

**A
HARRY HOLE
THRILLER**

Phantom

JO NESBO

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About the Book

THE MURDER HAS BEEN SOLVED. BUT HAS JUSTICE BEEN DONE?

Harry Hole is back in Oslo. He's been away for some time, but his ghosts have a way of catching up with him. The case that brings him back is already closed. There is no room for doubt: the young junkie was shot dead by a fellow addict.

THE POLICE DON'T WANT HIM BACK...

Denied permission to reopen the investigation, Harry strikes out on his own. Beneath the city's eerie tranquillity, he discovers a trail of violence and mysterious disappearances seemingly unnoticed by the police. At every turn Harry is faced with a conspiracy of silence.

THE CRIMINALS DON'T WANT HIM BACK...

Harry is not the only one who is interested in the case. From the moment he steps off the plane, someone is watching his every move and tracing his every call.

SOMEONE WANTS HIM SILENCED.

About the Author

Jo Nesbo played football for Norway's premier league team Modle, but his dream of playing professionally for Spurs was dashed when he tore crucial 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 by a publisher to write a memoir about life on the road with his band, he instead came up with the plot for his first Harry Hole crime novel, *The Bat*. He is regarded as one of Europe's leading crime writers, with both *The Leopard* and *Phantom* topping the UK bestseller charts, and his novels are published in 40 countries. Visit www.jonesbo.co.uk for more information.

