



VINTAGE

# BAD INTENTIONS

KARIN FOSSUM

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# Bad Intentions

TRANSLATED  
FROM THE NORWEGIAN  
BY

Charlotte Barslund



Harvill *Secker*

LONDON

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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



# CHAPTER 1

The lake, which was commonly known as Dead Water, lay like a well between steep mountains, and anyone who tried to wade into it would sink up to their knees in its soft mud. On the shore, partially hidden by spruce trees sat a small log cabin. Axel Frimann was looking out of the window. It was almost midnight on 13 September and the moon cast a pale blue light across the water. There was something magical about it all. At any moment, Axel imagined, a water sprite might rise from the depths. Just as the image came to him, he thought he saw a ripple in the water as though something was about to surface. But nothing happened and a smile, which no one noticed, crossed his face.

He turned to the other two and suggested that they should go rowing. 'Have you seen the light?' he said. 'It's really cool.'

Philip Reilly was reading. He tossed his long hair.

'Yes, why not?' he said. 'A trip on the lake. What do you say, Jon?'

Jon Moreno was lost in the flames in the fireplace. The fire made him feel warm and dizzy. In his hand he held a blister pack of anti-anxiety pills and every four hours he pressed one through the foil and put it in his mouth.

Did he want to go out on the lake?

He looked at Axel and Reilly. There is something about their eyes, something evasive, he thought, but then again, I'm not quite myself, I'm ill, I'm taking medication, calm down, they're my friends, they just want what's best for me. But he did not want to go out on the lake, not in the

middle of the night in the cold moonlight. He did not trust himself completely. In here by the fire he felt safe, in here between the timber walls, in the company of his friends, because they were his friends, weren't they? He tried to catch Reilly's eye, but Reilly had got up and was fumbling with something on a shelf.

'It's important that you get some exercise,' Axel said. 'Sitting still only makes your anxiety worse. You need to get your blood circulating, get it delivering oxygen to your cells. So come on.'

Jon did not want to let them down. They were doing this for him, they wanted him to have some fun and he did not have much of that at the hospital. Only endless days where nothing ever happened, spent wandering up and down the corridors. They were smiling at him, encouraging him now, Axel with his dark eyes, Reilly with his grey ones. So he got up from the chair and put the blister pack in his pocket. He never went anywhere without it. He reached out for his mobile which lay on the table, but changed his mind. His anxiety hummed through his body like an electric current. Somewhere a demon is flicking a switch, on and off, on and off, he thought, and I can't breathe.

'Put your jacket on,' Axel said. 'It's chilly.'

Jon looked around for his jacket. He could not remember where he had put it, but Axel found it and brought it over. Reilly blew out the paraffin lamp and a sudden darkness descended upon them. Jon knelt down to lace up his boots. A knot and a bow followed by another knot. Axel and Reilly waited.

'What about the fire?' Jon asked.

'We won't be gone long, there's no danger,' Axel said. 'Come on.'

'Shouldn't we put the fireguard in front of it?'

Axel shrugged. 'All right.'

He disappeared into the kitchen and they heard him scrabbling. Then he returned with the fireguard and placed it in front of the fire. The cast-iron fireguard was decorated with two wolves baring their teeth.

Jon looked at the wolves and at his two friends.

'We ready to go then?' Axel said.

Reilly nodded. Jon stuck his hands in his pockets. Axel patted him on the shoulder. His hand was warm and comforting. Trust us, the hand said, we only want what's best for you, you're among friends.

It was Friday the 13th of September. They went out into the dark night and fetched the oars from the shed.

A narrow path led down to the shore of Dead Water.

## CHAPTER 2

The boat lay bottom up among the reeds, green and swollen like a pea pod. Axel and Reilly took hold of it and turned it over. It was filthy and slimy on the inside and by the light of the moon they saw a reptile scurry over the side and disappear.

‘A lizard,’ Axel remarked.

Jon stood with his hands in his jacket pockets. He stared at the boat with apprehension. He did not want to sit on the dirty thwarts. Axel read his mind and wiped them with the sleeve of his jacket.

‘Sit at the stern,’ he ordered him.

Obediently Jon stepped into the boat. He looked down at the black water. Perhaps there was no bottom, only mud that went on for ever. It might be good to let yourself sink, he thought, stop the fear flowing through your body for good. An explosion in his head, a burning sensation in his lungs and it would be all over. Axel and Reilly pushed off and the boat glided smoothly through the reeds. Jon felt it rock from side to side. He sat very still on the thwart, a skinny lad with small hands. His gaze wandered across the landscape, the steep mountains which surrounded the lake. Axel and Reilly each took an oar, fumbling at first until they found their rhythm. The boat gained speed.

