



VINTAGE

**WHEN THE DEVIL
HOLDS THE CANDLE**
KARIN FOSSUM

Contents

Cover

About the Author

Also by Karin Fossum

Dedication

Epigraph

Title Page

Chapter 1

Chapter 2

Chapter 3

Chapter 4

Chapter 5

Chapter 6

Chapter 7

Chapter 8

Chapter 9

Chapter 10

Chapter 11

Chapter 12

Chapter 13

Chapter 14

Chapter 15

Chapter 16

Chapter 17

Chapter 18

Chapter 19

Chapter 20

Chapter 21

Chapter 22

Chapter 23

Chapter 24

Copyright

About the Author

Karin Fossum began her writing career in 1974. She has won numerous awards, including the Glass Key Award for the best Nordic crime novel, an honour shared with Henning Mankell and Jo Nesbo, and the *Los Angeles Times* Book Prize for *Calling Out For You*, which was also shortlisted for the Crime Writers' Association Gold Dagger Award.

ALSO BY KARIN FOSSUM

The Inspector Sejer series

Don't Look Back

He Who Fears the Wolf

When the Devil Holds the Candle

Calling Out For You

Black Seconds

The Water's Edge

Bad Intentions

The Caller

In the Darkness

Standalone crime fiction

Broken

With thanks to Terje Ringstad and Tor Buxrud

If you had never existed, you wouldn't have read this.

And it wouldn't have made any difference. And when you no longer exist, it will be as if you had never read this. It makes no difference. But now, as you are reading, something happens: it eats up a few seconds of your time, like a tiny gnawing animal, furry with letters, blocking the path between you and your next minute. You will never get it back.

Undisturbed, it chews on the micro-organisms of time. It never gets its fill.

Nor do you.

- Tor Ulven

When the Devil Holds the Candle

Translated from the Norwegian by
Felicity David

Karin Fossum

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CHAPTER 1

THE COURTHOUSE. SEPTEMBER 4, 4 p.m.

Jacob Skarre glanced at his watch. His shift was over. He slipped a book out of his inside jacket pocket and read the poem on the first page. It's like playing Virtual Reality, he thought. Poof! - and you're in a different landscape. The door to the corridor stood open, and suddenly he was aware that someone was watching him. Whoever it was was just beyond what he could see with his excellent peripheral vision. A vibration, light as a feather, barely perceptible, finally reached him. He closed his book.

"Can I help you?"

This woman didn't move, just stood there staring at him with an odd expression. Skarre looked at her tense face and thought that she seemed familiar. She was no longer young, maybe about 60, wearing a coat and dark boots. A scarf around her neck. Enough of the pattern was discernible under her chin. The design seemed a sharp contrast to what she most likely possessed in the way of speed and elegance: racehorses with jockeys in colourful silks against a dark blue background. She had a wide, heavy face that was elongated by a prominent chin. Her eyebrows were dark and had grown almost together. She was clutching a handbag against her stomach. But most noticeable of all was her gaze. In that pale face her eyes were blazing. They fixed him with a tremendous force and he could not escape them. Then he remembered who she was. What an odd coincidence, he thought, and waited in suspense. He sat there as if riveted by the probing silence. Any moment now she was going to say something momentous.

"It has to do with a missing person," was what she said.

Her voice was rough. A rusty tool creaking into motion after a long repose. Behind her white forehead burned a fire. Skarre could see the flickering glow in her irises. He was trying not to make assumptions, but obviously she was in some way possessed. Gradually it came to him what sort of person he was dealing with. In his mind he rehearsed the day's reports, but he could not recall whether any patients had been listed as missing from the psychiatric institutes in the district. She was breathing hard, as if it had cost her immeasurable effort to come here. But she had made up her mind, and at last had been driven by something. Skarre wondered how she had made it past the reception area and Mrs Brenningen's eagle eye, coming straight to his office without anyone stopping her.

"Who is it that's missing?" he asked in a friendly voice.

She kept staring at him. He met her gaze with the same force to see if she would flinch. Her expression turned to one of confusion.

