

A GANGSTER IS MURDERED

A PROFESSOR IS EXECUTED

EIGHT WOMEN DISAPPEAR

THREE CASES. ONE TEAM OF DETECTIVES

ARNE DAHL **EUROPA BLUES**



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About the Book

A Greek gangster arrives in Stockholm, only to be murdered in a macabre fashion at Skansen zoo, his body consumed by animals.

As the Intercrime Unit - a team dedicated to solving international violent crime - investigate what brought him to Sweden, eight Eastern European women vanish from a refugee centre outside of the city while an elderly professor, the tattooed numbers on his arm hinting at his terrible past, is executed at the Jewish cemetery.

Three cases, one team of detectives and an investigation that will take them across Europe and back through history as they desperately search for answers, and the identities of their killers.

About the Author

Arne Dahl is an award-winning Swedish crime writer and literary critic whose work has been translated into over twenty languages. *Europa Blues* won the German Crime Writing Award, which has also been won by authors including Ian Rankin, James Ellroy and John le Carré, while the Swedish adaptations of the ten book Intercrime series have been broadcast 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

Europa Blues

Arne Dahl

Translated from the Swedish
by Alice Menzies



Harvill Secker
LONDON

1

IT WAS AN evening in early May. It was completely still.

Not the slightest of breezes was blowing in over the waters of Saltsjön. Out on Kastellholm, the castle's flag was hanging limp. The toothed facades of Skeppsbron were like a painted backdrop in the distance. There wasn't a flutter on the flags over on Stadsgården, not a treetop swaying over on Fjällgatan, and up by Mosebacke, not even the leaves were moving an inch. The only thing distinguishing the dark waters of the Beckholmssund from a mirror was a shifting, rainbow-coloured slick of oil.

For a moment, the young man's reflection was framed by a nearly perfect concentric rainbow, *as though through a telescopic sight*, but then the circle dispersed and flowed calmly on towards the Beckholm bridge, its colour changing as it moved. The young man brushed off the momentary unease which passed through him and snorted the first line of coke.

He leaned back on the park bench, extending his arms along the back rest and raising his face to the cloudless sky, which was darkening with discernible speed. He didn't feel any different. Just the same self-assured calmness which had, for that split second, been disturbed. With a defiant smile, he looked down at the playing card lying next to him on the bench. The queen of spades. With a second line of coke waiting for him.

He unrolled the note and licked up the residue of the white powder. Then he held it out and looked at it. One thousand kronor. A Swedish thousand-kronor note. An old man with a beard. He would get bored of the sight of him

over the next few months, he knew that much. He rolled the old man back up again and carefully lifted the queen of spades from the bench. He felt doubly brave, doubly strong. To be sitting on a public bench after just a few weeks in a new town – in a new country, at that – and snorting cocaine was ballsy enough, but it was doubly so with the risk of a sudden breeze blowing away his entire high.

Though the evening was completely still.

These days, it took two lines for him to feel anything. He didn't care that it would soon take three, then four, then five, and he held the rolled-up old bloke above the delights of the queen of spades and snorted his way to paradise.

He could feel it now. Though not with the same kind of force as before, that baseball bat to the jaw, it was more creeping; an immediate, insatiable desire for more.

The high grew slowly but surely, twisting his field of vision sideways, leaning slightly, but not producing any gusts of wind. The dusky city was still completely still, it looked more like a postcard. Lights had started to come on in some of the buildings here and there, the headlights of cars slipping silently by in the distance, and the slightly decayed smell of early spring suddenly grew stronger until it became a sewer, the dung of a couple of enormous giraffes looming over him amid the distorted sound of the piercing, echoing shrieks of children. He hated animals. They scared him; ever since he was a child he had hated them. And now these monstrous, stinking, braying giraffes – like something from a nightmare. A brief wave of panic rushed through him before he realised that the giraffes were nothing more than a couple of large shipyard cranes and that the sound of children was coming from the nearby amusement park. The stench of giraffe dung receded; the air smelled like early spring once more.

Time passed. A lot of time. Unknown time. He was elsewhere, in another time. The high's time. An unknown prehistoric time.

It was starting to rumble within him. He stood up and regarded the city the same way he would an enemy. Stockholm, he thought, clenching his fist. You ruthlessly beautiful dwarf of a big city. It would be so easy to conquer, he thought, raising his fist towards the capital, as though he was the first ever to have done so.

