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SWEDISH CRIMEWRITER OF THE YEAR
EMELIE SCHEPP

MARKED
FOR
REVENGE



ONE PLACE. MANY STORIES



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For H.

PROLOGUE

THE GIRL SAT QUIETLY, LOOKING DOWN AT HER *bowl of yogurt and strawberries. She listened to the clinking of silverware against china as her mother and father ate breakfast.*

'Would you please eat?'

Her mother looked at her imploringly, but the girl didn't move.

'Are your dreams bothering you again?'

The girl swallowed, not daring to lift her gaze from the bowl.

'Yes,' she replied in a barely audible whisper.

'What did you dream about this time?'

Her mother tore a slice of bread in half and spread marmalade on it.

'A container,' she said. 'It was...'

'No!'

Her father's voice came from the other side of the table, loud, hard and cold as ice. His fists were clenched. His eyes were as hard and cold as his voice.

'That's enough!'

He got up, pulled her from the chair and shoved her out of the kitchen.

'We don't want to hear any more of your fantasies.'

The girl stumbled forward, struggling to keep ahead of him as he pushed her up the stairs. He was hurting her arm, her feet. She tried to wrench herself from his grasp just as he changed his grip and put his hand around her neck.

Then he let go, his hand recoiling as if he'd been stabbed. He looked at her in disgust.

'I told you to keep your neck covered all the time! Always!'

He put his hands on her shoulders and turned her around.

'What did you do with the bandage?'

She felt him pull her hair aside, tearing at it, trying frantically to expose the nape of her neck. Heard his rapid breathing when he caught sight of her scars. He took a few steps back, aghast, as if he had seen something horrifying.

And he had...

Because her bandage had fallen off.

CHAPTER ONE

THERE! THE CAR APPEARED FROM AROUND
the corner.

Pim smiled nervously at Noi. They were standing in an alley, in the shadows of the light from the streetlamps. The asphalt was discolored by patches of dried piss. It smelled strong and rank, and the howling of stray dogs was drowned out by the rumbling highway.

Pim's forehead was damp with sweat—not from the heat but from nerves. Her dark hair was plastered to the back of her neck, and the thin material of her T-shirt stuck to her back in creases. She didn't know what awaited her and hadn't had much time to think about it, either.

Everything had gone so quickly. Just two days ago, she had made up her mind. Noi had laughed, saying it was easy, it paid well and they'd be home again in five days.

Pim wiped her hand across her forehead and dried it on her jeans as she watched the slowly approaching car.

She smiled again, as if to convince herself that everything would be okay, everything would work out.

It was just this one time.

Just once. Then never again.

She picked up her suitcase. She'd been told to fill it with clothes for two weeks to make the fictitious vacation more convincing.

She looked at Noi, straightened her spine and pulled her shoulders back.

The car was almost there.

It drove toward them slowly and stopped. A tinted window rolled down, exposing the face of a man with close-cropped hair.

'Get in,' he said without taking his eyes from the road. Then he put the car in gear and prepared to leave.

Pim walked around the car, stopped and closed her eyes for a brief moment. Taking a deep breath, she opened the car door and got in.

Public prosecutor Jana Berzelius took a sip of water and reached across the pile of papers on the table. It was 10:00 p.m., and The Bishop's Arms in Norrköping was packed.

A half hour earlier, she'd been in the company of her boss, Chief Public Prosecutor Torsten Granath who, after a long and successful day in court, had at least had the decency to take her to dinner at the Elite Grand Hotel.

He had spent the two-hour meal carrying on about his dog who, after various stomach ailments and bowel problems, had had to be put to sleep. Although Jana couldn't have cared less, she had feigned interest when Torsten pulled out his phone to show pictures of the puppy years of the now-dead dog. She had nodded, tilting her head to one side and trying to look sympathetic.

To make the time pass more quickly, she had inventoried the other patrons. She'd had an unobstructed view of the door from their table near the window. No one came or

went without her seeing. During Torsten's monologue, she had observed twelve people: three foreign businessmen, two middle-aged women with shrill voices, a family of four, two older men and a teenager with big, curly hair.

