went on.

Eva shivered. ‘Mmm,’ she said. ‘They are pretty. But they get dirty awfully quickly. I think those brown ones are nice, those brown leather ones, have you seen them? Like the bigger children have?’

‘I’m not big. I’m only just starting school.’

‘Yes, but you’ll get bigger, and you can’t have a new bag every year.’

‘But we’ve got more money now, haven’t we?’

Eva didn’t reply. The question made her shoot a quick glance over her shoulder, a habit she’d formed. Emma found a stick and poked it into the water.

‘Why is there froth in the water?’ she continued. ‘Nasty, yellow froth.’ She whipped it a bit with her stick. ‘Shall I ask at school?’

Eva still didn’t answer. She, too, had her chin on her knees, her thoughts had wandered away again, and Emma had receded into the corner of her eye. The river brought back memories. Now she could see a face shimmering under the dark water. A round face with narrowed eyes and black brows.

‘Lie down on the bed, Eva.’

‘What?’

‘Just do as I say, lie down on the bed.’

‘Can we go to McDonald’s?’ Emma asked suddenly.

‘What? Yes, why not. We’ll go to McDonald’s, at least it’s warm there.’

She rose, slightly distractedly, and took the child by the arm. Shook her head and stared down into the river. The face had vanished now, there was nothing there, but she knew it would return, perhaps to haunt her for the rest of her days. They climbed up to the path and set off slowly back towards the town. They didn’t meet a soul.

Eva felt her thoughts running wild, pursuing their own course and arriving in places she’d rather forget. The roar of the river conjured up a host of images. She had waited for them to fade, to find peace at last. And time had passed. One day at a time had turned into six months.

‘Can I have a Happy Meal with a present? It’s thirty-seven kroner and I haven’t got Aladdin.’

‘Yes.’

‘What’ll you have, Mum? Chicken?’

'Not sure yet.' She stared at the black water again, the thought of food was nauseating. She didn't bother with food much. Now she noticed how the surface rose and fell, under the dirty yellow scum.

'Now we've got more money, we can eat whatever we want, can't we, Mum?'

Eva kept quiet. All at once she stopped and strained her eyes. Something pale had floated up just beneath the surface of the water. It rocked sluggishly as it was pushed towards the bank by the powerful eddy. Her eyes were so taken up with watching that she'd forgotten the girl, who had also halted and who could see far better than her mother.

'It's a man!' Emma gasped. She clamped herself hard on to Eva's arm, her eyes popping out of her head. For a few moments they stood transfixed, staring at the sodden, decomposed body as it floated, head first, in amongst the stones. He was lying face down. The hair on the back of his head was thin and they could make out a bald patch. Eva was oblivious to the nails digging in through her sweater, she looked at the waxen-coloured corpse with its matted blond hair and couldn't remember seeing him before. But his trainers - those blue and white striped high-top trainers.

'It's a man,' Emma repeated, more quietly now.

Eva wanted to cry out. The cry came forcing its way up her throat but never emerged. 'He's drowned. Poor man, he's drowned, Emma!'

'Why does he look so horrible? Almost like jelly!'

'Because,' she stammered, 'because it happened some time ago.' She bit her lip so hard she pierced it. The taste of blood made her sway.

'Have we got to lift him up?'

'No, don't be silly! The police do that.'

'Are you going to phone them?'

Eva put her arm round the girl's chubby shoulders and stumbled along the path. She looked back again quickly, as if waiting for some attack, yet uncertain from which direction it would come. There was a phone box on the approach to the bridge, so she hauled the child after her and searched in her skirt pockets for change. She found a five-kroner piece. The sight of the partially decomposed man flashed before her like an ill omen, an omen of all that was to come. She had managed to calm down at last, time had settled upon everything like dust and made the nightmare pale. Now her heart was hammering beneath her sweater, completely out of control. Emma was silent. She followed her mother with frightened grey eyes and halted.

'Wait here. I'll ring and tell them to come and fetch him. Don't move!'