He turned around in the ever deepening twilight. His vision was still slightly askew, the sounds and smells still slightly warped. Not a person in sight. He hadn't seen a single person the entire time he had been there. But, despite that, he could feel a kind of presence. Faint, like a mirage. Something that seemed to be moving just outside of his field of vision. He shook off the feeling. Those weren't the thoughts of a man about to conquer a city.

He picked up the queen of spades from the bench, took pleasure in licking her clean, and then placed her in his inner pocket, closest to his heart. He patted the chest of his thin, pale pink jacket. He unrolled the thousand-kronor note which had been glued to his hand during the immeasurable period of his high. Again, he licked up the last of the white powder and then demonstratively ripped the note into long tendrils which he dropped to the ground. They didn't move an inch. The night was completely still.

When he started moving, he made a clinking sound. He always did. For him, wealth was still measured by the thickness of the gold chain around his neck. People should be able to *hear* his success.

He was surprised to find Vattugränd, whose name he strenuously spelled his way through from the street sign, completely deserted. Didn't the Swedes go out at night? It was then he felt how cold it was. And almost pitch black. Completely quiet. Not a single joyful shout from the children in the amusement park.

How long had he been sitting down there by the water, lost deep within his high?

Something swept past his feet. For a moment, he thought they were snakes slinking by. Animals. A brief panic.

Then he saw what it was.

Strips of a thousand-kronor note.

He turned around. There were geese on Saltsjön. The ice-cold wind swept straight through him. The thousand-kronor snakes rushed off towards Djurgårdsstaden.

That was when he felt the strange presence again. It was nothing. Nothing at all. And yet there it was. An ice-cold presence. An icy wind straight through the soul. And yet not at all. As though it was always hovering at the precise point where his vision didn't reach.

He came up onto the main road. Still not a person in sight. Not a vehicle. He crossed the street and entered the forest. It felt like a forest, anyway. Trees everywhere. And the presence was suddenly much stronger. An owl hooted.

An owl? Animals, he thought.

And then, out of the corner of his eye, he saw a shadow move behind a tree. Followed by another.

He stood still. The owl hooted again. Minerva, he thought. Ancient mythology which had been drummed into him during his childhood in the poor quarter of Athens.

Minerva, the goddess of wisdom. Athena's name once she had been stolen by the Romans.

He paused for a moment, trying to be like Athena. Trying to be wise.

Is this really happening? Am I not just imagining these almost imperceptible movements? And why do I feel scared? Haven't I stood face-to-face with crazy addicts in the past, taken them down with a few quick moves? I rule an empire. What exactly am I afraid of?

But then his terror materialised. In some ways, it felt better. When a branch broke behind a tree, the noise overpowering the strengthening wind, he knew that they were there. Somehow, it was comforting. A confirmation. He couldn't see them, but he picked up the pace.

It was almost pitch black now and it felt as though he was running through an ancient forest. Branches were whipping at him. His thick gold chain was jingling and clinking like a cowbell.

Animals, he thought, hurling himself over the road. Not a car in sight. It was as though the world had ceased to exist. Just him and some beings he didn't understand.

More forest. Trees everywhere. The wind whistling through him. The icy wind. Shadows were shifting at the edge of his vision. Ancient beings, he thought, crossing a narrow road and running straight into a fine-meshed steel fence. He clambered up onto it and it swayed beneath him. He climbed and climbed. His fingers slipped. Not a sound other than the wind. Wait, there: the owl. Piercing. A distorted owl. A terrible sound, joining forces with the incessant wind.

An ancient cry.

The razor-sharp mesh ripped his fingertips to shreds. The presence was everywhere. Darker shadows dancing in the darkness.

He grabbed his pistol from his shoulder holster. He hung from the fence with one hand and shot with the other. Shooting in all directions. Indiscriminately. Silent shots out into the ancient forest. No return fire. The shifting continued unabated around him. Unchanged. Undaunted. Uncontrollable.

He managed to shove the pistol back into its holster, a couple of shots left, one last safety measure, and the closeness of the shadows gave him superhuman powers, at least that's what he thought as he heaved himself upwards and outwards and grabbed hold of the barbed wire at the top of the fence.

Superhuman powers, he thought with an ironic smile, working the metal barbs out of his hands and swinging over the top.

Now then, he thought as he hopped down into the greenery on the other side of the fence, get over that if you

can.

