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Arne Dahl To the Top of the Mountain



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About the Book

After the disastrous end to their last case, the Intercrime team – a specialist unit created to investigate violent, international crime – has been disbanded, their leader forced into early retirement.

The six officers have been scattered throughout the country. Detectives Paul Hjelm and Kerstin Holm are investigating the senseless murder of a young football supporter in a pub in Stockholm, Arto Söderstedt and Viggo Norlander are working on mundane cases, Gunnar Nyberg is tackling child pornography while Jorge Chavez is immersed in research.

But when a man is blown up in a high-security prison, a major drugs baron comes under attack and a massacre takes place in a dark suburb, the Intercrime team are urgently reconvened. There is something dangerous approaching Sweden, and they are the only people who can do anything to stop it.

About the Author

Arne Dahl is an award-winning Swedish crime writer and literary critic whose work has been translated into over twenty languages. *To the Top of the Mountain* won the German Crime Writing Award, which has also been won by authors including Ian Rankin, James Ellroy and John le Carré, and is the third book in the internationally acclaimed Intercrime series, adaptations of which were shown on BBC Four.

Alice Menzies is a freelance translator based in London.

Also by Arne Dahl

The Blinded Man
Bad Blood

To the Top of the Mountain

Arne Dahl

Translated from the Swedish by
Alice Menzies



Harvill Secker
LONDON

1

'I DIDN'T SEE anything.'

Paul Hjelm gave a heartfelt sigh.

'You didn't see anything?'

He tried to catch his eye, but the young man kept looking down, morose.

Morose? When had he last used the word 'morose'? Had he ever, at any point in his life, used the word 'morose'?

He felt old.

'Let's try again,' he said calmly. 'Even though a full-on fight broke out behind you, you saw nothing at all. Is that right?'

Silence.

Hjelm sighed again. He lifted his knuckles from the interrogation table, stretched his back, and cast a glance in the direction of his colleague, leaning against the drab concrete wall.

As their eyes met, he felt the contradictions of the moment. On the one hand, his relocation to the violent crimes division of the local police force, working in Stockholm's City district, and the whole range of hopeless, everyday crimes that went with it. On the other, the return of his favourite colleague, Kerstin Holm, to Stockholm.

And the first challenge facing the seasoned duo after their reunion? A pub brawl.

Paul Hjelm sighed once again and returned to his reluctant witness.

'You didn't glance over your shoulder even once?'

The young man smiled faintly. A slight, introspective smile.

‘Not even once,’ he said.

‘Why not?’

The young man met his eyes for the first time. Bright blue. There was an unexpected sharpness, as though he were on the verge of saying something completely different, when he said: ‘Because I was reading.’

Paul Hjelm stared at him.

‘Hammarby have just played a home game against Kalmar. It’s a 2-2 draw, and they finish last in the Allsvenskan league, and you’re sitting in the Hammarby fans’ favourite haunt, reading? In Kvarnen – a rowdy bar, heaving with frustrated Hammarby fans – twenty-year-old Per Karlsson is sitting alone, with a book? It’s a very strange choice of reading place, I must say.’

Per Karlsson smiled again, the same soft, introspective smile.

‘It was quiet when I got there,’ was all he said.

Hjelm pulled out the chair and sat down with a thud.

‘I’m really curious now,’ he said. ‘Which book had caught your attention to such a degree that you not only managed to ignore all the shouting and screaming and chaos, but also a fight that ended in someone getting a beer mug to the head and dying?’

‘Dying?’

‘Yeah, he died. He bled to death in the bar. On the spot. The blood just gushed out, he lost two litres in twenty seconds. It just poured right out of him. His name was Anders Lundström, he came from Kalmar and, for some unfathomable reason, he made the mistake of going to Kvarnen, which was about as close to Hell as an opposition supporter could get. And, sure enough, the Hammarby fans killed him with a beer mug. But you didn’t see any of this, because of which book? I’m very interested.’

Per Karlsson looked stricken. He mumbled: ‘It’s nothing you’ll have heard of . . .’

‘Try me,’ Paul Hjelm said in English, with a faux New York accent.

Kerstin Holm shifted for the first time since Per Karlsson had entered the interrogation room. She moved silently over to the table and took a seat next to Hjelm.