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

Headhunters

THE HARRY HOLE SERIES

The Redbreast

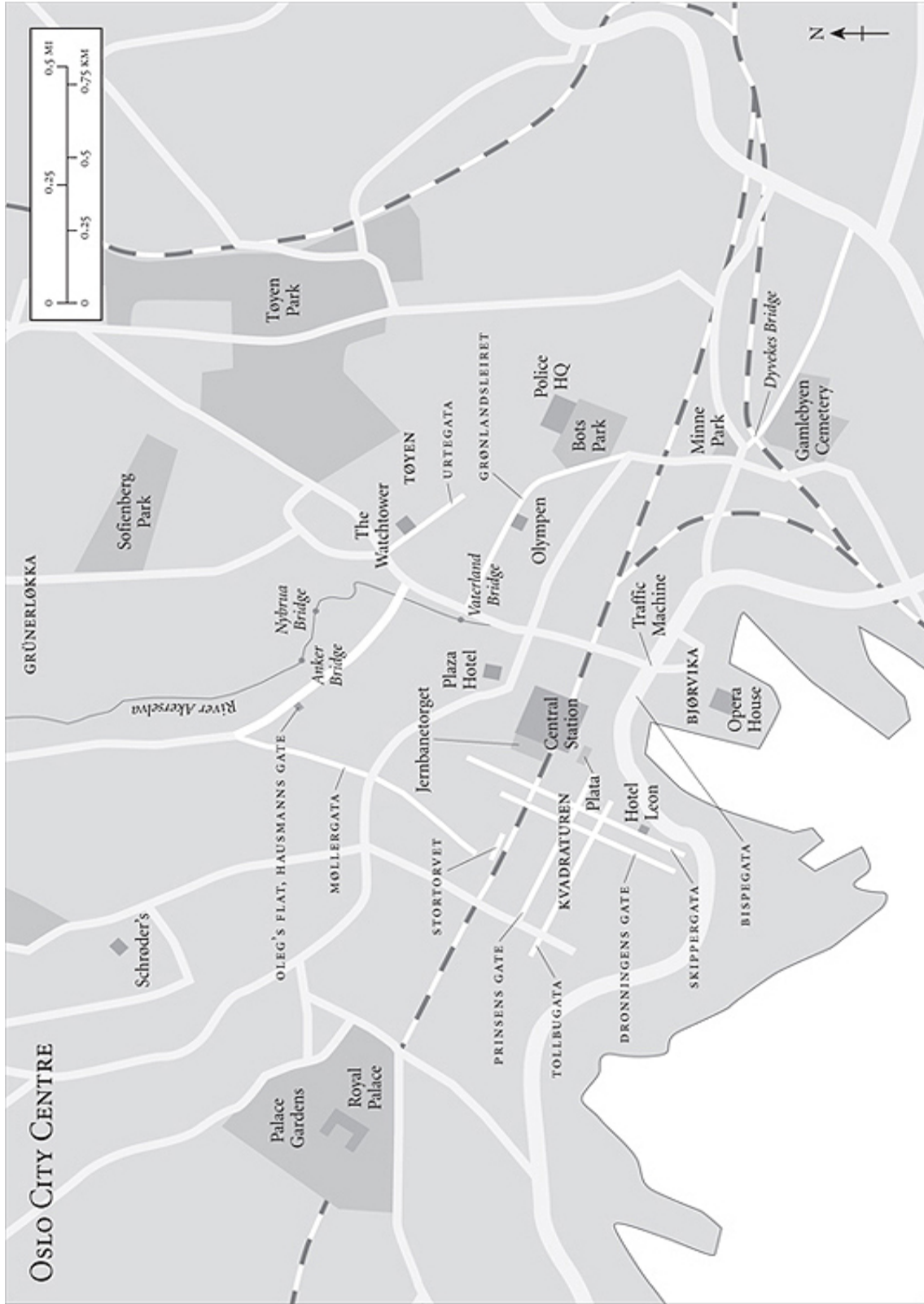
Nemesis

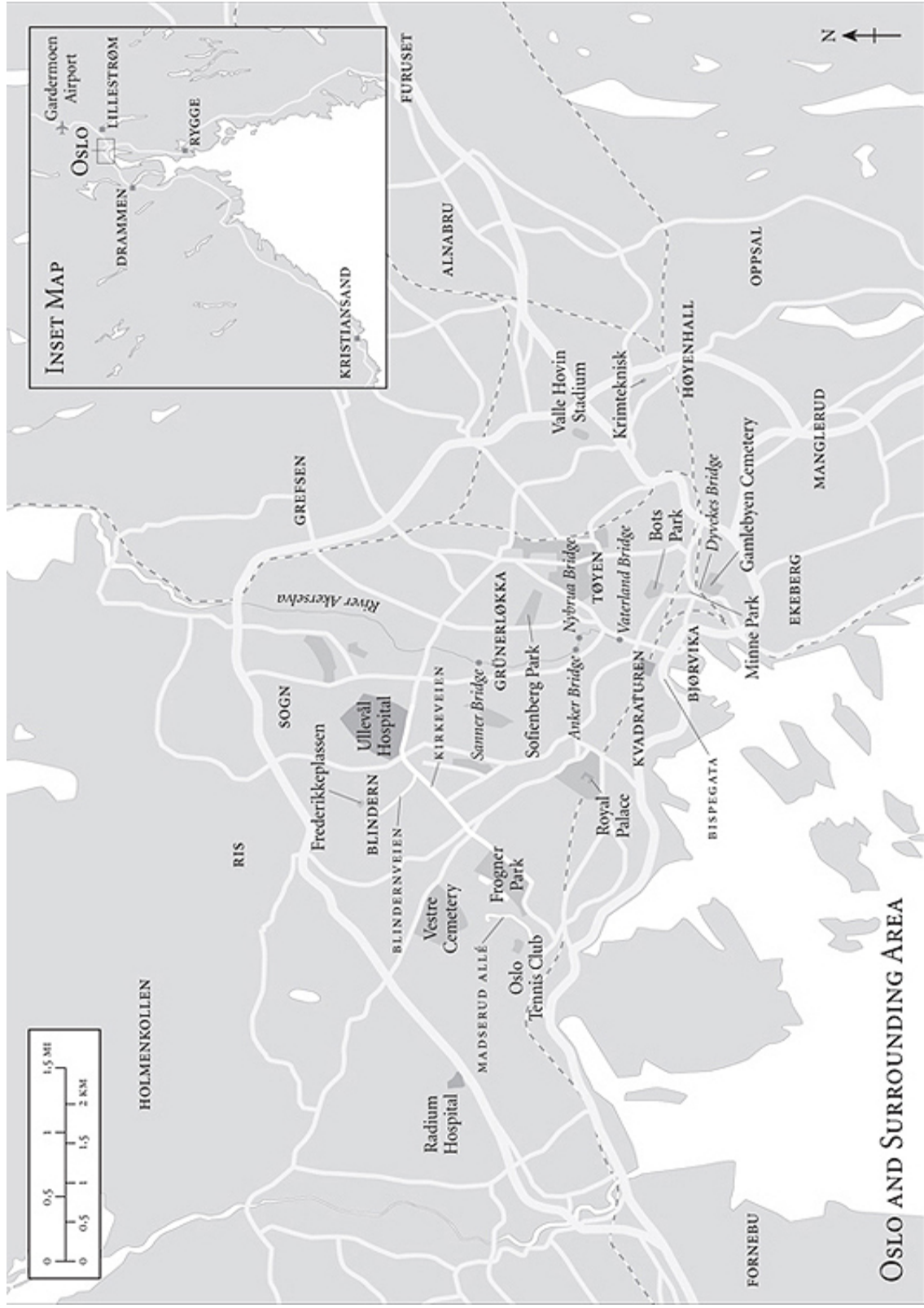
The Devil's Star

The Redeemer

The Snowman

The Leopard





OSLO AND SURROUNDING AREA

Jo Nesbo

PHANTOM

Translated from the Norwegian by Don Bartlett



Harvill Secker
LONDON

PART ONE

1

THE SQUEALS WERE calling her. Like acoustic spears they pierced all the other noises of the night in Oslo city centre: the regular drone of cars outside the window, the distant siren that rose and fell, and the church bells that had begun to chime nearby. She went on the hunt for food. She ran her nose over the filthy linoleum on the kitchen floor. Registering and sorting the sounds as quick as lightning into three categories: edible, threatening or irrelevant for survival. The pungent smell of grey cigarette ash. The sugary sweet aroma of blood on a piece of cotton wool. The bitter odour of beer on the inside of a bottle cap, Ringnes lager. The gas molecules of sulphur, saltpetre and carbon dioxide filtered up from an empty metal cartridge case designed for a lead bullet of nine by eighteen millimetres, also called a Makarov after the gun to which the calibre was originally adapted. Smoke from a still-smouldering cigarette with a yellow filter and black paper, bearing the Russian imperial eagle. The tobacco was edible. And there: a stench of alcohol, leather, grease and tarmac. A shoe. She sniffed it. And decided it was not as easy to eat as the jacket in the wardrobe, the one that smelt of petrol and the rotten animal from which it was made. Then the rat brain concentrated on how to force its way through what lay in front of her. She had tried from both sides, tried to squeeze past, but, despite the fact that she was only twenty-five centimetres long and weighed well under half a kilo, she couldn't. The obstacle lay on its side with its back to the wall blocking the entrance to the nest, and her eight newly

born, blind, hairless babies were screaming ever louder for her milk. The mountain of flesh smelt of salt, sweat and blood. It was a human body. A living human being; her sensitive ears could detect the faint heartbeats between her babies' hungry squeals.

She was frightened, but she had no choice. Feeding her young took precedence over all dangers, all exertions, all her other instincts. Then she stood with her nose in the air waiting for the solution to come to her.

The church bells were ringing in time with the human heart now. One beat, two. Three, four ...

She bared her rat teeth.

July. Shit. You should not die in July. Is that really church bells I can hear, or were there hallucinogens in the bloody bullets? OK, so it stops here. And what sodding difference does it make? Here or there. Now or later. But did I really deserve to die in July? With the birds singing, bottles clinking, laughter from down by the Akerselva and fricking summer merriment right outside your window? Did I deserve to be lying on the floor of an infected junkie pit with an extra orifice in my body, from which it all runs out: life, seconds and flashbacks of everything that led me here? Everything, big and small, the whole bundle