'We'll wait for them, won't we?'

'No, we certainly won't!'

She pushed into the box trying to control her panic. An avalanche of thoughts and ideas rushed through her head, but she dismissed each of them in turn. Then she made a quick decision. Her hands were clammy, she inserted the five-kroner piece into the slot and dialled a number with swift fingers. Her father answered, groggy, as if he'd been asleep.

'It's only me, Eva,' she whispered. 'Did I wake you?'

'Yes, but it was high time. Soon I'll be sleeping all round the clock. Is something the matter?' he growled. 'You're het up. I can hear that you're het up, I know you.'

His voice was dry and hoarse, but there was still a keenness to it, a keenness which she'd always loved. A sharpness that rooted her fast to reality.

'No, nothing's wrong. Emma and I were going out to eat and we found this phone box.'

'Well, put her on then!'

'Er, well, she's down by the water.'

She watched the numbers on the display counting down, threw a quick glance at Emma who was pressed against the glass of the door. Her nose was squashed flat like a lump of marzipan. Could she hear what they were saying?

'I haven't got a lot of change. We'll come and visit you one day soon. If you'd like.'

'Why are you whispering like that?' he demanded suspiciously.

'Am I?' she said a little louder.

'Give my girl a hug. I've got something for her when she comes.'

'What's that?'

'A school bag. She needs a school bag for the autumn, eh? I thought I'd save you the expense, things aren't all that easy for you.'

If only he'd known. She said: 'That was kind of you, Dad, but she's pretty sure about what she wants. Can we change it?'

'Yes of course, but I bought the bag they said I should. A pink leather one.'

Eva forced her voice to sound normal. 'I'll have to go, Dad, the money's run out. Look after yourself!' There was a click, and he was gone. The numbers on the display had stopped.

Emma looked at her expectantly. 'Are they coming now?'

'Yes, they're sending a police car. Come on, we'll go and eat. They'll ring if they want to speak to us, but I don't think they'll need to, at least not yet, perhaps later, but then they'll get in touch. This has nothing to do with us at all, you see, not really.' She was almost breathless, talking frantically.

'Can't we just wait and see them arrive, please can we?'

Eva shook her head. She crossed the street with the girl in tow, while the red man was still showing. They were an oddly matched pair as they walked into town, Eva tall and thin with slender shoulders and long, dark hair, Emma

plump and broad and knock-kneed, with a slightly waddling gait. Both of them felt cold. And the town was cold, in the miasma from the chill river. It's an inharmonious town, Eva thought, as if it could never really be happy because it was split in two. Now the two halves were struggling to gain the upper hand. The north side with the church, the cinema and the most expensive stores, the south side with the railway, the cheap shopping centres, the pubs and the state off-licence. This last was important and ensured a steady stream of cars and people across the bridge.

'Mum, why did he drown?' Emma fixed on her mother's face and waited for an answer.

'I don't know. Perhaps he was drunk and fell into the river.'

'Perhaps he was fishing and fell out of his boat. He should have been wearing a life jacket. Was he old, Mum?'

'Not particularly. About Dad's age perhaps.'

'At least Dad can swim,' she said with relief.

They had arrived at the green door of McDonald's. Emma put her weight against it and pushed it open. The smells within, of hamburgers and French fries, drew her and her unfailing appetite further into the place. Gone was the dead man in the river, gone all life's problems. Emma's tummy was rumbling and Aladdin was within reach.

'Find a table,' Eva said, 'and I'll order.'

She made for the corner as usual and seated herself under the flowering almond tree, which was plastic, while Eva joined the queue. She tried to banish the image that lapped at her inner eye, but it forced itself on her again. Would Emma forget it, or would she tell everyone? Perhaps she'd have nightmares. They must stifle it with silence, never mention it again. In the end she'd think it had never happened.

The queue inched forward. She stared distractedly at the youngsters behind the counter; with their red caps and red short-sleeved shirts they worked at an incredible pace.