‘My colleague here knows more about literature than you’d think,’ she said. ‘The last time we met, almost a year ago, you were reading . . . Kafka, wasn’t it?’

‘K,’ said Paul Hjelm ambiguously.

Kerstin Holm gave a short, slightly bitter laugh.

‘K,’ she repeated in the same faux New York accent. ‘So try him.’

The young man looked confused. Almost completely swathed in black, at the height of summer. Limp, unkempt blond hair. A budding intellectual? No, not quite. His cagey, almost wounded gaze, those introspective smiles. Definitely not a university student. Maybe just a young man reading to educate himself.

A rarity.

‘Ovid,’ said the rarity. ‘Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*.’

Paul Hjelm laughed. He hadn’t meant to; the last thing he wanted was to mock Per Karlsson. Still, it had happened. It was happening more and more often.

The insignia of bitterness.

Morose.

Hjelm felt a short but fleeting wave of self-loathing.

Holm stepped in. ‘And what a metamorphosis it was. For Anders Lundström from Kalmar. The ultimate metamorphosis. The transformation of all transformations. Which of Ovid’s metamorphoses would you say fits Anders Lundström’s fate, Paul? Orpheus?’

‘Sure,’ said Hjelm sluggishly. ‘Orpheus torn to pieces by the Thracian Maenads.’

Per Karlsson stared at them, suddenly quite indignant.

‘No,’ he said, ‘not Orpheus.’

Hjelm and Holm looked at one another, surprised.

‘Anyway,’ Hjelm eventually said, ‘we know that your little “I didn’t see anything” is a lie. It’s going to undergo a metamorphosis now, so tell us what you saw, Per, from the beginning. We’re going to do this like a proper interrogation. So, your name is Per Karlsson, born in Danderyd on the fourth of December 1979, currently living in Aspudden; you’re unemployed and did nine years of compulsory education. Is that correct?’

‘Yes,’ said Per Karlsson faintly.

‘Today is the twenty-fourth of June, the time is 08.13. Tell us everything that you saw in the Kvarnen bar on Tjärhovsgatan at 21.42 on the twenty-third of June. Yesterday evening, that is.’

Per Karlsson looked pale. He stared down at the table, fiddling with his fingers.

‘Are you recording this?’ he asked.

‘We’ve been recording everything since you entered the room. Including this.’

‘OK, well, when I got to Kvarnen there weren’t many people there. I had no idea there was a match on that evening, I probably wouldn’t have gone there if I had. It was quiet, I read. Then they arrived. The first fans got there just after nine, then it filled up. I tried to keep reading, it went pretty well, I’m good at concentrating. I was sitting a little way off, with my back to the bar, almost right over by the window, so I heard more than I saw. But sure, I turned round now and then.’

‘Why did you say that you didn’t see anything?’ Kerstin Holm asked.

Paul Hjelm said: ‘Is this how it is now? Is the automatic answer “I saw nothing” when the police ask? Have things gone that far?’

‘It’s the most common answer we get in any case.’

‘Should I go on?’ Per Karlsson asked, confused.

‘Of course,’ said Hjelm and Holm in unison.

Jalm and Halm, that famous American comedy duo.

'A gang of six or seven Hammarby fans heard another group, four guys, talking with southern accents, Småland accents. Both groups were standing by the bar. The Hammarby fans started arguing with the Smålanders, who said they lived in Stockholm and supported Hammarby. You could hear that they were scared, that they were lying. The Hammarby fans could hear it, too. They got more and more aggressive. Two of the Smålanders managed to get away and cleared off. Two of them were left. The atmosphere got ugly. Some more Hammarby fans turned up and tried to get the gang to move back, away from the Smålanders, I guess they could see what was happening. Eventually, one of the Smålanders made a run for it. He shoved one of the Hammarby fans so hard that he fell over, and then three of the others from the gang pushed him, the Smålander, up against the bar and the one who'd fallen over got up, grabbed a beer mug and smashed it as hard as he could on the man's head.'

'Did you see it?'