And they could. He immediately felt their presence. He clambered up out of the shrubbery where he had landed and found himself staring straight into a pair of slanted, yellow eyes. He cried out. Pointed ears pricked up above the eyes and a row of razor-sharp teeth appeared beneath. An animal, he thought, throwing himself to one side. Straight into another similar animal. The same slanted, yellowish eyes seeing a completely different world to the one he was seeing. Ancient eyes. As he staggered on through the woodland, suddenly he was back before the ice age.

Wolves, it occurred to him. My God, weren't they wolves?

What kind of city is this? his mind was screaming. How the hell can this be a major European city?

He jingled. His path was a roaring motorway. He snatched at his thick gold chain and tore it off, hurling it away into the vegetation. Straight out into nature.

Then he reached a wall and he grabbed it with his bloody, throbbing fingertips, pain pulsing through his entire body; like a mountain climber he clambered straight up the vertical wall, heaving himself up and over it, over a fence on top, and beneath, nature itself seemed to be wrapped up in shifting shadows, the trees seemed to be moving, the forest drawing closer, the motionless wolves part of the movement with their entire collective, ancient indifference. He reached for his pistol and shot in the direction of the animals, towards the whole shadowy nature. Nothing changed. Other than his pistol clicking. He threw it towards the shadows. His entire field of vision was warped. He didn't know what it hit.

Suddenly, he found himself on a road. Asphalt. Finally asphalt. He hurled himself up a slope, and all around, animals were staring at him, dark and indifferent, and the stench and the noise filled the whining air and he tried to find a name for these shifting shadow beings which were following him and which never never never seemed to give up.

Names can be calming.

Furies, he thought as he ran. Gorgons, harpies. No, not quite. No, what were they called? Goddesses of vengeance?

Suddenly, he realised that that was exactly what they were. That they really were the goddesses of vengeance. Irrepressible primordial deities. Female revenge. Though what was their name? In the midst of the insanity, he searched for a name.

Names can be calming.

He ran and ran but it was as though he wasn't getting anywhere. He was running on a treadmill, on sticky asphalt. And they were there, they materialised, they kept shifting but became bodies. Bodies. He thought he could see them. He fell. Was felled.

He felt himself being hoisted up. It was pitch black all around him. Ancient darkness. The ice-cold wind was whistling. His body was spinning. Or was it? He didn't know. Suddenly, he didn't know a thing. Suddenly, everything was a nameless, structureless chaos. All he was doing was looking for a name. A name for these mystical beings. He wanted to know who was killing him.

Then he saw a face. Maybe it was a face. Maybe it was many. Female faces. Goddesses of revenge.

He was spinning. Everything was upside down. He could see the moon peeping through between his feet. He saw the stars burst out into blinding song. And he saw the darkness growing darker.

Then he saw a face. It was upside down. It was a woman who was all women he had ever hurt, raped, abused, degraded. It was a woman who was all women who became an animal who became a woman who became an animal. A cute little weaselly snout which cracked into an enormous, murderous grin. It bit down on his face and he could feel his bloody fingertips dancing on the soft ground and he felt a pain beyond all comprehension, one which made the animal's attack – the animal which had just made off with

his cheek – feel more like a caress. He understood nothing, absolutely nothing.

Other than that he was dying.

Dying of pure pain.

And then, with a last burst of satisfaction, he remembered the name of the shadowy figures.

Earth seeping into his bloody fingertips was the last thing he felt.

It calmed him.

2

THE OLD FISHERMAN had seen a lot. In actual fact, he thought he had seen it *all*. But that evening as he packed up the watermelon stall which had long since replaced his fishing nets, he was forced to admit that there were still some surprises left. Even that had surprised him. Life – and above all tourism – still had plenty of madness to offer. It felt ... comforting. A sign that life wasn't quite over yet.

It had been years since the old fisherman had first realised that the money he could earn selling watermelons to tourists vastly exceeded the amount his nets could bring in. And that it required much less effort.

This particular fisherman wasn't especially keen on effort, which any fisherman worth his salt probably should be.

He looked out over the Ligurian Sea, rising and falling in the spring evening like it was enjoying it just as much as the casual observer. The old fisherman's gaze wandered up towards the wooded slopes surrounding the little town and then on towards the walls ringing the old town, which had once been an Etruscan harbour. Not that the old fisherman knew anything about that. But what he did know, as he let the pine-scented sea air fill his lungs, was that Castiglione della Pescaia was his home and that he was happy there.

He also knew that today he had been surprised for the first time in a long, long while.

