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ABOUT THE BOOK

Sonny is a model prisoner

He listens to the confessions of other inmates at Oslo jail, and absolves them of their sins. Some people even whisper that Sonny is serving time for someone else: that he doesn't just listen, he confesses to their crimes.

Inspector Simon Kefas is a dedicated police officer

Simon has worked for the Oslo police force for years. He's just been assigned a new murder investigation and a new partner, all on the same day.

Both of them knew Sonny's father

To Sonny he was the man he idolised, to Simon he was his best friend. Both were left devastated when his corruption was revealed.

But neither of them knew the truth

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jo Nesbo is a musician, songwriter, economist and prize-winning author. *The Bat*, his first crime novel, was published in Norway in 1997 and was an instant hit. His bestselling Harry Hole series has been a huge success in the UK and across the world, while his standalone crime novel, *Headhunters*, was made into an award-winning film.

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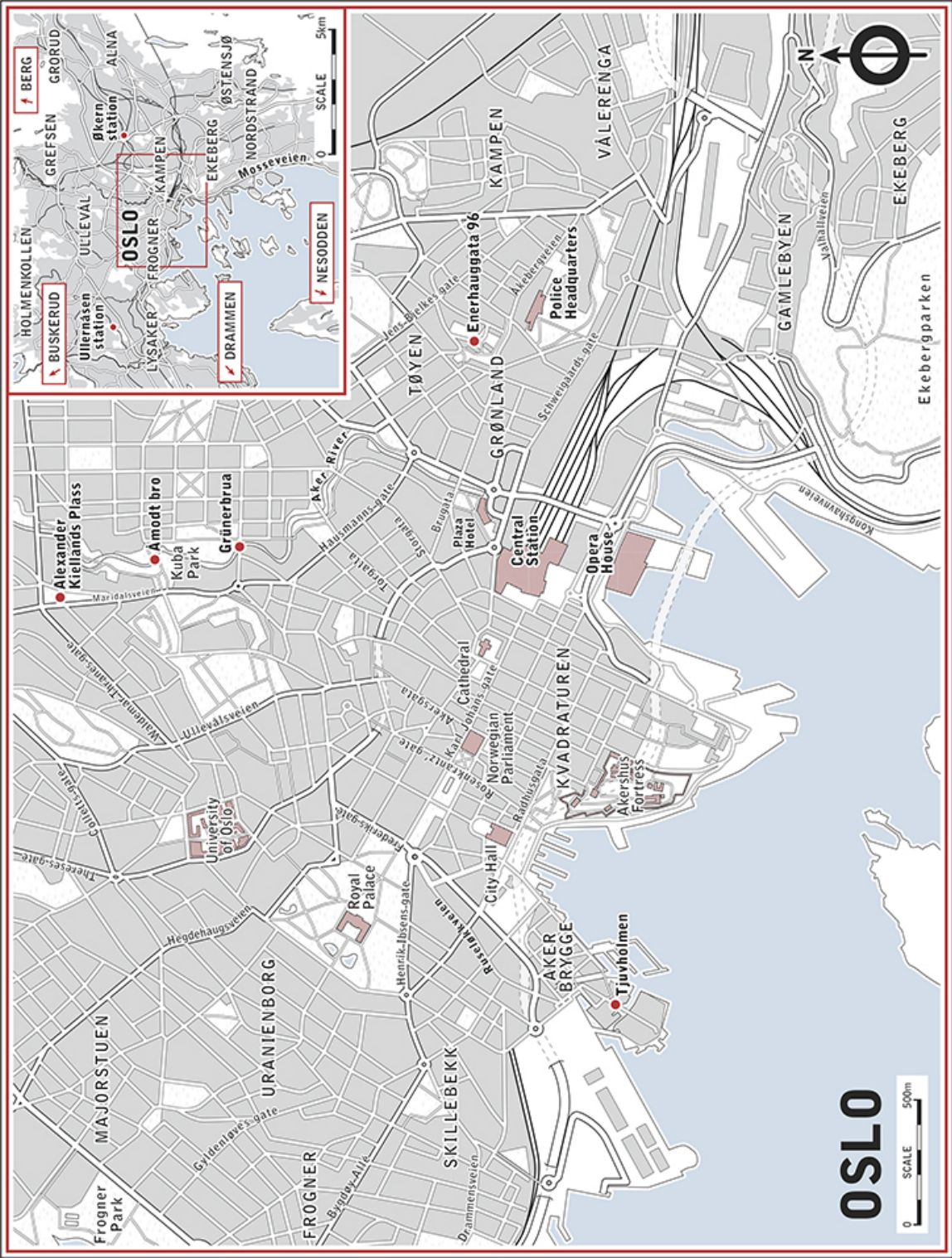
Charlotte Barslund is a translator of Scandinavian plays and novels. Her translation of *Calling Out For You* by Karin Fossum was nominated for the Crime Writers' Association Gold Dagger award, while her translation of *I Curse the River of Time* by Per Petterson was shortlisted for the *Independent Foreign Fiction* award.