'No, not really. I saw a little bit now and then, quick glances. But I heard it. I turned round when I heard the crack, a really fucking nasty crack. Not like when glass breaks, really. I think it was his head cracking. Fuck . . . his skull, the blood. I turned around just when the glass had hit him. There was a little empty space around him. He had his hands to his head and the blood was just gushing out, through his fingers and down his arms. Fuck! Then he collapsed, limp, just straight down onto the floor. And the Hammarby gang, they cleared out immediately, they just ran right out the door. The one who'd done it still had the handle of the beer mug in his hand, covered in blood. A whole crowd managed to squeeze out before the doormen woke up and blocked the door. Then the police came pretty quickly. The other Smålander was down on the floor trying to stop the blood with his jumper, there was a Hammarby

fan trying to help, I think, but it was hopeless. Christ, there was blood everywhere.'

Per Karlsson was white.

Hjelm and Holm tried to make sense of the information.

'You saw a lot for someone who didn't see anything,' said Hjelm.

'Don't keep going on about that,' Per Karlsson said sullenly.

'A whole crowd managed to get out?' Holm asked. 'Hammarby fans?'

'Mostly. Some others, too.'

'How many?'

'I was mostly looking at . . . the victim . . .'

The victim.

Hjelm shuddered.

Per Karlsson said: 'About ten Hammarby fans cleared out, I'd say. Him first. The perpetrator.'

The perpetrator.

Pseudo-terminology finding its way into his language in order to distance himself from reality. The witness. The victim. The perpetrator.

'With the handle of the beer mug in his hand?' asked Holm.

'Yeah,' said Per Karlsson.

'This one?' asked Hjelm, holding up a plastic bag containing the handle of a beer mug. The blood was smeared and clotted over the inside of the bag.

Per Karlsson wrinkled his nose and nodded.

'We found it a short distance away on Folkungagatan. That means he must've run round the corner, past the Malmen hotel and past the entrance to Medborgarplatsen metro station. His fingerprints aren't in the database, so it's of the utmost importance that you can help us to identify . . . the perpetrator. You didn't hear them say anything about where he might have gone?'

'No,' said Per Karlsson.

‘Let’s go back a few steps,’ said Kerstin Holm. ‘How many sneaked out before the doormen blocked the door? Ten or so Hammarby fans, you said, but also a number of others?’

‘I think so. Some of the people who’d been sitting at the table next to the door disappeared, and a few others, too.’

‘As you can imagine, we’re looking for impartial witnesses who disappeared. The people sitting at the table next to the door weren’t Hammarby fans?’

‘No, they were already there before it happened, when the game was still on. But there were a few tables between the one where I was sitting and theirs, and they filled up pretty quickly. There were five men. Now that I think about it, one of them stayed behind, a guy with a shaved head and light-coloured moustache.’

‘But the others disappeared after . . . the killing?’

‘I think so.’

‘What did they look like? A group of workmates?’

‘Maybe. I didn’t look too closely. They weren’t exactly talking to one another.’

‘Weren’t talking? What, were they reading Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*?’

‘Lay off! Look, one of them stayed behind, didn’t he? The one with the shaved head. Talk to him.’

‘OK. Who else? You were sitting at the table second from the window, second from the right-hand wall, as seen from the bar. This group was sitting on the far left, on the other side of the aisle. What about the tables in between?’

‘Like I said, they filled up before the Hammarby fans came in. As far as I remember, there weren’t any seats left for the Hammarby fans, except next to me. A bunch of them sat down at my table. A few of them managed to leave after it happened.’

‘And over by the window out onto Tjärhovsgatan? You were facing that way, weren’t you?’

‘A group of girls. They were taking up both tables over in the corner. A hen party, I think, having a last few drinks.’

They were pretty drunk - and pretty damn shocked afterwards. None of them left, they could hardly bloody walk.'

'Right next to you? Against the right-hand wall?'

'I don't know, I can't remember.'

'You can't remember? You seem to remember quite well otherwise.'

'I'm sorry, I don't know. There might've been some people sitting there, but I never looked in that direction.'

'Fine. Behind you, then? Towards the bar? You said you turned round a few times?'

'At one table there was a man by himself, staring at me. Closest to the bar. Really tall, in his fifties. Gay, I'd guess. But you have his name, he stayed behind. He must've been closest to it. I don't remember the rest of the tables too well. A group of amateur musician types who stayed behind. Two middle-aged couples. I've got no idea about the tables further in.'

