



'A superb writer
of psychological
suspense'

New York Times

THE Murder OF Harriet Krohn

KARIN
FOSSUM

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About the Book

Charlo Torp has problems.

He's grieving for his late wife, he's lost his job, and gambling debts have alienated him from his teenage daughter. Desperate, his solution is to rob an elderly woman of her money and silverware. But Harriet Krohn fights back, and Charlo loses control.

Wracked with guilt, Charlo attempts to rebuild his life. But the police are catching up with him, and Inspector Konrad Sejer has never lost a case yet.

Told through the eyes of a killer, *The Murder of Harriet Krohn* poses the question: how far would you go to turn your life around, and could you live with yourself afterwards?

About the Author

Karin Fossum 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

Broken
I Can See in the Dark

The Inspector Sejer Series

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

The Murder of Harriet Krohn

Karin Fossum

Translated from the Norwegian by James
Anderson



Harvill Secker
LONDON

Dearest Julie,

Do you read my letters? I hope so, but I don't make any demands, I stay in the background. I've nothing to offer you and I know why you feel bitter. But I'm writing anyway - I am your father, after all. Writing has become a consolation, I find it soothing. You know how things stand, how I'm placed. Everyone's after me because I'm in debt, I feel like a hunted deer. I've no real friends any more, only lukewarm acquaintances. Do you remember Bjørnar Lind? He was my best friend, we'd known each other since we were boys, now he won't have anything to do with me. I owe him two hundred thousand kroner, and I don't know where I'm going to find that sort of money. I'm worried he'll put people on to me, worried about what they'll do if I can't pay. There are rumours that he's hiring someone to come after me. And you know what they do to people? They cut off their fingers with secateurs, I feel ill just thinking about it. Daily life is difficult. The dole isn't enough for necessities, it's impossible to keep up with bills and repayments.

If only there was light at the end of the tunnel! It's my fault all this has happened, and you mustn't worry about it, just look after yourself and be happy. Be young and fit and hopeful! But I am trying to deal with things in my own pathetic way. I have some initiative left even though I'm down on my knees. I've got plans. Dreams. I'm racking my brain frantically to find a solution. It spins and sifts and searches in all directions. When did we last see one another? It was on 27 May, do you remember? We argued. I was simply trying to describe how compulsive gambling is. The thrill of it, the addiction. You slammed the car door behind you, and I thought, I'll never see her again, no more chances for me. I drove home to Blomsgate with the feeling that I'd failed at everything. There must be a way out! Is it just that I can't find it? I stare into the future until I can't see anything any more, I pace to and fro in the house, I chew my lips until they bleed. I often think of your mother, I think

of her with sadness and remorse. All the things she had to put up with as a result of my obsession. It was so much easier then, she took care of us and organised everything. She was a kind of corrective influence. I can't grasp that she's gone. Once a week I visit her grave, it's so sad. Often, I just want to fall to the ground, dig right down, lift off the lid and take her back. Yesterday, I bought a plant and placed it in front of her gravestone - an erica, the one with the mass of reddish-mauve flowers that can deal with almost any conditions, a bit like heather. I tend her grave, you know, I trim and weed and water. Sometimes I look for signs, to see if, perhaps, you've been hanging about there. Have you? Do you stand there crying all alone? I like the idea of acknowledging that death comes to everyone. Perhaps some just fade, sitting there withering away, like my mother. In my worst moments I've viewed death as a way out, I've still got my father's old revolver. Forgive this candour, you are not responsible for me. I won't live to be very old, I'm so tired already. Just think, your grandmother is seventy-nine. But she just sits there immobile in her chair, only half alive. In a kind of slumber where nothing happens. But her features are still strong, like that prominent chin which you've inherited. As for me, I can't disappear in a doze, every cell within me vibrates. Blood courses through my body, my fingers quiver. At night I lie in the darkness listening, there are so many creaks and sighs in this old house, I don't get much sleep. Is it them? I think, has my final hour come? Today, I was at the Job Centre, but nobody wants a middle-aged man. And I've no decent references, either, nothing to show or boast about. Julie! I won't give up, even if I'm driven to drastic measures. I've spent every minute of every day searching for a solution. It all hinges on money I haven't got. Things I can't afford, plans I can't bring to fruition, debts I can't pay. Fear and shame are everywhere, in the terror of each ring at the doorbell, and in the long hours until sleep arrives, bringing the only solace

the day affords. Unless, that is, I dream of ruin. Life can't go on like this, it's sapping my strength too much. This constant fear, this thudding heart. My own miserable face in the mirror, the knowledge that I destroyed everything. Just because of a flaw. A penchant for gambling, chance and luck.