ALSO BY JO NESBO

The Harry Hole series

The Bat
Cockroaches
The Redbreast
Nemesis
The Devil's Star
The Redeemer
The Snowman
The Leopard
Phantom
Police

Headhunters



The Son

Jo Nesbo

Translated from the Norwegian by
Charlotte Barslund



Harvill Secker
LONDON

And he will come again to judge the living and the dead

PART ONE

1

ROVER KEPT HIS eyes on the white-painted concrete floor in the eleven-square-metre prison cell. He bit down on the slightly too long gold front tooth in his lower jaw. He had reached the hardest part of his confession. The only sound in the cell was his nails scratching the madonna tattoo on his forearm. The boy sitting cross-legged on the bed opposite him had remained silent ever since Rover had entered. He had merely nodded and smiled his blissful Buddha smile, his gaze fixed at a point on Rover's forehead. People called the boy Sonny and said that he had killed two people as a teenager, that his father had been a corrupt police officer and that Sonny had healing hands. It was hard to see if the boy was listening, his green eyes and most of his face were hidden behind his long, matted hair, but that didn't matter. Rover just wanted his sins forgiven and to receive Sonny's distinctive blessing so that tomorrow he could walk out of Staten Maximum Security Prison with the feeling of being a truly cleansed man. Not that Rover was religious, but it could do no harm when he intended to change, to give going straight a real try. Rover took a deep breath.

'I think she was from Belarus. Minsk is in Belarus, innit?' Rover looked up quickly, but the boy made no reply. 'Nestor had nicknamed her Minsk,' Rover said. 'He told me to shoot her.'

The obvious advantage of confessing to someone whose brain was fried was that no name and incident would stick; it was like talking to yourself. This might explain why inmates at Staten preferred this guy to the chaplain or the psychologist.

‘Nestor kept her and eight other girls in a cage down in Enerhaugen. East Europeans and Asians. Young. Teenagers. At least I hope they were as old as that. But Minsk was older. Stronger. She escaped. Got as far as Tøyen Park before Nestor’s dog caught her. One of those Argentine mastiffs – know what I’m talking about?’

The boy’s eyes never moved, but he raised his hand. Found his beard. He started to comb it slowly with his fingers. The sleeve of his filthy, oversized shirt slipped down and revealed scabs and needle marks. Rover went on.

‘Bloody big albino dogs. Kills anything its owner points at. And quite a lot he doesn’t. Banned in Norway, ‘course. A guy out in Rælengen got some from the Czech Republic, breeds them and registers them as white boxers. Me and Nestor went there to buy one when it was a pup. It cost more than fifty grand in cash. The puppy was so cute you wouldn’t ever think it . . .’ Rover stopped. He knew he was only talking about the dog to put off the inevitable. ‘Anyway . . .’