of fortuitous and semi-determined events; is that me, is that everything, is that my life? I had plans, didn't I? And now it is no more than a bag of dust, a joke without a punchline, so short that I could have told it before that insane bell stopped ringing. Fires of hell! No one told me it would hurt so much to die. Are you there now, Dad? Don't go, not now. Listen, the joke goes like this: my name's Gusto. I lived to the age of nineteen. You were a bad guy who porked a bad woman and nine months later I popped out and was shipped to a foster family before I could say 'Dad'! And there I caused as much trouble as I could. They just wrapped the suffocating care blanket around even tighter and asked me what I

wanted to calm me down. A fricking ice cream? They had no bloody idea that people like you and me would end up shot at some point, eradicated like a pest, that we spread contagion and decay and would multiply like rats if we got the chance. They have only themselves to blame. But they also want things. Everyone wants something. I was thirteen the first time I saw in my foster-mother's eyes what she wanted.

'You're so handsome, Gusto,' she said. She had entered the bathroom - I had left the door open, and refrained from turning on the shower so that the sound wouldn't warn her. She stood there for exactly a second too long before going out. And I laughed, because now I knew. That is my talent, Dad: I can see what people want. Have I taken after you? Were you like that as well? After she had gone out I looked at myself in the large mirror. She wasn't the first to say it: that I was handsome. I had developed earlier than the other boys. Tall, slim, already broad-shouldered and muscular. Hair so black it gleamed, as if all light bounced off it. High cheekbones. Square chin. A big, greedy mouth, but with lips as full as a girl's. Smooth, tanned skin. Brown, almost black eyes. 'The brown rat', one of the boys in the class had called me. Didrik, think that was his name. He was going to be a concert pianist. I had turned fifteen, and he said it out loud in the classroom. 'That brown rat can't even read properly.'

I just laughed and, of course, I knew why he had said it. Knew what he wanted. Kamilla. He was secretly in love with her; she was not quite so secretly in love with me. At the class party I had had a grope to feel what she had under her jumper. Which was not a great deal. I had mentioned it to a couple of the boys and I suppose Didrik must have picked up on it, and decided to shut me out. Not that I was so bloody concerned about being 'in', but bullying is bullying. So I went to Tutu at the MC club, the bikers. I had already done a bit of hash dealing for them at

school, and said that I needed some respect if I was going to do a decent job. Tutu said he would take care of Didrik. Later Didrik refused to explain to anyone how he had got two fingers caught under the top hinge of the boys' toilet door, but he never called me 'brown rat' again. And - right - he never became a concert pianist, either. Shit, this hurts so much! No, I don't need any consoling, Dad, I need a fix. One last shot and then I'll leave this world without any bother, I promise. There, the church bell has rung again. Dad?

