

BEWARE THE FALLING SNOW



THE
SNOWMAN
JO NESBO

THE NUMBER ONE INTERNATIONAL BESTSELLER

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About the Book

On a cold winter night, a young boy wakes to find his mother missing. The house is empty but in the garden outside he finds his mother's favourite scarf - wrapped around the neck of the snowman that appeared in their garden that day.

As Harry Hole and his team begin their investigation they discover that an alarming number of wives and mothers have gone missing over the years. Is there a link between the disappearances and a menacing letter Harry was sent months earlier?

When a second woman disappears it seems his suspicions are confirmed. For the first time in his career Harry finds himself confronted with a serial killer operating on his home turf; a killer who will drive him to the brink of insanity...

About the Author

Jo Nesbo is one of the world's leading crime writers and regularly tops the UK bestseller charts. He played football for Norway's premier league team Molde, but his dream of playing professionally for Spurs was dashed when he tore ligaments in his knee at the age of eighteen. After three years' military service he attended business school and formed the band Di Derre ('Them There'). Their second album topped the charts in Norway, but he continued working as a financial analyst, crunching numbers during the day and gigging at night. When commissioned to write a memoir about life on the road with his band, he instead came up with the plot for his first Harry Hole thriller, *The Bat*. His novels are published in 50 languages.

Sign up for the Jo Nesbo newsletter:
jonesbo.com/newsletter

Don Bartlett lives in Norfolk and works as a freelance translator of Scandinavian literature. He has translated, or co-translated, Norwegian novels by Lars Saabye Christensen, Roy Jacobsen, Ingvar Ambjørnsen, Kjell Ola Dahl, Gunnar Staalesen and Pernille Rygg.

ALSO BY JO NESBO

The Bat

A Norwegian girl on a gap year in Sydney has been murdered, and Harry has been sent to Australia to assist in any way he can. When the team unearths a string of unsolved murders and disappearances, the hunt for a serial killer is on, but the murderer will talk only to Harry.

Cockroaches

Harry arrives in Bangkok to investigate the murder of the Norwegian ambassador, only to find that few people are willing to talk. When Harry lays his hands on some incriminating CCTV footage and the man who gave him the tape goes missing, Harry realises that failing to solve a murder case is not the only danger he faces.

The Redbreast

A report of a rare and unusual gun being fired sparks Harry's interest. Then a former soldier is found with his throat cut. Next Harry's former partner is murdered. Why had she been trying to reach Harry on the night she was killed?

Nemesis

A man is caught on CCTV, shooting dead a cashier at a bank. Harry begins his investigation but after a dinner with an old flame wakes up with no memory of the last twelve hours. Then the girl is found dead, and it soon becomes clear that someone is trying to frame him for her death.

The Devil's Star

When a young woman is murdered in her Oslo flat and a tiny red diamond in the shape of a five-pointed star is found behind her eyelid, Harry, currently on his final warning, is assigned the case alongside his long-time adversary Tom Waaler.

The Redeemer

One of the singers at a Christmas concert is shot dead. Harry and his team are called in to investigate but have little to work with - there is no immediate suspect, no weapon and no motive. But when the assassin discovers he's shot the wrong man, Harry finds his troubles have only just begun.

The Leopard

In the depths of winter, a killer stalks the Oslo streets. The crime scenes offer no clues, the media is reaching fever pitch, and the police are running out of options. There is only one man who can catch the killer. But Harry Hole doesn't want to be found.

Phantom

After the horrors of a case that nearly cost him his life, Harry Hole left Oslo far behind him - but now he's back. Investigating a case that's already closed, Harry discovers a trail of disappearances apparently unnoticed by the police. But he's not the only one interested in the case. From the moment Harry steps off the plane, someone is watching his every move.

Police

Police officers are being slain at the scenes of crimes they once investigated, but failed to solve. The murders are brutal, the media reaction hysterical. For years,

Harry Hole's dedication to his job has saved countless people. But now, with those he loves most facing terrible danger, Harry can't protect anyone - least of all himself.

The Thirst

A woman is found murdered after an internet date. The marks on her body show the police that they are dealing with a vicious killer. The force needs Harry Hole - but he's reluctant to return to the place that almost took everything from him. Until he starts to suspect a connection between this killing and his one failed case.