Per Karlsson fell silent. Hjelm and Holm fell silent. Eventually, Holm said: 'Shall we sum up, then? We'll draw a little sketch. The crime scene, the bar, is set back in the room, against the wall on the other side to the door. In a straight line from the bar, there are a number of tables at the rear. You don't know anything about them, you were sitting too far away. The periphery looks like this, as seen from the bar. Straight ahead, the window out onto Tjärhovsgatan. To the left, the door. Next to the door, one table, running longways. Then the aisle, then three rows of three big tables, with you sitting at the right-hand side of the middle one, facing the window. Before the Hammarby fans poured in just after nine, the following people were present. On the row of tables along the window, the hen party group were sitting at the two to the right. Then, at the window table nearest the door . . .?'

'I don't know. There was a group sitting there, but I've got no idea who they were. They were there afterwards, in any

case.'

'The middle row, then, the row of tables you were sitting at?'

'I don't know about the table on the far right, like I said. Then me, and after a while seven or eight Hammarby fans. There was a group of students sitting at the table to the left of mine, I think.'

'And the row nearest to the bar?'

'Christ, OK. At the first table, furthest to the right, nearest the bar: those two couples and the tall gay guy who was staring at me. Second table: the musician types, four of them. The third table: no idea. Then the single table by the door: the group of five men. Four of them disappeared.'

'Well, then,' said Hjelm. 'Time for the perpetrator.'

He felt pleased at being able to say the word without having to pause first.

'It's mostly the Hammarby scarves that I remember, actually,' said Per Karlsson. 'One of them had a banner, too; rolled up, green and white squares. The perpetrator had medium-long, pretty blond, pretty dirty hair. I almost only saw him from behind. I think he had a little moustache, too. I don't know, he looked like a mechanic or something, if you get what I mean. I was born and raised in Danderyd, and out there, he was one of those people you'd immediately assume was from the southern suburbs. A Farsta type.'

Hjelm and Holm stared at him.

'Judgemental, I know,' he said. 'I live in the south myself now. Unemployed and uneducated, living in the southern suburbs. Judgemental, but it's the best I can do.'

'No, one more thing,' said Kerstin Holm. 'Come with me to the police artist. He does it all on computers now, so it won't take long.'

She stood up. Per Karlsson stood up. She was taller than he was, Hjelm noticed irrelevantly.

'You don't have anything else to add, Per?' he asked.

Per Karlsson shook his head and gave him a furtive glance. That peculiar, paradoxical clarity in his eyes.

‘Well, thanks for your help.’

They disappeared.

Paul Hjelm disappeared, too. Into the vague half-world of daydreams. Per Karlsson. Born twenty years ago in Danderyd. Born in the affluent suburb of Danderyd, but hadn’t even stayed on at school. Unemployed, but sat in the most well-known and notorious of Södermalm’s pubs, reading the classics. What had happened? It was impossible to guess. An outsider at school? Thrown out of his father’s firm? Made to feel small, but on the way up? Rebellion against his father? Generally obstinate? Former addict? Dim-witted?

No.

Maybe the others, but not that. Not dim-witted. That much Paul Hjelm had seen, even though he felt, well . . . dim-witted.

Demoted to the dreary limbo of pub brawls.

Paradise lost.

No, not dim-witted. On the contrary, Per was unusually observant. But now Hjelm had to forget him. Now they had to plough on through more miserable interrogations with hungover witnesses, and Per Karlsson needed to be on someone else’s mind. Only his evidence could remain.

Hjelm yawned, his thoughts trundling on. The months spent with the local police. The violent crimes division of Stockholm’s City district. Police headquarters on Bergsgatan. The utterly temporary office which, equally temporarily, he had been liberated from. The office actually belonged to Gunnarlöv, a policeman on sick leave, whose telephone he always answered with: ‘Gunnar Lövs telephone, Paul Hjelm speaking.’ It was only when an old colleague of Gunnarlöv, now stationed in Härnösand, came in and asked after ‘Nils-Egg’ that he understand why there was always a pause on the other end of the line when he

answered. People were simply recovering from his strange pronunciation of Gunnarlöv. His jaw dropped when he looked up the name in the internal telephone catalogue and saw it there in black and white: it wasn't 'Gunnar Löv' at all, but 'Nils-Egil Gunnarlöv'. Shortened to Nils-Egg.