IT WAS ALMOST midnight at Gardermoen, Oslo's principal airport, as SK-459 from Bangkok taxied into its allocated spot by Gate 46. Captain Tord Schultz braked and brought the Airbus 340 to a complete halt; then he quickly switched off the fuel supply. The metallic whine from the jet engines sank through the frequencies to a good-natured growl before dying. Tord Schultz automatically noted the time, three minutes and forty seconds since touchdown, twelve minutes before the scheduled time. He and the first officer started the checklist for shutdown and parking as the plane was to remain there overnight. With the goods. He flicked through the briefcase containing the log. September 2011. In Bangkok it was still the rainy season and had been steaming hot as usual, and he had longed for home and the first cool autumn evenings. Oslo in September. There was no better place on earth. He filled in the form for the remaining fuel. The fuel bill. He had had to find a way of accounting for it. After flights from Amsterdam or Madrid he had flown faster than was economically reasonable, burning off thousands of kroner worth of fuel to make it. In the end, his boss had carpeted him.

'To make what?' he had yelled. 'You didn't have any passengers with connecting flights!'

'The world's most punctual airline,' Tord Schultz had mumbled, quoting the advertising slogan.

'The world's most economically fucked-up airline! Is that the best explanation you can come up with?'

Tord Schultz had shrugged. After all, he couldn't say the reason, that he had opened the fuel nozzles because there was something he himself had to make. The flight he had been put on, the one to Bergen, Trondheim or Stavanger. It was extremely important that *he* did the trip and not one of the other pilots.

He was too old for them to do anything else to him but rant and rave. He had avoided making serious errors, the organisation took care of him, and there were only a few years left before he reached the two fives, fifty-five, and would be retired whatever happened. Tord Schultz sighed. A few years to fix things, to avert ending up as the world's most economically fucked-up pilot.

He signed the log, got up and left the cockpit to flash his row of pearly-white pilot teeth set in his tanned pilot face to the passengers. The smile that would tell them that he was Mr Confidence in person. Pilot. The professional title that had once made him something in other people's eyes. He had seen it, how people, men and women, young and old, once the magic word 'pilot' had been enunciated, had looked at him and discovered not only the charisma, the nonchalance, the boyish charm, but also the captain's dynamism and cold precision, the superior intellect and the courage of a man who defied physical laws and the innate fears of mere mortals. But that was a long time ago. Now they regarded him as the bus driver he was and asked him what the cheapest tickets to Las Palmas were, and why there was more leg room on Lufthansa.

To hell with them. To hell with them all.

Tord Schultz stood at the exit next to the flight attendants, straightened up and smiled, said 'Welcome back, Miss' in broad Texan, the way they had learned at flying school in Sheppard. Received a smile of acknowledgement. There had been a time when he could have arranged a meeting in the arrivals hall with such a smile. And indeed had done. From Cape Town to Alta.

Women. Many women. That had been the problem. And the solution. Women. Many women. New women. And now? His hairline was receding beneath the pilot's cap, but the tailor-made uniform emphasised his tall, broad-shouldered physique. That was what he had blamed for not getting into fighter jets at flying school, and ending up as a cargo pilot on the Hercules, the workhorse of the sky. He had told them at home he had been a couple of centimetres too long in the spine, that the cockpits of Starfighters, F-5s and F-16s, disqualified all but dwarfs. The truth was he hadn't measured up to the competition. His body was all he had managed to maintain from those times, the only thing which hadn't fallen apart, which hadn't crumbled. Like his marriages. His family. Friends. How had it happened? Where had he been when it happened? Presumably in a hotel room in Cape Town or Alta, with cocaine up his nose to compensate for the potency-killing drinks at the bar, and his dick in not such a Welcome-Back-Miss to compensate for everything he was not and never would be.

Tord Schultz's gaze fell on a man coming towards him down the aisle. He walked with his head bent, yet still he towered over the other passengers. He was slim and broad-shouldered like himself. Younger though. Cropped blond hair stood up like a brush. Looked Norwegian, but was hardly a tourist on his way home, more likely to be an expat with the subdued, almost grey tan typical of whites who had spent a long time in South-East Asia. The indisputably tailor-made brown linen suit gave an impression of quality, seriousness. Maybe a businessman. Thanks to a not altogether thriving concern, he travelled economy class. But it was neither the suit nor his height that had caused Tord Schultz's gaze to fix on this person. It was the scar. It went from the left corner of his mouth and almost reached his ear, like a smile-shaped sickle. Grotesque and wonderfully dramatic.

'See you.'

Tord Schultz was startled, but did not manage to respond before the man had passed and was out of the plane. The voice had been rough and hoarse, which together with the bloodshot eyes suggested he had just woken up.