After dinner, she and Torsten had moved to The Bishop's Arms next door. He'd said the classic British interior reminded him of golfing in the county of Kent and that he always insisted on the same table. For Jana, the choice of pub was a minor irritation. She had shaken her boss's hand with relief when he'd finally decided to call an end to the evening.

Yet she had lingered a bit longer.

Stuffing the papers into her briefcase, she drank the last of her water and was just about to get up when a man came in. Maybe it was his nervous gait that made her notice him. She followed him with her gaze as he walked quickly toward the bar. He caught the bartender's attention with a finger in the air, ordered a drink and sat down at a table with his worn duffel bag on his lap.

His face was partly concealed by a knit cap, but she guessed he was around her age, about thirty. He was dressed in a leather jacket, dark jeans and black boots. He seemed tense, looking first out the window, then toward the door and then out the window again.

Without turning her head, Jana shifted her gaze to the window and saw the contours of the Saltäng Bridge. The Christmas lights swayed in the bare treetops near Hamngatan. On the other side of the river, a neon sign wishing everyone a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year blinked on and off.

She shuddered at the thought that there were only a few weeks left until Christmas. She was really not looking forward to spending the holiday with her parents. Especially since her father, former Prosecutor-General Karl Berze-

lius, suddenly and inexplicably seemed to be keeping his distance from her, as if he wasn't interested in being part of his daughter's life anymore.

They hadn't seen each other since the spring, and every time Jana mentioned his strange behavior to her mother, Margaretha, she offered no explanation.

He's very busy, was always her response.

So Jana decided not to waste any more energy on the matter and had just let it be. As a result, there had been few family visits over the past six months. But they couldn't skip Christmas—the three of them would be forced to spend time together.

She sighed heavily and returned her gaze to the man whom the server had just given a drink. When he reached for it, she saw a large, dark birthmark on his left wrist. He raised the glass to his lips and looked out the window again.

He must be waiting for someone, she thought, as she got up from the table, carefully buttoning her winter jacket and wrapping her black Louis Vuitton scarf around her neck. She pulled her maroon hat over her head and gripped her briefcase firmly.

As she turned toward the door, she noticed that the man was talking on his phone. He muttered something inaudible, downed his drink as he stood up and strode past her toward the exit.

She caught the door as it swung shut after him and stepped out onto the street and into the cold winter air. The night was crystal clear, quiet and almost completely still.

The man had quickly vanished from sight.

Jana pulled on a pair of lined gloves and set out for her apartment in Knäppingsborg. A block from home, she caught sight of the man again, standing against the wall in a narrow alley. This time he wasn't alone.

Another man stood facing him. His hood was up, and his hands were stuffed deep into his pockets.

She stopped in her tracks, took a few quick steps to the side and tried to hide behind a building column. Her heart began to pound and she told herself she must be mistaken. The man in the hood could not be who she thought he was.

She turned her head and again examined his profile.

A shiver went down her spine.

She knew who he was.

She knew his name.

Danilo!

Detective Chief Inspector Henrik Levin turned off the TV and stared at the ceiling. It was just after ten o'clock at night and the bedroom was dark. He listened to the sounds of the house. The dishwasher clunked rhythmically in the kitchen. Now and then he heard a thump from Felix's room, and Henrik knew his son was rolling over in his sleep. His daughter, Vilma, was sleeping quietly and still, as always, in the next room.

He lay on his side next to his wife, Emma, with his eyes closed and the comforter over his head, but he knew it was going to be difficult to fall asleep with his mind racing.

Soon he wouldn't be sleeping much at night for other reasons. The nights would instead be filled with rocking and feeding and shushing long into the wee hours. There were only three weeks left until the baby's due date.

He pulled the comforter down from his head and looked at Emma sleeping on her back with her mouth open. Her belly was huge, but he had no idea if it was larger than during her earlier pregnancies. The only thing he knew was that he was about to become a father for the third time.

He lay on his back with his hands on top of the comforter

and closed his eyes. He felt a sort of melancholy and wondered if he would feel different when he held the baby in his arms. He hoped so, because almost the whole pregnancy had passed without him really noticing. He hadn't had time—he'd had other things to think about. His job, for example.

The National Crime Squad had contacted him.

They wanted to talk about last spring's investigation of the murder of Hans Juhlén, a Swedish Migration Board department chief in Norrköping. The case was closed and Henrik had already put it behind him.