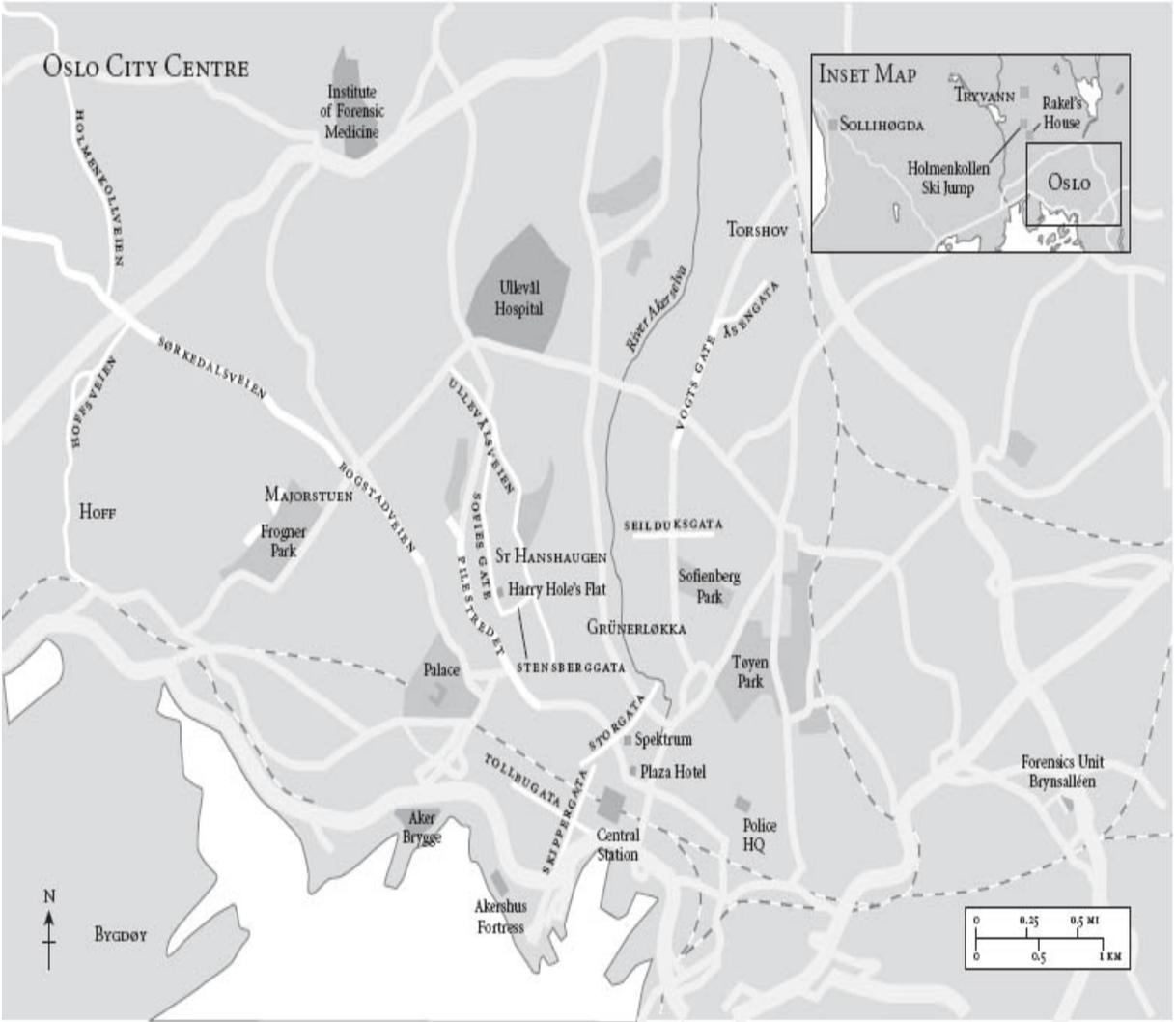
STANDALONE CRIME

Headhunters

Headhunter and art thief Roger Brown has it all; clever and wealthy, he's at the very top of his game. But when Roger plans his biggest ever theft, he soon runs into trouble - and it's not long before the hunter becomes the hunted ...

The Son

Sonny is a model prisoner. He listens to the confessions of other inmates, and absolves them of their sins. But then one prisoner's confession changes everything: he knows something about Sonny's disgraced father, and now Sonny wants revenge. He needs to break out of prison and make those responsible pay for their crimes - whatever the cost.