The fatty haze from the cooking hung like a curtain behind the counter, the smells of fat and frying meat, melted cheese and seasonings of all kinds forced their way into her nostrils. But they seemed oblivious to the thickness of the atmosphere, running back and forth like industrious red ants, smiling optimistically at each and every order. She watched the quick fingers and the light feet that sped across the floor. This was nothing like her own day's work. She stood in the middle of her studio most of the time, arms folded, fixing a stretched canvas with a hostile stare, or possibly an imploring one. On good days she stared aggressively and went on the attack, full of audacity and aplomb. Once in a blue moon she sold a painting.

'Happy Meal, please,' she said quickly, 'and chicken nuggets and two Cokes. Would you be very kind and put an Aladdin in? She hasn't got that one.'

The girl went to work. Her hands packed and folded at lightning speed. Over in the corner, Emma raised her head and followed her mother with her eyes as she finally came weaving across with the tray. Suddenly Eva's knees began to tremble. She sank down at the table and looked in wonderment at the girl who was eagerly struggling to open the little cardboard box. She searched for the toy. The eruption was deafening.

'I got Aladdin, Mum!' She raised the figure above her head and showed it to the entire restaurant. They all stared at her. Eva buried her face in her hands and sobbed.

'Are you ill?' Emma turned deadly serious and hid Aladdin under the table.

'No, well - just not a hundred per cent. It'll soon pass.'

'Are you upset about the dead man?'

She started. 'Yes,' she said simply. 'I'm upset about the dead man. But we won't talk about him any more. Never, d'you hear, Emma! Not to anyone! It'll only make us sad.'

'But do you think he's got children?'

Eva wiped her face with her hands. She wasn't certain of the future any more. She stared at the chicken, at the doughy brown lumps fried in fat, and knew that she couldn't eat them. The images flashed past again. She saw them through the branches of the almond tree.

'Yes,' she said at length, 'he's probably got children.'

Chapter 3

AN ELDERLY WOMAN out walking her dog suddenly caught a glimpse of the blue and white shoe amongst the stones. She phoned from the telephone box near the bridge, just as Eva had done. When the police arrived, she was standing somewhat self-consciously by the bank with her back to the corpse. One of the officers, whose name was Karlsen, was first out of the car. He smiled politely when he caught sight of the woman and glanced inquisitively at her dog.

‘He’s a Chinese Crested,’ she said.

It really was an intriguing creature, tiny, wrinkled and very pink. It had a thick tuft of dirty yellow hair on the crown of its head, but was otherwise entirely bald.

‘What’s his name?’ he asked amicably.

‘Adam,’ she replied. He nodded and smiled, diving into the car’s boot for the case of equipment. The policemen struggled with the dead man for a while, but eventually got him up on the bank where they placed him on a tarpaulin. He wasn’t a big man, he just looked that way after his sojourn in the water. The woman with the dog retreated a little. The team worked quietly and precisely, the photographer took pictures, a forensic pathologist knelt by the tarpaulin and made notes. Most deaths had trivial causes and they weren’t expecting anything unusual. Perhaps a drunk who’d toppled into the water, there were gangs of them under the bridge and along the footpaths in the evenings. This one was somewhere between twenty and forty, slim, but with a beer belly, blond, not particularly tall.

Karlsen pulled a rubber glove on to his right hand and carefully raised the dead man's clothing.

'Stab wounds,' he said tersely. 'Several of them. Let's turn him over.' They fell silent. The only sound was that of rubber gloves being put on and pulled off, the quiet click of the camera, the breath of one or other of them, and the crackling of the plastic sheeting which they spread out by the side of the body.

'I wonder,' Karlsen muttered, 'if we haven't found Einarsson at long last.'