Were people really allowed to be called such things? Weren't there laws? Wasn't it the same as naming your child Heroin, like a family in Gnesta had tried to do a while ago, Heroin Lindgren? They had been turned down and written a whole series of letters to the local press where they went on the offensive against the nanny state.

In any case, Gunnarlöv was on sick leave because he had, while on duty, found himself in the Stureplan branch of Föreningssparbank when a hysterical female bank robber aged around fourteen rushed in with a staple gun at the ready, demanding 'all your high-yield shares, ready to go'. Don't staple guns need to be plugged in? Gunnarlöv had thought to himself, going over to the robber to calmly point out that fact and receiving, to his surprise, no fewer than thirty-four staples peppered across his face. Miraculously enough, none of them hit his eyes. The first thing he said on waking from unconsciousness was: 'Don't staple guns run on electricity?' His wife stared at his bandage-covered head, her eyes swollen and red with crying, and answered: 'There are ones that run on batteries.'

The adventures of Nils-Egil Gunnarlöv.

Nils-Egg in Wonderland.

Still, Paul Hjelm's own story wasn't all that much more entertaining. Quite the opposite, in fact, since the story of Nils-Egg actually had its bizarre moments.

Kerstin Holm came back, leafing through a notepad.

'Welcome to reality,' Paul Hjelm said gruffly.

'It's not much different in Gothenburg.'

'Sweden's shithole.'

'What're you getting at?' exclaimed Kerstin Holm in her good-natured Gothenburg accent.

‘Ah, sorry. No, well, it was just something that was being bandied about in the media a few weeks ago. The Black Army, you know, the AIK supporters’ club, it was on their answering machine before the team’s cup final against IFK Göteborg, in Ullevi Stadium. Stockholm arrogance and tribal football hate in an unhealthy union.’

‘Yeah, and now we’ve got it again. Stockholm arrogance and tribal football hate, only a more serious type. Did you see him?’

‘Anders Lundström from Kalmar? Yeah. Really nasty. His head was a terrible mess. To think a beer mug can do so much damage!’

‘Why? How do we explain it?’

Paul Hjelm looked at Kerstin Holm. They had a shared past which meant that no glance was entirely innocent.

‘Are you serious?’ he asked, half serious himself.

‘Yes. Yes, I am, I really am. Why’s the violence getting worse?’

He sighed. ‘Well, at least now we’ve been able to see it up close. For just over six months. The grey, everyday violence in the city. It doesn’t exactly do much to encourage your philanthropic tendencies. Are you back for good now, Kerstin?’

‘I was on loan. You know what it’s like with footballers who’re on loan, there’s something wrong with them. Now I’m not on loan any more.’

‘For good, though? How was being home in Gothenburg?’

‘This is home now, that much I’ve figured out. That’s probably all, though.’

‘But life is OK?’

‘Exactly. OK. No more, no less. Under control. Could wish for a little more . . .’

‘Sure, same here. I think I’m beginning to have a little midlife crisis. Is this all there is? Isn’t there more to it? You know.’

‘I think so.’

‘You’ve just got to make the best of the situation. We’re back together again, and now we’re going to smoothly wrap up what the media are already calling the Kvarnen Killing. Right?’

Kerstin Holm chuckled slightly and slipped a sachet of snus tobacco under her upper lip.

‘What’s this, then?’ said Hjelm, pointing.

‘A fresh start,’ said Kerstin Holm without batting an eyelid. She changed to another subject, one from the past. ‘How are the others? I’ve kept in touch with Gunnar the whole time, things are going well for him.’

‘Yeah. Ah yes, our friend Gunnar Nyberg . . . He was the only one who stayed with national CID, actually. A reward for refusing to take part in the final phase of the hunt for the Kentucky Killer. He ended up in the middle of the paedophile busts. The so-called Paedo University.’

‘I can just see him,’ Kerstin Holm smiled, leafing through her little notepad. ‘He’s just re-established contact with his kids and his one-year-old grandchild, and then he finds himself thrown head first into the world of Internet paedophiles. Like a steamroller.’

