

Steen Langstrup

THE INFORMER

Steen Langstrup

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BB sticks close to the wall, pulling his Walther P38 from his pocket. The darkness is complete. The gate only a few feet to his left is nothing more than a dim shape. It is shut—as it should be. Closing the distance to the gate, he pulls his hat down to shield his eyes from the needle-like rain.

The gate is locked; no need to check on that. *Super*, the full-service garage is located beyond the gate in the backyard of this building. It is here that the Gestapo have their black Mercedes-Benzes repaired.

Leaning over the gate to look down the darkened street, he is unable to see much due to the darkness. Copenhagen is as pitch black as the Devil's soul. All windows are covered by thick, black curtains, all street lamps have been turned off. It has been like this since the Germans came four and a half years ago.

He gives the all clear signal—a long, flat whistling note—and seeks shelter inside the gateway. It is not the best choice for a signal on a night like this. The sound could easily get lost in the howling wind, but it is too late to change that. For a moment he is almost certain he can hear a car cruising down Norrebrogade, and his blood runs cold.

The Germans?

The *Hipo*—the Danish Nazi Police Force?

Borge appears next to him, seeming to materialize from out of the darkness carrying a backpack full of explosives. Gasping for breath as he releases the safety on his English submachine gun, he gives a curt nod of his head.

BB slides a copy of the key into the lock on the gate. It clicks as it slides in. BB glances at Borge. *Ready?*

Borge nods his head again—excited, impatient, high on adrenaline. His eyes are wide with anticipation.

BB can feel the excitement himself. As always, it gathers in his crotch making him hard.

He slowly turns the key, trying to avoid any noise. It is not a perfect copy and doesn't fit too well inside the lock. He wiggles it back and forth a couple of times before it finally turns, unlocking the gate.

He holds his breath. The first minutes will be the most dangerous. The guardhouse is situated on the right, just inside the gateway. There will be two guards patrolling the premises; both Danish SS veterans from the Eastern Front, and both armed. Right now, they should be inside the guardhouse playing cards and drinking ersatz coffee, but you never know. One of them could be taking a shit or might have slipped inside the garage to steal a couple of bolts for his bicycle.

There is a direct telephone line from the guardhouse to the Gestapo HQ at *the Shell House*. If the guards are allowed to use that telephone, the place will be crawling with German soldiers within five minutes. The guards have to be taken out before they are given a chance to raise the alarm.

When BB pulls the door open, the light inside the guardhouse will be blinding. Unable to see much of what is going on, they will have to disarm the two guards quickly.

However, from that point it should be quite easy. BB will stay with the guards while Borge places the explosives inside the garage. After that is accomplished, it is all about getting out. Away. Home.

BB leaves the key in the lock. Shifting the gun to his right hand, he meets Borge's eyes. "This is it!" he whispers, easing the gate open.

Instantly, the place explodes with a flash of pure white light as a giant searchlight is switched on with an audible pop that paralyzes him like a deer caught in headlights. Instantly, the place explodes with a flash of pure white light as a giant searchlight is switched on with an audible pop that paralyzes him like a deer caught in headlights. Someone is shouting in German. The rapid bam-bam-bam of a machine gun engulfs the words. His hat goes flying and something is pulling at his coat. Bullets hiss by his face; he can feel them whiz past. He will be dead in seconds and he knows it. Yet, he can't move.

At his side, Borge's submachine gun opens fire. The noise is so loud that it hurts his ears. The searchlight dies with a cacophony of shattering glass. Borge must have hit it. The darkness is instant. BB remains blind—only now it is by yellow and red dots dancing in front of his eyes. Borge drags him back out through the gate.

"Are you hit?"

Shaking all over, BB tries to answer by shaking his head.

Borge fires his Sten gun at the gate.

"BB, goddammit! Talk to me!"

A smack in his face, and then another has him gasping for air. "I'm okay. We gotta go." Trying to shake the paralysis from his system. Trying to think.

A truck turns down the street. The wet cobblestones sparkle in the meager light from the truck's darkened headlights. Germans. BB turns around. Another car arrives, this one smaller. Muzzle flashes light up the street; Alis K is trying to cover them. Where the hell is Jens? BB looks back. The truck has stopped and soldiers are swarming. Jens was supposed to cover that side! Where is he? Has he fled? Is he dead?

BB aims his weapon at the soldiers, firing off a couple of rounds. Borge slams a new magazine into the Sten gun and pulls away from the gate.

"We're surrounded!" BB yells. "This way!"

He darts down the street towards Alis K, shooting at the car ahead of him, then dives into a stairway. Shots slam into the walls all around him, projectiles hiss through the air. Borge has drawn over to the other side of the street and is shooting in both directions. Alis K has disappeared.

BB jumps back into the street, firing again and again as he goes for the next stairway. Finally, he spots her; she is at a gateway across the street with her own weapon spitting fire. Someone is screaming in pain. Crying. Weeping. BB swaps a new magazine in the Walther.

A sharp pain pounds into his left thigh, and the magazine goes flying from his hands as he stumbles back into the stairway. Touching his thigh, he sees blood on his fingertips. A humming ache builds in his thigh like a bee sting. Luckily, the leg still seems able to carry his weight.

The magazine lay out on the sidewalk. Might just as well be in China. It was his last one. All his ammo spent, he looks back at the garage and sees the soldiers closing in, seeking cover by the walls.

"BB! Let's go!" Borge shouts.

BB leans out to look in the other direction. Dead Germans everywhere. Alis K is going for the car. Borge is already behind the wheel. How did that happen?

He jumps out from the stairway and runs for the car. The instant he has one foot inside the vehicle, Borge steps hard on the gas. If it wasn't for Alis K grabbing his collar and pulling him in, he wouldn't have made it inside.

Behind them, the Germans send a hailstorm of lead. The rear window explodes in a shower of broken glass. BB and Alis K throw themselves down on the back seat.

"Jens?" Alis K asks, her lips brush BB's ear. "Where is Jens?"

"Don't know."

A few minutes later, they leave the car at Runddelen and part without saying a word. Borge slips away in one direction, Alis K and BB in another.

2

Alis K moans as BB slowly moves inside her. She grabs his neck, whining words that make no sense as she pushes up to receive him. The echoes of the noise rolling down the high church walls blends in with the sounds of the storm from outside. He pushes her skirt up higher to get a firm grip on her ass and lifts her up. Kissing her mouth, squeezing his tongue inside. Pumping harder.

On the altar above them, the flames of the candles dance to the rhythm of his thrusts; the shadows in the dark church come alive.

Afterwards, he rolls on to his back. Her hands sliding through his hair. He is freezing; he gets up and buttons his trousers.

"You're hurt." She touches his thigh.

"It's nothing. Just a flesh wound." He moves away from her.

"Let me have a look." She pulls up her panties and attaches the stockings. Smooths down the skirt. "A wound like that can get infected very easily."

He doesn't say anything. Instead, he goes for the altar wine. "Do you want a glass? It's the good bottle. Not the cheap stuff I use for the Holy Communion."

"Let me have a look at that wound. You can't let your wife see it, you know."

"She won't. There is absolutely no danger of that happening. She hasn't seen me naked since June. We..." He hands her a glass of wine. "...don't even sleep in the same room anymore."

She sips the wine. Bites her lip. "It was close tonight."

"Yeah."

"You lost your hat. Your coat is ripped to pieces."

"That kind of experience could make a man turn to religion."

"So says the reverend."

He kisses her in the hair. "So says the reverend...yes, he does."

She rests her head against his chest, and for a brief moment, she's nothing but a little girl hiding from the cruel world. He puts his arms around her.

"I shot so many Germans," she mumbles.

"I know. You saved my life. And Borge's life as well."

"Tomorrow..."

"Don't think about that," he whispers, looking up at Jesus hanging on the cross.

The same Jesus he once believed could save the lost souls, but not in this world. Not now. The Germans have their own way of avenging dead soldiers.

They simply shoot and kill the same number of innocent Danes in the streets. Terror against terror. An eye for an eye. You kill a German; you kill a Dane in the same shot.

Alis K shot five Germans tonight, Borge and BB easily as many. BB doesn't want to think about tomorrow. The retaliation killings—and the reprisal bombings of Danish properties as revenge for sabotage of German factories—are done by a special corps of Danish SS soldiers called *the Schalburg Corps*; named after the Danish Nazi hero, Christian Frederik von Schalburg, who died on the Eastern Frontier in 1942. Hence, the retaliation terror is nicknamed *Schalburgtage*.

BB deliberately avoids reading any newspapers the day after a hit.

He empties the wine glass, using his fingers to wipe his lips.

"Hold me a little longer." Alis K lowers her cheek back against his chest.

He hesitates for a second; he then places the glass on the altar and pulls her close. He senses that she wants to say something and he squeezes her even harder, hoping to stop the words from coming. If they begin to talk about the *Schalburgtage*, about the reprisal killings, he will not be able to think about anything else. Next time, he might restrain himself—and then he will get himself killed.