I'm not asking you for forgiveness, only an iota of understanding. I'm on a different course now. Gambling is no longer a pleasure to me, I think I could walk past a fruit machine with my money safe in my pocket. But there's something about those flashing lights, it's a kind of intoxication. Time stands still in front of the machine, and I'm fully alive. I take possession of it, control it, challenge it, the machine greets me with its lights and music, draws me in, tempts me. And I surrender myself to it, float away, begin to dream. This may seem like weakness to you, but it's only half the truth. If you knew how desperate I am, how far I'm prepared to go for us to be in contact again. I've no one else but you. I feel I've been driven back to my last bastion and I don't know how things will end. I'm friendless, jobless and childless. No, not childless, I still cling to you, even though you don't need me, don't want me. Maybe you've seen me occasionally, sitting in the Honda outside your school, hidden amongst the vehicles in the car park. I watch you emerge from the building with a crowd of friends, see you healthy and laughing and fooling around. I see your magnificent red hair, like a cloud around your face. Do I have any place at all in your life? I don't know if I could bear it if you cut me adrift forever. To grow old alone with no ties to anyone. Of all the misfortunes that can befall us, loneliness is the worst. Not even having someone to weep with in this wretched world. You are the only thing I'm proud of in my life. But you look thin, Julie, are you eating enough? You must wrap up better, it's winter now. Mum would have said the same if she'd seen you with nothing around your neck. You always used to listen to her. Do you remember

those happy days? When I still had my job at the car showroom. I was a good salesman, capable and reliable, and I remember the satisfaction of concluding each sale. The feeling of success, of being in the swing of things. Returning to you and Mum in the evenings, to the warmth and light. There's no light any more, my life is disappearing. While I write you feel so close. It's as if I'm holding your hand, I can't bear to let go. Listen to me! Think of me, let me feel that I'm part of your life! Are things all right with your flat, and at school? I dream of making some difference to you, of giving you what you want most of all. I don't believe in miracles, but I believe one can change one's own destiny, it's just a matter of willpower and imagination. Of endurance and courage. I also believe it comes at a price. As things stand now, I'd give anything, I've nothing to lose. Dark, fearful days are all that lie before me.

Chapter 1

A MAN IS walking through the darkness.

He is visible beneath the street lights for a few moments, then is swallowed up by shadow until he emerges again under the next light, as if his existence only flares up momentarily. That's how he experiences it, that's what his life is now. He comes to life and starts to glow, only to go out again, on and off like a hot, quivering fever. His fists are clenched in his pockets as he thrusts on through the darkness, but he arouses no interest. Nobody turns to look at him, he's an ordinary middle-aged man with thinning hair, and as he walks along he thinks, with something approaching amazement, that it's not visible from the outside. The thing I'm just about to do. How little people know. I'm moving in the midst of them, and look, they walk the streets immersed in their own affairs.

The faces coming towards him are expressionless. There's no happiness in them, no joy over life or the day, or the falling snowflakes. The life they own for just a brief span, and take for granted, glides past slowly as they dream of another life in another place. Of love, tenderness, all the things that human beings need. He walks on and on, he'd rather turn back, but he knows it's too late, he's come too far. He can barely comprehend how he's got to this point, but he pushes the thought away and allows himself to drift onwards, spurred by necessity and fear. He stares into the chasm that opens in front of him, it's bottomless. The leap scares him out of his wits, the leap is enticing. He curls his fingers inside his pockets, he's so fearful for them, he imagines the secateurs going through the thin skin, and the

blood spurting from the stumps. He feels faint. He's unable to banish the image. He must get to a different place, even if the name of that place is disaster. He bears a huge shame, a miserable life, he can't take any more, he must act now. Occasionally, he raises his eyes and peers at the unsuspecting passers-by. They can't see all the horror that's slowly growing inside him. Is this really happening? Isn't the town a set, isn't this a film? The facades seem like papier mâché and everyone else like extras. No, this is real; he clenches his fists, feels the muscles tightening. He's on the move now, he gets ready, it's as if he's being propelled along a track.