It had all started relatively harmlessly. With his slightly darkened vision, he had spotted a blue-and-white parasol in the middle of the beach on which the majority of sun worshippers were lapping up the spring sunshine with as little protection as they could. But under the parasol, three

children of different ages had been sitting, each of them chalk white, their bodies as pale as their hair. Another had appeared and sat down beneath it, followed by a woman holding another small child by the hand. Six utterly chalk-white people were cramped together beneath the parasol, sharing the little circle of shadow it was casting down onto the moderately sun-drenched beach.

Fascinated by the strange sight, the old fisherman had forgotten all about his business for a moment and heard, as though in the distance:

'Cinque cocomeri, per favore.'

His surprise at the strange family beneath the blue-and-white parasol was compounded by his surprise at this enormous order – and was given yet another boost at the sight of the customer's good-natured smile.

It belonged to a thin, utterly chalk-white man dressed in a loose linen suit and bizarre sun hat with a bright yellow Pikachu on it.

Despite the strange pronunciation, his order had been perfectly clear. If somewhat absurd.

'Cinque?' the old fisherman exclaimed.

'Cinque,' the chalk-white man nodded, taking the watermelons and staggering like a drunk tightrope-walker along the beach, clutching them in his arms. One by one, they dropped down into the sand by the parasol, like enormous seeds being planted by a giant. The chalk-white man practically threw himself into the shade, as though he had been wandering lost in a radioactive area and finally come across a protective safe zone.

The old fisherman wondered for a moment how five watermelons could be divided between seven people. Then he asked himself the inevitable question:

Why travel to Italy, to the Tuscan coast, to Maremma, to Castiglione della Pescaia, *if you couldn't bear the sun?*

Not even Arto Söderstedt knew quite what to say to that. 'Beauty' wasn't really a satisfactory answer for taking five

children out of school during an important few weeks in spring. 'Peace' wasn't quite enough of a reason for two adults to take months off from their jobs in the public sector either, particularly when, as with his wife, Anja, you were a tax inspector and the self-assessments had just come flooding in.

So, of course, his conscience was there, picking holes in both the 'beauty' and 'peace' arguments. The only thing his conscience hadn't reached was his own situation. Arto Söderstedt didn't feel the slightest bit guilty at having temporarily left the police corps.

The A-Unit, or the National Criminal Investigation Department's Special Unit for Violent Crimes of an International Nature, had certainly been busy over the past year, but since the Sickla Slaughter case had reached its peculiar conclusion, the big, all-consuming cases had been noticeable in their absence. They had come extremely close to a disaster of huge international proportions during the Sickla case. But that was almost a year ago now, and time does have a tendency to heal old wounds.

And so when the money came pouring in like manna from heaven, Arto Söderstedt didn't hesitate for a second.

Besides, he also felt *burnt out*, without quite understanding what that meant. Everyone was *burnt out* nowadays, everyone but him – mainly because he had never quite understood the meaning of it. He had probably been burnt out for years without having been any the wiser.

It was his turn now, in any case. In the name of 'beauty' and 'peace', he allowed himself to tend to his burnout – regardless of whether it existed or not. And there was plenty of both in Tuscany, that much he knew after having been there only a few days.

The family had rented a house in the Tuscan countryside, nestled among the vineyards. It wasn't a villa – in Italy, a villa was something completely different to elsewhere – but a rustic little stone house on a pine-scented slope not far

from the village of Montefioralle and the town of Greve. At the foot of the slope, the wine estates spread out like eternity's own fields, as though the sky had split to make room for small pieces of paradise to fall down to earth and form an other-worldly patchwork quilt.

Arto Söderstedt was enjoying it to the full – all while feeling oddly *unworthy*. It felt as though St Peter had fallen asleep just as a chalky-white detective inspector had slipped his slender body in through the gates of paradise. Thoroughly undeserved. He often found himself sitting on the porch, waiting in the nights with a glass of Vin Santo or a majestic Brunello di Montalcino washing over his taste buds. He had deliberately and uncritically devoured the whole Tuscany myth and he was enjoying himself enormously. He would never forget a single moment from his trip to Siena, that magical town. Even though the kids had howled away in the heart of the cathedral. Organ pipes was all he could think, watching those five little creatures standing there, in order of both height and pitch, screeching at the top of their lungs. Until a guard had decided that enough was enough and thrown the whole rabble out, that was. When that happened, Söderstedt had denied his paternity without a single pang of conscience. The guard had glared suspiciously at his identical, albeit slightly larger frame. Lying about such a thing in the house of God ... He had wandered around inside the cathedral for an utterly peaceful thirty minutes after that, drinking in Donatello, Michelangelo, Pinturicchio, Bernini, Pisano. When he came back out again, the children had been sitting calmly on the cathedral steps, slurping Italian gelati. Not even Anja, slurping worse than the children, had seemed particularly annoyed.