"I know where he is."

Skarre was startled. "So you know where he is? He's not missing, then?"

"He probably won't live much longer," she said. Her thin lips began to quiver.

"Who are we talking about?" Skarre said. And then, because he guessed who it might be. "Do you mean your husband?"

"Yes. My husband."

She nodded resolutely. Stood there, straight-backed and unmoving, her handbag still pressed to her stomach. Skarre leaned back in his chair.

"Your husband is sick, and you're worried about him. Is he old?"

It was an inappropriate question. Life is life, as long as a person is alive and means something, maybe everything, to

another being. He regretted the question and picked up his pen from the desk, twirling it between his fingers.

"He's almost like a child," she said sadly.

He was surprised at her response. What was she really talking about? The man was sick, possibly dying. And senile, it occurred to him. Regressing to his childhood. At the same time Skarre had a strange feeling that she was trying to tell him something else. Her coat was threadbare at the lapels, and the middle button had been sewn on rather badly, creating a fold in the fabric. Why am I noticing these things? he thought.

"Do you live far from here?" He glanced at his watch. Perhaps she could afford a taxi.

She straightened her shoulders. "Prins Oscars gate 17." She enunciated the street name with crisp consonants. "I didn't mean to bother you," she said.

Skarre stood up. "Do you need help getting home?"

She was still staring into his eyes. As if there was in them something that she wanted to take away with her. A glow, a memory of something very much alive, which the young officer was. Skarre had a weird sensation, the sort of thing that happens only rarely, when the body reacts on impulse. He lowered his gaze and saw that the short blond hairs on his arms were standing on end. At the same moment the woman turned slowly around and walked to the door. She took short, awkward steps, as if she were trying to hide something. He went back to his chair. It was 4.03 p.m. For his amusement, he scribbled a few notes on his pad.

"A woman of about 60 arrives at the office at 4 p.m. She seems confused. Says her husband is missing, that he doesn't have long to live. Wearing a brown coat with a blue scarf at her neck. Brown handbag, black boots. Possibly mentally disturbed. Left after a few minutes. Refused offer of help to get home."

He sat there, turning her visit over in his mind. Probably she was just a lost soul; there were so many of them

nowadays. After a while he folded the piece of paper and stuck it into his shirt pocket. The incident didn't belong in his daily report.

*

Has anyone seen Andreas? That was the headline in the town's largest newspaper, set in bold type. That's the way newspapers express themselves, using an informal tone to address us directly, as if we were on first-name terms and have known each other a long time. We're supposed to break down the barriers of formality and use a straightforward, youthful tone, in this fresh, onward-storming society. So even though very few people actually knew him or used his first name, let's just cut right to the chase and ask: Has anyone seen Andreas?

And the picture of him. A nice-looking boy of 18, with a thin face and unruly hair. I say "nice-looking", I'm generous enough to admit that. So handsome that things came easily to him. He strutted around with that handsome face of his and took things for granted. It's a familiar pattern, but it does no-one any good to look like that. Handsome in a timeless, classic sense. A charming boy. It costs me a bit to use that word, but all the same . . . charming.

On the afternoon of September 1, he left his house on Cappelens gate. He said nothing about where he was off to. Where are you going? Out. That's the kind of answer you give at that age. A sort of infinite guardedness. You think you're somebody so exceptional. And his mother didn't have the sense to press him. Maybe she used his obstinacy as food for her martyrdom. Her son was in the process of leaving her, and she hated that fact. But it's really a matter of respect. She ought to have raised the boy so that it would be unthinkable for him not to reply in a polite and precise manner. I'm going out, well, with someone. We're thinking of going into town. I'll be home before midnight. Surely that's

not too much to ask, is it? But she had failed, as have so many others. That's what happens when you invest all of your energy in yourself, your own life, your own sorrow. I know what I'm talking about. And the sorrow was going to get worse. He never came home.