His lower lip is cut, he doesn't know when it happened, there's the sweet tang of blood in his mouth, he thinks it tastes good. Later, when it's all over, people will grieve, cover their eyes and condemn. Even though he can explain. He knows he can explain, step by step, about the weary way, about the great abyss beneath him, if he's given time. If they'll only listen to his story. But people haven't got time, they've got their own tales of hard luck; oh, his burden is so heavy, he's so alone! Such are his thoughts as he walks along the street, with his hands deep in his pockets, and his face turned to the slushy pavement.

He's of medium height and powerfully built, and he's wearing a green parka. The parka has a hood, which is gradually filling with snow. His face is wide, his eyes grey and close-set, not a handsome man, and not all that shy, either. A high forehead, a wide jaw and a strong, unshaven chin. He's wearing decent boots, but the leather is worn and leaking water, his toes are numb. He hardly notices, there's so much to think about. No, he daren't think at the moment, he empties his mind, turning himself into a purely purposeful organism that doesn't look back. He must reach his goal now, not allow fear to intervene. It surrounds him, lying there like a colourless gas; he hardly dares draw

breath. He passes a shop selling mirrors and catches a glimpse of his own face that makes him look away in horror. His face is so naked, his eyes deep in shadow. He keeps moving on, his figure strong and compact, his shoulders broad and round, and he walks with a resolute step. Each time his boots make contact with the pavement, the slush spurts in all directions with a sodden, slurping sound. Nothing can stop him. All the same, if I met someone now, he thinks, an old friend for example, we might make small talk or reminisce about the past. We might have a beer at The Dickens, and everything would be different. But no old friend appears. He has no friends, not any more, no work either; he's become reclusive, turned in on himself. He lives with fear and sorrow and worry. His world is small and mean. It's 7 November and sleet is falling. Great wet flakes. He lights a cigarette, inhales deeply, filling his lungs with smoke. It makes him cough, but he knows it will pass. Soon he catches sight of a Jet service station with its garish, neon-yellow signs. He gazes up at the large H&M posters. They cover the front of the block on his right. How strange, he thinks, that the buxom girl in the lacy underwear is naked on a bleak evening like this. She looks relaxed in spite of it all, though he is wet and chilled, but this is hardly something that troubles him. It's a fact he registers only vaguely, as if looking at himself from the outside. Soon he sees the door to the florist's. He slackens his pace at once. He makes his final approach peering furtively in through the shop window. He can't stop now, he's on that track, and before him is the plummeting slope that vanishes into darkness. At the same time he feels himself flinching, he feels shaken, he can't understand how it's happened, how he's come so close to the precipice. That before him lies a deceitful mission, a despicable purpose. Before *him*: good old Charlo. Charles Olav Torp. A perfectly ordinary man. A little unlucky perhaps, a little weak, but apart from that a thoroughly decent chap. Or is he a decent chap? He thinks

he is, clenches his teeth and pushes at the heavy door. It opens inwards. He hears the sound of a bell. Its delicate tinkle disturbs him. He would prefer to arrive soundlessly, unnoticed and unheard.

He stands in the middle of the shop. Immediately the smell of the place assails him, sweet and stupefying. It's too much, for an instant he feels giddy and has to take a sideways step to regain his balance. He hasn't eaten for a long time, did he forget? He can't remember any more. The day has passed in a fog, for him it's as if he's only now waking up on the edge of the abyss. His eyes take in the premises. It's like a mini-jungle of flowers and greenery, leaves and petals. He can make out artificial blooms and watering cans, plant food and leaf shine, wreaths of dried roses. An indescribable profusion of flowers. He reads their exotic names: chrysanthemum and erica, hibiscus and monstera. A young girl is standing behind the counter. She reminds him of his daughter Julie, but she isn't so beautiful because Julie is the loveliest, the best. His heart beats tenderly whenever he thinks of his daughter, but he also feels a gnawing pain, and his own betrayal hits him with its full horror.