Anyway. Rover looked at the tattoo on his other forearm. A cathedral with two spires. One for each sentence he had served, neither of which had anything to do with today’s confession. He used to supply guns to a biker gang and modify some of them in his workshop. He was good at it. Too good. So good that he couldn’t remain below the radar forever and he was caught. And so good that, while serving his first sentence, Nestor had taken him under his wing. Nestor had made sure he owned him so that from then on only Nestor would get his hands on the best guns, rather than the biker gang or any other rivals. He had paid him more for a few months’ work than Rover could ever hope to earn in a lifetime in his workshop fixing motorbikes. But Nestor had demanded a lot in return. Too much.

‘She was lying in the bushes, blood everywhere. She just lay there, dead still, staring up at us. The dog had taken a chunk out of her face – you could see straight to the teeth.’

Rover grimaced. Get to the point. 'Nestor said it was time to teach them a lesson, show the other girls what would happen to them. And that Minsk was worthless to him now anyway, given the state of her face . . .' Rover swallowed. 'So he told me to do it. Finish her off. That's how I'd prove my loyalty, you see. I had an old Ruger MK II pistol that I'd done some work on. And I was going to do it. I really was. That wasn't the problem . . .'

Rover felt his throat tighten. He had thought about it so often, gone over those seconds during that night in Tøyen Park, seeing the girl over and over again. Nestor and himself taking the leading roles with the others as silent witnesses. Even the dog had been silent. He had thought about it perhaps a hundred times? A thousand? And yet it wasn't until now, when he said the words out loud for the first time, that he realised that it hadn't been a dream, that it really *had* happened. Or rather it was as if his body hadn't accepted it until now. That was why his stomach was churning. Rover breathed deeply through his nose to quell the nausea.

'But I couldn't do it. Even though I knew she was gonna die. They had the dog at the ready and I was thinking that me, I'd have preferred a bullet. But it was as if the trigger was locked in position. I just couldn't pull it.'

The young man seemed to be nodding faintly. Either in response to what Rover was telling him or to music only he could hear.

'Nestor said we didn't have all day, we were in a public park after all. So he took out a small, curved knife from a leg holster, stepped forward, grabbed her by the hair, pulled her up and just seemed to swing the knife in front of her throat. As if gutting a fish. Blood spurted out three, four times, then she was empty. But d'you know what I remember most of all? The dog. How it started howling at the sight of all that blood.'

Rover leaned forward in the chair with his elbows on his knees. He covered his ears with his hands and rocked back and forth.

‘And I did nothing. I just stood there, looking on. I did sod all. While they wrapped her in a blanket and carried her to the car, I just watched. We drove her to the woods, to Østmarksetra. Lifted her out and rolled her down the slope towards Ulsrudsvannet. Lots of people take their dogs for walks there so she was found the next day. The point was, Nestor wanted her to be found, d’you get me? He wanted pictures in the papers of what had happened to her. So he could show them to the other girls.’

Rover removed his hands from his ears.

‘I stopped sleeping; every time I closed my eyes I had nightmares. The girl with the missing cheek smiled at me and bared all her teeth. So I went to see Nestor and told him I wanted out. Said I’d had enough of filing down Uzis and Glocks, that I wanted to go back to fixing motorbikes. Live a quiet life, not worry about the cops the whole time. Nestor said that was OK, he’d probably sussed that I didn’t have it in me to be a tough guy. But he made it very clear what would happen to me if I talked. I thought we were sorted. I turned down every job I was offered even though I still had some decent Uzis lying around. But I kept thinking that something was brewing. That I would be bumped off. So I was almost relieved when the cops came and I got put away. I thought I’d be safer in prison. They got me on an old case – I was only an accessory, but they had arrested two guys who both said that I had supplied them with weapons. I confessed to it on the spot.’

Rover laughed hard. He started to cough. He leaned back in his chair.