"Tell me about the first time you ever slept with a woman," she says as he finally releases his grip.

"Excuse me?" A silly laugh, even to his own ears.

"You can tell me." She looks at him with her big bluish-green eyes. He can see the orange flicker from the candles reflected in her pupils. Twenty-two years old. Not a single wrinkle anywhere. He feels old.

"I don't remember."

"Of course you do. Was it your wife?"

"No." He pours another glass of wine for both of them. "It was a long time before I met her."

"How old were you?"

"When I met my wife?"

"No, fool. The first time you made love to a woman."

He swallows. "I might have been sixteen. It was in 1920. Why do you want to know?"

"1920? I wasn't even born."

"No."

"Tell me. What happened? Was it the neighbor's daughter?"

"If you insist. It was a maid down the street. Nothing worth remembering."

"Was she nice?"

"Yes, she was nice enough. Her name was Gertrud. She got kicked to death by a mad horse the year after."

"Where did you do it?"

"In the drying attic. What about you? How was your first time?"

"I think, we got betrayed," she says, walking to the pulpit to get her overcoat hanging from a carved angel.

"Betrayed?" He feels lost, two steps behind.

"They were waiting for us...the Germans."

"I've been thinking the same, but honestly, who could have betrayed us? As far as I know, there's no one but the four of us who knew anything about tonight." He helps her slip into the overcoat. It's still wet from the rain.

"What about the guy who got you a copy of the key to the gate?"

“That’s one of Borges old comrades from the Spanish Civil War. Besides, he couldn’t have known when we’d be there and what we were planning to do. I can’t imagine the Germans waiting there night after night for a whole month.”

She ties her scarf. “Jens?”

“Jens?”

“Where was he when the Germans came?”

“Listen, Alis K...” he gently holds her head and looks into her eyes, “...Jens and I started this group. Jens is not an informer.”

“Then why wasn’t he where he was supposed to be?”

“I don’t know. Borge will talk to him. There will be a good explanation. Jens is the only one I truly trust.”

“What about me? I know your real name, Johannes.”

“And you, of course. And you.”

“Jens is a cop.”

“Yes, at least he used to be.”

“You can’t trust a cop.”

“Is that so?”

“Why didn’t he go to the concentration camps along with all the other police officers?”

“It wasn’t all the police that were sent...”

“No, some of them are in the Hipo.”

“I’m really not up to this. Go home and get some rest, Alis K.” He gently shoves her towards the door. “I’m too tired right now.”

“Can I have my money?”

“Your money?”

“We all got to make a living.”

“But I love you.”

“I bet you say that to all the girls.”

He sighs, shrugs, and finds his wallet. “You will be the end of me.”

3

In these early hours of the morning, the city’s still dark. A train with an endless row of wagons carrying trucks and tanks under green tarpaulins scrambles by. Jens smells a puff of steam and smoke in the cold wind. His hands are buried deep inside his pockets, his hat low on his forehead. It is blistering cold. There’s a thin layer of ice covering the puddles. His breath forms clouds around his face. The rain has stopped.

The city is waking up. Out on the major streets, the trams pass bicycles, horse wagons and very few cars. To the east, the first glow of the sun welcomes the day.

Jens crosses the street and heads towards the allotments. A rat runs along the hedge and disappears around the corner. The dirt squeaks under his shoes.

Behind him, a bicycle brakes violently. He stiffens at the sound of the tire plowing the dirt. He’s too tired to do anything else.

“Jens!” It’s Borge. It’s only Borge.

“Are you trying to scare the shit out of me?”

“Sorry, I didn’t mean to,”

“Sorry, I didn’t mean to.”

“Come on. We can’t stay here.”

“I wasn’t sure this was still your hideout,” Borge says soon after, as they sit inside a small, leaking allotment house.

“Grab a blanket! I can’t heat the place. Someone would notice the smoke coming from the chimney. Do you want a shot of schnapps to warm you up?”

“Where do you get schnapps these days?”

“I got it all. You can get whiskey or vodka. Vodka might suit a red devil like you better. Here, take a cigarette. I’m afraid it’s Danish tobacco. It’s so difficult to get anything else. Even for me.” He throws a package of cigarettes on the table and takes two small glasses from the cabinet. “A smuggler owes me a few favors back from my time as a cop. In fact, he was the guy who warned me when they took the police a couple of months ago.”

“You’re a dirty cop, and you know it.”

“Of course, but you’ve got to take care of yourself in this world. It might be different over in your USSR, but here, only the strong survive.”

“In the Communist world order, the black market will be eliminated.”

“If you say so. Cheers.”

“Cheers.”

Borge empties his glass, grimacing as the schnapps burns his throat. So young, so naïve, so rich. Watching him makes Jens sick to his stomach. In a few years he will surrender and come crawling back to daddy to take over the family corporation. That Communist bullshit has nothing to do with struggling classes. Borge is not fighting for any working man; he is just fighting his dad.

“What happened tonight?” Jens asks, as Borge puts his glass down and looks back at him with watery eyes. “Did you allow them to hit the alarm?”

“No, they were waiting for us in ambush. Where were you?”

“At my post.”

“At your post?” One eyebrow goes up.

Jens sighs heavily, pulls his revolver out, placing it on the table. “I dropped my gun when the Germans came. The hammer bent and there was nothing I could do with a damaged gun. There was a whole truckload of Germans. I hid in a shit stinking privy in some backyard all night.”

Borge takes the revolver to investigate the bent hammer before putting it back on the table. “You will need a new weapon. I know a guy who has a few pistols stolen from the Danish Army.”

“I do not want any pistol. I’ll get myself a new revolver. Pistols never work when you need them.”

“Like tonight?” That infuriating smile.

“You got me there.”

Borge shakes a cigarette from the package and strikes a match. “The Germans were waiting in ambush. I can’t believe we all survived. BB and I were standing right in the line of fire. His coat was ripped into pieces.”

“All three of you got away?”

“That should have been your first question.”

Jens raises his hands. What else can he do? He’s not perfect; judging by what his wife said when he had to go underground he is quite far from perfect.

“Oh, that’s why you’re here.” Jens laughs. His big, round belly wobbles.

“You figured I was the rat? Get a grip, young man.” The laughter comes to a sharp end. He leans forward, resting his hands on the table. “I know *all* of your real names. I know where you live—BB, you, and that hooker. If I was the

informer, don't you think the Germans would have showed up at your places? BB and I make up the core of this group. Remember that. Hell, if there's anyone the Gestapo would love to get their hands on, it would be me!"

"I'm sorry," Borge mumbles. "You're right, of course."

"Forget it." The chair squeaks under his weight as he leans back. "We are all under pressure."

"I've met a young man."

"Oh, that's your thing?"

Borge blushes. He flicks the ashes from his cigarette. "A smith apprentice. A smith could be of great use to us. We could make our own Sten guns. They do that in some of the other resistance groups ... *Holger Danske* for instance."

"A smith?" More schnapps.

"We need to test him, of course."

"I've got a traitor who needs to be liquidated, a Hipo officer. I have done all the preparations. It could be an obvious way to test him."

"He is very young."

"Apprentices always are."

"All right. I'll take care of it."

"No. It is better Alis K does that. Let me organize it with BB."

4

Poul-Erik Smith gets up on the footstool and lifts the top off the stand drill. The noise inside the workshop is a constant pressure against his eardrums. In the back of the workshop one of the smiths is grinding welds, a couple of workmen are cutting thick iron plates with mechanical shears while the Master Smith and his oldest apprentice are hammering on a ventilation pipe made from two pieces of thin iron plate.

Every single thing you do inside a smith's workshop is noisy. The eardrums are singing for a long time after the work day is done. Some nights, Poul-Erik can't sleep from the humming and hissing in his ears.

He takes an angle iron off the wagon and switches on the stand drill. Behind him, the smith has started welding. Blue flashes like distant lightning illuminate the workshop.

Poul-Erik presses the drill down into the marked spot on the angle iron. The hot drill cuttings dance up from the hole as the drill pierces the iron. He swallows the pain, clenching the angle iron with his left hand as the drill cuttings burn the skin on his hand. If the drill gets stuck, he has to be able to hold onto the iron. If it slips, it can cut him in half. There is not time to use clamps or anything else to secure the piece. Besides that, nobody tightens anything just to drill with a tiny five millimeter drill according to the Master Smith.

There are two hundred angle irons to drill. Soon his thoughts start to wander while his hands do the job. New angle iron, drill a hole in one end, drill a hole in the other end, put it away, repeat.

Poul-Erik's mother is more than happy for this apprenticeship. He should be glad to even have a job, she says. He could have been forced to go to Germany

to get work, like his father. She also takes most of his salary—for the little ones. We all have to do our share; or else it won't do.