He swallows and straightens and looks at the young girl once more; she's slender, her fair hair is in long plaits, and he notices her thin wrists, so amazingly pale and delicate. She's young, he thinks, and her bones are as pliable as a kitten's. She could probably do the splits or a backbend. Her skin is healthy and pink and almost unbelievably clear. Her eyes are lowered modestly. The floor is covered with flowers in blue and red plastic buckets. He can see roses, crimson and yellow, and other flowers whose names he doesn't know. He stands looking around diffidently with his hands in his pockets. For a moment he's overcome. He feels terribly exposed in the bright light, alone with this young girl who is still waiting. She's looking at him now, uncertain but receptive. She likes being there, likes her work, soon the

shop will close and she can go home to her little flat and a hot bath. Something nice to eat, perhaps, maybe something good on television. Or a long chat on the phone to a close friend. He doesn't know why, but he can tell that she's happy, that she's content with the way things are. Some people are content, he thinks, they must be or the world would stop, and the undergrowth would spring up and hide all traces of humanity. How beautiful, a bright green planet with no people, just a few grazing animals, and flapping, shrilling birds. The girl is thin, but she looks healthy. She probably eats only as much as she needs, he thinks, maybe she takes exercise and doesn't put on any weight. Or she's inherited the trait from a slim family.

He muses, kills time, feels that his heart is thumping tirelessly, and that his cheeks are hot, even though he's just been trudging the streets for an eternity, going round and round the town that's grey with sleet and mist. He stood on the river bank and stared down into the water, and considered that as a solution. To jump from the bank and allow himself to sink to the bottom. It would be quick, he thought, he'd see his life pass in front of his eyes. Inga Lill's illness, Julie's despair, his own sick mania for gambling. He pushes the thoughts away. It's all becoming real for him. What he'd pictured in his head for days and weeks, is now materialising. This is the first step. So harmless, so respectable, buying a bunch of flowers. The girl waits patiently, but she's becoming uneasy because he doesn't speak. She shifts her weight from one foot to the other, withdraws her hands then rests them on the counter once more. Her fingers are adorned with thin rings and her nails are painted red. She pushes her plaits over her shoulders, they are as bright and shiny as nylon rope, but a moment later they've fallen forward again and are hanging over her breasts. And he knows that when she gets into bed at night and takes the bands off, her hair will be fluffy and full after the plaiting. How young these girls are, he thinks, how

smooth, how translucent. They make him think of rice paper, porcelain and silk, they make him think of fragile glass. He can see her veins, a delicate network of green beneath the skin of her wrists. Life is pulsing there, with nutrition and oxygen and everything she needs to keep herself alive. He takes another deep breath. The light inside the shop, the powerful scent of roses and the cloying heat is almost overpowering. He sees stars. He feels his pulse rise and clenches his fists hard, he feels the nails pressing into his skin. Pain, he thinks, this is really happening. No, nothing has happened, not yet, but time is moving on, and sooner or later I'll get there. When I do, will it be awful? The girl behind the counter makes another attempt, she smiles pleasantly, but he doesn't return the smile. His face is immobile. He knows that he ought to smile, so that he'll seem like an ordinary customer, a man about to do something gratifying. Buy a bunch of flowers. But he's no ordinary customer and this is not enjoyable.

He approaches the counter hesitantly, his sturdy body moving with a rolling gait. He's uncertain about his voice as he hasn't used it for a while, so he puts some extra force behind it.

'I want a mixed bunch,' he says, and the loudness of his own words makes him start. My feet are wet, he thinks, my boots aren't watertight. Cold perspiration is trickling down my back, but my cheeks are boiling hot. I'm not certain this is real. Shouldn't it feel different, shouldn't I feel more present within myself? I'm having so many strange thoughts. Am I losing control? No, I'm focused, I'm secure. I've made a plan and I'm going to stick to it. His chain of thought is interrupted by the girl speaking.