The plane was empty. The minibus with the cleaning staff stood parked on the runway as the crew left in a herd. Tord Schultz noticed that the small, thickset Russian was the first off the bus, watched him dash up the steps in his yellow high-visibility vest with the company logo, Solox.

See you.

Tord Schultz's brain repeated the words as he strode down the corridor to the flight crew centre.

'Didn't you have a boarding bag on top?' asked one of the flight attendants, pointing to Tord's Samsonite trolley. He couldn't remember what her name was. Mia? Maja? At any rate he had fucked her during a stopover once last century. Or had he?

'No,' Tord Schultz said.

See you. As in 'see you again'? Or as in 'I can see you're looking at me'?

They walked past the partition by the entrance to the flight crew centre, where in theory there was room for a jack-in-the-box customs officer. Ninety-nine per cent of the time the seat behind the partition was empty, and he had never - not once in the thirty years he had worked for the airline - been stopped and searched.

See you.

As in 'I can see you, alright'. And 'I can see who you are'.

Tord Schultz hurried through the door to the centre.

Sergey Ivanov ensured, as usual, he was the first off the minibus when it stopped on the tarmac beside the Airbus, and sprinted up the steps to the empty plane. He took the vacuum cleaner into the cockpit and locked the door behind

him. He slipped on latex gloves and pulled them up to where the tattoos started, flipped the front lid off the vac and opened the captain's locker. Lifted out the small Samsonite boarding bag, unzipped it, removed the metal plate at the bottom and checked the four brick-like one-kilo packages. Then he put them into the vac, pressed them into position between the tube and the large dust bag he had made sure to empty beforehand. Clicked the front lid back, unlocked the cockpit door and activated the vacuum cleaner. It was all done in seconds.

After tidying and cleaning the cabin they ambled off the plane, stowed the light blue bin bags in the back of the Daihatsu and went back to the lounge. There was only a handful of planes landing and taking off before the airport closed for the night. Ivanov glanced over his shoulder at Jenny, the shift manager. He gazed at the computer screen showing arrival and departure times. No delays.

'I'll take Bergen,' Sergey said in his harsh accent. At least he spoke the language; he knew Russians who had lived in Norway for ten years and were still forced to resort to English. But when Sergey had been brought in, almost two years ago, his uncle had made it clear he was to learn Norwegian, and had consoled him by saying that he might have some of his own talent for picking up languages.

'I've got Bergen covered,' Jenny said. 'You can wait for Trondheim.'

'I'll do Bergen,' Sergey said. 'Nick can do Trondheim.'

Jenny looked at him. 'As you like. Don't work yourself to death, Sergey.'

Sergey went to a chair by the wall and sat down. Leaned back carefully. The skin round his shoulders was still sore from where the Norwegian tattooist had been plying his trade. He was working from drawings Sergey had been sent by Imre, the tattooist in Nizhny Tagil prison, and there was still quite a bit left to do. Sergey thought of the tattoos his uncle's lieutenants, Andrey and Peter, had. The pale

blue strokes on the skin of the two Cossacks from Altai told of their dramatic lives and great deeds. But Sergey had a feat to his name as well. A murder. It was a little murder, but it had already been tattooed in the form of an angel. And perhaps there would be another murder. A big one. If *the necessary* became necessary, his uncle had said, and warned him to be ready, mentally prepared, and to keep up his knife practice. A man was coming, he had said. It wasn't absolutely certain, but it was probable.

Probable.

Sergey Ivanov regarded his hands. He had kept the latex gloves on. Of course it was a coincidence that their standard work gear also ensured that he would not leave any fingerprints on the packages if things should go wrong one day. There wasn't a hint of a tremble. His hands had been doing this for so long that he had to remind himself of the risk now and then to stay alert. He hoped they would be as calm when *the necessary* - *chto nuzhno* - had to be performed. When he had to earn the tattoo for which he had already ordered the design. He conjured up the image again: him unbuttoning his shirt in the sitting room at home in Tagil, with all his urka brothers present, and showing them his new tattoos. Which would need no comment, no words. So he wouldn't say anything. Just see it in their eyes: he was no longer Little Sergey. For weeks he had been praying at night that the man would come. And that *the necessary* would become necessary.

The message to clean the Bergen plane crackled over the walkie-talkie.

Sergey got up. Yawned.

The procedure in the second cockpit was even simpler.

Open the vacuum cleaner, put the contents in the boarding bag in the first officer's locker.

On their way out they met the crew on their way in. Sergey Ivanov avoided the first officer's eyes, looked down and noted that he had the same kind of trolley as Schultz.