However, Poul-Erik has too many thoughts inside his head. He can't just stand here and drill holes as the world is fighting the Great War. He feels useless and misused at the same time. He needs more than a shitty job and a shitty paycheck and the constant beatings from the smiths.

The smith's big hand slams the side of his head—he didn't even hear him coming! The force from the blow causes him to stumble, the terror filling him, as the angle iron drops to the concrete floor.

"What are you doing?" the smith yells, eyes watery and furious.

"I drill holes—" Poul-Erik answers, bowing his head in expectation of the next beating. It comes, hitting him on the other cheek.

"You drill holes?" the smith screams. His breath stinks. It's ten in the morning and he is on his fifth beer.

"Yes." Poul-Erik turns off the stand drill. "A five millimeter hole in both ends at the spots you've marked yourself."

"Are you blind, you little piece of shit? It said three millimeter holes on the note."

Poul-Erik goes for the note in his pocket, trying to keep his hands from shaking too much as he reads the note. The smith's handwriting is close to unreadable, but it clearly says five millimeter. "Look," he says, holding the note so the smith can see it.

"It says three millimeter. And don't you get smart with me. You get what I'm saying?"

"Yes, sir. I'm sorry."

"How many did you drill?"

"Those." Poul-Erik points at the stack on the floor.

The smith sighs. "That was not good. Did you get my beer?"

"No, not yet. I wanted to drill..."

"You are one sad excuse for an apprentice. Go get those beers and then I'll talk to Master Smith about this shit."

"Thank you."

"Get the hell out of here."

One of the other smiths shakes his head at him as he goes out to get the beers. It is tough to be the youngest apprentice. The only thing that makes it endurable is that, in a few months, a new kid will start here, and then he'll be the one who gets all the beatings, has to get beer and sweep the floor at closing time and such.

There is a woman waiting at the tram stop by the grocery store as he stops the carrier bicycle on the sidewalk. She is looking at him. He blushes, he can feel it. He is not good with women. He is struggling with the bicycle outrigger, pretending she isn't there, isn't looking; but he can feel her eyes following him all the way inside the grocery store.

"I was beginning to think you weren't coming at all," the shopkeeper laughs, going straight for the usual crate of beer. "You are usually like clockwork."

The woman is standing by the carrier bicycle when Poul-Erik exits the grocery store carrying the wooden beer crate containing fifty bottles.

"Are you Poul-Erik Smith?" she asks.

Poul-Erik nods his head without looking at her. He puts the crate on the carrier platform.

"We have a friend in common," she says quietly, glancing down the street. "Borge."

“B-Borge?” Poul-Erik mumbles. “He said nothing about women.”

“Have you got any plans for the evening?”

“I don’t trust Borge.”

“Why not?”

“He said something would happen last night, but I went past the *Super* garage this morning...and it was still there.”

“He said that?”

“Sure did.”

She remains quiet for a long time; just standing there, looking at the tram rumbling by. Poul-Erik glances at her while she looks away. He can’t decide what to do—stay or get the hell back to the workshop with the beer for the smiths.

“Meet me tonight, six o’clock sharp, at the gates of the municipal hospital. It is very important that you are precise. Not five minutes early, not five minutes late. In case I’m not there, you leave straight away. Got it?”

“Sure.”

She walks away without saying any more. Poul-Erik stares after her until she turns the corner a block down the street. Then he gets on the carrier bicycle and heads back to the workshop where he is greeted by the Master Smith with a smack to the side of his head. Fortunately, he will not have to pay for the ruined angle irons with his own salary...this time.

5

Silently, the rain is falling from a dark, gray sky. Borge rushes down the sidewalk with his hands deep in his pockets and a nervous pain in his stomach. Living underground, even walking the streets gets nerve-racking. You try to make yourself invisible, especially around your hideout. The neighbors can’t be allowed to notice your comings and goings. Anybody might be an informer. It is getting even harder to find a safe place to hide out during the day. People are afraid. There is a death penalty for hosting a wanted saboteur.

Borge stays in the attic of a small villa in Vanlose. In a quiet suburban street like this, it is almost impossible to go out in daylight without being spotted; he has to be extremely careful leaving or returning to the hideout during the day. He is hungry all the time.

He has been living underground since last year when the Germans captured most of his comrades in the Communist resistance group of which he had just become a member. The villa in Vanlose is his twelfth hiding place since then. He’s seen his family only twice in that time. It is too painful. His mother’s repeated cries—praying for him to flee to neutral Sweden.

Borge buys half a loaf of bread at a bakery in Osterbro and walks the streets towards the harbor, ripping pieces off and eating them. A factory producing parts for the caterpillars on the German Panzer tanks is located just outside that harbor. It has to go. He pulls the cap down low; fooling himself into believing that the cap is making him look a little like Lenin.

Two men in dark SS uniforms riding a motorcycle with sidecar pass by in the street. Borge fights the urge to look at them. He is fully equipped with false

papers, even a fake gun license. Right now, the gun license is back in his attic hideout along with his Sten gun. It is easier to get past a German street raid without weapons. License or no license.

He lights a cigarette, inhaling the smoke as he wanders along. Not much tobacco in that one. It tastes like old newspapers and saw dust.

He heads towards the factory. Barbed wire and guards in bunkers. Dogs. He passes by. No stopping here. No too-obvious glances. He is just a regular Dane out for a walk.

They can't sabotage this one alone. One of the other groups has to come along—the Communist group *Bopa*, maybe. It will take at least ten men to waste that factory.

A taxi slows down and stops at the curb a few meters ahead of him. He stiffens for a second, but he can't turn around here. Not in front of the German guards. There is nowhere to run. So, he continues towards the waiting taxi.

Through the rain that washes down the rear windshield of the taxi, he gets a glimpse of a figure moving in the back seat. The back door swings open just as he reaches the taxi. He steps to the side to get around the open door, his pulse hammering in his ears.

"Borge!" a voice calls from within the taxi. "Get in!"

He stops and looks inside. Alis K. A hand in her pocket pointing something at him.

"What's up?" he asks.

"Get in!"

He gets in. No need for more words. Alis K tells the driver to go, and the cab slowly starts to move.

"We'll talk when we get there," she says, and Borge nods his head.

The taxi goes north on Strandvejen following the coastline. Through the windows, Borge is watching the wet city go by. The grand villas of the rich, and behind them, the beach and Oresound, the narrow sound between Denmark and Sweden. He smokes one more of his terrible cigarettes. Doesn't offer any to Alis K. She has still got her hand inside her pocket. Borge doesn't like this. If she thinks he is the rat, informing the Germans of the hit on *Super* last night, she will kill him.

They drive in silence. The taxi crawls along the streets. Downhill it tops at 40 kilometers per hour. It is a gas generator car driving on gasses made from kindling wood, and this is top speed. Only the Hipo, the Germans, and some rescue vehicles are allowed the use of gasoline.

The taxi halts at Dyrehaven, the old hunting fields of the Renaissance Kings. Alis K pays the driver as they exit the taxi.

"The rain's stopped," she says as the taxi puffs away. "Let's go for a walk in the woods."

"What's all this about, Alis K? I want an explanation."

"You are the one who's got something to explain."

"Me?"

A royal stag crosses the path up ahead. The deer in these woods are used to humans. Alis K stops to look at it. "I talked to the smith apprentice today." Her voice is calm. She doesn't look at Borge.

"Hm," Borge says. "He's a good boy."

"Maybe so."

"He will be able to make Sten guns," Borge says, unable to stand the silence.

"We are always in need of decent guns. We can all have submachine guns."

"He doesn't trust you."

“What?”

“I’m not sure, *I* trust you.” She starts to walk again.

“Now, listen ...”

“Somebody ratted us out last night.”

“What’s that got to do with me?”

“At first I figured, it could’ve been Jens...but BB says no way.”

“Stop it!” Borge grabs her by the shoulders. “Now, you listen to me! I’m not an informer. I waited the whole night out at Jens’s hideout because I also figured it could’ve been him ratting us out.”

“How much did you tell the smith apprentice?”

Borge staggers. Looking away. “Fuck.”

“I just can’t comprehend, that *you*, Borge, of all people, couldn’t keep your mouth shut.”

“Fuck. Fuck. Fuck.”

“He knew we were to hit the garage last night. He drove past it this morning to see the destruction, but there wasn’t any destruction. That’s why he doesn’t trust you.”

“Listen, Alis K, I’m sorry. Maybe I was a little too keen on getting him into our group. It won’t happen again. If he is the one who betrayed us, I’ll take him out myself.” He lights a new cigarette. His hands shake.

“I don’t think he’s the informer.” She snatches the cigarettes, pulling one from the package herself. “Thank you.”

“It could’ve been him. He knew we were to sabotage the *Super* garage last night, but he doesn’t know who we are, or where we live. I’ll handle him.”

“He’s not the problem. The problem is you, Borge.” She looks him straight in the eye, placing the cigarette between her full lips.