'Is it a special occasion?' she's asking.

The voice is sweet and childish, slightly put on; she's making herself sound younger than she is, protecting herself, so that he'll treat her gently. It's what women do, and he forgives her for it, but only because she's young.

Grown-up women should behave like grown-ups, he can't abide the same affectation in older women, making the most of their reputation as the weaker sex, when they're really tough, resilient and clever, and more calculating than men. It makes him think of Inga Lill. She did it frequently, especially in the beginning. She would make her voice sugary sweet, ingratiating herself and hiding behind all that femininity. It made him feel boorish because he was simple and direct. Inga Lill, you're dead now, you don't know what's happening, and thank God for that. I'm losing the plot, he realises, I'm getting hung up on details; I must get to the point soon. How old is she? he asks himself, and studies the girl, could she be eighteen? She's older than Julie, who's sixteen. It doesn't matter, I don't know her, we won't ever see each other again. They've got so many customers here, and she'll remember hardly any of them because she's young and lives like all young girls, in a dream for much of the day, a dream of all the wonderful things in store for her.

She pulls up her sleeves and comes out to stand amongst the flowers.

Her jumper is tight-fitting and deep red; she's like a flower, a slender tulip, fresh, taut and vivid. Oh yes, it's a special occasion all right. Good God, if only she knew! But he doesn't want to speak, doesn't want to reveal more of himself than necessary. Buying flowers is a normal daily activity and can hardly be linked to the other thing he'll be doing later on. What is it he's about to do? Where will it end? He doesn't know. He's heading for the edge of the precipice to find a solution. A transition to something else. He looks round the place. The business has a good reputation. A large number of customers come in every day, he imagines a steady stream of people in and out. An infinite number of faces, an infinite number of orders, bouquets of many colours. He'll hardly stand out in his green parka. He's careful to lower his eyes, drawing the

girl's attention away from himself. What blooms there are in the large buckets! He can barely believe they emerge from the damp, black earth. To earth shall you return, he thinks, and out of the earth come the flowers. Dandelions, or nettles. It's precisely the way it should be: death isn't as bad as its reputation, on that point he's quite decided. The girl waits patiently. She's a floral designer. She has professional pride. She's an artist with flowers. She can't just throw something together, any old mixture, it's all about creating a composition, about shape and colour and scent, she never makes two bouquets the same. She's got her own signature, but she needs something to get her started. A little inspiration, an idea. It's not forthcoming. Charlo is taciturn and uncooperative.

'For a lady?' she probes. She notes his unwillingness, she can't comprehend it, and it makes her feel uncomfortable. He seems disinterested, as if he's running an errand for someone, he seems awkward and nervy. He appears to be pouring sweat, his body swaying gently, his jaw clenched. Perhaps he's going to visit someone who's ill, she thinks. You never can tell.

Charlo nods without meeting her eyes. But then he begins to realise that if he's helpful and pliant, he'll be able to leave the shop sooner. He must clear his head now, he mustn't become preoccupied, he's got to see the plan through. My nerves, he thinks, are as taut as wires. He knew it would be this way. Once more he focuses on his objective.

'Yes,' he says, 'for a lady.' Again his voice has too much of a bark about it, and on a sudden whim, which he feels is wise, he adds: 'It's her birthday.'

Relieved, the florist's assistant begins working. Everything falls into place and the slight frame gathers itself. The shoulders relax, the delicate fingers pick up a pair of tongs, she bends over the buckets and picks out the flowers, one by one. Her fingers hold the stalks so gently. She seems to have a plan, there's no more hesitating, no uncertainty. Her

eyes survey the buckets, it's a professional gaze, self-assured now. White lilies, blue anemones, sweet peas and roses. Slowly, a plump, pastel spray takes shape in her hands. She begins in the centre of the bunch with a lily, around which the other flowers cluster, nodding and dipping, but still held firm, each flower protecting and supporting the other; it's an art. He watches this, he becomes deeply fascinated and falls in love with what's being created, but shivers when he recalls that the flowers are to serve an evil purpose.