‘Look at the light,’ Axel said.

The moonlight was cold and pale. Everything around them had acquired a metallic sheen. Reilly concentrated on rowing. The boat moved steadily across the lake, the water dripped like silver from the oars. Jon gripped the thwart

with both hands. He was surrounded by darkness and black water. His fear gnawed at him like a sharp tooth.

Axel broke the silence.

‘And what about your psychologist, Jon? Can you talk to him?’

‘Her,’ Jon corrected him. ‘Her name’s Hanna Wigert. Yes, I can talk to her.’

‘How old is she?’ Axel wanted to know.

‘Forty, I think,’ Jon said. ‘Besides, she’s a psychiatrist.’

‘Same thing, isn’t it?’ Axel declared.

‘No,’ Jon said. ‘It’s not the same thing.’

The men rowed with long, steady strokes.

‘And you talk about whatever you like?’ Axel probed.

Jon looked the other way. ‘I suppose so. Mostly about when I was little,’ he said. ‘But it wasn’t when I was little that things went wrong.’

He felt disoriented. In the moonlight Axel’s face was blue and white, and his eyes were black hollows.

‘But your dad left you,’ Axel said. ‘That couldn’t have been easy?’

Jon curled up on the thwart.

‘People lose each other all the time,’ he said, ‘and they carry on anyway. As I did. It was fine, we managed fine.’

Axel’s oar sliced like a knife through the water.

‘Well,’ he said, ‘this is fun. But we all know what this is really about. Don’t we, Jon?’

Everyone in the boat fell completely silent.

Jon’s head dropped, he was having trouble breathing. Hanna had told him what to do when this happened. Stand up, she had said, so that your lungs have room to expand. But he was scared of standing up in the boat so he stayed huddled up, struggling to breathe.

Reilly mumbled a verse he had learned by heart.

“If God were to punish men according to what they deserve, He would not leave on the back of the earth a single living creature: but He gives them respite for a stated Term: when their Term expires, verily God has in His sight all His Servants.”

‘Jesus,’ Axel said, ‘I’m impressed. You know your Bible.’

‘Koran, Axel, Koran.’

‘Same thing, isn’t it?’

‘No,’ Reilly said. ‘It’s not the same thing.’

Axel stuck his hand in his pocket and came up with a packet of Marlboro. The flame from the lighter made his face glow.

‘Why are we stopping?’ Jon asked.

‘Just felt like a cigarette,’ Axel replied.

Jon stared at his feet for a long time; he was feeling nauseous. He was far away from the cabin and even further away from the hospital. I’m in their way, he thought, I’m the weak link. I can’t do what they can. Axel’s eyes glow like his cigarette, those eyes will never leave me in peace.

Reilly stared at the bottom of the boat. He also seemed to be uncomfortable. He was too big overall, his arms and legs too long. His large hands rested on his knees. From the shore they heard a rustling sound, probably a bird taking off, Jon thought. Axel inhaled. Jon watched the repetitive movements. He followed the tip of Axel’s cigarette with his eyes. It had an almost hypnotic effect on him. Why aren’t they talking, he wondered, what are they waiting for? Are they trying to get rid of me, is that why they came to pick me up from the hospital, is that why they wanted to get me out here on the water, in the darkness? The fear crept up on him, but it was a ridiculous notion; they are my friends, he rebuked himself, sitting here

worrying like a little kid, what am I thinking? Pull yourself together, Jon Moreno.

But he was incapable of pulling himself together. If only he could take off like the bird and fly away from everything, away from anxiety and guilt. Like a sleepwalker he got up from the thwart. Then he fell over the side of the boat.

Everything happened softly and quietly. There were only a few splashes which swiftly turned into ripples. Then he was gone.

Reilly leapt up, the boat rocked. He went to jump in after him, but Axel pulled him back down.

‘Don’t!’ he shouted. ‘You won’t make it. You won’t get him back into the boat, your clothes will get waterlogged and you’ll both drown. Don’t do it!’

‘Jon can’t swim,’ Reilly screamed.

Axel held him tight. The boat settled down.

The water lay shiny and still.

They dragged the boat ashore.