“I haven’t told anybody else, Alis K. I promise. It was a stupid thing to do. A mistake.”

“Are you still capable of getting guns?”

“Maybe. I know a guy. It’s pistols from the Danish Army stolen from a weapons stock on Amager a few weeks ago.”

“Get me one for tonight.”

“You’re not planning to...”

“Your smith apprentice has to be tested. He is to kill the Hipo bastard as arranged. I’m meeting him at six o’clock by the gates of the municipal hospital.”

“What if he refuses? We’ve never forced anyone to terminate a traitor.”

“Then he’ll refuse and we won’t have anything to do with him ever again.”

Borge is glancing at the tall trees. The gray trunks. The gray sky above. The brown, dead leaves on the ground. Alis K’s green eyes. “I’ll get you a gun.”

“All right. Then let’s talk no more.” She turns to the left, taking a shortcut through the forest. “Come along, we have to take the train from Klampenborg station.”

“What if there’s a Gestapo roundup? Do you have a license for the thing you pointed at me from inside your pocket?”

“A license for what? My finger?”

BB is sitting in his study, staring at the blank piece of paper in the typewriter. He bites his lip, typing a few words.

We are gathered here today to pay our last respects to William Birkegaard Hansen. He will be remembered and missed, not only as an enterprising businessman, but also as a loving

BB halts in the middle of the sentence, letting his head fall back. "I am a hooker," he whispers to the stucco on the ceiling. "I'm a fucking whore!"

He slowly pulls the paper from the typewriter, letting it drop down into the trash can. He feeds a new piece, turns the reel until the paper is placed correctly, and starts typing.

There is hardly anybody who will miss William Birkegaard Hansen, as he was an asshole if there ever was one. How often have we who live in this neighborhood heard the fighting taking place in his house, only to see the marks on his wife's face the day after?

"You can't say something like that, Johannes!" BB's wife, Grete, says, placing a tray with coffee and cookies next to the typewriter. "It is a funeral after all."

"The man's a bastard anyway."

"Sure, he was." She stands there looking at him. Touches his neck. "I worry about you."

"About me?"

"I am not blind, you know. I can see what you are doing."

"What do you mean?"

"Sneaking out at night. You think you're so clever, but you're not." She pours a cup of coffee, handing it to him. "Either you're a saboteur, Johannes, or you've got a mistress."

"I can't sleep at night," he lies, gently taking her hand. "I don't know what's wrong with me. Sometimes I get up and go for a walk. It helps most of the time. That's all it is."

"Even when there's a curfew?"

He drums a finger at the typewriter. Looking down the coffee cup. She's been a good wife to him for many years. She's so thin. Always has been. But nice tits. Light, almost white hair. At night she looks like a ghost in her white nightgown. Once, he used to kid her about that. Her hands are beautiful, and she lights up when she smiles with those cute dimples. Johannes fell in love with those dimples back in the day. Back then she smiled all the time. The reverend's daughter from Struer. So well-behaved and nice. Wild in bed, though...and in the hay...and in the forest. How many years have passed? BB lets out a deep sigh.

"Yesterday I heard you talking to a man down at the church. I was out in the back. You were both whispering, but I could hear every single word. You were talking about a garage called *Super*. You were going to sabotage the garage last night."

"You must have gotten something wrong there. We were talking about a broken gas generator. He was thinking they might be able to fix it at that garage." BB gets up and walks to the heater to stir up the fire.

"What's going to happen to me if you get killed?" she asks with no emotion. "How am I going to manage on my own? Tell me, Johannes."

"Grete ... " What can he say? He waves his hands. "I have to finish this eulogy."

She scans his face like she's searching for something. He meets her stare. She's got wrinkles around her eyes. He hadn't noticed that before. Actually, he can't seem to remember the last time he looked into her eyes. For a brief moment, he wants to kiss her...grab her around the hips and take her right there on his desk on top of William Birkegaard Hansen's funeral eulogy. Then the moment passes.

"Suit yourself," she says, closing the door as she leaves the room.

He stands there in the middle of the room, looking at the closed door. The paint is starting to peel off the top of the door. Everything decays. He pulls the chair to sit down in front of the typewriter, but instantly gets up again. He empties the cup of coffee in one big gulp. Ersatz coffee, tastes terrible, but at least it's warm. He falls back into the chair, running his hands down his face.

Everything's a mess. He's losing his grip. His life's a jigsaw spilled on the floor.

7

It is ten minutes to six. Riding her bicycle along the four lakes in central Copenhagen, the pedals scratching the chain guard, and the wind making it a struggle to get anywhere, Alis K knows, she'll be at the hospital on time; she has to.

If you are not on time, you don't come at all. Linger at the gates for everyone to notice is far too dangerous. Someone might call the Hipo or the Gestapo, trying to make some easy money. You simply can't let yourself be noticed. An assignment is instantly canceled if you're not there on time.

Stopping at the back of the municipal hospital, she gets off her bicycle to avoid being a few minutes early. She pulls it down the side street along the wall surrounding the hospital, then heads towards the main gates on Oster Farimagsgade.

This will be her fourth termination. Her fourth kill. She's calm, but excited—focused. It's no game killing a Hipo officer.

Hipo is short for *Hilfspolizei*—the helping police. It is a Danish police force, formed to keep some law and order in the city, after the Germans discharged the entire Danish police force a few months ago. The original Danish police force had continued as the law enforcement of the country for the first four years of the German occupation. That ended September the 19th 1944, when the Germans rounded the Danish police force and almost two thousand police officers were straight to the German concentration camps. The Hipo HQ is located at the old central police station. Four men in each car and running on gasoline, the Hipo patrol the city in cars with the doors removed to let the officers disembark the vehicles quickly to return fire in the frequent event of an attack. Being a member of the *Hilfspolizei*, you're automatically placed on the death lists of the resistance. The Hipo are feared and hated far worse than even the Gestapo and the SS.

At exactly 6:00 p.m. Alis K is leaning against her bicycle in front of the twin main gates of the hospital. The boy is not there. For a short moment she's close to wishing he will not show up at all. She has no concerns whatsoever of killing

a couple of Hipo herself. It's a job that needs to be done. However, she is not all that excited about having to guide a big boy in the art of murder.

But no more than two minutes later, he halts his bicycle in front of her.

"My name's Alis K," she says. "From now on you will be Willy. Come on, let's push the bicycles for a bit."

He nods. His eyes sparkle. A little boy at Christmas. Starting to walk, she flashes him a smile.

"Your first assignment is tonight."

"Tonight?"

"Yes." Finding the pistol inside her purse, she slips it into his coat pocket.

"Don't!" She grabs him by the wrist, pulling his hand away from the pocket.

"It's a gun. Made in Denmark, it's a very poor gun. However, it was the best I could get at this point. You can keep it, but try to get a better one."

Now his eyes widen. He's starting to get nervous. He is realizing this is for real. This is now; this is it.

"What's the plan?"

Alis K starts walking again. The first man she killed was a pharmacist in the northern suburb Hellerup. Last year at springtime. Discovering his neighbor providing shelter for a wanted saboteur, he called the police. Jens, who was a police officer back then, managed to warn the saboteur before they came for him.

Handed a gigantic Belgian revolver, Alis K was ordered to kill the pharmacist the same night. She took the bus to Hellerup and shot him down at closing time as he left the pharmacy by the back door on his way home to his family.

The revolver was so heavy that she had to hold it with both hands. Nevertheless, the recoil almost tore it from her hands as the first shot failed to hit him. She remembers the way his double chin was shaking and his big, blue eyes went wide; holding his small, fat hands up in front of him like they could offer any protection against her bullets.

He dropped his bag and wet his pants, but he didn't scream. He didn't try to run. He just stood there with his hands in front of him, pissing his pants. Alis K didn't have the strength to just pull the trigger. She had to cock the hammer before being able to fire the revolver again. It felt like forever to do so, and when she finally aimed the gun at the pharmacist the second time, he just mumbled: "Oh no!" Then she shot him right in the face, dropped the revolver, and walked away.

Even though the loss of the revolver made Jens furious, he did grow quite fond of using her as an assassin. Maybe because she went all numb in those violent situations. She was there, she acted, she did what needed be done, but she felt nothing doing it. You learn stuff like that being a prostitute.

"You are to shoot a Hipo," she says to Willy. "We have to be at his place in an hour."

Looking at her with saucer-like eyes, his hands start to shake. "I didn't know... I have an appointment a quarter past seven."

"You don't have to be a part of this if you have any concerns about it. Nothing will happen; we won't force you to do it. We just split up and go home. Like we never even met."

"That's not it." He stops to look around. "I just need to cancel my appointment, that's all. I'll get in trouble if I ... It's my boss. I promised to renovate his garden shed. I'll lose my apprenticeship if I don't show up. I have to make a telephone call."