For Kirsten Hammervoll Nesbø

JO NESBO

The Snowman

TRANSLATED FROM THE NORWEGIAN BY
Don Bartlett

VINTAGE BOOKS
London

Part One

WEDNESDAY, 5 NOVEMBER 1980.

The Snowman.

IT WAS THE day the snow came. At eleven o'clock in the morning, large flakes appeared from a colourless sky and invaded the fields, gardens and lawns of Romerike like an armada from outer space. At two, the snow-ploughs were in action in Lillestrøm, and when, at half past two, Sara Kvinesland slowly and carefully steered her Toyota Corolla SR5 between the detached houses in Kolloveien, the November snow was lying like a down duvet over the rolling countryside.

She was thinking that the houses looked different in daylight. So different that she almost passed his drive. The car skidded as she applied the brakes, and she heard a groan from the back seat. In the rear-view mirror she saw her son's disgruntled face.

'It won't take long, my love,' she said.

In front of the garage there was a large patch of black tarmac amid all the white, and she realised that the removal van had been there. Her throat constricted. She hoped she wasn't too late.

'Who lives here?' came from the back seat.

'Just someone I know,' Sara said, automatically checking her hair in the mirror. 'Ten minutes, my love. I'll leave the key in the ignition so you can listen to the radio.'

She went without waiting for a response, slithered in her slippery shoes up to the door she had been through so many times, but never like this, not in the middle of the day, in full view of all the neighbours' prying eyes. Not that late-night visits would seem any more innocent, but for some reason acts of this kind felt more appropriate when performed after the fall of darkness.

She heard the buzz of the doorbell inside, like a bumblebee in a jam jar. Feeling her desperation mount, she glanced at the windows of the neighbouring houses. They gave nothing away, just returned reflections of bare black apple trees, grey sky and milky-white terrain. Then, at last, she heard footsteps behind the door and heaved a sigh of relief. The next moment she was inside and in his arms.

'Don't go, darling,' she said, hearing the sob already straining at her vocal cords.

'I have to,' he said in a monotone that suggested a refrain he had tired of long ago. His hands sought familiar paths, of which they never tired.

'No, you don't,' she whispered into his ear. 'But you want to. You don't dare any longer.'

'This has nothing to do with you and me.'

She could hear the irritation creeping into his voice at the same time as his hand, the strong but gentle hand, slid down over her spine and inside the waistband of her skirt and tights. They were like a pair of practised dancers who knew their partner's every move, step, breath, rhythm. First, the white lovemaking. The good one. Then the black one. The pain.

His hand caressed her coat, searching for her nipple under the thick material. He was eternally fascinated by her nipples; he always returned to them. Perhaps it was because he didn't have any himself.

'Did you park in front of the garage?' he asked with a firm tweak.

She nodded and felt the pain shoot into her head like a dart of pleasure. Her sex had already opened for the fingers which would soon be there. 'My son's waiting in the car.'

His hand came to an abrupt halt.

'He knows nothing,' she groaned, sensing his hand falter.

'And your husband? Where's he now?'

'Where do you think? At work of course.'

Now it was she who sounded irritated. Both because he had brought her husband into the conversation and it was difficult for her to say anything at all about him without getting irritated, and because her body needed him, quickly. Sara Kvinesland opened his flies.

'Don't ...' he began, grabbing her around the wrist. She slapped him hard with her other hand. He looked at her in amazement as a red flush spread across his cheek. She smiled, grabbed his thick black hair and pulled his face down to hers.

'You can go,' she hissed. 'But first you have to shag me. Is that understood?'

She felt his breath against her face. It was coming in hefty gasps now. Again she slapped him with her free hand, and his dick was growing in her other.

He thrust, a bit harder each time, but it was over now. She was numb, the magic was gone, the tension had dissolved and all that was left was despair. She was losing him. Now, as she lay there, she had lost him. All the years she had yearned, all the tears she had cried, the desperate things he had made her do. Without giving anything back. Except for one thing.

He was standing at the foot of the bed and taking her with closed eyes. Sara stared at his chest. To begin with, she had thought it strange, but after a while she had begun

to like the sight of unbroken white skin over his pectoral muscles. It reminded her of old statues where the nipples had been omitted out of consideration for public modesty.