‘In eighteen hours I’m getting out of this place. Haven’t got a clue what’s waiting for me on the outside. But I know that Nestor knows I’m coming out even though I’m being released four weeks early. He knows everything that goes

on in here and with the police, I'm sure of it. He has eyes and ears everywhere. So what I'm thinking is, if he wanted me dead, he might as well have me killed in here rather than wait for me to get out. What do you think?'

Rover waited. Silence. The boy didn't look as if he thought anything at all.

'Whatever happens,' Rover said, 'a little blessing can't hurt, can it?'

It was as if a light came on in Sonny's eyes at the word 'blessing' and he raised his right hand to signal that Rover should come closer and kneel. Rover knelt on the prayer rug in front of the bed. Franck didn't let any of the other inmates have rugs on the floor in their cells - it was a part of the Swiss model they used at Staten: no superfluous items in the cells. The number of personal possessions was limited to twenty. If you wanted a pair of shoes, you would have to give up two pairs of underpants or two books. Rover looked up at Sonny's face. The boy moistened his dry, scaly lips with the tip of his tongue. His voice was surprisingly light even though the words came slowly, but his diction was perfectly clear.

'All earthly and heavenly gods have mercy on you and forgive your sins. You will die, but the soul of the penitent sinner shall be led to Paradise. Amen.'

Rover bowed his head. He felt the boy's hand on his shaved head. Sonny was left-handed, but in this case it didn't take a genius to work out that he had a shorter life expectancy than most right-handed people. The overdose could happen tomorrow or in ten years - who knew? But Rover didn't think for one minute that the boy's hand was healing like people said. Nor did he really believe this business with the blessing. So why was he here? Well, religion was like fire insurance; you never really thought you'd need it, so when people said that the boy was prepared to take your sins upon himself and didn't want anything in return, why not say yes to some peace of mind?

What Rover did wonder was how someone like Sonny could have killed in cold blood. It made no sense to him. Perhaps it was like the old saying: The devil has many disguises.

‘Salaam alaikum,’ the voice said and the hand was lifted.

Rover stayed where he was with his head lowered. Probed the smooth backside of the gold tooth with his tongue. Was he ready now? Ready to meet his Maker if that was his fate? He raised his head.

‘I know you never ask for anything in return, but . . .’

He looked at the boy’s bare foot which he had tucked under. He saw the needle marks in the big vein on the instep. ‘I did my last stretch in Botsen and getting hold of drugs in there was easy, no problem. Botsen isn’t a maximum security prison, though. They say Franck has made it impossible to smuggle anything into Staten, but . . .’ Rover stuck his hand in his pocket, ‘. . . but that’s not quite true.’

He pulled something out. It was the size of a mobile phone, a gold-plated object shaped like a pistol. Rover pressed the trigger. A small flame shot out of the muzzle. ‘Seen one of these before? Yeah, I bet you have. The officers who searched me when I came here certainly had. They told me they were selling smuggled cigarettes on the cheap if I was interested. So they let me keep the lighter. I don’t suppose they’d read my rap sheet. No one bothers doing their job properly these days – makes you wonder how anything in this country ever gets done.’

Rover weighed the lighter in his hand.

‘Eight years ago I made two of these. I ain’t boasting if I tell you that nobody in Norway could have done a better job. I’d been contacted by a middleman who told me his client wanted a gun he would never have to hide, a gun that didn’t look like a gun. So I came up with this. It’s funny how people’s minds work. At first they think it’s a gun, obvs. But once you’ve shown them that you can use it as a lighter, they forget all about it being a gun. They still think it could

also be a toothbrush or a screwdriver. But not a gun, no way. So . . .’

Rover turned a screw on the underside of the handle.

‘It takes two 9mm bullets. I call it the Happy Couple Killer.’ He aimed the barrel at the young man. ‘One for you, sweetheart . . .’ Then he pointed it at his own temple. ‘And one for me . . .’ Rover’s laughter sounded strangely lonely in the small cell.