Walking in silence for a while, Alis K glances at him. "Rule number one—"

"Always be on time. I know. It is dangerous to be noticed lingering in the streets." He seems tense now. The nerves are building. It's not good. It's her responsibility to ensure this thing goes down as planned.

Smiling all warm now, she takes his head between her hands, caressing him. "Rule number two then: Never speak to anybody about what we are doing. Never. Never ever."

"Good. Tell me, what are you are going to say to your boss?"

"I'll tell him my mother's had an accident and ..."

"He knows your mother?"

"No. They met when I got the apprenticeship, but nothing more than that."

"Anybody else in your family? Your father? He knows your dad?"

"No." He looks away.

She tightens her hands around his head. "Any shared friends or acquaintances?"

"No."

"All right. There's a telephone booth at the corner over there. You can make the call from there. Hurry."

8

"We're ahead of schedule," Alis K says, getting off her bicycle. They'd had a tailwind all the way. "Come, let's go around the backyard." Turning her bicycle around, she leaves it resting against the wall.

Following her example, the pulse singing in his ears, the pistol heavy inside his pocket, he places his bicycle next to hers and lets his hand slip down his pockets to feel the pistol. "This is where he lives?"

"Just around the corner. Are you ready?"

He looks at her. Shrugs.

"Have you ever fired a gun before?"

He shakes his head. "I guess you just have to pull the trigger?"

She frowns. "Might be a good thing we are a little early. Give me the pistol."

Taking the gun out of his pocket, he can't help staring at it. The magazine is an odd square block in front of the trigger. He hands the pistol to her reluctantly.

"You have to release the safety catch before you can fire the pistol." She does so, moving on to loading the pistol. "Now it's ready to fire. Be careful, it might go off if you handle it too roughly."

Letting the pistol go back down his pocket, he nods again. He didn't understand one word she was saying, but doesn't question any of it. He is just standing there, unable to concentrate or even think, waiting to get started. All he wants to do is shoot the Hipo bastard and get out of there. Get it over with. He shifts his weight, unable to stand still. "When are we going to do it?"

"We should wait until seven o'clock."

"Why?"

"That's the plan. You always try to stick to the plan."

"But it's only us."

Carrying a rag doll, a little girl steps into the gateway. "Good day." She smiles, curtsying slightly before entering one of the stairways in the back house.

As the door closes behind her, Alis K takes the flowers from the front basket on her bicycle and turns to touch Poul-Erik's shoulder.

"Usually he arrives home between six and a quarter past six. He should be home by now. Are you still up for it? No second thoughts?"

"No, no. I just want to get started." His voice breaks. He clears his throat, trying to smile, but he can't.

"Very well. He lives in number seventy-four, just around the corner. On the second floor. We go up the stairs. You squeeze tight up against the door of his neighbor, the pistol ready to fire. I ring the bell. I am there to deliver a bouquet of flowers for Einar Hovgaard personally. If he's not the one to answer the door, I will ask to speak to him. When he shows, or if he's the one answering the door, I'll say: 'Good day, a bouquet for Mr. Hovgaard.' Then you shoot him. Understood?"

Poul-Erik nods his head.

"You'll be very close to him when you shoot him. So shove the pistol in his face and pull the trigger instantly. He can't be given a chance to react. I'll have my pistol hidden inside the bouquet. If you can't shoot him, or your pistol jams, I'll shoot him."

She looks at him closely, as if she is searching for something in his face. Poul-Erik's mouth is dry. He nods again. Shifts his weight to the other foot.

"The moment he's dead, we rush back here and get on our bicycles. Remember the wind. We can't go back the way we came. The headwind will slow us down. We go the other way. Just follow me."

Poul-Erik nods again. Moving his shoulders, they feel stiff and sore. He scratches his ear. He can't keep still any longer. It boils inside of him in a weird, stunning way. He hears the sound of dishes clinking from an open window above them. A horse carriage in the street. A married couple fighting. The hissing of an alley cat. He sees the unevenness of the paint on the window frames at the porter's apartment.

Alis K is quite relaxed. Taking a small, black pistol from her pocket, she swiftly cocks it before hiding it between the flowers. She sends him a crooked smile. "This is it."

She leads the way through the gateway, Poul-Erik only a few steps behind. Down the street, very calm, no rushing. Looking at her feet, the small shoes, the heels in the thin stockings, Poul-Erik's not daring to look anywhere else or at anybody else. His stare will betray him. He can feel it. He's on his way to kill a man. He's at war now.

There is a small grocery shop on the corner and a bookstore on the opposite side. A tram rattles by. A woman is struggling against the strong wind on an old bicycle with worn out tires.

Turning around the corner, out of the wind, Alis K stops dead in her tracks, Poul-Erik almost bumps into her.

"What is it?" he gasps.

She doesn't answer. A small van is parked at the sidewalk a few steps down the street. The engine running.

Plumber Hansen.

Hesitating for only a second, Alis K walks on. The van is parked at number 74. There is no plumber to be seen anywhere.

"What?" Poul-Erik repeats his question, suddenly feeling the cold.

"Smell," she says under her breath. "Gasoline."

No plumbers drive on gasoline. That goes without saying. Nobody leaves the engine on a gasoline-fueled car running unless they have an extremely good reason to do so. And a leaking toilet is anything but.

Alis K turns to look in all directions. Poul-Erik can't take his eyes away from the van. There is blue smoke coming out of the exhaust pipe. There are no windows in the back of the van—just two swinging doors. One is closed, the other left ajar. A movement in the side mirror catches his eye. Someone is sitting behind the wheel. Black uniform. No work clothes. Busy cleaning his fingernails.

By now, Alis K is down by the van. Throwing the flowers aside on the sidewalk, she steps out on the street aiming the pistol at the back of the van, ripping the doors open to show two Hipo sitting behind a mounted machine gun, looking astonished with open mouths.

One of them stutters, "N-n-no!"

Then she shoots.

9

Alis K turns to face the boy and finds him standing paralyzed on the sidewalk, gasping for air. She's instantly at his side, pulling his arm. "Come on. We have to go. *Now!*"

Looking at her with blinking eyes, he nods his head.

Glancing back over her shoulder at the van and the two dead Hipo inside, she sees the door of number 74 slam open. Only glimpsing the black uniform, she starts shooting at the door. "Run!" she yells, pushing the boy. "Back to the bicycles!"

Firing another round, she follows Willy around the corner, only to see his flapping coat disappear inside the gateway down the street.

She is running for all she's worth. A skinny woman with a hat and two small poodles on a leash comes out of a beauty shop. There is no time for Alis K to stop. She jumps over the dogs, the lady with the hat screams, yanking the dog leashes, making the little dogs fall over. Getting one foot tangled in the leashes, Alis K crashes to the sidewalk, losing her pistol, seeing it skip away as the taste of blood fills her mouth. The woman behind her keeps screaming.

Feeling her mouth and looking at the blood on her fingers, she is up on her knees when the first bullets hit the sidewalk next to her.

She scrambles for the pistol as the woman with the dogs makes a quick escape back into the beauty shop. Grabbing it, she rolls over to see the van rushing around the corner, tires squealing; one Hipo behind the wheel, another hanging out the side window clutching a big revolver. She aims her Walther and pulls the trigger.

Nothing happens. It doesn't fire.

It only clicks. The spring inside the clip must have been damaged when she dropped it. *Shit!*

She throws the pistol aside, holding up her hands.

The van stops, tires screaming. Both Hipo are instantly out of the van. The first one collects the Walther while the other kicks her in the stomach. Bending

over, she drops to her knees and falls on her side. She hardly feels the next kick. She doesn't hear the Hipo shout as he throws her to the ground, kneeling her back, pushing her face into the sidewalk; he cuffs her hands behind her back.

He hits the back of her head then kicks her sides, before pulling her back onto her feet, and presses her up against the wall. The Hipo is yelling in her face. Nose to nose. He's got a vein pulsating on his forehead. Pressing the revolver to her chin, he calls her a murdering bitch—*those* words she does hear. His eyes are gray and bloodshot.

The sound of a gunshot shatters the air, and for a second, she almost believes she's been shot. Then the Hipo releases his grip. Behind him the other Hipo is lying on the street, writhing and grabbing his stomach; his fingers are red.

"Helge!" the Hipo, who seconds ago had his gun pressed to her chin, is shouting as he searches frantically in all directions at the same time. An instant later, he is lying next to his friend with a hole in his forehead.

Alis K spots Willy standing down by the gateway holding a smoking gun in his hand. "Hurry," she yells. "I'm handcuffed. The fat one has the keys."

He turns to look at her. "Keys?"

"Yes, goddammit. Hurry!"

He runs up to the two Hipo. The one called Helge is still lying on the street squirming and grunting in pain until Willy shoots him twice in the face. Kneeling by the fat one who is obviously dead, he finds the keys in the pocket of the Hipo's trousers and moves over to Alis K to release the handcuffs.

"The bicycles. Hurry! This place will be crawling with more Hipo in a matter of minutes. We didn't get the man we came for. He's probably calling for help right now. Get moving!"