His groans were getting louder. She knew that soon he would let out a furious roar. She had loved that roar. The ever-surprised, ecstatic, almost pained expression as though the orgasm surpassed his wildest expectation each and every time. Now she was waiting for the final roar, a bellowing farewell to his freezing box of a bedroom divested of pictures, curtains and carpets. Then he would get dressed and travel to a different part of the country where he said he had been offered a job he couldn't say no to. But he could say no to this. This. And still he would roar with pleasure.

She closed her eyes. But the roar didn't come. He had stopped.

'What's up?' she asked, opening her eyes. His features were distorted alright. But not with pleasure.

'A face,' he whispered.

She flinched. 'Where?'

'Outside the window.'

The window was at the other end of the bed, right above her head. She heaved herself round, felt him slip out, already limp. From where she was lying, the window above her head was set too high in the wall for her to see out. And too high for anyone to stand outside and peer in. Because of the already dwindling daylight all she could see was the double-exposed reflection of the ceiling lamp.

'You saw yourself,' she said, almost pleading.

'That was what I thought at first,' he said, still staring at the window.

Sara pulled herself up onto her knees. Got up and looked into the garden. And there, there was the face.

She laughed out loud with relief. The face was white, with eyes and a mouth made with black pebbles, probably

from the drive. And arms made from twigs off the apple trees.

'Heavens,' she gasped. 'It's only a snowman.'

Then her laugh turned into tears; she sobbed helplessly until she felt his arms around her.

'I have to go now,' she sobbed.

'Stay for a little while longer,' he said.

She stayed for a little while longer.

As Sara approached the garage she saw that almost forty minutes had passed.

He had promised to ring now and then. He had always been a good liar, and for once she was glad. Even before she got to the car she saw her son's pale face staring at her from the back seat. She pulled at the door and found to her astonishment that it was locked. She peered in at him through steamed-up windows. He only opened it when she knocked on the glass.

She sat in the driver's seat. The radio was silent and it was ice-cold inside. The key was on the passenger seat. She turned to him. Her son was pale, and his lower lip was trembling.

'Is there anything wrong?' she asked.

'Yes,' he said. 'I saw him.'

There was a thin, shrill tone of horror in his voice that she couldn't recall hearing since he was a little boy jammed between them on the sofa in front of the TV with his hands over his eyes. And now his voice was changing, he had stopped giving her a goodnight hug and had started being interested in car engines and girls. And one day he would get in a car with one of them and also leave her.

'What do you mean?' she said, inserting the key in the ignition and turning.

'The snowman ...'

There was no response from the engine and panic gripped her without warning. Quite what she was afraid of,

she didn't know. She stared out of the windscreen and turned the key again. Had the battery died?

'And what did the snowman look like?' she asked, pressing the accelerator to the floor and desperately turning the key so hard it felt as though she would break it. He answered, but his answer was drowned by the roar of the engine.

Sara put the car in gear and let go of the clutch as if in a sudden hurry to get away. The wheels spun in the soft, slushy snow. She accelerated harder, but the rear of the car slid sideways. By then the tyres had spun their way down to the tarmac and they lurched forward and skidded into the road.

'Dad's waiting for us,' she said. 'We'll have to get a move on.'

She switched on the radio and turned up the volume to fill the cold interior with sounds other than her own voice. A newsreader said for the hundredth time today that last night Ronald Reagan had beaten Jimmy Carter in the American election.

The boy said something again, and she glanced in the mirror.

'What did you say?' she said in a loud voice.

He repeated it, but still she couldn't hear. She turned down the radio while heading towards the main road and the river, which ran through the countryside like two mournful black stripes. And gave a start when she realised he had leaned forward between the two front seats. His voice sounded like a dry whisper in her ear. As if it was important no one else heard them.

'We're going to die.'

2 NOVEMBER 2004. DAY 1.

Pebble-Eyes.