Samsonite Aspire GRT. Same red. Without the little red boarding bag that can be fastened to it on top. They knew nothing of each other, nothing of motivations, nothing of the background or the family. All that linked Sergey, Schultz and the young first officer were the numbers of their unregistered mobile phones, purchased in Thailand, so they could send a text in case there were changes to the schedule. Sergey doubted Schultz and the first officer knew of each other. Andrey limited all information to a strictly need-to-know basis. For that reason, Sergey hadn't a clue what happened to the packages. He could guess though. For when the first officer, on an internal flight between Oslo and Bergen, passed from airside to landside there was no customs check, no security check. The officer took the boarding bag to the hotel in Bergen where the crew was staying. A discreet knock on the hotel door in the middle of the night and four kilos of heroin exchanged hands. Even though the new drug, violin, had pushed down heroin prices, the going rate on the street for a quarter was still at least 250 kroner. A thousand a gram. Given that the drug - which had already been diluted - was diluted once more, that would amount to eight million kroner in total. He could do the maths. Enough to know he was underpaid. But he also knew he would have done enough to merit a bigger slice when he had done *the necessary*. And after a couple of years on that salary he could buy a house in Tagil, find himself a good-looking Siberian girl, and perhaps let his mother and father move in when they got old.

Sergey Ivanov felt the tattoo itch between his shoulder blades.

It was as though the skin was looking forward to the next instalment.

THE MAN IN the linen suit alighted from the airport express at Oslo Central Station. He established it must have been a warm, sunny day in his old home town, for the air was still gentle and embracing. He was carrying an almost comical little canvas suitcase and exited the station on the southern side with quick, supple strides. From the outside, Oslo's heart - which some maintained the town did not have - beat with a restful pulse. Night rhythm. The few cars there were swirled around the circular Traffic Machine, were ejected, one by one, eastwards to Stockholm and Trondheim, northwards to other parts of town or westwards to Drammen and Kristiansand. Both in size and shape the Traffic Machine resembled a brontosaurus, a dying giant that was soon to disappear, to be replaced by homes and businesses in Oslo's splendid new quarter with its splendid new construction, the Opera House. The man stopped and looked at the white iceberg situated between the Traffic Machine and the fjord. It had already won architectural prizes from all over the world; people came from far and wide to walk on the Italian marble roof that sloped right down into the sea. The light inside the building's large windows was as strong as the moonlight falling on it.

Christ, what an improvement, the man thought.

It was not the future promises of a new urban development he saw, but the past. For this had been Oslo's shooting gallery, its dopehead territory, where they had injected themselves and ridden their highs behind the

barracks which partially hid them, the city's lost children. A flimsy partition between them and their unknowing, well-meaning social democratic parents. What an improvement, he thought. They were on a trip to hell in more beautiful surroundings.

It was three years since he had last stood here. Everything was new. Everything was the same.

They had ensconced themselves on a strip of grass between the station and the motorway, much like the verge of a road. As doped up now as then. Lying on their backs, eyes closed, as though the sun was too strong, huddled over, trying to find a vein that could still be used, or standing bent with bowed junkie-knees and rucksacks, unsure whether they were coming or going. Same faces. Not the same living dead when he used to walk here, they had died long ago, once and for all. But the same faces.

On the road up to Tollbugata there were more of them. Since they had a connection with the reason for his return he tried to glean an impression. Tried to decide if there were more or fewer of them. Noted that they were trading in Plata again. The little square of asphalt to the west of Jernbanetorget, which had been painted white, had been Oslo's Taiwan, a free trade area for drugs, established so that the authorities could keep a wary eye on what was happening and perhaps intercept young first-time buyers. But as business grew in size and Plata showed Oslo's true face as one of Europe's worst heroin spots, the place became a pure tourist attraction. The turnover for heroin and the OD statistics had long been a source of shame for the capital, but nonetheless not such a visible stain as Plata. Newspapers and TV fed the rest of the country with images of stoned youths, zombies wandering the city centre in broad daylight. The politicians were blamed. When right-wingers were in power the left were in an uproar. 'Not enough treatment centres.' 'Prison sentences create users.' 'The new class society creates gangs and drug trafficking in

immigrant areas.' When the left was in power, the right were in an uproar. 'Not enough police.' 'Access for asylum seekers too easy.' 'Six out of seven prisoners are foreigners.'

So, after being hounded from pillar to post, Oslo City Council came to the inevitable decision: to save itself. To shovel the shit under the carpet. To close Plata.

The man in the linen suit saw a youth in a red-and-white Arsenal shirt standing on some steps with four people shuffling their feet in front of him. The Arsenal player's head was jerking left and right, like a chicken's. The other four heads were motionless, staring only at the dealer in the Arsenal colours, who was waiting until there were enough of them, a full cohort, maybe that was five, maybe six. Then he would accept payment for the orders and take them to where the dope was. Round the corner or inside a backyard where his partner was waiting. It was a simple principle; the guy with the dope never had any contact with money and the guy with the money never had any contact with dope. That made it harder for the police to acquire solid evidence of drug-dealing against either of them. Nonetheless, the man in the linen suit was surprised, for what he saw was the old method used in the 1980s and 90s. As the police gave up trying to catch pushers on the streets, sellers had dropped their elaborate routines and the assembly of a cohort and had started dealing directly as punters turned up; money in one hand, drugs in the other. Had the police started arresting street dealers again?