"The bicycles are gone," Poul-Erik says.

"What?"

"They are just gone. Maybe someone stole them."

"No!"

"It has to be somebody living nearby. We haven't been away for more than ten minutes," he says.

"Forget it. We don't have the time. We'll take the van." She bends down to pick up her Walther, then continues over to get the guns from the two dead Hipo.

"Won't they be looking for the van?"

"Sure, they will." She gets in behind the wheel. "Get in!"

He's only just inside the car when she slams it into gear and floors the accelerator. The first bystanders are already gathering at the intersection.

She suddenly remembers the two dead bodies in the back of the van. "Are the doors in the back closed?"

"Yes."

"Positive?"

"Yes."

"Good."

She glances in the side mirror. Nobody is following. Going right at the next intersection, she heads for Norrebro. "Where did you learn to shoot like that?"

"Who me?"

"Yes, you."

"I've never touched a pistol before."

"Liar."

"No!"

Glancing at him from the corner of her eye, she drums the wheel in silence. He's pale...visibly shaken. "That pistol I gave you is a piece of crap. You can't hit anything with it, not at that distance."

Staring at her with tears in his blinking eyes, he says, "I did."

Holding her breath, she spots a gray BMW with the SS license plates turning out on the street in front of them. She removes her foot from the accelerator to slow the van and get some space between the two cars. There are two men in the BMW. One is talking on the radio. She looks in the side mirror. Should she make a turn? In front of them the BMW's now stopped at an intersection. She steps on the brakes, pulling up behind the SS car.

She glances at Willy. Sweat is dripping from his nose despite the cold. He is falling apart. Everybody has a point where they can't take anymore—and he's only sixteen years old. She drums the wheel with the tip of her fingers again.

She decides to make a turn at the next intersection, taking Falkoner Allé instead. She follows the BMW as it starts moving again. Feeling her heart pounding inside her chest, she makes the turn with one eye glued to the side mirror. The SS car seems to be heading straight ahead. Willy's teeth start to chatter. Backing up, the BMW turns right. After them.

"Hold on," she says to Willy as the BMW comes rushing up behind them. "I think—"

Then suddenly the BMW pulls over next to a tobacco shop and the two SS officers step out of the car.

Unable to breathe, she keeps staring in the side mirror for a long time.

"We better walk the rest of way," she says, parking the van on a quiet side street.

10

Sitting under the floor lamp in the living room, Grete Bach Sørensen is sewing upholstery for a pillow when the telephone starts ringing. Putting the needlework aside, she goes out in the hall to answer the phone.

"At Reverend Sorensen's."

"Can I please talk to the reverend?" A woman's voice.

"No. I'm sorry, he is busy at the moment. May I ask who is calling?"

"Please give him this message: The flowers not delivered. Infected by weeds. Four dandelions broken. All buds intact."

"Is it the florist? We didn't order any—"

"The flowers not delivered. Infected by weeds. Four dandelions broken. All buds intact." The woman is gasping for breath.

"Well, if you say so. I'll give him the message."

"Please repeat the message."

"What?"

"Repeat the message, please."

"The dandelions need water. The buds are broken, but the flowers are intact."

"No-no. Do you have a pen and paper?"

"I am a little busy myself. Can it wait?"

“Now listen! This is very important! I am a close friend of Johannes!”

“You—”

“Are you still there?”

“Yes.”

“Are you listening?”

“Yes.”

“The flowers not delivered. Infected by weeds. Four dandelions broken. All buds intact.”

Grete repeats the message without saying another word. The woman hangs up.

Staring at a spot on the tapestry for the next several minutes, Grete stands paralyzed beside the telephone. What is she going to do?

“Who was it?” Johannes is shouting from the toilet.

“Nobody,” she says.

She rushes back into the living room to continue sewing on her pillowcase. Working too quickly with the needle, she stabs her index finger. She wipes the tears from her eyes and licks the blood from her fingertip. She puts the needlework down on the table and heads out into the kitchen, where she moves some cans around before she goes to sit by the kitchen table, only to get up again instantly.

As she goes to the window to carefully lift the blackout curtains, she can hear the wind from outside. Unable to see anything but her own reflection, she lets the curtain fall back, and goes back to rearranging the cans.

11

Johannes can hear Grete rummaging about in the kitchen. The maid has the night off, so it can only be Grete.

He has had problems defecating for months, and he should, of course, see a doctor. However, it is too much of a risk to take. Having a collection of new scars on his body, he fears the doctor might start to wonder how he got them. If you are not sure whom you can trust, it is better not to trust anyone at all. The doctor could be an informer.

A fine scab has formed during the night on the gunshot wound from the hit on the *Super* garage. It has not bled that much. It is only a bit swollen and quite sore. It will be okay.

Careful not to touch the wound, he pulls up his trousers, fastens the belt, and flushes the toilet.

Grete is standing with her back to the kitchen sink looking at him as he makes his way into the kitchen. She’s crying. He halts, unable to decide what to do.

“Grete ...” he says and stalls.

“Why is it we don’t have any children, Johannes?”

“That’s how the Lord wanted it to be.”

“The Lord?” She’s freezing. “I don’t believe in him anymore, Johannes. I just can’t.”

Unable to look at her, he scans the floor. There is a tiny bit of onion the maid must have dropped when she made dinner lying on the floorboards. He sighs deeply. Shrugs.

"I would have been so happy to give you children, Johannes."

"I know. Don't think about it. They make a mess and drag mud into the living room."

She smiles, or at least tries. He puts his arms around her. Hiding herself inside his embrace, she starts sobbing like a baby.

Not understanding anything, he whispers, "Hush, hush," into her hair.

"Do you remember the first time we met?" She untangles from his embrace to look at him.

"Of course I do."

"Tell me about it."

"Do you want me to tell you about it?" He frowns.

"Yes, tell me about the first time you saw me."

"Grete ..."

"Tell me."

He thinks for a while. "Well, it was in Odense. You sang in the church choir. Your father had sent you off to serve in another reverend's family. I studied theology at the university. I used to come to the church just to look at you. You were so beautiful. I felt all warm inside if I only got a glance of your smile. Those cute dimples." He touches her cheeks softly.

"That wasn't the first time."

"It wasn't?"

"No."

"Oh, you're thinking about the bakery. I remember your hands. You've always had beautiful hands."

"I was there to pick up some bread for a funeral..." Even as she smiles, she looks tired, but the tears are gone. "Do you remember when it happened?"

"It must have been in the morning."

"I meant the date."

"Fall...definitely fall. I recall the yellowing leaves on the trees outside."

"That was fifteen years ago last month."

"Fifteen years?"

She goes to get the kettle. "Do you want a cup of coffee?"

"Sure."

She lights a match and ignites the burners. "Fifteen years and no children, Johannes." She fills water into the kettle and places it on the stove. Just standing there, she stares at the kettle.

"I haven't finished writing my funeral eulogy for tomorrow," Johannes says. "I'd better—"

"Johannes!"

"Listen, don't think so much. It is not right for a woman. How is the pillowcase getting along?"

"The flowers not delivered. Infected by weeds. Four dandelions broken. All buds intact."

"What are you saying?" He turns away to hide the expression on his face. This is not good. He is thinking faster than the German Messerschmitts can fly. Inside he's shaking. He hopes it is only on the inside.

"A woman called on the telephone... She said she was a close friend of yours, Johannes." She puts a hand on his shoulder. "What are you doing?"

He turns around. "Why didn't you call me?"

"You were busy."

"But this was important, goddammit!"

Stepping away from him, she turns to pour coffee into the coffee pot. "I'm so afraid," she says. "I've got nothing left if I lose you."

He's getting a headache. Touches his forehead. "Sorry," he mumbles.

"I know you too well," she says without looking at him. "You can't hide anything from me. You are involved with some kind of resistance group, and you have been for a long time. You think you're so clever, but I can see right through you."

He hides his shaking hands in his pockets. "I didn't want to scare you. I was trying to protect you."

The water boils. She kills the burner, lifting the kettle to pour the water into the coffee pot. "Now, you will tell me everything, Johannes," she says calmly.

Shutting his eyes a couple of seconds, he fills his lungs. "That message you got for me was in code in case the operator was listening."

She turns to look him in the eye. Strange as it might seem, she's more beautiful than ever.

"Translated, it means, 'The operation failed. The Germans or the Hipo was expecting them. Four bad guys dead, none of ours got hit.'"

She's just standing there. He can see her throat move as she swallows something. Then she nods. "Continue."

"It was the second time in a row they were expecting us. We've got an informer in our group."

"Are the Germans coming here?"

"I don't think so. I don't know."

"You don't know?"

"There really aren't that many people who knew about these two operations. It is only the inner circle. Myself, the woman on the phone, Jens—the man you overheard me having a conversation with yesterday in the church—and then another man. We all know the real identities of at least some of the others. It doesn't add up."