‘Anyway. I was only supposed to make one; the client didn’t want anyone else to know the secret behind my little invention. But I made another one. And I took it with me for protection, in case Nestor decided to try to kill me while I was inside. But as I’m getting out tomorrow and I won’t need it any more, it’s yours now. And here . . .’

Rover pulled out a packet of cigarettes from his other pocket. ‘Because it’ll look weird if you have a lighter, but no cigarettes, right?’ He then took out a yellowed business card saying ‘Rover’s Motorcycle Workshop’ and slipped it into the cigarette packet.

‘Here’s my address in case you ever have a motorbike that needs fixing. Or want to get yourself one hell of an Uzi. Like I said, I still have some lying—’

The door opened outwards and a voice thundered: ‘Get out, Rover!’

Rover turned round. The trousers of the prison officer in the doorway were sagging due to the large bunch of keys that dangled from his belt, although this was partly obscured by his belly, which spilled over the lining like rising dough. ‘His Holiness has a visitor. A close relative, you could say.’ He guffawed with laughter and turned to the man behind him. ‘No offence, eh, Per?’

Rover slipped the gun and the cigarette packet under the duvet on the boy’s bed and took one last look at him.

Then he left quickly.

The prison chaplain attempted a smile while he automatically straightened his ill-fitting dog collar. *A close relative. No offence.* He felt like spitting into the prison officer's fat, grinning face, but instead he nodded to the inmate emerging from the cell and pretended to recognise him. Glanced at the tattoos on his forearms. The madonna and a cathedral. But no, over the years the faces and the tattoos had become too numerous for him to distinguish between them.

The chaplain entered. He could smell incense. Or something that reminded him of incense. Like drugs being cooked.

'Hello, Sonny.'

The young man on the bed didn't look up, but he nodded slowly. Per Vollan took it to mean that his presence had been registered, acknowledged. Approved.

He sat down on the chair and experienced a slight discomfort when he felt the warmth from the previous occupant. He placed the Bible he had brought with him on the bed next to the boy.

'I put flowers on your parents' grave today,' he said. 'I know you haven't asked me to, but . . .'

Per Vollan tried to catch the boy's eye. He had two sons himself; both were grown up and had left the Vollan family home. As Vollan himself had. The difference was that his sons were always welcome back.

In court a witness for the defence, a teacher, had testified that Sonny had been a star pupil, a talented wrestler, popular, always helpful, indeed the boy had even expressed a desire to become a police officer like his father. But ever since his father had been found dead next to a suicide note in which he confessed to corruption Sonny hadn't been seen at school. The chaplain tried to imagine the shame of the fifteen-year-old boy. Tried to imagine his own sons' shame if they ever found out what their father had done. He straightened his dog collar again.

‘Thank you,’ Sonny said.

Per thought how strangely young Sonny seemed. Because he must be close to thirty by now. Yes. Sonny had served twelve years and he was eighteen when he was sent down. Perhaps it was the drugs that had preserved him, preventing him from ageing so that only his hair and beard grew while his innocent baby eyes continued to gaze at the world in wonder. A wicked world. God knows it was evil. Per Vollan had been a prison chaplain for over forty years and seen the world grow more and more sinful. Evil spread like cancer, it made healthy cells sick, poisoned them with its vampire bite and recruited them to do its work of corruption. And once bitten no one ever escaped. No one.

‘How are you, Sonny? Did you enjoy being out on day release? Did you get to see the sea?’

No reply.

Per Vollan cleared his throat. ‘The prison officer said you got to see the sea. You might have read in the papers that a woman was found murdered the next day, not far from where you were. She was found in bed, in her own home. Her head had been . . . well. All the details are in here . . .’ He tapped his finger on the Bible. ‘The officer has already filed a report saying you ran away while you were at the sea and that he found you by the road one hour later. That you refused to account for your whereabouts. It’s important that you don’t say anything that contradicts his statement, do you understand? As usual you’ll say as little as possible. All right? Sonny?’