‘You’re right there.’

An image emerged in both their minds, doubtless almost identical. A snorting giant with a bandage around his head, hunting paedophiles with a blowtorch.

‘Yep,’ said Hjelm gloomily, ‘the rest of us got our little punishments. Bad blood always comes back round.’

‘We should never say that again.’

‘You’re right, never again.’

‘And the others?’

‘I haven’t had that much contact with them since the A-Unit split. I ended up on that God-awful loan to the local police. “Gunnar Löf’s telephone.” Punishment. Deep down, I think they held me responsible for the cock-up with the Kentucky Killer, but Jan-Olov was the scapegoat.’

‘Have you heard from him?’

‘No, he just disappeared. Involuntary retirement. Retired Detective Superintendent Jan-Olov Hultin. I think he even stopped playing football. That’s the end of the saga of Wooden Leg Hultin. Söderstedt and Norlander ended up with local CID’s violent crimes squad, and Chavez has been doing more training.’

‘At the Police College?’

‘Yep. Career plans rumbling on. Are there still superintendent courses? It’s something like that he’s doing if there are.’

‘There you go. And our room? The “Supreme Command Centre”?’

‘I think they’ve got admin staff in there now.’

They sat in silence for a while, observing one another. All they had experienced together . . . For a short moment, their hands met, pressing together. That was enough. A lot of work lay ahead of them. Kerstin Holm glanced through her notepad, Paul Hjelm leafed through the mediocre notes from the brief interrogations carried out by the night staff. Together, they looked at the little sketch of the Kvarnen bar.

‘They’re waiting out there,’ Kerstin said, sighing.

‘Yeah, yeah. The next man to be held to account,’ said Paul, also sighing.

2

SKY.

How long had it been since he had seen it?

In Sweden, there are fifty-seven prisons with over four thousand places. They are divided into six security classes, of which class F prisons are open institutions and classes A to E are closed. Of these, class A prisons are the most secure, with the most dangerous inmates, and in Sweden there are two: Hall and Kumla.

Now he was looking directly at the sky, actually looking, not from behind bars. He glanced back to the gates which had closed behind him, and for a moment it felt as though he had left his body and become one with the sky; he saw the flat landscape below him, the whole of southern Närke county with its square green, brown and golden fields. The prison looked like nothing more than two square fields among all the others.

He couldn't see the walls.

Dissolved by perspective.

Then he was down again.

Back to earth.

His feet on the ground.

He turned round once more. The walls were completely bare. Nothing behind them, nothing sticking up. Only walls. Grey. Grey walls.

He moved off. A smile playing at the corners of his mouth.

He walked towards the van that stood waiting. Ticking over. The sound of freedom. Freedom was a metallic-green van.

He stopped. Stood for a moment. Gentle, warm summer wind against his newly shaved cheeks. The sun. Morning heat. Asphalt quivering in the distance.

He glanced towards the van. Hands protruding from it. Waving. No sound yet. The sound didn't reach him. The movements within. Like a foetus. An egg about to hatch. Preserved movements. Future events. Many quick steps coming together at one point.

Step one. Wallet out. Pitiful banknotes. Three forty an hour basic pay. Also a small device which looked like a miniature calculator.

He took it out. Weighed it in his hand. Held it up towards the van.

The waving stopped. The sound disappeared before it had reached him. Future movements were put on hold.

A single button, slightly raised. Red. Almost luminous.

He pressed it, smiled faintly and climbed into the van.

A fiery blaze rose up behind the walls.

High, high up towards the sky.

No longer only walls behind him.

As the van gathered speed, the sound still hadn't reached him.

3

‘SO YOU’RE ON the committee for the Bajen Fans club?’

The man was in his thirties, and squinting as though the light in the darkened interrogation room was blinding. Behind his hangover, something else was going on. Watchfulness. The feeling that they would always be the accused.

‘Yes,’ he said eventually. ‘Committee member.’

‘What is the Bajen Fans club, exactly?’ Kerstin Holm asked.

‘Not a violent organisation if that’s what you’re getting at.’

‘No one’s suggesting that, not by any means. But a Hammarby supporter committed a terrible act of violence in a known Hammarby haunt, in the presence of at least one committee member from Bajen Fans. So it’s relevant for us to ask.’