What had initially seemed to be a typical murder investigation of a high-ranking civil servant had turned into something much more, much worse. Something macabre: the smuggling of illegal refugees had led the team working the case to a narcotics ring that had, among other activities, been training children to be soldiers, turning kids into cold-blooded killers.

It was far from a routine case, and the investigation had been front-page news for several weeks.

Tomorrow, the National Crime Squad was coming to ask questions about the refugee children who had been transported from South America in shipping containers locked from the outside. More specifically, they wanted to talk about the ring leader, Gavril Bolanaki, who had killed himself before anyone could interrogate him.

They'd be reviewing every minute detail yet again.

Henrik opened his eyes and stared out into the darkness. He glanced at the alarm clock, saw that it was 10:15 and knew the dishwasher would soon signal the end of its cycle.

Three minutes later, it beeped.



CHAPTER TWO

HER HEART WAS POUNDING AND HER PULSE
racing.

Jana Berzelius breathed as quietly as possible.

Danilo.

A wave of mixed emotions flowed over her. She felt simultaneously surprised, confused, irritated.

There was a time when she and Danilo had been like siblings, when they had shared a daily existence. That was a long time ago now, back when they were little. Now they shared nothing more than the same bloody past. He had scars on his neck the same as she, initials carved into flesh, a constant reminder of their shared dark childhood. Danilo was the only one who knew who she was, where she came from—and why.

She had sought out Danilo last spring to ask for his help when the shipping containers filled with refugee children began appearing outside the small harbor town of Arkösund. He had seemed helpful, even favorably inclined, but in the end he had still betrayed her. He had attempted to kill her—unsuccessfully—and then disappeared underground.

Ever since then, she had been searching for him, but it

was as if he had vanished into thin air. She hadn't been able to find a single trace of him in all those months. Nothing. Her frustration had intensified in proportion to her desire for revenge. She daydreamed of different ways to kill him.

She had sketched his face in pencil on a white sheet of paper, drawing and erasing and drawing again until it was a perfect likeness. She had saved the picture, pinned it to a wall in her apartment as if to remind herself of the hatred she felt for him—not that she could ever forget it.

In the end, she had given up on her search for him and returned to her everyday life with the belief that she would probably never find him.

He was gone forever.

Or so she had thought.

Now he stood fifty feet from her.

She felt her body tremble and stifled an impulse to throw herself forward—she had to think rationally.

She held her breath so that she could hear the men's voices, but she couldn't make out a single word. They were too far away.

Danilo lit a cigarette.

The worn duffel bag lay on the ground, and the man with the birthmark was crouched down next to it. He pulled the zipper, exposing its contents. Danilo nodded and gestured with his right hand, and both of them went with quick steps through the alley and disappeared down the stone steps toward Strömparken.

Jana clenched her teeth. What should she do? Turn around and go home? Pretend she hadn't seen him, let him get away? Let him disappear from her life yet again?

Silently, she counted to ten before stepping out of the shadows and going after them.

* * *

Detective Inspector Mia Bolander opened her eyes and immediately clapped her hand to her forehead. Her head was spinning.

She got out of bed and stood there naked, looking at the man whose name she had forgotten, who lay on his stomach with his hands under a pillow.

He hadn't been completely with it. For twenty minutes, he had paced the room and repeated that he was a waste of space and didn't deserve her. She had told him again and again that of course that wasn't true, and in the end she had convinced him to get into bed with her.

When he later asked considerately if he could massage her feet, she was too exhausted to say no. And when he had put her big toe in his mouth, she had finally reached her limit and asked straight out if they couldn't just fuck. He had gotten the hint and taken his clothes off.

He had also moaned loudly, licked her neck and given her hickeys.

That shithead.

Mia scratched under her right breast and looked down at the floor where her clothes lay in a heap.

She dressed quickly, not caring if she made noise. She just wanted to go home.

She'd only intended to make a quick stop at the pub. Harry's had had a Christmas-themed karaoke night, and the place had been packed with women in sparkly dresses and men in suits. Some had been wearing Santa hats and had probably gotten drunk earlier in the night at some Christmas party somewhere in Norrköping.