HARRY HOLE GAVE A start and opened his eyes wide. It was freezing cold, and from the dark came the sound of the voice that had awoken him. It announced that the American people would decide today whether their President for the next four years would again be George Walker Bush. November. Harry was thinking they were definitely heading for dark times. He threw off the duvet and placed his feet on the floor. The lino was so cold it stung. He left the news blaring from the radio alarm clock and went into the bathroom. Regarded himself in the mirror. November there, too: drawn, greyish pale and overcast. As usual his eyes were bloodshot, and the pores on his nose large, black craters. The bags under his eyes with their light blue, alcohol-washed irises would disappear after his face had been ministered to with hot water, a towel and breakfast. He assumed they would, that is. Harry was not sure exactly how his face would fare during the day now that he had turned forty. Whether the wrinkles would be ironed out and peace would fall over the hunted expression he woke with after nights of being ridden by nightmares. Which was most nights. For he avoided mirrors after he left his small, spartan flat in Sofies gate to become Inspector Hole of the Crime Squad at Oslo Police HQ. Then he stared into others' faces to find their pain, their Achilles heels, their

nightmares, motives and reasons for self-deception, listening to their fatiguing lies and trying to find a meaning in what he did: imprisoning people who were already imprisoned inside themselves. Prisons of hatred and self-contempt he recognised all too well. He ran a hand over the shorn bristles of blond hair that grew precisely 192 centimetres above the frozen soles of his feet. His collarbone stood out under his skin like a clothes hanger. He had trained a lot since the last case. In a frenzy, some maintained. As well as cycling he had started to lift weights in the fitness room in the bowels of Police HQ. He liked the burning pain, and the repressed thoughts. Nevertheless, he just became leaner. The fat disappeared and his muscles were layered between skin and bone. And while before he had been broad-shouldered and what Rakel called a natural athlete, now he had begun to resemble the photograph he had once seen of a skinned polar bear: a muscular, but shockingly gaunt, predator. Quite simply, he was fading away. Not that it actually mattered. Harry sighed. November. It was going to get even darker.

He went into the kitchen, drank a glass of water to relieve his headache and peered through the window in surprise. The roof of the block on the other side of Sofies gate was white and the bright reflected light made his eyes smart. The first snow had come in the night. He thought of the letter. He did occasionally get such letters, but this one had been special. It had mentioned Toowoomba.

On the radio a nature programme had started and an enthusiastic voice was waxing lyrical about seals. 'Every summer Berhaus seals collect in the Bering Straits to mate. Since the males are in the majority, the competition for females is so fierce that those males which have managed to procure themselves a female will stick with her during the whole of the breeding period. The male will take care of his partner until the young have been born and can cope by themselves. Not out of love for the female, but out of love

for his own genes and hereditary material. Darwinist theory would say that it is natural selection that makes the Berhaus seal monogamous, not morality.'

I wonder, thought Harry.

The voice on the radio was almost hitting falsetto with excitement. 'But before the seals leave the Bering Straits to search for food in the open sea, the male will try to kill the female. Why? Because a female Berhaus seal will never mate twice with the same male! For her this is about spreading the biological risk of hereditary material, just like on the stock market. For her it makes biological sense to be promiscuous, and the male knows this. By taking her life he wants to stop the young of other seals competing with his own progeny for the same food.'

'We're entering Darwinian waters here, so why don't humans think like the seal?' another voice said.

'But we do, don't we! Our society is not as monogamous as it appears, and never has been. A Swedish study showed recently that between fifteen and twenty per cent of all children born have a different father from the one they - and for that matter the postulated fathers - think. Twenty per cent! That's every fifth child! Living a lie. And ensuring biological diversity.'

Harry fiddled with the frequency dial to find some tolerable music. He stopped at an ageing Johnny Cash's version of 'Desperado'.

There was a firm knock on the door.

Harry went into the bedroom, put on his jeans, returned to the hall and opened up.

'Harry Hole?' The man outside was wearing a blue boiler suit and looking at Harry through thick lenses. His eyes were as clear as a child's.

Harry nodded.

'Have you got fungus?' The man asked the question with a straight face. A long wisp of hair traversed his forehead

and was stuck there. Under his arm he was holding a plastic clipboard with a densely printed sheet.

Harry waited for him to explain further, but nothing was forthcoming. Just this clear, open expression.

'That,' Harry said, 'strictly speaking, is a private matter.'

The man gave the suggestion of a smile in response to a joke he was heartily sick of hearing. 'Fungus in your flat. Mould.'

'I have no reason to believe that I have,' said Harry.

'That's the thing about mould. It seldom gives anyone any reason to believe that it's there.' The man sucked at his teeth and rocked on his heels.