"What is the name of the woman on the telephone?"

"Alis K."

"Is that her real name?"

"No."

"Then what is her real name?"

"We don't use real names. We only use our cover names, never the real names."

"Do you know her real name?"

"Sure."

"You're not going to tell me?"

"It's better if you don't know."

"What's your cover name?"

"BB."

"BB? What does that stand for?"

"Nothing. You can never tell anybody about *any* of this. Never ever. Promise me!"

"I'm your wife, Johannes. If you can't trust me, who can you trust?" She finds two cups in the cabinet, placing them on the kitchen table. "Now, you sit down and tell me everything."

"Everything?"

"When did it begin? What have you done? Everything."

He sits down at the kitchen table, staring at his coffee cup. "It started last year. Jens was a police officer back then. He'd heard about the German plans to deport the Danish Jews to concentration camps in Poland, and he...came to me..."

"And you just said 'yes'?"

"We could use the money."

"Did you take money for saving the Jews?"

He sighs. "Sure. It was even quite expensive, but they had a lot of money, you know, and we did take a risk saving them."

Pouring coffee into the cups, she goes to sit at the table herself, lifting an eyebrow.

"Jens knew a fisherman from Skane in Sweden who would anchor his boat on the coast near Charlottenlund up north. We saved the lives of a whole family that night. Children, parents, uncles, aunts, grandparents, all sailed to safety in Sweden inside a little fisherman's boat. Putting some pressure on the leader of a local smuggler gang, he made him lend us a small truck to transport the whole family of Jews to Charlottenlund."

"Just the two of you?"

"No, there were four of us."

"The other two were Alis K and that guy...you didn't tell me his name?"

"Borge. No. It was another police officer and a porter from the state hospital." He washes down the hot coffee, putting the cup down to touch his tongue. "I burned myself."

She just stares at him. "Continue."

"A few weeks went by, and Jens contacted me again. In the beginning, it was quite innocent, a guy from some resistance group needing to get away to safety in Sweden...that kind of thing. Later we started to blow up factories."

"Have you killed anybody, Johannes?"

"Yes."

"More than once?"

"Yes."

"Oh my God."

The kitchen is silent. You can hear the wind from outside. After a couple of long, quiet minutes, Johannes continues. "Just before Christmas last year, we were to sabotage a train for Norway carrying German weapons. The train was supposed to take the ferry from Elsinore, but the day before on the way to Elsinore, some wagons were to be detached at Svanemollen here in Copenhagen where the train would spend the night at a sidetrack. There were tanks, cannons, and different kinds of combat vehicles, all hidden under the green tarpaulins. We knew there would be guards, but ..." Moving the empty coffee cup in circles, he looks at the lamp over the table. "We thought we would be able to outwit them."

"I read about this in the newspaper," Grete whispers. "Only two got away."

"Jens and I."

She takes his hand. "The porter from the state hospital and the other police officer ...?"

"They died. Along with three other men who had joined our group. We were betrayed. The porter had told his girlfriend about the operation. They'd only just met each other. Jens shot her a week later."

The darkness is complete and filled with strange noises. The wind bites through his clothes, numbing his ears.

Alis K sneaks up to monitor the street, pressing herself into the hedge as a motorcycle drives by.

Inside the garden, behind the hedge, Poul-Erik hides, his back against a tree. Shaking. The bark of the tree is rough and moist. The villa is a big, dark block in front of him. A car with a gas generator is parked in the driveway. He had never been to this part of the city before.

“Willy!” Alis K whispers. He follows her quietly out of the upper-class residential neighborhood, down dark side streets, through backyards, over wooden fences. He throws up in a basement shaft. Alis K lifts his head to look at him. “Are you okay?”

He nods.

“I think I’ll have to take you with me,” she says, half to herself. “You don’t look too good.”

Somewhere, a dog starts barking. She turns her head towards the sound. There’s a little blood under her nose. “Come on, I live just around the corner.”

Minutes later, Poul-Erik is sitting under a blanket on her big bed, holding a cup of warm tea in his hand. He is not shaking anymore.

Alis K has put her overcoat inside the wardrobe and is now inspecting her face in the mirror hanging over the small desk. The blackout curtains are stained by the steam from the cold windows. A fire is burning inside the small stove, but the room is still chilled. A red lamp is hanging from the wire under the ceiling. The walls are bare.

“Do you live here?” he asks.

“Sure do.” She dabs away the blood from under her nose with a piece of cotton. “We’re twelve girls living here in separate rooms along this corridor. It’s an old home for unmarried nurses.” She catches his eyes in the mirror and smiles. “Feeling better?”

He nods, but looks away.

She shakes her head, unwrapping her hair. “I couldn’t sleep for three days after my first kill.” She walks to him. “You’re my hero now. You saved my life.”

His face gets all warm, and he bows his head, looking down into his tea. “I was so afraid,” he mutters. “I was so afraid.”

“Do you mind unhooking my dress?” She turns her back to him. Putting the tea cup down on the floor, he finds the hooks. “Everybody gets afraid,” she says, as he fumbles with the hooks. “You shouldn’t think like that.”

“I wasn’t even aiming. I just lifted the pistol and fired.”

She pulls the dress over her head. She has goose bumps on her arms and legs. Her nipples are hard under the thin fabric of her bra.

“But you didn’t shoot me! Don’t waste your time thinking about it.” She takes the duvet from the bed, wraps it around her body. “Let me have a sip of that tea.”

Silence fills the room as she drinks. A door slams in the corridor. A woman laughs.

“Did you tell anybody about the hit tonight?” she asks.

“No.”

“Not a single word? Not even by mistake?”

“No.”

“What about the hit last night?”

“The *Super* garage?”

“Yes. Did you tell anybody?”

“No.”

“It was a setup. It was a trap. They were expecting us. In the van. They knew we were coming. Only we got there a little early and took them by surprise.” She pulls a bent pack of cigarettes out from under the mattress. Lights one. “We would be dead by now if it hadn’t been for the tailwind we had on the way out there.”

Poul-Erik turns to look at her. It is hard for him to believe that this is real, that he just shot and killed two people, that he is a member of the underground resistance, that he could be dead now, that he is sitting next to an almost naked woman.

“Smoke?” She hands him the cigarette. The duvet falls down, and one of her breasts is showing all too clearly through the thin fabric of her undergarment. Snatching the cigarette from her fingers, he turns away, pulling hard on the cigarette. He feels a tickling inside his pants.

“I had my first cigarette when I was five,” he says, making rings of smoke. “With my mother.”

“You’re so cute.” She caresses the back of his neck. “You just killed two Hipo pigs. You’re one of us now. That calls for a celebration.” She puts a hand beneath his blanket and starts to unbutton his pants. He sits there stiff as a poker, letting her do so. Unable to breathe. She slowly pulls his cock out of his pants. And then he comes. Making the blanket wet and sticky. And still he just sits there.

Alis K smiles. “You’re fast on the trigger tonight.”

“I’ve never been with a...” he mumbles, pulling hard on the cigarette.

“There’s a first time for everything,” she whispers, pushing him back on the bed. “Think you’re man enough to fire two rounds?”

Later, when he is lying on his back, letting his eyes follow the cracks in the ceiling, he can still feel the recoil from the pistol in his hand, still see the two Hipo fall every time he closes his eyes. But he is feeling relaxed in a strange way now.

Alis K is all dressed again. She seems kind of busy—sitting in front of the mirror, powdering her face.

“Who was the guy I should’ve shot?” He sits up, finding his shirt on the floor.

She goes to the wardrobe. Opening it, she pulls a tiny latch at the bottom. She takes a blurry photograph and a small note from the secret compartment and hands him both. The man on the photograph looks really big, maybe even two meters high. Large hands, blonde hair. Black uniform.

“That the guy?”

“Right.”

The note is covered in words written in pencil. The guy’s name and address. An order to kill him. His rank in the Hipo.

“Einar Hovgaard,” Poul-Erik reads out loud.

"A real bastard," she says, fixing her hair. "Give it back to me." She puts the picture and the note back inside the secret latch in the closet. Looks at her watch. "Get dressed, I've got an appointment coming up."

"Are you my girlfriend now?"

She almost starts to laugh. "You wouldn't want me as your girlfriend."

"Why not?"

"Because." She claps her hands. "Get moving."

He gets dressed in a blur. Taking the pistol from the coat pocket, he hands it to her. "Thanks for lending me this."

"Keep it. It's yours. Hide it where nobody will find it. And now you really have to get moving." She pushes him out in the hallway as the doorbell starts to ring. "You'll have to go out the back." She shoves him through the shared kitchen, pointing his way to the door and the back staircase. "Go that way!"

"Goodbye," he says, but she is already gone down the corridor to get the door. Puzzled, he stares after her as she goes down the hallway to open the door. Exchanging a few words, she moves aside to let a man all dressed in black into the hallway.