The man's wallet had gone, if he'd ever had one. But his wristwatch was there, a gaudy affair with a lot of extras, like the time in New York and Tokyo and London. Its black strap had dug into his swollen wrist. The corpse had been in the water a long time and had presumably been carried by the current from further upstream, and so the location of the find wasn't of special interest. Even so, they inspected it a bit, searching the bank for possible footprints, but found only a plastic can which had once contained antifreeze and an empty cigarette packet. A number of people had gathered up on the path, mostly youngsters; now they were craning their necks to steal a glance at the body on the tarpaulin. Decomposition was well under way. The skin had loosened from the body, especially on the hands, as if he were wearing oversized gloves. It was very discoloured. His eyes, which had once been green, were transparent and pale, his hair was falling out in great tufts, his face had puffed up and made his features indistinct. The fauna of the river, crayfish, insects and fish, had all tucked in greedily. The stab wounds in his side were great gaping gashes in the ashen white flesh.

'I used to fish here,' said one of the boys on the path, he'd never seen a dead body in all his seventeen years. He didn't really believe in death, just as he didn't believe in God, because he'd never seen either of them. He hunched

his chin into the collar of his jacket and shivered. From now on anything was possible.

The post-mortem report arrived a fortnight later. Inspector Konrad Sejer had called five people to a conference room situated in one of the Portakabins behind the courthouse. They'd been erected there in more recent times owing to lack of space, a row of offices hidden from the public and which most people had never seen, apart from the unhappy souls who came into more intimate contact with the police. Some things had already been established. They knew the man's identity, they'd got that right away because the name Jorun was engraved on his wedding ring. A file from the previous October contained all the information about the missing Egil Einarsson, aged thirty-eight, address: Rosenkrantzgate 16, last seen on 4 October at nine in the evening. He left a wife and a six-year-old son. The file was thin, but would soon get thicker. The new photographs fattened it up well, and they weren't pretty. A number of people had been interviewed when he'd disappeared. His wife, workmates and relations, friends and neighbours. None of them had much to say. He wasn't exactly whiter than white, but he had no enemies, at least, none that they knew of. He had a regular job at the brewery, went home to his dinner every day and spent most of his spare time in his garage, tinkering with his beloved car, or with his mates at a pub on the south side. The pub was called the King's Arms. Einarsson was either a poor sod who'd been the victim of some desperado wanting money - heroin had taken a firm grip, seeing the potential in this cold, windswept town - or he had a secret. Perhaps he was in debt.

Sejer peered down at the report and rubbed his neck. It always impressed him the way criminal pathologists managed to pull together a semi-rotten mass of skin and hair, bones and muscles, and turn it into a complete human

being with age and weight and physical attributes, condition, previous complaints and operations, dental hygiene and hereditary disposition.

‘Remnants of cheese, meat, paprika and onion in the stomach,’ he said aloud. ‘Sounds like pizza.’

‘Can they be sure after six months?’

‘Yes, of course. When the fish haven’t eaten it all. That sometimes happens.’

The man called Sejer was made of solid stuff. He was in his forty-ninth year, his forearms were already reasonably tanned, he’d rolled up his shirtsleeves and the blood vessels and sinews were conspicuous beneath the skin, making them look like seasoned wood. His face was well defined and a little sharp, his shoulders straight and broad, his good overall colour gave the impression of something that was well used, but which would also endure. His hair was spiky and steel-coloured, almost metallic and very short. His eyes were large and clear, their irises the colour of wet slate. That was how his wife Elise had once described them years before. He’d found her description charming.

Karlsen was ten years his junior and slight by comparison. At first glance he could give the impression of being a dandy, without solidity or weight, he had a waxed moustache and a high, impressively bouffant head of hair. The youngest and sprightliest of them, Gøran Soot, was struggling to open a bag of jelly babies without making too much of a rustling noise. Soot had thick, wavy hair, a compact, muscular body and a fresh complexion. Taken on its own, each part of his body was a feast for the eye, but all together they were rather too much of a good thing. He, however, was unaware of this interesting fact. Seated by the door was Chief Inspector Holthemann, taciturn and grey, and behind him a female officer with close-cropped fair hair. At the window, with one arm propped on the sill, sat Jakob Skarre.

‘How are things with Mrs Einarsson?’ Sejer asked. He cared about people, knew that she had a young son.