The man whose name she had forgotten had been standing at the bar, holding a beer. He seemed to be around forty

and had straight, blond hair that was oddly styled—parted straight down the middle. She had seen a colorful skull-and-crossbones tattoo on his neck. He had otherwise been neatly dressed in a sport coat with overstuffed shoulder pads and a tie.

Mia had sat down a few stools away from him, fingering her glass and trying to get him to notice her. He finally had, but it took even longer for him to walk over and ask if he could join her. She had answered with a smile, again running her finger around the top of her glass. He'd finally understood that he should buy her another drink. Three pints of beer and two seasonal saffron-flavored cocktails later, they'd shared a taxi home to his apartment.

She could still taste the saffron. She went out in the hall, into the bathroom and turned on the light. She was blinded for a second and kept her eyes closed while she drank water out of her cupped hands. She squinted into the mirror, tucked her hair behind her ears and then caught sight of her neck.

Two large red hickeys featured prominently on the right side, under her chin. She shook her head and turned off the light.

She took his sport coat from the hook in the hall and rifled through the pockets. His wallet was in the inside pocket and only held cards—no cash at all.

Not a single krona.

She looked at his driver's license and saw that his name was Martin Strömberg, then she replaced it and put her boots and jacket on.

'Just so you know, Martin,' she said, pointing a finger toward the bedroom, 'you *are* a goddamn waste of space.'

She unlocked the door of the apartment and left.

* * *

Jana Berzelius stopped at the top of the hill near Norrköping's Museum of Work and looked around. She couldn't see Danilo or the man with the birthmark anymore.

She surveyed all the street corners in front of her, but neither of the men were there. She didn't see another living soul, in fact, and was amazed at how deserted the industrial landscape could be on a chilly Wednesday evening in early December.

She stood there silently for ten minutes, watching. But she didn't hear a single sound or see the slightest movement.

Finally, she accepted that they were gone. She had lost him. The anger welled up inside her. There was only one thing to do now, and that was to leave, go home with the feeling of again having been tricked.

But what had she thought was going to happen? What had she been thinking? She shouldn't have followed him; she should just leave him alone and take care of herself.

There was nothing else she could do, really.

Walking along Holmensquare, she suddenly had the strange feeling that someone was following her, but when she spun around, the only thing she saw was a short man walking a dog off in the distance. She glanced up at the apartments along Kvarngatan and saw advent candelabras in many of the windows. The sky was pitch-black and still crystal clear.

Shivering, she pulled her shoulders up before continuing across the square and into the tunnel. Halfway through, she was again gripped by the feeling of being followed.

She stopped, turned and stared into the darkness behind her. She stood still, breathing quietly, listening.

Nothing.

She crossed Järnbrogatan with quick steps and rushed through the pink archway that marked the entrance to the Knäppingsborg neighborhood.

Then she suddenly heard a sound behind her.

There he stood, alone.

Thirty feet from her.

His chin was down and his jaw was clenched.

She met his gaze, dropping her briefcase, and prepared herself.

CHAPTER

THREE

'JUST SWALLOW IT!'

Pim gave a start and met the man's eyes. He stood, leaning over the table with his face a few inches from hers. He was wearing a dark gray shirt with rolled-up sleeves.

She looked at the capsule in her hand. It was larger than a grape tomato and had more of an oval shape than she had expected. The contents were tightly packed in layers upon layers of latex.

Noi sat next to her and looked pleadingly at Pim, nodding almost imperceptibly in encouragement. *You can do it!*

They were sitting in a room above a pharmacy, the stairs to which had really been more of a ladder. A fan on the floor hummed from one corner of the room. Even so, it was hot and smelled musty.

She'd had no problem swallowing the tablet that neutralized her stomach acid. It had slid right down. But the capsule looked so huge, she thought now, pressing against the coating with her pointer finger and thumb.

The man grabbed her arm and slowly pushed her hand toward her mouth. The capsule touched her lips. She knew what she was supposed to do and her mouth instantly went dry.

‘Open up!’ he said between clenched teeth.

Pim opened her mouth and placed the capsule on her tongue.

‘All right then, chin up and down the hatch with it.’

She looked at the ceiling and felt the capsule drop far back on her tongue. She tried to swallow, but she couldn’t. The capsule refused to go down.

She coughed it up into her hand.