He had even switched his mobile phone off.

But sitting there now beneath the blue-and-white parasol, trying to remember how he had been planning to divide five watermelons between seven people of varying sizes, his

thoughts turned to his Uncle Pertti. Thoughts of gratitude. And also of guilt.

He had completely forgotten the man was still alive. And now he wasn't.

Strictly speaking, Uncle Pertti had been his mother's uncle, and during his childhood the legend of him had never been far away. The hero from the Winter War. The doctor who became one of the greats in Mannerheim's army.

Söderstedt himself had no siblings – that was presumably why he and his only-child wife had five children together – and his side of the family was microscopic. His parents, themselves both only children, were long since dead, and he had no other relatives. As a result, there had been no other heir.

Arto Söderstedt fumbled with his knife and thought: five divided by seven, hmm, that's 0.714 of a watermelon each, assuming everyone gets an equal amount, but if they went by bodyweight instead ...

He paused, glancing at his big, shadow-drenched family which, in turn and increasingly grumblingly, was looking at his passive knife. Were they really worthy heirs to Pertti Lindrot, the great hero of the Winter War, victor at Suomussalmi; one of the architects of the famous motti tactic, used to crack the Red Army's road-bound troops by splitting them into smaller units as they passed through forests, surrounding them and defeating them?

'Just cut it into pieces,' his second oldest daughter Linda said impatiently.

Arto Söderstedt looked at her, offended. He would certainly never work so sloppily. No, no. Arto was sixty-five kilos, Anja roughly the same; Mikaela weighed forty and Linda thirty-five, Peter too; Stefan weighed twenty-five and little Lina twenty. Two hundred and eighty-five kilos in total. Of that, twenty-three per cent – sixty-five divided by two hundred and eighty-five – should go to each of the parents. And twenty-three percent of five watermelons was ...

‘Just cut it into pieces,’ little Lina echoed.

... was 1.5 watermelons. More than one whole melon for each of the parents. Was that really how he had envisaged it?

If that was the case, there would be only 0.35 of a watermelon for little Lina, and that didn’t seem fair.

Fair.

Was it fair that he, a man who had just gone up to his eyeballs in debt to buy a big family car, suddenly found that the whole thing had been paid off and that he had so much left over that he could, immediately and without the family’s knowledge, go online and rent a house in Tuscany for two months?

No, it wasn’t especially fair.

But what was fair in life?

Certainly not 0.35 of a watermelon for the little one, he thought with sudden decisiveness, cutting the melon into pieces and dividing them fairly between the various members of his enormous family.

More than a million. Who could have known that old Uncle Pertti, whose very existence he had forgotten, was sitting on such riches? With the money came memories, though Arto Söderstedt could really only remember him as a stinking mouth and a handful of half-rotten teeth. A hero who had let himself go, but whose heroic halo always shone brightly. As though he had the *right* to let himself go, that was how he understood his parents’ attitude. He had always had the impression that it had been his parents, Pertti’s last living relatives, who provided for the old man. And then it transpired he had been sitting on just over a million.

Nothing was ever really as it seemed.

When he reconstructed Pertti’s life, it must have gone something like this: young, enthusiastic, provincial doctor finds himself drawn into the Finnish Winter War after an abrupt attack by the Soviet Union. He turns out to have a knack for guerrilla warfare in the frozen winter forests and

quickly climbs the ranks. He becomes a hero after several decisive offences, and after the Russian victory, disappears into the forests like a classic guerrilla fighter. He returns after the Second World War, more or less a broken man. He starts drinking more and more and has trouble keeping his job as a doctor in increasingly remote backwaters. He eventually returns to Vasa and becomes an eccentric, living that sad old life until he turns ninety. End of story.

Or so Arto Söderstedt thought.

Until his inheritance arrived.

The inheritance which was now being consumed, in the form of watermelon, beneath the growing shade of an umbrella. The Tuscan spring sun was now touching the curving horizon of the Ligurian Sea. Before long, it had sunk low enough for the chalk-white family to venture out into the water.

After everyone else – shivering – had already left the beach.