'But?' Harry said at length.

'But it is.'

'What makes you think that?'

'Your neighbour's got it.'

'Uh-huh? And you think it may have spread?'

'Mould doesn't spread. Dry rot does.'

'So then ...?'

'There's a construction fault with the ventilation along the walls in this block. It allows dry rot to flourish. May I take a peep at your kitchen?'

Harry stepped to the side. The man powered into the kitchen where at once he pressed an orange hairdryer-like apparatus against the wall. It squeaked twice.

'Damp detector,' the man said, studying something that was obviously an indicator. 'Just as I thought. Sure you haven't seen or smelt anything suspicious?'

Harry didn't have a clear perception of what that might be.

'A coating like on stale bread,' the man said. 'Mouldy smell.'

Harry shook his head.

'Have you had sore eyes?' the man asked. 'Felt tired? Had headaches?'

Harry shrugged. 'Of course. For as long as I can remember.'

'Do you mean for as long as you've lived here?'

'Maybe. Listen ...'

But the man wasn't listening; he'd taken a knife from his belt. Harry stood back and watched the hand holding the knife being raised and thrust with great force. There was a sound like a groan as the knife went through the plasterboard behind the wallpaper. The man pulled out the knife, thrust it in again and bent back a powdery piece of plaster, leaving a large gap in the wall. Then he whipped out a small penlight and shone it into the cavity. A deep frown developed behind his oversized glasses. Then he stuck his nose deep into the cavity and sniffed.

'Right,' he said. 'Hello there, boys.'

'Hello there who?' Harry asked, edging closer.

'*Aspergillus*,' said the man. 'A genus of mould. We have three or four hundred types to choose between and it's difficult to say which one this is because the growth on these hard surfaces is so thin it's invisible. But there's no mistaking the smell.'

'That means trouble, right?' Harry asked, trying to remember how much he had left in his bank account after he and his father had sponsored a trip to Spain for Sis, his little sister who had what she referred to as 'a touch of Down's syndrome'.

'It's not like real dry rot. The block won't collapse,' the man said. 'But you might.'

'Me?'

'If you're prone to it. Some people get ill from breathing the same air as the mould. They're ailing for years, and of course they get accused of being hypochondriacs since no one can find anything and the other residents are fine. And then the pest eats up the wallpaper and the plasterboard.'

'Mm. What do you suggest?'

'That I eradicate the infection, of course.'

'And my personal finances while you're at it?'

'Covered by the building's insurance, so it won't cost you a krone. All I need is access to the flat for the next few days.'

Harry found the spare set of keys in the kitchen drawer and passed them to him.

'It'll just be me,' the man said. 'I should mention that in passing. Lots of strange things going on out there.'

'Are there?' Harry smiled sadly, staring out of the window.

'Eh?'

'Nothing,' Harry said. 'There's nothing to steal here anyway. I'll be off now.'

* * *

The low morning sun sparkled off all the glass on Oslo Police HQ, standing there as it had for the last thirty years, on the summit of the ridge by the main street, Grønlandsleiret. From there the police were - although this had not been exactly intentional - near to the high crime areas in east Oslo, and the prison, located on the site of the old brewery, was its closest neighbour. The police station was surrounded by a brown, withering lawn and maple and linden trees which had been covered with a thin layer of grey-white snow during the night, making the park look like a deceased's shrouded chattels.

Harry walked up the black strip of tarmac to the main entrance and entered the central hall where Kari Christensen's porcelain wall decoration with running water whispered its eternal secrets. He nodded to the security guard in reception and went up to Crime Squad on the sixth floor. Although it was almost six months since he had been given his new office in the red zone, he often went to the cramped, windowless one he had shared with Police

Officer Jack Halvorsen. Now Magnus Skarre was in there. And Jack Halvorsen had been interred in the ground of Vestre Aker Cemetery. At first the parents had wanted their son to be buried in their home town, Steinkjer, as Jack and Beate Lønn, the head of Krimteknisk, the Forensics Unit, had not been married; they hadn't even been living together. But when they found out that Beate was pregnant and Jack's baby would be born in the summer, they agreed that Jack's grave should be in Oslo.