Yes, I've seen Andreas. I can see him whenever I like. A lot of people are going to be surprised when he's finally found. And of course they'll speculate, they'll guess, and write up reports, and carry on discussions and fill numerous files. Everyone with his own theory. And all wrong, of course. People howl with many voices. In the midst of that din I've lived in silence for almost 60 years. My name is Irma. At last I'm the one who's doing the talking. I won't take much time, and I'm not saying that I have a monopoly on the truth. But what you're reading now is my version.

A childhood memory comes back to me. I can summon it up whenever I like. I'm standing in the porch with one hand on the door knob. It's quiet inside, but I know that they're there. Yet there's not a sound to be heard. I open the door very quietly and walk into the kitchen. Mother is standing at the counter, lifting the skin from a boiled mackerel. I can still recreate the smell in my nose, a cloying, unpleasant odour. She shifts her heavy body a little, indicating vaguely that she has noticed my presence. Father is busy over by the window. He's pressing putty into the cracks in the frame to keep the draught out. It's an old house. The putty is white and soft like clay, with a dry, chalk-like smell. My two sisters are sitting at the kitchen table, both busy with books and papers. I remember that pale, almost nauseating light when the sun cast its yellow rays into the green kitchen. I'm maybe six years old. Instinctively I'm scared of making any noise. I stand there, all alone, and stare at them. They're all busy with something. I feel very useless, almost in the way, as if I'd been born too late. I often thought I might have been an accident that they were unable to stop. There are

two years between my sisters. I came along eight years later. What could have made my mother want another child after such a long time? But the idea that I might have been an unloved obligation makes me miserable. I've had it for so long, it's a well-worn idea.

This memory is so real that I can feel the hem of my dress tickling my knee. I'm standing in the yellowish-green light and noticing how alone I am. No-one says hello. I'm the youngest. Not doing anything important. I don't mean that my father should have stopped what he was doing, maybe lifted me up and tossed me in the air. I was too heavy for him. He had rheumatism, and I was big and chubby, with bones like a horse. That's what mother used to say. Like a horse. It was just Irma who had come in. Nothing to make a fuss about. Their heads turning imperceptibly, in case it was someone important, and then discovering that it was only Irma. We were here first, their looks said.

Their indifference took my breath away. I had the same feeling as when I persuaded Mother to tell me about when I was born. And she shrugged, but admitted that it had happened in the middle of the night, during a terrible storm. Thunder and a fierce wind. It made me happy to think that I had arrived in the world with a crash and a roar. But then she added, with a dry laugh, that the whole thing was over in a matter of minutes. You slid right out like a kitten, she said, and my good feeling drained away.

I waited, my knees locked, my feet planted on the floor. I'd been gone for quite a while, after all. Anything could have happened. We lived near the sea, didn't we? Ships from other countries regularly docked in the harbour. Sailors swarmed through the streets, staring at anyone over the age of ten. Well, I was six, but I was as sturdy as a horse, as I mentioned. Or I could have been lying with a broken leg or arm on the pavement near Gartnerhall, where we often played on the flat roof. Later, three Alsatians stood guard up there, but before that happened we used to play on the roof

there, and I might have fallen over the edge. Or I could have been crushed under the wheels of a big lorry. Sometimes they have 20 tyres, and not even my big bones would survive that. But they were never worried. Not about things like that. About other things, yes. If I was holding an apple, had someone given it to me? I hadn't pinched it, had I? No? Well, did I thank them nicely? Had they asked me to say hello to my mother and father?

My brain was churning over to think up some kind of task. Some way that I could make my way into the companionship that I felt they shared. Not that they turned me away, just that they didn't invite me in. I'll tell you one thing: those four people shared an aura. It was strong and clear, and reddish-brown, and it hardly flickered at all, the way it does for the rest of us. It was wrapped around them as tightly as a barrel hoop, and I was on the outside, enveloped in a colourless fog. The solution was to do something! The person who is doing something cannot be overlooked, but I couldn't think of anything. I didn't have any homework because this was before I had started school. That's why I just stood there, staring. At the boiled mackerel, at all the books lying around. At Father, who was working carefully and quietly. If only he would have given me a piece of that white putty! To roll between my fingers.