Arto Söderstedt saw the old fisherman pack up his stall of watermelons, cast a last astonished glance at the shadow-covered family, shake his head, and head off for a glass of wine in his local *osteria*. Once there, he would tell his friends about the sun-shy family and pay with money which had once belonged to a different eccentric from a completely different part of the world.

For a moment, Söderstedt was fascinated by the movement of money, its transfer, its origins.

Then he took off his crinkled suit and ran at the head of a line of children towards the edge of the water, testing it with his big toe. Its icy coolness reminded him of the Finnish lakes of his childhood.

On the beach, Uncle Pertti sat, necking Koskenkorva vodka and laughing hoarsely at his cowardice.

He ran in. The children wailed like organ pipes.

And in his rucksack, up under the blue-and-white parasol, his mobile phone was still switched off.

3

THE GIRL WHO had been fortunate in her misfortune was sitting on a hospital bed with a surprised look on her face. She probably hadn't stopped looking surprised since the previous evening. It was now a permanent look of surprise.

Paul Hjelm found her surprise entirely understandable. When you were ten years old and walking hand in hand with your dad one spring evening, you hardly expected to be shot.

But that was what had happened.

She had felt cold; the wind had suddenly picked up, blowing straight through her thin quilted jacket and chilling her practically bare legs. She had been holding her dad's hand and clutching a balloon shaped like a happy yellow face. She had been skipping slightly, mainly to keep warm but also because she was happy about the bag of sweets she had fished up out of the lucky dip. Aside from the cold, everything was just fine.

And then she had been shot.

A bullet had come flying from somewhere and buried itself in her upper right arm. That was where it came to rest. Fortunately.

She had been fortunate in her misfortune.

'You'll be fine, Lisa,' Paul Hjelm said, placing his hand on hers. 'It's just a flesh wound.'

Lisa's father's eyes were puffy and red from crying and he was snoring loudly in the armchair. Paul Hjelm poked his shoulder gently. His head jerked upwards with a snort and he stared uncomprehendingly at the policeman standing by the edge of the bed. Then he saw his daughter with the

bandage around her arm and the awful reality came crashing back down.

‘Excuse me, Mr Altbratt,’ Hjelm said courteously. ‘I just need to be absolutely certain you didn’t see any sign at all of a perpetrator. No movement in the trees? Nothing?’

Mr Altbratt shook his head and stared down into his hands.

‘There wasn’t a single person anywhere nearby,’ he said quietly. ‘Didn’t hear a thing. Suddenly Lisa just screamed and the blood started pouring out. I didn’t realise she’d been shot until the doctor told us. Shot! What kind of world do we live in?’

‘So you were walking along Sirishovsvägen in the direction of Djurgårdsvägen? Where had you been?’

‘Does it matter?’

Paul Hjelm’s phone rang. The timing wasn’t the best. He hoped no respirators or heart-lung machines would crash when he answered. He could just see the headlines: ‘TEDDY BEAR KILLER! EXTRA! EXTRA! FAMOUS POLICEMAN MURDERS FOUR CRITICALLY ILL PATIENTS WITH MOBILE PHONE.’

‘Hjelm,’ he answered laconically. Unless you’re severely disturbed – or an answering machine, perhaps – how exactly *did* you answer a phone using more words than that?

A moment of silence followed. The Altbratt man was looking at him like he was busy ripping the feathers from an endangered eagle. The Altbratt girl still just looked surprised.

‘Skansen?’ the eagle violator exclaimed. That was all he said. Then he got up from the bed, patted Lisa on the head and held his hand out to the father.

‘I’ve got to go, I’m afraid. I’ll be back.’

Cold morning sunshine greeted him on the steps of the paediatric accident and emergency department. The Astrid Lindgren Children’s Hospital. He searched his pockets as he wandered over to the car park. His keys were gone. Then

again, this wasn't an unusual occurrence and so he went through his patting ritual once more, and hey presto, they appeared from one of the pockets of his much-too-thin jacket. Same procedure as last year.

It was a fresh spring morning of the newly woken kind, the type often seen during the first week of May. The kind of day which looks so inviting from indoors but turns out to be a slyly masquerading winter's day. Hjelm, always dressed too lightly, was now practically naked. His pitiful scraps of clothing offered absolutely no protection against the icy wind. He tried to pull them tighter around him but couldn't find anything to pull.