Per Vollan finally succeeded in making eye contact with the boy. His expression told Per little about what was going on inside his head, but he felt fairly certain that Sonny Lofthus would follow orders and not say anything unnecessary to the police or the public prosecutor. All he had to do was utter a light, soft ‘Guilty’ when he was asked how he pleaded. Though it sounded paradoxical, Vollan occasionally sensed a direction, a force of will, a survival

instinct that distinguished this junkie from the others, from those who had always been in free fall, who had never had any other plans, who had been heading for the gutter all along. This willpower might express itself as a sudden flash of insight, a question that revealed he had paid attention all along and seen and heard everything. Or in the way he might suddenly stand up, with a coordination, balance and flexibility you didn't see in other habitual drug users. While at other times, like now, he seemed to register nothing at all.

Vollan squirmed in his chair.

'Of course this means no more trips on the outside for you for quite a while. But you don't like the outside anyway, do you? And you did get to see the sea.'

'It was a river. Did the husband do it?'

The chaplain jumped. As when something unexpected breaks through black water right in front of you. 'I don't know. Is that important?'

No reply. Vollan sighed. He felt nauseous again. Recently it seemed to come and go. Perhaps he should make a doctor's appointment and get it checked out.

'Don't you worry about that, Sonny. Just remember that on the outside people like you have to scavenge all day to get their next fix. While in here everything is taken care of. And don't forget that time passes. Once you finish serving out your old sentences, you'll be no use to them, but with this murder you can extend your detention.'

'So it was the husband. Is he rich?'

Vollan pointed to the Bible. 'In here you'll find a description of the house you entered. It's big and well furnished. But the alarm that was supposed to guard all this wealth wasn't turned on; the front door wasn't even locked. The family's name is Morsand. The shipowner with the eyepatch. Seen him in the papers, have you?'

'Yes.'

'Have you? I didn't think that you—'

‘Yes, I killed her. Yes, I’ll read up on how I did it.’

Per Vollan exhaled. ‘Good. There are certain details about how she was killed which you ought to memorise.’

‘Right.’

‘She was . . . the top of her head was severed. You used a saw. Do you understand?’

The words were followed by a long silence which Per Vollan considered filling with vomit. Throwing up was preferable to exploiting the boy. He looked at him. What determined the outcome of a life? A series of random events you had no control over or did some cosmic gravity pull everything in the direction it was predestined to go? He loosened his strangely uncomfortable dog collar, suppressed his nausea and steeled himself. Remembered what was at stake.

He got up. ‘If you need to get in touch with me I’m currently staying at the Ila Centre on Alexander Kiellands Plass.’

He saw the boy’s quizzical look.

‘Just for the time being, you understand.’ He laughed quickly. ‘My wife threw me out and as I know the people who run the centre, they—’

He stopped abruptly. Suddenly he realised why so many of the inmates went to the young man to talk. It was the silence. The beckoning vacuum of someone who simply listens without reaction or judgement. Who extracts your words and your secrets from you without doing anything at all. He had striven for that ability as a chaplain all his life, but it was as if the inmates sensed that he had an agenda. They didn’t know what it was, only that there was something he wanted by knowing their secrets. Access to their souls and later a possible recruitment prize in heaven.

The chaplain saw that the boy had opened the Bible. It was such a simple trick, it was comical; the cut-outs in the pages created a compartment. Inside were folded papers

with the information Sonny needed in order to confess. And three small bags of heroin.

ARILD FRANCK BARKED a brief 'Enter!' without taking his eyes off the document on his desk.

He heard the door open. Ina, his secretary in the front office, had already announced his visitor and, for a split second, Arild Franck considered asking her to tell the chaplain that he was busy. It wouldn't even be a lie; he had a meeting with the Commissioner at Politihuset, Oslo Police's headquarters, in half an hour. But recently Per Vollan hadn't been as stable as they needed him to be and there was no harm in double-checking that he could still hold it together. There was no room for screw-ups in this case, not for any of them.