For a paralysing second I was struck by something that I think is important; important in order to explain both to myself and to you, who are reading this, how it could happen. The whole thing with Andreas. I suddenly became aware of the tremendous set of rules governing that room. In the silence, in the hands that were working, in the closed faces. A set of rules I had to submit to and follow to the letter. I was still standing in the silence of the kitchen, I felt that set of rules descend on me like a cage from the ceiling. And it struck me with enormous force: within that set of rules I was invulnerable! Within that clear framework of diligence and propriety, no-one could touch me. The

concept of “within” meant the possibility of being around people without anyone looking askance, without offending anybody, and at the same time feeling a sense of peace because you were like everyone else. You thought the same way. But in my mind I saw a narrow street with high walls. It was to be my life. And a terrible sadness overwhelmed me. Until that moment I might have believed in Freedom, the way children do; they believe that anything is possible. But I made a decision, even though I was so young and might not have understood it all. I obeyed a primeval instinct for survival. I didn’t want to be alone. I’d rather be like them and follow the rules. But something departed at that instant – it rose up and flew off and it vanished for ever. That’s why I remember the moment so clearly. There in the kitchen, in the yellow-green light, at the age of six, I lost my freedom.

That silent, well-mannered child. In Christmas and birthday pictures I’m sitting on my mother’s knee and looking at the camera with a pious smile. Now I have an iron jaw that shoots pain up into my temples. How could things have ended up this way? No doubt there are many different reasons, and some of it can be put down to pure coincidence, the fact that our paths crossed on one particular evening. But what about the actual crime? The impulse itself, where does that come from? When does murder occur? In such and such a place, at such and such a moment in time? In this case I can share the blame with circumstance. The fact that he stepped into my path, that he was the sort of person he was. Because with him I was no longer Irma. I was Irma with Andreas. And that was not the same as Irma with Ingemar. Or Irma with Runi. Chemistry, you know. Each time a new formula is created. Irma and Andreas destroyed each other. Is that true? Does it emerge over a period of years? Does the crime lie dormant in the body’s individual coding? Is the murder a result of a long, inevitable process? Of necessity, I have to view my life

in the light of the horrible thing that happened, and I have to view that horrible thing in the light of what has been my life. Which is what everyone around me will do. They'll look in my past life for something that could explain whatever part of it can be explained. The rest will be left to float in a grey sea of theories.

But to get back to the past: I was standing there, in the silence of the kitchen. My wordless presence made the silence shrill. It had felt so beautiful, but now they couldn't stand it any more. Mother turned around and crossed the room. She bent down and sniffed at my hair.

"Your hair needs washing," she said. "It smells."

For a moment I considered going to fetch my art supplies. I could smell the oily scent of the pastels I liked to use. But I left the kitchen, went out to the garden, over the fence, past the abandoned smithy and into the woods. Among the spruce trees there was a pleasant, grey-green darkness. I was wearing brown sandals, and on the dry path I came across an ant hill. I poked at it with a twig, gleeful at the chaos I was able to create, a catastrophe in that well-ordered society that might take weeks to repair. The desire to destroy! The feeling of joyous power as I scraped inside that ant hill with the twig. It felt good. I looked around for something to feed them. A dead mouse, something like that. Then I could have stood there and watched while they devoured it. They would have dropped everything and forgotten about the catastrophe; having something to devour would come first, I was sure of that. But I didn't find anything, so I kept on walking. I came to a derelict farmhouse, sat down on the front steps, and thought about the story of the people who once lived there. Gustav and Inger and their twelve children. Uno, Sekunda, Trevor, Firmin, Femmer, Sexus, Syver, Otto, Nils, Tidemann, Ellef and Tollef. It was incomprehensible, nevertheless true: none of them is now alive.

Yes. The God that I don't believe in knows that I've seen Andreas. I think back to that terrifying moment when I felt it coming, the desire to destroy him. At the same instant I saw my own face reflected in a windowpane. And I remember the feeling, a sweet pressure, like warm oil running through my body. The certainty that this was evil. My face in the bluish glass. The hideous, evil person you become when the Devil holds the candle.