A man in cycling gear pedalled past, helmet, orange goggles and heaving, brightly coloured jersey. His thigh muscles bulged under the tight shorts, and the bike looked expensive. That must have been why he took it with him when he and the rest of the cohort followed the Arsenal player round the corner to the other side of the building. Everything was new. Everything was the same. But there were fewer of them, weren't there?

The prostitutes on the corner of Skippergata spoke to him in pidgin English - Hey, baby! Wait a minute, handsome! - but he just shook his head. And it seemed as if the rumour of his chasteness, or possible pecuniary difficulties, spread faster than he could walk because the girls further up showed no interest in him. In his day, Oslo's prostitutes had dressed in practical clothing, jeans and thick jackets. There hadn't been many of them; it had been a seller's market. But now the competition was fiercer, and there were short skirts, high heels and fishnet stockings. The African women seemed to be cold already. Wait until December, he thought.

He advanced deeper into Kvadraturen, which had been Oslo's first town centre, but now it was an asphalt-and-brick desert with administrative buildings and offices for 250,000 worker ants, who scuttled home at four or five o'clock and ceded the quarter to nocturnal rodents. When King Christian IV built the town in square blocks, according to Renaissance ideals of geometrical order, the population was kept in check by fire. Popular myth had it that down here every leap year's night you could see people in flames running between houses, hear their screams, watch them burn and dissolve, but there would be a layer of ash left on the tarmac, and if you managed to grab it before the wind blew it away the house you occupied would never burn down. Because of the fire risk Christian IV built broad roads, by the standards of Oslo's poor. Houses were erected in the un-Norwegian building material of brick. And along one of these brick walls he passed the open door of a bar. A new violation of Guns N' Roses' 'Welcome to the Jungle', dance-produced reggae pissing on Marley and Rose, Slash and Stradlin, belted out to the smokers standing around outside. He stopped at an outstretched arm.

'Gotta light?'

A plump, top-heavy lady somewhere in her late thirties looked up at him. Her cigarette bounced provocatively up and down between her red lips.

He raised an eyebrow and looked at her laughing girlfriend, who was standing behind her with a glowing cigarette. The top-heavy one noticed and then laughed as well, taking a step aside to regain her balance.

'Don't be so slow,' she said in the same Sørland accent as the Crown princess. He had heard there was a prostitute in the covered market who got rich by looking like her, talking like her and dressing like her. And that the 5,000-kroner-an-hour fee included a plastic sceptre which the customer was allowed to put to relatively free use.

The woman's hand rested on his arm as he made to move on. She leaned towards him and breathed red wine into his face.

'You're a good-looking guy. How about giving me ... a light?'

He turned the other side of his face to her. The bad side. The not-such-a-good-looking-guy side. Felt her flinch and slip as she saw the path left by the nail from his time in the Congo. It stretched from mouth to ear like a badly sewn-up tear.

He walked on as the music changed to Nirvana. 'Come As You Are.' Original version.

'Hash?'

The voice came from a gateway, but he neither stopped nor turned.

'Speed?'

He had been clean for three years and had no intention of starting again.

'Violin?'

Least of all now.

In front of him on the pavement a young man had stopped by two dealers; he was showing them something as he spoke. The youngster looked up as he approached, fixing

two searching grey eyes on him. Policeman's eyes, the man thought, lowered his head and crossed the street. It was perhaps a little paranoid; after all, it was unlikely such a young police officer would recognise him.

There was the hotel. The dosshouse. Leon.

It was almost deserted in this part of the street. On the other side, under a lamp, he saw the dope seller astride the bike, with another cyclist, also wearing professional cycling gear. The dope seller was helping the other guy to inject himself in the neck.

The man in the linen suit shook his head and gazed up at the facade of the building before him.

There was the same banner, grey with dirt, hanging below the third-and top-floor windows. 'Four hundred kroner a night!' Everything was new. Everything was the same.

The receptionist at Hotel Leon was new. A young lad, who greeted the man in the linen suit with an astonishingly polite smile and an amazing - for Leon - lack of mistrust. He wished him a hearty 'Welcome' without a tinge of irony in his voice and asked to see his passport. The man assumed he was often taken for a foreigner because of the tanned complexion and the linen suit, and passed the receptionist his red Norwegian passport. It was worn and full of stamps. Too many for it to be called a good life.

'Oh, yes,' the receptionist said, returning it. Placed a form on the counter and handed him a pen.

'The marked sections are enough.'