'Don't bother sitting down,' Arild Franck said, signing the document and getting up. 'We'll have to walk and talk.'

He headed for the door, took his uniform cap from the coat stand and heard the chaplain's shuffling feet behind him. Arild Franck told Ina that he would be back in an hour and a half and pressed his index finger against the sensor at the door to the stairwell. The prison was on two floors and there was no lift. Lifts equalled shafts which equalled any number of escape routes and had to be closed off in the event of fire. And a fire and its ensuing evacuation chaos was just one of many methods ingenious inmates had used to break out of other prisons. For the same reason, all electric cables, fuse boxes and water pipes had been laid so they were inaccessible to the inmates, either outside the building itself or cemented into the walls. Here nothing had been left to chance. *He* had left nothing to chance. He had sat with the architects and international prison experts

when they drew up the blueprint for Staten. Admittedly the Lenzburg Prison in the Aargau canton in Switzerland had provided the inspiration: hypermodern, but simple and with an emphasis on security and efficiency rather than comfort. But it was him, Arild Franck, who was responsible for its creation. Staten was Arild Franck and vice versa. So why had the board, in their infinite wisdom, damn them all to hell, made him only assistant prison governor and appointed that moron from Haldern Prison as governor? Yes, Franck was something of a rough diamond and, no, he wasn't the kind of guy who would suck up to politicians by jumping for joy at every bright new idea about how to reform the prison system while the previous reforms had yet to be implemented. But he knew how to do his job - keeping people locked up without them getting ill, dying or becoming noticeably worse human beings as a result. He was loyal to those who deserved his loyalty and he looked after his own. That was more than could be said for his superiors in this rotten-to-the-core, politically motivated hierarchy. Before he was deliberately overlooked for the post of governor, Arild Franck had hoped for a small bust as a memorial in the foyer when he retired - though his wife had expressed the opinion that his bull neck, bulldog face and straggly comb-over wouldn't suit a bust. But if people failed to reward your achievements, his view on the matter was you just had to help yourself.

'I can't keep doing this, Arild,' Per Vollan said behind him as they walked down the corridor.

'Doing what?'

'I'm a chaplain. What we're doing to the boy - making him take the fall for something he didn't do. Serve time for a husband who—'

'Hush.'

Outside the door to the control room, or 'the bridge' as Franck liked to call it, they passed an old man who paused his swabbing of the floor and gave a friendly nod to Franck.

Johannes was the oldest man in the prison and an inmate after Franck's own heart, a gentle soul who sometime in the previous century had been picked up – almost by chance – for drug smuggling, had never hurt a fly since and over the years had become so institutionalised, conditioned and pacified that the only thing he dreaded was the day he was released. Sadly, inmates like him didn't represent a challenge for a prison like Staten.

'Is your conscience troubling you, Vollan?'

'Yes, yes, it is, Arild.'

Franck couldn't remember exactly when his staff had started addressing their superiors by their first names, or when prison governors started wearing plain clothes rather than uniforms. In some jails the prison officers wore plain clothes as well. During a riot at the Francisco de Mar Prison in São Paulo, officers had shot at their own colleagues in the tear-gas smoke because they couldn't tell staff from inmates.

'I want out,' the chaplain implored him.

'Is that right?' Franck was jogging down the stairs. He was in good shape for a man less than ten years away from retirement, because he worked out. A forgotten virtue in an industry where obesity was the rule rather than the exception. And hadn't he coached the local swimming team when his daughter used to compete? Done his bit for the community in his spare time, given something back to this country which had given so much to so many? So how dare they overlook him. 'And how is your conscience when it comes to those young boys we've evidence you've been abusing, Vollan?' Franck pressed his index finger against the sensor at the next door; this took them to a corridor which to the west led to the cells, and to the east, the staff changing rooms and the exit to the car park.

'I suggest you think of it as Sonny Lofthus atoning for your sins as well, Vollan.'