CHAPTER 2

SEPTEMBER 1.

A boy was walking through the streets alone. He was wearing jeans and a Nike jacket, black with an olive green yoke and a red-and-white swoosh on the back. They were expecting him home by 6 p.m. He might make it. A faint glow from a hazy sky hovered over the town. The wind was picking up. It was September and perhaps a bit melancholy, but that's not what he was thinking. Up until now life had been good.

The boy was about seven, thin and nice-looking. He was walking along with his hands in his pockets. In one pocket there was a bag of sweets. He had been walking for 15 minutes and had begun to sweat inside his jacket.

He raised a hand to wipe his forehead. His skin was the colour of coffee. His hair was thick and curly and black, and his eyes flashed in his dark face.

Then, behind him, a car turned into the street. In the car were two men, peering out of the windows. They both felt that right now life was very boring. This town wasn't exactly brimming with surprises. It just sat there, split in half by a grey river, content with its mediocrity. The car was a green Golf. The owner went by the nickname of Zipp. He was named for the sound of a zip opening in the fly of a tight pair of jeans, or more specifically, one being opened with trembling fingers and blazing cheeks. His real name was Sivert Skorpe. Zipp had blond, wiry hair, and his young face always had an inquisitive expression. Bordering on sheep-like, some might say, though he usually had luck with the ladies. He wasn't bad-looking, and besides, he was gentle,

playful and simple. Not entirely without depth, but he never turned his thoughts inward, and that's why he lived his life oblivious to what existed deep inside. His companion looked like a faun, or something else from a fairy tale. He didn't try to compete. He seemed to have set himself above the chase, as if the girls should come to him, or something like that. Zipp could never understand it. He was driving at a leisurely pace. Both were silently hoping for the same thing, that something would happen. Then they caught sight of the boy.

"Stop!" said the passenger.

"What the hell. Why?" Zipp grunted and stepped on the brake. He didn't like trouble.

"I just want to have a little chat."

"Shit, Andreas. He's just a kid."

"A little black kid! I'm bored."

He wound down the window.

"You're not going to find any money on that brat. And it's money we need. I'm as thirsty as hell."

The car drew up beside the boy. He cast them a glance and then looked away. It wasn't good to look people in the eye. Or dogs. Instead he fixed his gaze on his shoes and didn't slow his pace.

"Hey, Pops!"

A young man with reddish-brown curls was staring at him from the car window. Should he answer? The man was grown-up. The car was following him.

"Helluva a nice jacket you've got." The man nodded with admiration. "And it's a Nike! Your dad must make good money, right?"

"My grandfather gave it to me," the boy muttered.

"If you were a size bigger, I'd swipe it from you," the man said, laughing. "But it'd be a bit tight on me."

The boy didn't reply, just kept his eyes firmly fixed on the tips of his shoes.

“I’m only kidding,” the man went on. “Just wanted to ask for directions. To the bowling alley.”

The boy risked a glance. “It’s over there. You can see the sign,” he told him.

“Oh, yeah. I was only kidding, as I said.”

He gave a low, ingratiating laugh and stuck his head all the way out of the window.

“Want a lift home?”

The boy shook his head vigorously. He could see a doorway up ahead.

“I live over there,” he lied.

“Is that right?” The man was laughing hard. “What’s your name?”

The boy didn’t answer. He had said his name often enough to know what the reaction would be.

“Is it a secret?”

“No.”

“Well, then what is it, boy!”

“Matteus,” he whispered.

Dead silence. The man in the car looked at his companion.

“What the hell,” he shouted. “That’s really cool! Is it really Matteus? The Gospels and all that shit?”

He clucked his tongue. “Where are you from?”

Smiling, he looked at the black curls and brown cheeks. For a moment there was a flash of yearning in his eyes that the boy couldn’t possibly see.

“Right over there,” he said, pointing.

“No, I mean what country are you from? You’re adopted, aren’t you?”

“Give it up, Andreas,” said Zipp with a groan. “Leave him be.”