Everything had happened so fast that Reilly had barely had time to think, but he was thinking now. And Jon must have thought, too, as he swallowed the cold, muddy water. While he sank to the bottom he must have been thinking that it was all over now. It was all over. But I’m still here, Reilly thought, and I wake up every day struggling to breathe. They were back inside the cabin. Axel lit the paraffin lamp. The fire had nearly gone out, only a few embers remained. He removed the fireguard with the two wolves and threw on a new log. It soon flared up. Reilly sat down on a chair. He slumped, his big hands resting on his thighs. It was not long before he rummaged around his inside pocket for a small bottle. It looked like the miniature shampoo bottles you find in hotels and it was filled with a

clear liquid. He poured a little into the cap and swallowed it.

‘What’s that you’re taking?’ Axel wanted to know.

‘An upper.’

‘And what’s an upper?’

Reilly closed his eyes.

‘Don’t worry about it. It’s a substance which naturally occurs in your brain. I’m merely raising the level.’

He sat still, waiting for the rush which was about to hit his head and body. Soon he would feel as light as a feather. A wave would lift him upwards and onwards, and the pain which was always with him would melt away like snow.

‘What are we going to do?’ Reilly asked.

Axel waited a long time before he replied.

‘I’ve got an idea,’ he said. ‘We do nothing right now. We wait until the morning, then we call. We say that Jon must have gone out while we were sleeping. That we woke up and found his room empty. It’s simpler like that. It’s the middle of the night and it would take them several hours to drive here. They can’t start looking for him now, anyway. What do you think, Reilly?’

Reilly shook his head. ‘We have to call,’ he said. ‘Who do we call, who will come?’

‘Divers,’ Axel said. ‘Police officers and people from the rescue services. And they might bring dogs. It’ll be teeming with people here. Also, I’ve been thinking about something,’ he added. ‘I don’t fancy telling Ingerid that we watched Jon drown. I don’t want to be a bigger part of this than I have to. It was Jon’s choice.’

‘But he didn’t have a choice,’ Reilly objected.

‘He was ill,’ Axel said.

Again there was silence in front of the fire. The rush carried Reilly off.



Besides, it suited him fine that Axel made the decision.

'We need to agree on some key points,' Axel said. 'I'm the first to wake up. I see that Jon has gone. I go straight to your room to tell you. I run around the forest calling out for him, but after one hour we give up and phone for help.'

'They'll want to know how Jon was,' Reilly said. 'If we noticed anything.'

'We didn't notice anything in particular. Jon was just as he always was. And we haven't found any letters. We need to roll out his sleeping bag, he didn't unpack it. We'll say that we went to bed at midnight and that we haven't seen him since.'

They went to the smallest bedroom, where Jon normally slept. Reilly rolled out the sleeping bag and arranged it on the bed. He pulled down the zip and rumped it up a bit. Axel put his hand on Reilly's shoulder.

'Let's go and sit down, have a beer.'

'He went straight down,' Reilly said.

'I know,' Axel replied.

They were back in front of the fire. Reilly met Axel's eyes in the flickering glow.

'You're finding this all very convenient, aren't you? That he's gone.'

Axel clenched his teeth. 'I think you should watch your mouth,' he hissed.

'I've noticed how you look at him sometimes,' Reilly said. 'I think Jon found you intimidating. I think he felt you were always judging him.'

'Your imagination is playing tricks on you,' Axel said. 'No more drugs now, they mess with your mind. You need to have a clear head tomorrow when the police turn up.'

They sat in silence for a while.

‘Why don’t we make the call now?’ Reilly said. ‘Why don’t we call for help right away?’

Axel got up and started wandering around the room. ‘Taking your own life is a choice you make alone,’ he said, ‘and I do not want to be literally a spectator of it.’

‘But we were spectators. And we’ll have to talk to his mum. She’ll ask all sorts of questions. She’ll blame us for not taking better care of him.’

‘That’s why I want to tell the police another version,’ Axel explained. ‘He went out on his own. Everything was beyond our control, we were asleep. But we’re obviously devastated. Do you think you can manage that?’

Reilly sent him a dark look.

‘Yes,’ he said. ‘I can do devastated.’

## CHAPTER 3

Reilly woke up early.

The light cut through a gap in the curtains and he shuddered as he recalled the night just past. He believed that Jon had died for him and Axel, that he had assumed the blame because he was the weakest, because he was the link that might break. But surely none of us deserves to die, he thought, we aren't bad people.

The day was coming through the window like a beam of light and it pinned him to the mattress. His first thought was to huddle against the wall, close his eyes and never get up, never deal with any of it. Instead he wriggled out of his sleeping bag, put on his old corduroy trousers and went into the living room. Axel Frimann was standing there staring out of the window.

'I went down to the lake,' he said.

'Why?'

'Just wanted to check that everything was all right.'