He stands waiting edgily. His heart is thudding hard under his parka, he wants to pacify it but can't, his heart won't listen to him any more. Oh, well, he thinks, let it beat as much as it wants, I've still got a mind, and that's working all right. I'm the one who decides, I'm the one who orders my body to do things. It's still my decision. He sighs, so heavily that she hears and glances up. She's wise to him, she knows that something's afoot, but she can't interpret the meaning of his behaviour. Instinctively, she retreats into her craft, the thing she knows. Arranging flowers. Charlo breathes easily again. Pull yourself together, says the voice inside him, nothing has happened, not yet. Nobody's got anything on you. You can still turn back, you can pull out and life will go on, go on until death. He throws quick glances at the bouquet, his thoughts wander far away again, he's only half there. He's a cipher, a nobody; now at last he wants to set himself free. Mentally he thinks he knows something about how the whole thing will come off. He's been through it again and again. He'll take charge of the moment, he'll direct all that takes place. There is no room for unforeseen circumstances, he brushes them hastily aside. He stares out of the window, sees that sleet is still falling fast. Tracks, he thinks, and feels in his pockets. He wants to check that he's remembered everything. He has; he's thought of the whole lot, he's thought about it for weeks. He's practised mentally, and sometimes, in his sleep, he's cried out in fear.

The bouquet grows.

The shop bell chimes brightly in the silence, and he starts. A woman enters dressed in a green coat with a black fur collar, her shoulders covered in sleet. She brushes it off with a hand in a beige-coloured glove and regards him with hard, painted eyes. She's weighing him up, isn't she? A sharp old trout who takes everything in, Charlo thinks. All the details, a personal trait that she may later be able to describe. But he has no personal traits, he's sure he hasn't, and he simmers down again. She leans over one of the buckets, draws out a rose and studies the stalk intently. He quickly turns his face away. The face that feels so large, as if it's hanging there, proclaiming itself like a pennant. He stands looking out at the sleet. It's most visible under the streetlights, a thick, greyish-white drift cutting across the darkness. He feels miserable. Because of his terrible destiny. I don't deserve this, he thinks, I'm a kind-hearted man. But dread destroys the soul. He's in the process of losing himself. The girl works on. Will she never be finished? The bouquet is big and becoming expensive. He thinks about the time that's passing, how he's standing in here exposed and susceptible. About how it could be dangerous for him. From now on everything will be dangerous. He's prepared for this fear. It's physical, but he can keep it at bay if he can control his breathing.

'The bouquet's two hundred and fifty kroner at the moment,' the assistant says. She looks up at him, but just as quickly looks away, still uncertain because of his sullenness.

He nods and says: 'That's fine.' In a clumsy attempt at sociability, he adds, 'It looks lovely.'

She sends him a smile of relief. There is something nice about him after all, she thinks, and rejoices.

I ought to have chatted and smiled, Charlo thinks. Charmed her, because I can when I want to. Then she would have forgotten me with all the others.

‘Will it be long before they’re put in water?’ she asks.

Now her voice is brighter, more open.

He stands there cogitating dumbly. Will they be put in water at all? He doesn’t know. It’s coming up to eight o’clock and he realises the shop will shut in a few minutes. He’ll have to wait a while before setting his plan in motion. Until the traffic dies down in the streets. Until people have got home and he can wander past the houses unseen.

‘About an hour or two,’ he replies, and watches as she packs the stems in damp tissue. She wraps them in cellophane, which crackles ominously, then in white paper.