Harry entered his new office. Which he knew would be known as that for ever, the way the fifty-year-old home ground of Barcelona football club was still called Camp Nou, Catalan for new stadium. He dropped onto his chair, switched on the radio, and nodded good morning to the photos perched on the bookcase and propped against the wall. One day in an uncertain future, if he remembered to buy picture pins, they would hang on the wall. Ellen Gjeltén and Jack Halvorsen and Bjarne Møller. There they stood in chronological order. The Dead Policemen's Society.

On the radio Norwegian politicians and social scientists were giving their views on the American presidential election. Harry recognised the voice of Arve Støp, the owner of the successful magazine *Liberal* and famous for being one of the most knowledgeable, arrogant and entertaining opinion-formers in the country. Harry turned up the volume until the voices bounced off the brick walls, and grabbed his Peerless handcuffs lying on the new desk. He practised speed-cuffing on the table leg, which was already splintered as a result of this bad habit he had picked up on the FBI course in Chicago and perfected during lonely evenings in a lousy bedsit in Cabrini Green, to the screams of rowing neighbours and in the company of Jim Beam. The aim was to bang the cuffs against the arrestee's wrist in such a way that the spring-loaded arm closed around the wrist and the lock clicked on the other side. With the right amount of force and accuracy you could

cuff yourself to an arrestee in one simple movement before he had a chance to react. Harry had never had any use for this on the job and only once for the other thing he had learned over there: how to catch a serial killer. The cuffs clicked around the table leg and the radio voices droned on.

‘Why do you think Norwegians are so sceptical about George Bush, Arve Støp?’

‘Because we’re an overprotected nation which has never fought in any wars. We’ve been happy to let others do it for us: England, the Soviet Union and America. Yes, ever since the Napoleonic Wars we’ve hidden behind the backs of our elder brothers. Norway has based its security on others taking the responsibility when things get tough. That’s been going on for so long that we’ve lost our sense of reality and we believe that the earth is basically populated by people who wish us – the world’s richest country – well. Norway, a gibbering, pea-brained blonde who gets lost in a backstreet in the Bronx and is now indignant that her bodyguard is so brutal with muggers.’

Harry dialled Rakel’s number. Aside from Sis’s, Rakel’s telephone number was the only one he knew off by heart. When he was young and inexperienced, he thought that a bad memory was a handicap for a detective. Now he knew better.

‘And the bodyguard is Bush and the USA?’ the host asked.

‘Yes, Lyndon B. Johnson once said that the US hadn’t chosen this role, but he had realised there was no one else, and he was right. Our bodyguard is a born-again Christian with a father complex, a drink problem, intellectual limitations and not enough backbone to do his military service with honour. In short, a guy we should be pleased is going to be re-elected President today.’

‘I assume you mean that ironically?’

'Not at all. Such a weak president listens to his advisers, and the White House has the best, believe you me. Even though on that laughable TV series about the Oval Office one may have formed the impression that the Democrats have a monopoly on intelligence, it is on the extreme right wing of the Republicans, surprisingly enough, that you find the sharpest minds. Norway's security is in the best possible hands.'

'A girlfriend of a girlfriend has had sex with you.'

'Really?' said Harry.

'Not you,' Rakel said. 'I'm talking to the other guy. Støp.'

'Sorry,' Harry said, turning down the radio.

'After a lecture in Trondheim. He invited her up to his room. She was interested, but drew his attention to the fact that she'd had a mastectomy. He said he would give that some thought and went to the bar. And came back and took her with him.'

'Mm. I hope expectations were fulfilled.'

'Nothing fulfils expectations.'

'No,' Harry said, wondering what they were talking about.

'What's happening this evening?' Rakel asked.

'Palace Grill at eight is fine. But what's all this rubbish about not being able to reserve tables in advance?'

'It gives the whole place cachet, I suppose.'

They arranged to meet in the bar next door first. After they had rung off, Harry sat thinking. She had sounded pleased. Or bright. Bright and cheery. He tried to sense if he had succeeded in being pleased on her behalf, pleased that the woman he had loved so much was happy with another man. Rakel and he had had their time, and he had been given chances. Which he wasted. So why not be pleased that she was well, why not let the thought that things could have been different go, and move on with his life? He promised to try a bit harder.