A checking-in form at Leon? the man thought with surprise. Perhaps some things had changed after all. He took the pen and saw the receptionist staring at his hand, his middle finger. The one that had been his longest finger before it was cut off in a house on Holmenkollen Ridge. Now the first joint had been replaced with a matt, greyish-blue, titanium prosthesis. It wasn't a lot of use, but it did

provide balance for his adjacent fingers when he had to grip, and it was not in the way as it was so short. The only disadvantage was the endless explanations when he had to go through security at airports.

He filled in *First name* and *Last name*.

Date of birth.

He wrote knowing he looked more like a man in his mid-forties now than the damaged geriatric who had left Norway three years ago. He had subjected himself to a strict regime of exercise, healthy food, plentiful sleep and – of course – absolutely no addictive substances. The aim of the regime had not been to look younger, but to avoid death. Besides, he liked it. In fact he had always like fixed routines, discipline, order. So why had his life been chaos instead, such self-destruction and a series of broken relationships between dark periods of intoxication? The blank boxes looked up at him, questioningly. But they were too small for the answers they required.

Permanent address.

Well, the flat in Sofies gate was sold right after he left three years ago, the same applied to his parents' house in Oppsal. In his present occupation an official address would have carried a certain inherent risk. So he wrote what he usually wrote when he checked in at other hotels: Chungking Mansion, Hong Kong. Which was no further from the truth than anything else.

Occupation.

Murder. He didn't write that. This section hadn't been marked.

Telephone number.

He put a fictitious one. Mobile phones can be traced, the conversations and where you make them.

Next of kin's telephone number.

Next of kin? What husband would voluntarily give his wife's number when he checked in at Hotel Leon? The place was the closest Oslo had to a public brothel, after all.

The receptionist could evidently read his mind. 'In case you should feel indisposed and we have to call someone.'

Harry nodded. In case of a heart attack during the act.

'You don't need to write anything if you don't ...'

'No,' the man said, looking at the words. *Next of kin*. He had Sis. A sister with what she herself called 'a touch of Down's syndrome', but who had always tackled life a great deal better than her elder brother. Apart from Sis there was no one else. Absolutely no one. All the same, next of kin.

He ticked 'Cash' for mode of payment, signed and passed the form to the receptionist. Who skimmed through it. And then at last Harry saw it shine through. The mistrust.

'Are you ... are you Harry Hole?'

Harry Hole nodded. 'Is that a problem?'

The boy shook his head. Gulped.

'Fine,' said Harry. 'Have you got a key for me?'

'Oh, sorry! Here. 301.'

Harry took it and noticed that the boy's pupils had widened and his voice constricted.

'It ... it's my uncle,' the boy said. 'He runs the hotel. Used to sit here before me. He's told me about you.'

'Only nice things, I trust,' Harry said, grabbing his canvas suitcase and heading for the stairs.

'The lift ...'

'Don't like lifts,' Harry said without turning.

The room was the same as before. Tatty, small and more or less clean. No, in fact, the curtains were new. Green. Stiff. Probably drip-dry. Which reminded him. He hung his suit in the bathroom and turned on the shower so the steam would remove the creases. The suit had cost him eight hundred Hong Kong dollars at Punjab House on Nathan Road, but in his job it was an essential investment; no one respected a man dressed in rags. He stood under the shower. The hot water made his skin tingle. Afterwards he walked naked through the room to the window and

opened it. Second floor. Backyard. Through an open window came the groans of simulated enthusiasm. He grasped the curtain pole and leaned out. Looked straight down onto an open skip and recognised the sweet smell of rubbish rising forth. He spat and heard it hit the paper in the bin. But the rustling that followed was not of paper. There was a crack, and the stiff green curtains landed on the floor on either side of him. Shit! He pulled the thin pole out of the curtain hem. It was the old kind with two bulbous pointed ends; it had broken before and someone had tried to stick it together with brown tape. Harry sat down on the bed and opened the drawer in the bedside table. A Bible with a light blue synthetic leather cover and a sewing kit comprising black thread wound round card with a needle stuck through. On mature reflection, Harry realised they might not be such a bad idea after all. Afterwards guests could sew back torn fly buttons and read about forgiveness of sins. He lay down on the bed and stared at the ceiling. Everything was new. Everything ... He closed his eyes. On the flight he hadn't slept a wink, and with or without jet lag, with or without curtains, he was going to have to sleep. And he began to dream the same dream he had had every night for the last three years: he was running down a corridor, fleeing from a roaring avalanche that sucked out all the air, leaving him unable to breathe.

It was just a question of keeping going and keeping his eyes closed for a bit longer.

He lost a grip on his thoughts; they were drifting away from him.

Next of kin.

Kin. Kith.

Next of kin.

That's what he was. That's why he was back.

Sergey was driving on the E6 towards Oslo. Longing for the bed in his Furuset flat. Keeping under 120, even though the