It was nine in the morning and the traffic around Haga Södra and Nortull was at a complete standstill. Car traffic had increased dramatically in Stockholm over the last year. For some reason, it had suddenly become extremely attractive to be stuck in traffic. Cheap psychotherapy, presumably; a line of metal boxes full of screaming Mr Hydes. The alternative was the newly privatised commuter train which never seemed to be running, or else the metro which seemed to be forever standing in dark tunnels for hours on end, or else you could cycle along one of the sadistic cycleways no one dared to use since they seemed to have been deliberately designed to cause particularly awful injuries.

OK, so he was a whiner.

He didn't really have anything to complain about. The red metro line was relatively free from stupidity. He continued to devote his long daily journey from Norsborg in to central Stockholm to intense, reality-fleeing jazz listening. After a jaunt into the world of opera, like some kind of slightly depraved Inspector Morse, he had gone back to jazz. He couldn't quite tear himself away from the bebop years around 1960. But at the moment, he was hooked on Miles Davis. *Kind of Blue*. It was, quite simply, a masterpiece. Every single track on it. Five classics: 'So What', 'Freddie

Freeloader', 'Blue In Green', 'All Blues' and 'Flamenco Sketches' – all more or less improvised in the studio during the golden year of 1959. The musicians went to the studio not having seen the music before, Miles turned up with a bundle of notes, and all five tracks were said to have been recorded on their very first attempt. Somehow, it felt like music that had been created as it was performed, music which immediately and naturally took shape. A new kind of blues, infinitely down to earth, infinitely sophisticated. Every second of it a pleasure.

But during work hours, he had his service vehicle. He pushed the key which had miraculously appeared into the lock on the old beige Audi, looked out at the traffic and sighed deeply. It would probably be quicker to *swim* over to Djurgården.

That was where he was headed. His colleague and partner in crime Jorge Chavez had had that mysterious, expectant tone in his voice, the kind Paul Hjelm had been longing for for months. 'I think you should head over here, Paul. To Skansen.'

The fact that he had just come from another case with links to the area around the Skansen open-air museum and zoo made it even more interesting.

He got caught up in traffic *within* the gates of the hospital and made a conscious decision not to turn into Mr Hyde. It just wasn't worth the effort. Instead, he slipped the *Kind of Blue* CD into the car stereo and smiled as its opening notes spread their honey over his eardrums. As he meekly fought his way out of the enormous hospital area, he started ranking strange surnames. Wasn't Altbratt a candidate for strangest? He'd come across heavyweights like Kungskranz and Riddarsson before, Äppelblohm and Sarkander, but did they really stand a chance against Altbratt?

Anton Altbratt was the wealthy owner of a fur shop in Östermalm, living in Djurgårdsstaden and currently on his second marriage, of which ten-year-old Lisa was the fruit. He

also had a couple of adult children from his previous marriage, and they hadn't been able to get in touch with his new wife, Lisa's mother. She was on a business trip to some unknown location. To Hjelm, the whole thing stank of intricate erotic arrangements, but he decided not to enquire further.

Instead, he was trying to work out what could be behind the shooting of poor little Lisa. With any luck, her father Anton had been the intended victim. It was much easier to imagine a rational motive if that was the case – the young wife, the upper-class business activity, maybe even an attack by militant vegans. Though the lack of sound implied a silencer, which in turn implied some kind of professional criminality – in other words, it sounded more like the wife had wanted to get her husband out of the way for financial or sexual reasons, or else it was down to some kind of dodgy business links, or maybe even illegal fur dealings. Something like that. If any of those were true, it didn't seem half as dangerous. An unsuccessful one-off attack. But if Lisa had been the target, it was much, much worse. That would mean the majority of plausible motives disappeared, making some kind of madman more likely. A madman specialising in children.

Paul Hjelm didn't really want to follow that thought through to its logical conclusion.

But of course there was a third alternative: that neither father nor daughter had been the intended target, and the bullet had simply found its way into Lisa's arm by pure chance. If that was what had happened, the picture which emerged was of some kind of underworld dispute in among the trees of Djurgården.

There was, in other words, plenty to be done. They needed to check the wife's activities the previous evening, what her relationship with Lisa's father was really like; they had to check who knew about the children's party up in Rosendal, any possible irregularities in the business, any

possible threats from militant vegans or similar, and search the wooded area from which the shot had, in all likelihood, been fired. Et cetera, et cetera.

And then they had to wait and see whether it was anything other than a coincidence that two crimes had been committed so close to one another – whatever it was Jorge had to offer up at Skansen.