The morning meeting was soon over. As head of Crime Squad, *Politioverbjetjent* - POB for short - Gunnar Hagen ran through the cases they were working on. Which were not many, as for the time being there weren't any fresh murder cases under investigation, and murder was the only thing that got the unit's pulse racing. Thomas Helle, an officer from the Missing Persons Unit of the uniformed police, was present and gave a report on a woman who had been missing from her home for a year. Not a trace of violence, not a trace of the perpetrator and not a trace of her. She was a housewife and had last been seen at the nursery where she had left her son and daughter in the morning. Her husband and everyone in her closer circle of acquaintances had an alibi and had been cleared. They agreed that Crime Squad should investigate further.

Magnus Skarre passed on regards from Ståle Aune - Crime Squad's resident psychologist - whom he had visited at Ullevål Hospital. Harry felt a pang of conscience. Ståle Aune was not just his adviser on criminal cases, he was his personal supporter in his fight against alcohol and the closest thing he had to a confidant. It was over a week since Aune had been admitted with some vague diagnosis, but Harry had still not overcome his reluctance to enter hospitals. Tomorrow, Harry thought. Or Thursday.

'We have a new officer,' Gunnar Hagen announced. 'Katrine Bratt.'

A young woman in the first row stood up unbidden, but without offering a smile. She was very attractive. Attractive without trying, thought Harry. Thin, almost wispy hair hung lifelessly down both sides of her face, which was finely chiselled, pale and wore the same serious, weary features Harry had seen on other stunning women who had become so used to being observed that they had stopped liking or disliking it. Katrine Bratt was dressed in a blue suit that underlined her femininity, but the thick black tights under the edge of her skirt and her practical winter boots

invalidated any possible suspicions that she was playing on it. She stood letting her eyes run over the gathering, as if she had risen to see them and not vice versa. Harry guessed that she had planned both the suit and this little first day appearance at Police HQ.

'Katrine worked for four years at Bergen Police HQ dealing mainly with public decency offences, but she also did a stint at Crime Squad,' Hagen continued, looking down at a sheet of paper Harry presumed was her CV. 'Law degree from Bergen University 1999, Police College and now she's an officer here. For the moment no children, but she's married.'

One of Katrine Bratt's thin eyebrows rose imperceptibly, and either Hagen saw this, or he thought this last scrap of information was superfluous, and added, 'For those who may be interested ...'

In the oppressive and telling pause that followed, Hagen seemed to think he had made matters worse, coughed twice, with force, and said that those who had not yet signed up for the Christmas party should do so before Wednesday.

Chairs scraped and Harry was already in the corridor when he heard a voice behind him.

'Apparently I belong to you.'

Harry turned and looked into Katrine Bratt's face. Wondering how attractive she would be if she made an effort.

'Or you to me,' she said, showing a line of even teeth but without letting the smile reach her eyes. 'Whichever way you look at it.' She spoke Bergen-flavoured standard Norwegian with moderately rolled 'r's, which suggested, Harry wagered, that she was from Fana or Kalfaret or some other solidly middle-class district.

He continued on his way, and she hurried to catch up with him. 'Seems the *Politioverbetjent* forgot to inform you.'

She pronounced the word with a slightly exaggerated stress on all the syllables of Gunnar Hagen's rank.

'But you should show me round and take care of me for the next few days. Until I'm up and running. Can you do that, do you think?'

Harry eased off a smile. So far he liked her, but of course he was open to changing his opinion. Harry was always willing to give people another chance to wind up on his black list.

'I don't know,' he said, stopping by the coffee dispenser. 'Let's start with this.'

'I don't drink coffee.'

'Nevertheless. It's self-explanatory. Like most things here. What are your thoughts on the case of the missing woman?'

Harry pressed the button for Americano which, in this machine, was as American as Norwegian ferry coffee.

'What about it?' Bratt asked.

'Do you think she's alive?' Harry tried to ask in a casual manner so that she wouldn't realise it was a test.

'Do you think I'm stupid?' she said and watched with undisguised revulsion as the machine coughed and spluttered something black into a white plastic cup. 'Didn't you hear the *Politioverbetjent* say that I worked at the Sexual Offences Unit for four years?'

'Mm,' Harry said. 'Dead then?'

'As a dodo,' said Katrine Bratt.

Harry lifted the white cup. He pondered the possibility that he had just been allocated a colleague he might come to appreciate.

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Walking home in the afternoon, Harry saw that the snow was gone from the pavements and streets, and the light,