He looked sullen. Remained silent. Glanced over to Hjelm, who was trying to look as though he was awake.

‘I know roughly what it is,’ said Hjelm. ‘An independent supporters’ group. Something that grew out of the Hammarby tribe in the early eighties.’

‘There you have it,’ said the man, with obvious pride. ‘We organise trips to the away games and our clubhouse on Grafikvägen is open on Thursdays and before every home game. We’re the ones making sure it *doesn’t* degenerate into violence. We stand for the only bloody bit of carnival colour in this monochrome country, and that’s why suspicion automatically falls on us.’

‘The *club* isn’t suspect. *You* are, Jonas Andersson from Enskede, *you*. You’re suspected of withholding the identity of the Kvarnen Killer.’

'The Kvarnen Killer . . .'

'The papers' name for you-very-well-know-who.'

Jonas Andersson from Enskede met Hjelm's eye without hesitation.

'I was bloody well sitting there pressing a jumper to the guy's mashed head. I knew right away it'd be us who'd get the blame.'

'Did you see the perpetrator?'

'No.'

'Where were you?'

'In a group by the wall, a little way from the door. It was crowded and there were loads of people and I didn't see anything.'

'You didn't see anything?'

Hjelm hung up his boots. It was the fourth time that day he had uttered those words. Kerstin Holm saw him throw in the towel and picked up the baton. To mix a few metaphors.

'Let's make it easy,' she said, pushing a sheet of paper in front of Jonas Andersson from Enskede. 'Here's a sketch of Kvarnen. When did you arrive, what did you see, and where?'

'I was standing here, against the wall where the door is, with about ten people who were aiming to grab some seats over towards the corner. We got there at quarter past nine and we'd already had a fair bit to drink. So we were standing there, pressed up against the wall.'

'OK. Had that group at the bar already arrived then?'

'The bar was bloody busy. I don't know. I swear I don't know. It was packed, rowdy and noisy. A haze of disappointment. A 2-2 draw with Kalmar, at home. Last place confirmed. Everyone was pretty unhappy. Then suddenly it went quiet for a few seconds, the silence building like a little hole in the crowd. Then he was lying there. With a mashed head. I ran over and helped that Smålander hold the jumper to his head. It was all soft inside.'

Really fucking nasty. The only thing I saw was a whole load of people rushing for the door.'

'A whole load of people?'

'Yeah, twenty people escaped for sure before the bouncers turned up. They'd probably been off doing drugs.'

'Twenty Hammarby fans?'

'Others, too. Some managed to get out even though the bouncers were there. Talked their way out, probably, but I didn't really see.'

'So what you saw was a flood of people heading for the exit?'

'I guess. Not what you'd expect. People normally react kind of like that group of dolled-up birds over in the corner did, screaming in panic and stuff like that. But quite a lot of people just rushed straight out.'

'OK. Can you try to take us through where everyone was, using the sketch?'

Jonas Andersson caught his breath and groaned. He started pointing vaguely at the sketch, beginning with the row of tables by the window.

'The group of girls at two tables over in the corner. Three of them panicked and got hysterical. The third table, nearest the door: a group of IT types. They were all still there afterwards. The next row: a group of Hammarby fans in the middle, next to some kid who was reading. Staring right down into his book. On one side of them, by the wall, a gang of Slavs. On the other side, nearest us, a group of bookish-looking students. Then on the row nearest the bar: the Hard Homo. Two couples taking up one table, and the Hard Homo squashed onto the same table. On the next table: some drunks. Closest to us, a bit of a mixture. Then the table next to the door, along the wall here, a tough-looking group, not exactly skinheads but almost. They cleared out, all apart from one.'

'This is getting complicated now. The tough guys, how many of them were there?'

‘We were standing next to them, tried talking to them, but they didn’t say a word, just sat there, pushed us if we got too close – one of them was even listening to music. Not the one who stayed behind, though. Slaphead. With a moustache. Five, there were five of them. One stayed behind.’

‘Who else? The Hard Homo? The drunks?’

‘They stayed. You’ve got their names. The Hard Homo is Sweden’s bravest fag. Always got his eye on someone from the tribe. We’re used to it now. He was just staring at that kid with the book, though. I didn’t recognise the drunks, but they were the usual. Alcoholics, culture and media types, the kind who love their artsy Södermalm area. Probably haven’t done a blind thing for culture these past thirty years.’