Another door, another sensor. Franck pressed his finger against it. He loved this invention which he had copied from the Obihiro Prison in Kushiro, Japan. Instead of issuing keys that could be lost, copied or misused, the fingerprints of everyone who was authorised to pass through the doors were entered into a database. Not only had they eliminated the risk of careless handling of the keys, they also maintained a record of who had passed through which door and when. They had installed surveillance cameras as well, of course, but faces could be concealed. Not so with fingerprints. The door opened with a sigh and they entered a lock, a small room with a barred metal door at either end where one door had to be closed before the other would open.

‘I’m saying that I can’t do it any more, Arild.’

Franck raised a finger to his lips. In addition to the surveillance cameras which covered practically the entire prison, the locks had been fitted with a two-way communication system so that you could contact the control room if, for some reason, you got stuck. They exited the lock and continued towards the changing rooms where there were showers and a locker for clothing and personal property for each staff member. The fact that the assistant prison governor had a master key that opened every locker was something Franck had decided his staff didn’t need to know. Quite the opposite in fact.

‘I thought you knew who you were dealing with here,’ Franck said. ‘You can’t just quit. For these people loyalty is a matter of life and death.’

‘I know,’ Per Vollan said; his breathing had acquired an ugly rasping. ‘But I’m talking about eternal life and death.’

Franck stopped in front of the exit door and glanced quickly at the lockers to his left to make sure that they were alone.

‘You know the risk?’

‘As God is my witness, I won’t breathe a word to anyone. I want you to use those exact words, Arild. Tell them I’ll be as silent as the grave. I just want out. Please, help me?’

Franck looked down. At the sensor. Out. There were only two ways out. This one, the back way, and the other through reception at the front entrance. No ventilation shafts, no fire exits, no sewer pipes with dimensions just wide enough to allow a human body to squeeze through.

‘Maybe,’ he said and placed his finger on the sensor. A small red light at the top of the door handle flashed to indicate the database was being searched. It went off and a small green light appeared in its place. He pushed open the door. They were blinded by the bright sunlight and put on their sunglasses as they crossed the large car park. ‘I’ll tell them you want out,’ Franck said and took out his car keys while he peered at the security booth. It was staffed with two armed guards 24/7 and both the roads in and out had steel barriers which even Franck’s new Porsche Cayenne could not force. Possibly one could do it with a Hummer H1 which he had quite fancied buying, but that car would have been too wide since they had made the entrance narrow precisely to stop larger vehicles. It was also with large vehicles in mind that he had placed steel barricades within the six-metre-high fence which surrounded the entire prison. Franck had asked to have it electrified, but the planning authorities had turned down his application on the grounds that Staten was located in central Oslo and innocent civilians might hurt themselves. Innocent, ha - if anyone wanted to touch the fence from the street, they would first have to scale a five-metre-high wall with barbed wire on top.

‘Where are you going, by the way?’

‘Alexander Kiellands Plass,’ Per Vollan said hopefully.

‘Sorry,’ Arild said. ‘It’s not on my way.’

‘Not a problem, the bus stops right outside.’

‘Good. I’ll be in touch.’

The assistant prison governor got into his car and drove up to the security booth. The rules stated that all vehicles, including his own, must be stopped and the occupants checked. Only now, when the guards had seen him exit the prison building and get into the car, did they raise the barrier and let him pass. Franck returned the guards' salute. He stopped at the traffic lights by the main road. He glanced up at his beloved Staten in the rear-view mirror. It wasn't perfect, but it came close. He blamed the planning committee, the new, inane regulations from the ministry and the semi-corrupt human resources for any shortcomings. All he had ever wanted was the best for everyone, for all of Oslo's hard-working, honest citizens who deserved a safe existence and a certain standard of living. So, OK, things could have been different. He didn't like having to go about things this way. But like he always said to the learners in the pool: you sink or swim, no one is going to do you any favours. Then his thoughts returned to what lay ahead. He had a message to deliver. And he had no doubt as to the outcome.

The lights changed to green and he pressed the accelerator.