Reilly gave him a baffled look. His long hair was a tangled mess after the hours spent in bed. With his protruding chin and pointed nose he looked like a troll from a fairy tale.

'Nothing is all right.'

'Don't talk like that,' Axel said.

'But it's the truth.'

Axel sat down on the sofa and put his feet on the coffee table.

‘We’ve talked about the nature of truth before,’ he said. ‘Many things are true, but they still need to be left alone. Imagine if people always told the truth, it wouldn’t work. Society would fall apart. We need to start each day from scratch,’ he argued. ‘Build something that people can see, that they can cope with and believe in.’

‘You can’t speak for everyone,’ Reilly said. ‘Not everyone agrees with you.’

Axel gave him a challenging look.

‘Then think about Jon’s mum, when she finds out that she has lost him. Imagine how awful that will be. And imagine if she were to learn that her son was not the boy she thought he was and his memory was horribly tarnished. How would she cope with that? Don’t talk to me about truth: people can’t handle it. And they don’t want to hear it, either. Listen to me!’

He leapt to his feet and went out into the kitchen. Reilly heard him clattering with the coffee pot and pouring water from a bucket. He went back into his bedroom and put on a T-shirt. He went over to the window and stared down at Dead Water, which lay there like a green and black mirror. Perhaps a layer of mud had already settled on Jon’s skinny body and the divers would not find him with their torches. Jon was small and thin. Jon could be mistaken for a branch, a modest bump on the bottom.

He snapped out of his trance and left the cabin, but collapsed on the two large stones which served as the front steps.

Axel came outside.

‘Calm down,’ he said. ‘Jon had been ill for a long time. We could see it coming.’

Reilly remained sitting with his head buried in his hands, incapable of speech. He badly needed something to calm him down, but Axel had banned him from getting high

until it was all over and done with. The expression 'over and done with' echoed in his head as though they had committed a crime, as though they had personally pushed Jon out of the boat.

'Of course I've wondered about it,' Axel continued. 'I don't mind admitting it. What do you think Jon did at the hospital? He had therapy and he talked. He talked for four weeks. He was encouraged to open up about everything, the most intimate things that tormented him, that had led to his breakdown. The truth would have come out sooner or later. It would have taken us with it and we wouldn't be sitting here by the water now. Do you hear what I'm saying?'

'We don't know anything about what he did or how he would have handled it,' Reilly said. 'You're just guessing. People get through all sorts of things.'

Axel found a stick and began stabbing the ground in front of the steps.

'There's unlikely to be much fuss made over this,' he said. 'Jon had been admitted to Ladegården Psychiatric Hospital with anxiety and depression and he was on medication. The police will soon join the dots. Meanwhile, we need to cherish our freedom.'

'If that freedom is a torment,' Reilly said, 'then it's not worth much. You don't feel pain like other people,' he added.

He sat there staring into the forest. From where he was sitting the black spruce trees looked dark and mysterious. The light fell through the treetops in long, slanted columns. A pine had keeled over, roots spiking up dramatically amidst all the green like a claw. Then he spotted something between the trees, a flash of white. Axel followed his pointing hand.

'Someone's there,' Reilly said.

‘Oh, shut up,’ Axel replied.

Reilly panicked.

‘What if someone saw us last night? There are bound to be more cabins up here, someone could have watched us through binoculars. It was a full moon.’

‘The crows saw us,’ Axel said. ‘And they’re bound to tell the magpies and the lapwings, and before you know it will be all over the forest.’

Reilly paced up and down on his long legs.

‘Something’s moving,’ he stated. ‘In the heather over there, to the right of the pine. There’s definitely something moving.’

They crossed the area in front of the cabin, passed some scrub and peered in between the pines. Reilly sped up and started to run, his long hair fluttering like a horse’s mane. On the ground, at the foot of a pine, lay a dead cat. And next to the cat, four kittens. They too were dead, but a fifth was crawling through the heather trying to get away.

Something happened to Philip Reilly. The sight of the helpless kitten moved him. He had never seen anything so small, so doomed as the tiny creature. The events of last night had shaken him and he melted like butter in the sun.

‘Have you seen it?’ he said. ‘Poor thing.’

Axel watched in amazement as Reilly bent down and picked up the kitten, which was white with grey specks, with his big hands. From its toothless mouth a weak mewling could be heard. Its eyes were just about open, surprisingly blue, its tail a stump as thin as a piece of string.

‘I’ll take him inside,’ Reilly said. ‘He needs something to eat.’

Axel snapped his fingers in front of his face to rouse him.