Time, time, time. He was really stuck; as usual, the engine temperature of his Audi shot up drastically the moment it found itself in the slightest hint of a queue. The car lacked all patience. Since the driver refused to become Mr Hyde, the car would have to do it instead. As though every queuing car and its driver were, by definition, forced to explode. Paul Hjelm turned the heating up high and thanked his Maker that it was winter and not summer in Stockholm. With one eye on the engine temperature gauge, he allowed his thoughts to drift along with Miles Davis, John Coltrane, Bill Evans, Cannonball Adderley, Wynton Kelly, Paul Chambers and Jimmy Cobb's unrivalled improvisations.

A picture of his life, it struck him.

A stony, controlling eye on an engine about to explode. Trains of thought taking the form of reckless improvisations. All while the vehicle crept forward extremely slowly.

Yup, that was exactly how it was. Though the picture wasn't quite complete.

Just as 'So What' faded out into 'Freddie Freeloader' and a more familiar twelve-bar blues started streaming out into Hjelm's sauna masquerading as a car, a gap appeared in the right-hand lane at Roslagstull. He sped forwards, accelerating so violently that the tyres screeched, made it through on the newly introduced European-standard amber light, and suddenly found the whole of Birger Jarlsgatan empty ahead of him.

Well, he thought. That's it, now the picture's complete.

'Freddie Freeloader', he thought, putting his foot down.

It was remarkably smooth-going all the way to Stureplan, where he found himself in a slight, inevitable tussle with one of those reckless drivers, the type who worked in advertising, who thought they were in the right regardless of how wrong they were. Paul Hjelm didn't care. Let them have their way, he thought, mumbling along with the final notes of 'Blue In Green'. Even down in the confusion of traffic by Nybroplan, he held his tongue. Just as he was singing along like a fool to a favourite line from 'All Blues', windows down, he saw Ingmar Bergman staggering up the steps into the National Theatre, cane in hand. The old man turned round, astonished, and met his eye for a brief moment. It seemed like more than a coincidence.

Strandvägen was worse. It seemed awfully big.

No, he thought. *Now* the picture was complete. A brief free stretch and then back to the slow, sluggish, grind. A plod.

The traffic eased slightly and he crossed Djurgården Bridge without problem. By that point, the picture had already gone up in smoke. As he parked, terribly, outside the entrance to Skansen, the last Spanish-tinged harmonies of 'Flamenco Sketches' were playing. That was what you called precision. His route – from Astrid Lindgren to Skansen via Ingmar Bergman, practically a trip through the heart of Sweden – was the exact same length as Miles Davis's *Kind of Blue*. That was that.

It was quarter to ten when Paul Hjelm marched in through Skansen's gates, was handed a little map and sent in the direction of 'the wild animals' in the north-east corner of the big open-air museum. As he stepped onto the long, covered escalator heading up the hill, Hjelm wondered which animals *weren't* wild. Was man a wild animal? He reached the top and stepped out into completely different weather from at the bottom. It was as though winter had been blown away. In its place, he found himself wandering through the museum's mock-nineteenth-century town in highest

possible summer. April weather, he was on the verge of thinking, even though it was in fact May. Thursday the fourth of May, in the two thousandth year of Our Lord. Twenty hundred. As the sun reflected on red-painted walls, his thoughts drifted to the way people spoke about the year. In general, they had naturally gravitated towards calling it 'the year two thousand', a perfectly logical choice. But Paul couldn't help but wonder why it wasn't twenty hundred, like the beginning of the previous century. He found a certain pleasure in taking what he called the either/or approach, occasionally using both. It never failed to raise an eyebrow or two.

That was what was playing on Detective Inspector Paul Hjelm's mind in this, the two thousandth year of Our Lord – a year in which the kingdom of Sweden had been singled out by Amnesty International for a sharp rise in police violence; a year in which the police had regularly turned their batons around to strike out with the hard end; a year in which Kosovans and Albanians had been sent back to their war-torn homelands with five thousand noble Swedish kronor in their pockets.

For a short moment, it felt like *someone else* had taken over his thoughts.

He wondered where all the good old-fashioned sexual fantasies had gone, those fantasies the latest research said should grip us at least fifteen times a day.

One last thought flashed through his mind before he caught a whiff of the predatory animals: who the hell were these model people who had enough time for fifteen sexual fantasies a day? But then the stench took over and Paul Hjelm found himself feeling genuine expectation, like a child in the minutes before Father Christmas turns up, at that moment when fathers sneak off to the toilet with an utterly expressionless look plastered on their faces. In this case, Father Christmas's real name was Jorge Chavez and he was a detective inspector in Sweden's national CID.