The man slammed his fist onto the table.

‘Where did you find this piece of garbage?’ he said to Noi, who turned white as a sheet. ‘I can’t afford idiots, do you understand that? Time is money.’

Noi nodded and looked at Pim, who avoided meeting her gaze.

‘Try again,’ Noi whispered. ‘You can do it.’

Pim shook her head slowly.

‘You have to!’ Noi insisted.

Pim shook her head again. Her lower lip quivered and her eyes watered. She knew that she was lucky, that she should be happy that she had this opportunity. She wasn’t used to good luck, but when Noi told her about the possibility of earning quick, easy money, her heart had leaped in excitement.

‘Okay, that’s it! Get out of here!’ The man grabbed Pim’s arm and pulled her to standing. ‘I have plenty of others who want to earn some cash.’

‘No! Wait! I want to!’ Pim screamed, resisting. ‘Please, I want to! Let me try again. I can do it.’

The man held her tightly. He glared at her for a moment, at her narrow, bloodshot eyes, red cheeks and compressed lips.

‘Prove it!’ he said.

With a bottle in one hand, he grabbed her jaw, forced her mouth open and squirted lubricant into her mouth three times.

He held up the capsule.

‘Here,’ he said.

Pim took it and popped it into her mouth. She attempted to swallow. Poking it with one finger to move it farther back into her mouth, she only gagged more.

She grew more panicked.

She stuck the capsule down her throat again, thrust her chin up. But that only resulted in more gagging.

Her palms were damp with sweat.

She closed her eyes and opened her mouth, poking the capsule as far down her throat as she could.

She swallowed.

Swallowed, swallowed, swallowed.

Slowly, it slid down toward her stomach.

The man clapped his hands together and grinned.

‘There you go,’ he said. ‘Only forty-nine left.’

The first blow was aimed at her head, the second at her throat.

Jana Berzelius deflected Danilo’s fists with her lower arms.

He was in a rage, darting from side to side, trying to land blows from every direction. But she fought against him, got her right fist up, ducked, jabbed with her left and then kicked. She missed but repeated the movements, quicker this time, striking Danilo’s knee. His leg buckled slightly, but he kept his footing. She knew she had to make him lose his balance and fall, so she kicked again—this time at his head. But as she did, he grabbed her foot, wrenching it forcefully

to the left. She was twirled around and landed flat on her back on the cold, hard ground. In almost the same movement, she rolled to the side, hands in defensive position, and jumped to her feet.

Danilo was standing completely still in front of her, waiting, his nostrils flaring and teeth bared.

He rushed toward her, throwing himself forward. At the same moment, she bowed her head, holding her fists in front of her face. Using all of her strength, she raised her foot and kicked in defense.

She hit her target.

As Danilo crumpled to the ground, she pounced on top of him and was about to put one knee on his chest when, with a primal roar, he threw his weight around so that they rolled together and he ended up on top. He sat astride her, punching her in the ribs with all of his strength.

Grabbing her hair, Danilo pulled her head toward him, lifting it from the ground. She tried to lift her upper body to lessen the pain, but his weight on her chest made that impossible.

‘Why are you following me?’ He leaned forward, hissing in her face.

She didn’t answer. She was thinking feverishly: this can’t happen, she couldn’t let him win. She knew far too well what he was capable of. But she was trapped, her arms under his legs. She reached out with her fingertips, trying to find something to defend herself with, but there was only ice and snow.

An unpleasant feeling began to wash over her. She hadn’t counted on ending up on the bottom. She had been intending to ambush him—she’d had the advantage from the beginning.

She clenched her fists and flexed her muscles, summoning all of her energy. Swinging her legs into the air, she drove her knees into his back. Danilo arched backward, losing his grip on her hair. She kneed him again and again, trying unsuccessfully to hook one leg around his neck.

He wouldn't budge.

He grabbed her hair again.

'You shouldn't have done that,' he snarled, beating her head against the ground.

The pain was incredible. Her vision went black.

He slammed her head against the ground again and again, and she felt how the strength ran out of her body.

'Stay away from me, Jana,' he said.

She heard his voice as if in a fog, far away from her.

She didn't feel the pain anymore.

A warm wave washed over her, and she realized she was about to lose consciousness.