“Somalia,” the boy said.

“Why didn’t they give you a Norwegian name like other children that are adopted? Not that it matters.” He tossed his head. “I feel a little faint every time I meet black or

Chinese children named Petter and Kåre. Shit, it's really starting to get to me."

He laughed out loud, revealing a row of sharp, white teeth. Matteus pressed his lips together. His name was Matteus when they found him, the people he called his mother and father, at an orphanage in Mogadishu. They didn't want to change it, but sometimes he wished that they had. Now he just stared at the doorway up ahead, clutching his bag of sweets in a brown fist and casting a glance at the car. Then he turned and took a few steps up the gravel path towards the house that wasn't his at all. He saw a rack holding rubbish bins. He slipped behind them and crouched down. A nauseating, rotting smell came from the rubbish. The car accelerated away and disappeared. When he thought they were out of sight, he crawled out and continued on his way. He was walking faster now. His heart, which had been pounding, began to calm down. The incident had made his stomach churn, giving him a vague presentiment of what awaited him in his future. A car was coming down the street. For an awful moment he thought they might have turned around and come back. They realised that he didn't live there, and they had come to get him! His heart was pounding hard again as he heard the car approach. It stopped on the other side of the street.

"Hey, Matteus! You off out again? You sure do get around, Pops!"

Matteus ran. The men laughed and the engine started up. The car disappeared, headed into town. It was 6.15 when he reached his front door.

Zipp and Andreas supposed that they knew each other pretty well. In fact, they were aware of little, insignificant things, such as one another's likes and dislikes, and something about how they functioned in the world. Apart from that, they were both too preoccupied with themselves to look to the other for anything new. Zipp knew that

Andreas' preferred brand of beer had a blue cap. That he liked The Doors and didn't like mustard on his sausages. And that no girl was ever good enough for him. This was something that Zipp couldn't understand. The girls were always looking him over. Andreas is too good-looking, thought Zipp. His looks had given him an indolent, sauntering demeanour that occasionally irritated Zipp. There was something intractable about Andreas, something invulnerable and sluggish that almost made you want to hit him, or stick out your leg to see him lose his balance. If that was even possible. Furthermore, Zipp knew where Andreas lived and worked. He had been up to his room and visited his workplace, at the Cash & Carry. He worked among racks of tins of paint, bread knives and Teflon frying pans. It was a place for old ladies. Andreas was the only guy who worked there.

Andreas knew that Zipp's father had died years ago, but he couldn't remember what his name was or why he had died. He also knew that Zipp was unemployed and was always bumming money from him. He liked having company and he owned a car. The car had, of course, belonged to his father. His mother didn't know how to drive, but she did pay for the petrol. Zipp's mother did shift work at some kind of home and was almost never around. She was either at work or asleep. In Zipp's basement they had a little room, a place where they could hang out when they were broke. It was pleasant to stick with the familiar. Zipp was predictable, and Andreas liked that. And last, but not least, being friends with Zipp felt safe.

They didn't have much to offer one another, yet they still hung out together. Anything was better than solitude. If Zipp ever suggested including a third or a fourth person, Andreas would talk him out of it, saying that it would just complicate things. Besides, they didn't have room for women in the car, which was a good argument. They fell out a few times, but none ever developed into a fight. They agreed on most

things and usually it was Andreas who managed to turn any conflict to his advantage. He did it so effortlessly that Zipp never even noticed. They had crossed a few boundaries. Insignificant things: once in a kiosk where they had stolen some cartons of cigarettes and money; another time when they stole a car. The Golf had a dead battery, and the idea of trudging through the streets like a couple of schoolboys didn't appeal to them. But they didn't drive far. Basically they were quite cowardly. They never resorted to violence, and they had never owned a gun between them, although Andreas had a knife that was given to him as a confirmation present. Sometimes it hung from his belt, hidden under his shirt. The knife made Zipp uncomfortable. Sometimes they drank too much, and the knife would swing like a pendulum on Andrea's narrow hips, readily accessible. Not that Andreas set out to provoke anyone, or let himself be provoked by others. He had just the opposite effect on people. They felt good in his company, they would relax and sit staring into his pale blue eyes. But when Andreas drank, he changed. A restlessness would come over him, and the lazy boy would develop an almost feverish agitation. His thin fingers couldn't keep still; they were in constant motion, plucking at everything. Zipp was always amazed by this. He, on the other hand, would become dull and sleepy if he drank too much.