‘And next to the reader, you said “a gang of Slavs”?’

‘Yeah, three or four Slavs. Yugoslavs. They were talking. The guy with the book was sitting right next to them, he got pushed closer to them by the Hammarby tribe.’

‘How do you know they were Yugoslavs?’

‘They looked like they were. They disappeared, all of them.’

Kerstin Holm paused. Passed on the baton. Hjelm had returned. Recovered. He was ready again.

‘So that entire group of “three or four Slavs” rushed towards the exit as soon as Anders Lundström got the beer mug to the head?’

‘Yeah. There was something dodgy about them, that’s for sure.’

‘You saw a lot for someone who didn’t see anything,’ said Hjelm with a vague feeling of *déjà-vu*.

‘I’m on the committee,’ said Jonas Andersson, looking up. ‘I always try to keep an eye on what’s going on. I’m just really bloody sorry that I was focused on the wrong things. I want to get the bastard just as much as you. He’s ruined years of good work.’

'The drunks,' Paul Hjelm said carelessly to the four grizzled men dressed in worn-out corduroy jackets, each with flowing locks and greyish-white beards of various lengths.

'What do you mean?' said the one to the right.

'Pardon?' said the one to the left.

The two in the middle looked like they had been stuffed by an eager amateur taking a night class in taxidermy.

Hjelm pulled himself together and turned the tables.

'Did any of you gentlemen see anything of what the drunks by the bar in the Kvarnen were up to during the course of yesterday evening?'

'Unfortunately, at the time and place in question, we were deep in conversation about acutely important matters.'

'Dare I ask which important matters these were?'

'Of course you may dare,' said the one on the right. '*Quod erat demonstrandum.*'

'A self-answering question,' said the one on the left.

The two in the middle leaned gravely towards one another, as though the seams were about to burst and the stuffing come out.

'Let's be serious now,' said Paul Hjelm.

'We are the Friends of Vreeswijk, Cornelis Vreeswijk' said the one on the right. 'Sweden's finest balladeer. We were having our annual meeting.'

'We're trying to gain support for a Cornelis museum in the middle of Medborgarplatsen,' said the one on the left. 'The hope is that we'll be able to convince the Muslims to sing his "Agda the Hen" from the top of the minaret.'

'No, "Felicia, adieu",' exclaimed the second from the right.

'No, "Lasse small blues",' retorted the second from the left.

Following this, the duo in the middle fell silent.

'The multicultural society,' said the one on the right, with a visionary glint in his eye.

'Did you see anything at all?'

The duo in the middle came back to life.

“Grimaces . . .” said the mid-left soberly.

“ . . . and telegrams”,’ the mid-right finished for him equally soberly.

‘You saw grimaces and telegrams in Kvarnen yesterday evening?’ asked Paul Hjelm, starting to think about claiming his pension. But the bright orange envelope containing information on the new pension system which had recently come through his letter box at home just outside of Stockholm made the thought impossible. He had miscalculated by thousands of kronor per month. Like all other Swedes of his generation.

The duo in the middle leaned forward over the table and simultaneously interrupted his ill-humoured thoughts about his pension.

‘1966,’ said the mid-left confidently.

‘An unsurpassed single,’ said the mid-right equally confidently.

‘My moral sensibilities greatly enjoyed hearing such ambitious plans for partner swapping as those going on at the neighbouring table,’ said the one on the left, as the duo in the middle slumped back as though someone had let go of the strings.

‘And *my* moral sensibilities equally greatly enjoyed the multicultural conversation which was going on at the table beyond that,’ said the one on the right.

‘Can I just ask if you know why you’re here?’ said Hjelm, wondering where Kerstin had gone. ‘Fled the field’ was the term which came to mind.

‘You can, yes.’

‘Go right ahead.’

‘Do you know why you’re here?’ asked Paul Hjelm silkily.

‘Unfortunately not,’ said the one on the right. ‘We expect to be questioned by the police authorities every now and then. It’s in the nature of our societal role.’

‘Outsiders,’ said the one on the left solemnly, nodding.