He raised his fist, holding it near her face without striking her. It was as if he was hesitating. Meeting her gaze, panting, he said something unintelligible that echoed as if in a tunnel.

She heard a shout that seemed to be coming from far away.

'Hey!'

She didn't recognize the voice.

She tried to move, but the pressure on her chest made it impossible. Fighting to keep her eyelids open, she looked straight into Danilo's dark eyes.

He glared back at her. 'I'm warning you. Follow me one more time and I'll finish what I started here.'

He held her face a half inch from his.

'One more time and you'll regret it forever. Understand?'

She did, but was unable to answer.

She felt the pressure on her chest release. The silence told her Danilo was gone.

She coughed violently and rolled to her side, closing her eyes for a long moment...until she thought she heard the unfamiliar voice again.

Anneli Lindgren laid a plate with two pieces of crispbread on the kitchen table and sat down across from her live-in partner, Gunnar Öhrn. Both worked for the county police, she as a forensic expert; he as a chief investigator.

Steam rose in wisps from their teacups.

‘Do you want Earl Grey or this green tea?’ she asked.

‘Which are you having?’

‘Green.’

‘I’ll have that, too, then.’

‘But you don’t like it.’

‘No, but you’re always saying I should drink it.’

She smiled at him and as she opened the tea bags, music came drifting in from Adam’s room. She heard their son singing along.

‘He seems to like it here,’ she said.

‘Do you?’

‘Of course.’

She could sense Gunnar’s anxiety in the question, so she answered quickly and without hesitation. It was the only way to avoid any follow-up questions. He was always nervous about everything, overthinking, analyzing, obsessing about things he should have let go of long ago.

‘Are you sure? You like it here now?’

‘Yes!’

Anneli dropped her tea bag into her cup and let it swell

with hot water as she listened to Adam's voice, the music and lyrics he had memorized, and watched the color from the tea leaves seep into the water, counting the number of times she and Gunnar had lived apart but then together again. It was too many to remember. It might be the tenth time, maybe the twelfth. The only thing she could be sure of was that they had lived together off and on for twenty years.

But it was different now, she tried to convince herself. More comfortable, more relaxed. Gunnar was a good man. Kind, reliable. If he could only stop harping on every little thing.

He rested his hand on hers.

'Otherwise we can try to find a new apartment. Or maybe a town house? We've never tried that.'

She pulled her hand away, looking at him without bothering to voice an answer. She knew the look on her face was enough.

'Okay,' he said, 'I get it. You're happy here.'

'So stop nagging.'

She sipped her tea, noting that there were approximately ninety seconds left of the song Adam was playing. One guitar solo and then the refrain three times.

'What do you think about the meeting with the National Crime Squad tomorrow?' he asked.

'I'm not thinking anything in particular. They can come to whatever conclusion they want. We did a very good job.'

'But I don't understand why Anders Wester would come here anyway. I have nothing to say to him.'

'What? That really sexy guy is coming?'

She couldn't help teasing him. There was something in his unnecessary worry, his jealousy, that she got a kick out of. But she regretted it immediately.

He glared at her.

‘I’m only kidding,’ she said.

‘Do you really think so?’

‘That he’s handsome? Yes, at one time I did.’

She tried to look nonchalant, amused.

‘But not anymore?’ he asked.

‘Oh, stop it,’ she said.

‘Just so I know.’

‘Stop! Drink your tea.’

‘Are you sure?’

‘Stop nagging!’

She heard the guitar solo. Then Adam’s voice singing the refrain.

Gunnar got up and poured the contents of his teacup into the sink.

‘What are you doing?’ Anneli asked.

‘I don’t like green tea,’ he said, heading for the bathroom.

She sighed, at Gunnar and at the music she could barely stand. But she didn’t want to end the evening with yet another argument. Not now, when they had just decided to try living together again.

She was already tired.

So tired.

‘Hello? Are you okay?’

Robin Stenberg knelt down beside the woman who was lying on the ground in the fetal position. The chain from his ripped jeans clattered as it touched the hard concrete. He saw she was bleeding heavily from the back of her head and was just about to poke her when she opened her eyes.

‘I saw everything,’ he said. ‘I saw him. He went that way.’

He pointed toward the river, his hand trembling.