Karlsen shook his head. ‘She seemed a bit bewildered. She asked if this meant she’d get the life insurance money at last, and then broke down in despair because the first thing she’d thought about was the cash.’

‘Why hasn’t she had anything?’

‘We had no body.’

‘I’ll take that up with the appropriate person,’ said Sejer. ‘What have they been living on these past six months?’

‘Social security.’

Sejer shook his head and flipped through the report. Soot stuffed a green jelly baby into his mouth, only its legs protruded.

‘The car,’ Sejer went on, ‘was found at the municipal dump. We rooted through the rubbish for days. In fact he was killed in a completely different location, possibly by the river. Then the killer got into the car and drove it to the rubbish tip. It’s extraordinary if Einarsson really has been in the water for six months and hasn’t turned up until now. That’s quite some time the murderer has been clinging to the hope that he would never surface again. Well, now he’s had a reality check. I imagine it’ll be quite a hard one, too.’

‘Did he get caught up on something?’ Karlsen wondered out loud.

‘Don’t know. It’s a bit strange, that, the riverbed is pure gravel, it’s not long since it was dredged. He may have been swept in towards the bank and got caught up on something there. His appearance was roughly what we’d have anticipated, anyway.’

‘The car had been cleaned and hoovered inside,’ said Karlsen, ‘the dashboard had been polished. Wax and cleaning stuff everywhere. He left home to sell it.’

‘And his wife didn’t know who the prospective purchaser was,’ Sejer recalled.

'She knew nothing at all, but that was par for the course in that household.'

'No one phoned asking for him?'

'No. He told her quite suddenly that he had a purchaser. She thought it was strange. He'd scraped and saved to get that car, tinkered with it for months, treated it like his baby.'

'Maybe he needed money,' said Sejer urgently, rising. He began to pace. 'We've got to find that buyer. I wonder what happened between them. According to his wife he had a hundred kroner in his wallet. We ought to go through the car again, someone sat in it and drove it several kilometres, a murderer. He must have left something behind!'

'The car's been sold,' Karlsen put in.

'Wouldn't you just know it.'

'9 p.m.'s pretty late to go showing off a car,' said Skarre, a curly-haired man with an open face. 'It's bloody dark in October at nine in the evening. If I were going to buy a car I'd want to see it in daylight. It could have been planned. A kind of trap.'

'Yes. And if you want to test drive a car, you head out of town. Away from people.' Sejer scratched his chin with well-clipped nails. 'If he was stabbed on the fourth of October, he's been in the river six months,' he said, 'is that consistent with the state of the body?'

'The pathologists are being difficult about that,' said Karlsen. 'Impossible to date that sort of thing, they say. Snorrasson told of a woman who was found after seven years, and she was as good as new. Some lake in Ireland. Seven years! The water was freezing cold, pure preservation. But we can assume it happened on the fourth of October. It must have been quite a strong person, I should have thought, judging by the results.'

'Let's look at the stab wounds.'

He selected a photograph from the folder, went to the board and clipped it in position. The picture showed

Einarsson's back and bottom; the skin had been thoroughly washed and the stab wounds left crater-like depressions.

'They do look rather strange, fifteen stab wounds, half of which are to the lower back, bottom and abdomen, and the remainder in the victim's right side, directly above the hip, delivered with great force by a right-handed person, striking from above and slicing downwards. The knife had a long, thin blade, very thin in fact. Perhaps a fishing knife. Altogether a strange way to attack a man. But you remember what the car looked like, don't you?'

All at once he strode over and hauled Soot out of his chair. His bag of goodies fell to the floor.

'I need a victim,' Sejer said. 'Come here!' He pushed the officer over to the desk, took up position behind him and grabbed the plastic ruler. 'It could have happened something like this. This is Einarsson's car,' he said, pushing the young policeman over on to the desktop. His chin just reached the far edge. 'The bonnet is up, because they're busy looking over the engine. The killer pushes the victim on to the engine and holds him down with his left arm while he stabs him fifteen times with his right. FIFTEEN TIMES.' He wielded the ruler and prodded Soot's bottom as he counted aloud: 'One, two, three, four,' he moved his hand and stabbed him in the side, Soot squirmed a bit, as if he was ticklish, 'five, six, seven - and then he stabs him in the nether regions ...'