Andreas was actually quite remarkable. He was more like a mood, as if he weren't entirely present. He didn't belch when he got drunk. He didn't cough, and he didn't hiccup. Everything around him was quiet. And he didn't have any particular kind of smell. Zipp used Hugo Boss aftershave when he could afford it, or he would steal a bottle from the Cash & Carry if he was feeling confident. Andreas never used aftershave. He always looked the same; his hair never got greasy, he was always clean, but not too clean. If Zipp happened to wake him up on a Sunday morning, and he appeared in the doorway wearing his bathrobe, he never

looked tired. His eyes were wide open. His hair was always the same length. His shoes never looked worn out. It was strange.

Right now Andreas was waiting for his wages. Between them they were worth the princely total of 60 kroner. Not even enough for two beers.

“What are you thinking about?” Andreas said out of the blue.

Zipp grimaced, “I’m thinking about Anita.”

“Shit, is she really worth thinking about?”

“What do you mean?” Zipp looked sullen.

“The girl’s as dead as a doornail.”

“You can say that again.” Zipp had to look out of the window to hide his face. “How much buckshot is there in one cartridge?” he said tonelessly.

“Depends. Why do you ask?”

“I’m thinking about her face. How it looked afterwards. Anita was so pretty.”

Andreas shrugged. “If you stand close enough, the shot comes out like one huge bullet. By the way, I talked to Roger. He said her nose was sticking out and her whole jaw was wide open. One of her eyes was gone.” He took a drag on his cigarette. “And Anders,” he said, “he was standing right behind Anita when the shot was fired. The top of his skull was totally perforated.”

Zipp sat in silence, painting the picture in his mind. There was no end to the details. His brain was stuffed with images from films, X-rated, wide-screen and with digital sound effects.

“Fucking hell.”

Andreas rolled his eyes. “Why are you carrying on like this? It’s not like she was your sister. That’s life, Zipp. ‘All these moments will be lost in time, like tears in rain.’”

Andreas was quoting Roy Batty. But Zipp was still thinking about Anita. He thought about her laugh, her voice and her

scent. He remembered the tiny green gemstone in her nose. Everything blasted to smithereens.

“Well, you know I’ve been in the sack with Anita. It’s weird to think about it,” he said in a low voice.

“Is there a single jam jar in the whole town that you haven’t dipped your wick in?”

“Ha, ha. Not many.” He snorted up the snot running from his nose. “The Devil must have got into Robert,” he muttered. “I know Robert. Something must have made him go crazy.”

“Okay, so that’s what we’ll say. He was possessed. But not by the Devil.”

“No?”

“Good Lord, man. He was dead drunk! He was possessed by alcohol. His brain was pickled. Blotto, unpredictable and insane! There’s your Devil.”

“I think I’m going on the wagon,” said Zipp gloomily. This made Andreas burst out laughing because the idea was preposterous. Then the moment passed, the mood lifted, and Zipp erased the bloody image from his mind. For a while they drove in silence.

“Were you with the Woman yesterday?” Out of the corner of his eye Zipp glanced at Andreas’ thigh in the light-coloured slacks.

“Yes, I was,” he replied. Zipp heard the smile in his voice, and the warning not to ask anything more. Not that it was a secret. He had plainly told Zipp that they were sleeping together. Or had he? Maybe he was just pulling his leg. Andreas was so secretive, so difficult to work out.

“I can’t understand why you bother,” laughed Zipp.

“A few extra kroner,” said Andreas curtly. His voice didn’t sound annoyed, but there was a wariness to his tone. “You’re always so thirsty.”

And then he added, with great pathos: “I’m doing it for us, Zipp.”