Charlo has turned away once more, and when he turns back, he sees that she’s putting the bouquet in a cone-shaped carrier bag. The bag has the words ‘Tina’s Flowers’ prominently printed on it in blue and red. He gets out his wallet to pay, his hands shaking slightly. The girl avoids looking at him and instead stares at his wallet, which is brown and tattered. Her young, alert eyes notice that the zip is broken, the leather is worn and the seams are gaping. She sees the small red-and-white sticker announcing that he’s a blood donor. He pays, replaces his wallet and gives her a little smile. She smiles back, noticing that his left front tooth is chipped, and that he’s never bothered to repair it. It makes his smile rather charming. Charlo glances quickly at the elderly woman who’s waiting. The snow on her shoulders has melted, the wet patches shine in the light. She looks at the time, she’s in a hurry and marches up to the counter. Her nose is sharp and red in her long, lean face. Deep creases at the corners of her mouth, blue bags under her eyes. He knows that he’ll always remember this face. At last he can leave. The door bangs, the bell jingles.

The air outside seems strangely fresh. He walks through the streets carrying the bag. He’s visible under a streetlight for a few seconds, gets swallowed up by darkness, only to become visible again under the next. The bag swings in his hand. All that trouble she went to over the bouquet, all that

skill and experience, all to no purpose. The flowers are merely an entry ticket. That's how he'll get into the house.
And right into Harriet Krohn's kitchen.

Chapter 2

SHE LIVES IN Fredboesgate, Hamsund.

It's a seventeen-kilometre drive. Harriet's house is one of a cluster of listed timber buildings dating from the middle of the nineteenth century, and is situated in a very quiet street. They are small, pretty wooden houses with beautifully framed windows. Most of the inhabitants are elderly, and most are well off. In summer, the frontages are decorated with flourishing window boxes full of geraniums, nasturtiums and marguerites. The house is only a few minutes away from the railway station; there are twelve houses in all, six on each side of the street. Harriet lives in number four. The house is lichen-green, the sills and bargeboards are painted yellow.

Charlo approaches Hamsund. It's still sleeting heavily, and he concentrates hard on keeping the car on the road, he doesn't want to end up in the ditch, not tonight. On the seat next to him is an old Husqvarna revolver, which isn't loaded. It's only for show, he thinks, she won't be uncooperative, she won't dare to be, she's elderly. He also has a pair of black leather gloves and a cotton bag for anything he finds of value. It is rolled up in his pocket. He's on the E134, driving by the river, which is surging along on his left, rough and black. He knows the river is full of salmon, but he's never bothered to fish. When he thinks about fishing, he remembers his boyhood. He remembers his father, who always wanted to go fishing, while he sat there getting bored, his rod dipping lethargically over the water. Fishing was too slow for him, too dull. This was something he never articulated, he didn't want to hurt his father, he didn't want

to complain. I used to be a considerate boy then, he thinks. And what am I thinking about my father for, he's dead now and at peace. People pass away, just as I'll pass away, and that's good. It certainly is good, he decides, and squints at the road ahead.

The markings in the middle of the carriageway are only just visible, the sleet is settling like grey porridge on the tarmac, the windscreen wipers struggle with the slush. But the Honda doesn't let him down, the Honda is matchless and reliable. He's already worked out a good place to park. He'll do the last bit on foot, it's only a couple of hundred metres. There's an old, derelict hotel at Hamsund, and a car can be parked in the courtyard there, out of sight of the street. He's aware that the car could give him away, and that he must conceal it. He turns to the right and on to the R35, catches sight of Hamsund church, which is floodlit, and its gravestones. He passes an Opel showroom, a couple of shopping centres, and cruises slowly past the railway station on his right. It's a really elegant building, like a great layer cake covered with icing. How strange, he thinks, that his mind is running on cakes; everything seems odd this evening, as if he's playing a part in a film. There's hardly any traffic. People are indoors.

Now he sees the hotel, it's called The Fredly. A handsome white timber building with much fine ornamentation and dark, unseeing windows. He turns into the courtyard and parks; there are no other cars there. A notice on the wall facing him announces that unauthorised vehicles will be towed away, but he knows that no one will come here tonight, everyone is sheltering from the weather. Then he hears a noise. A sort of click and something ringing faintly, and he heaves himself round in his seat and looks through the windows. Is someone coming after all? Has someone seen the car? Again, he has an acute attack of nerves. I don't have to do this, he mumbles into the darkness. I'm not quite myself. Can't anybody stop me, isn't there another