'No!' Soot leapt up in horror and crossed his legs.

Sejer stopped, gave his victim a small push and sent him back to his chair as he fought to suppress a smile.

'It's a lot of times to strike with a knife. Fifteen stabs and a whole lot of blood. It must have spurted out everywhere, over the killer's clothes, face and hands, over the car and the ground. It's a bugger that he moved the car.'

'At any rate, it must have been done in the heat of the moment,' Karlsen maintained. 'It's no normal execution.'

Must have been an argument.'

'Perhaps they couldn't agree on a price,' quipped Skarre.

'People who decide to kill using a knife often get a nasty shock,' said Sejer. 'It's a lot harder than they think. But let's assume it actually was premeditated, and at the opportune moment he pulls out his knife, for example just as Einarsson is standing with his back to him, bending over the engine.'

He narrowed his eyes as if conjuring up the scene. 'The killer had to strike from behind, so he couldn't easily get at what he wanted. It's much harder to reach vital organs from behind. And maybe it took quite a number of stabs before Einarsson finally collapsed. It must have been a terrifying experience, he's stabbing and stabbing, his victim goes on screaming, that makes him panic and he's unable to stop. That's what happens. In his imagination it'll be one or two lunges. But how often has the killer been content with that in all the many knife murders we've dealt with? Off the top of my head I can recall one instance with seventeen stab wounds, and another with thirty-three.'

'But they knew each other, do we agree on that?'

'Knew and knew. They had some kind of relationship, yes.' Sejer seated himself and put the ruler away in the drawer. 'Well, we'll have to begin at the beginning again. We must find out who wanted to buy that car. Use the list from October and begin at the top. It might be one of his workmates.'

'The same people?' Soot looked at him dubiously. 'Are we going to ask the same questions all over again?'

'What do you mean?' Sejer raised an eyebrow.

'I mean that we ought to be finding new people. The answers will be the same as last time. I mean, nothing's really changed.'

'Hasn't it? Perhaps you've not been listening all that carefully, but we've actually found the victim now. Stuck

like a pig. And you say nothing's changed?'

He fought to hold back a note of arrogance. 'I mean, we're not going to get different answers because of that.'

'That,' said Sejer holding back an even larger one, 'remains to be seen, doesn't it?'

Karlsen closed the file with a little snap.

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Sejer replaced Einarsson's folder in the filing cabinet. He filed it next to the Durban case, and thought that now they could keep each other company. Maja Durban and Egil Einarsson. Both were dead, but no one knew why. Then he leant back in his chair and placed his long legs on the desk, patted his backside and fished out his wallet. Jammed in between his driving and skydiving licences he found the picture of his grandson, Matteus. He had just turned four, he could recognise most makes of car and had already had his first fight, which he'd lost grievously. It had been a bit of a surprise, that time he'd gone to Fornebu Airport to pick up his daughter Ingrid and son-in-law Erik, who'd been in Somalia for three years. She as a nurse, he as a Red Cross doctor. She'd been standing at the top of the aircraft steps, tanned golden all over and with her hair bleached by the sun. For one wild second it had been like seeing Elise, that first time they'd met. She carried the little boy on her arm. He was four months old at the time, chocolate brown, with crinkly hair and the darkest eyes he'd ever seen. The Somalis were a beautiful race, he thought. And he gazed at the photo for a while before replacing it. It was quiet in the Portakabins now, and in most of the large adjacent building. He pushed two fingers into his shirtsleeve and scratched his elbow. The skin flaked off. Underneath there was new, pink skin which also flaked off. He pulled his jacket off the chair back and locked up, then he paid a lightning visit to Mrs Brenningen on the reception desk.