Poul-Erik hurries down the stairs. Two steps at a time. Between the second and third floor a fat, tired and sweating maid comes up the staircase.

"Watch it, young man," she says harshly. "Are you trying to scare the life out of me, rushing down the stairs like that?"

"I'm sorry," he says, stepping to the side to let her pass him on the narrow staircase.

"What are you doing here?" she asks, sending him a suspicious glance. "There are criminals everywhere these days, you know. One might end up missing the police! Who would have thought that possible?"

"I have been paying a visit to the nurses on the fourth floor," he answers politely.

The big maid lifts both her eyebrows and starts to laugh so hard her gigantic breasts almost spill out. "Well, you do look a little frail, my boy." She pets his cheek. "Nurses? Ha! You are some character."

She squeezes past him. He can still hear her laughing as he reaches the ground floor and goes out the back door.

He steals a bicycle and rides it downtown. Over Queen Louise's Bridge, down Gothersgade. Into the slum. Home.

Leaving the bicycle by The King's Garden, he walks the rest of the way. Afraid to go home. Scared they might see the difference in his face.

That he's no longer the same.

13

Jens is gasping for air. Fighting his way out of the dream into a daze where echoes of the nightmare make him quiver; he is still hearing the sound of stomping boots. Covered in sweat. Clothes clinging to his body. He curses under his breath. Pulling the revolver out from under the pillow and releasing the safety, he runs the other hand over his face. Listening. Switching the safety back on, he slips the revolver back under the pillow.

“Just a nightmare,” he whispers to the dark inside the allotment house as he grabs the bottle of schnapps by the bed, unscrewing the cap to drink from the bottle.

The cold hits him nonetheless—makes him shiver in the sweaty clothes. He puts the bottle back under the bed and pulls up the covers. He sleeps fully dressed under two duvets and a couple of old, worn blankets. There is a small stove inside the allotment house, but he can’t risk making a fire. Smoke from the chimney of an allotment house at this time of year? He might as well put up a sign saying: *Something sneaky is going on right here, please contact the Gestapo immediately*. It would only be a matter of days before he was given a not-so-private berth in the Kz-Buchenwald. He would take the cold and freezing nights over that any day.

When he had had nightmares as a child, it was always his dad who came to comfort him. He would sit on the bed and talk Jens back into a calm sleep with his deep voice. It was also his dad who cared for him when he was sick. He was a big man with a beard and dark eyes.

A businessman to the tip of his toes, he had an almost instinctive sense for the future. He would build companies from scratch, run them a few years, and then sell them to make fortunes. Buy other companies; sell the machinery, the buildings, the patents, only to shut them down when there was nothing left to sell. “Never let your emotions get involved in business. You always have to sell in time,” he would say, handing his son a bag of hard candy, “or else you’ll end up with a bunch of trash, nobody wants to buy.”

Jens was an only child. Something went wrong during his birth, making his mother linger between life and death for several days. She recovered, but was unable to bear another child. Might be the reason she never really connected with Jens. She was just a thin and pale shadow moving around the home. She hardly ever spoke to him.

Jens was twelve years old when his father was run down by the tram and suffered major brain damage, placing him like a shrunken man drooling in the rocking chair in front of the fireplace for the next four years. Then he died.

All his mother was concerned about was keeping up appearances. This was a prosperous family, and nobody could be allowed to see that the family wealth was disappearing. She fought a fierce battle to keep the family dignity intact while Jens was left alone. She married a banker only a year after Jens’ dad had finally passed away. Jens was sent away to join the army—to become a real man.

He curls up under the covers to let his breath warm up the duvets. The damp clothes are uncomfortable. He can smell his own sweat. He hasn’t showered for three weeks now.

He thinks about his wife for a moment—that angry bitch. He does not miss her at all, but he sure as hell could use some of her domestic skills around here. He doesn’t miss his children either. He wonders if they miss him? Who cares?

The rain drums on the roof. The wind makes the branches of the lilac tree rub against the small house. He wonders what time it is as he shifts sides under the cover, letting cold air seep in under the duvets.

He has got a sore feeling in his back. He grinds his teeth. The schnapps bites his stomach. He doesn’t want to go back to sleep. The nightmare feels like a curse.

He met Magda when he was around twenty-five years old. It was back in the late Twenties, and he was making good money delivering illegal porn shots on behalf of an ‘art’ photographer. Magda was seventeen—pretty even with her

glasses—and very quiet. She worked at the bakery where Jens bought his bread every morning. When he asked her out for a movie one day, she just nodded her head without looking at him. Then she got pregnant, and that would of course have been her problem had she not been the daughter of a high-ranking police investigator. He came by one night to explain in every detail what prospects of a future life Jens had to choose between.

A month later, they got married. Walter was born and named after Magda's grandfather to appease family traditions. Magda's silence was by then long gone, now she complained about everything. If she didn't get her way, her dad would show up to make sure she did.

There were a lot of traditions in that family, and Jens had better stick by all of them. All the men in the family were police officers, and so Jens had to join the force as well. Fortunately he'd never been busted so that wasn't too much of a problem. In the years following, Ole and Erna were born. Magda got varicose veins and stretch marks, her eyesight got worse, and her glasses got thicker and thicker. Along with all that, she got meaner and meaner. Jens began working extra shifts just to keep out of the house.

He lets a hand slide inside his shirt to scratch the hairs on his big belly. Maybe he'd gotten fleas? The thought alone makes him itch all over his body. He turns in the bed.

He knows for a fact that Alis K isn't exactly fond of him. Hookers have always hated cops. That is just the way it is. You don't have to put that much pressure on a hooker to get a free blow job. And who wouldn't? There was one particular redhead out on Jagtvej he had been keen on. She couldn't have been much older than sixteen, but she had been a quite experienced girl. He moves his hand further down, making the memory come alive. Masturbation has always had a calming effect on his nerves. He used to fuck her with his police stick while she sucked his cock. He remembers her tiny, firm breasts. Those tiny, pale tits. Oh, she was something.

Afterwards he wipes himself with a handkerchief and stares at the ceiling for a long time. His real name is Verner Hansen. He is forty-three. Too old for this shit. If the world hadn't lost its mind and started this insane war, he would have been a detective in only five more years. He had all the right connections. He only needed to get a foot inside the Freemasons, and he could have gone all the way to the top...and the higher the rank, the better the bribe. But now, the police had been sent to the concentration camps as prisoners of the Third Reich, counting his father-in-law and the rest of the men in the Saeby family. The Schalburg Corps have taken over the house of the Freemasons at Blegdamsvej, and the Hipo use the main police station as HQ.

Suddenly, the mechanical howling of the air raid sirens cuts through the night, sending the whole city on its nightly tour down the basement shelters where they will all be buried in rubble if a bomb were to hit their houses. Jens doesn't move. There's nowhere for him to take shelter from the war.

"It's all a pile of shit," he whispers to the darkness around him. "It's all just one big pile of shit."

Inserting a new sheet of paper into the typewriter, Borge drums his fingers on the top of the desk, which is in fact nothing but a door on top of two sawhorses. He is hungry, hasn't had anything to eat since lunch yesterday. The typewriter is placed on a pillow to dim the sound of its constant click-click. The gray morning light comes through the sloping ceiling windows above him. There are boxes and old furniture everywhere. His bed is an old, worn mattress on the floor. There is no insulation under the red tiled roof, making the attic boiling hot in the summer and freezing in the winter.

In the inevitable socialist world order that is sure to follow this imperialist war, the brave members of the Danish resistance will be honored and remembered as the true heroes they indeed were. The socialist world will not forget those who fight the evil of fascism. Comrades, have no fear! The future belongs to us!

Ejecting the paper from the typewriter, he rolls it along with the rest of the article for the illegal newspaper, *The Red Banner*, into a tight roll. Tying a string around the roll, he lets it slide down the lining of his old jacket. It's not the best hiding place in the world, but it might survive a sloppy body search.

He ties his shoes and pulls on his jacket. Puts a cap on his head and a scarf around his neck. He hides the Sten gun behind some boxes over by the chimney, before opening the hatch to let the ladder slide down the hallway below. He has to be extremely careful not to make a single sound. There is a small dental clinic located in the villa. The waiting room is like the rest of the clinic at the ground floor, but unfortunately right under this hallway. If he makes a sound, someone might wonder ...

He gets down, pushing the ladder back up and shutting the hatch carefully before he sneaks down the stairs all the way to the basement. Through the clothes drying from a line under the basement ceiling and out the basement door. Up the back stairs leading to the garden at the back of the villa. He makes his way through the scrub at the end of the garden to the railroad behind it.

An hour later, he knocks on a back door of a one-bedroom apartment in Vesterbro.

Borge's birth name is Thorkild Holm. He is a twenty-seven-year-old son of a highly regarded manufacturer in upper-class Hellerup. Before the war began, he was studying literature at the university—Shakespeare interpreted through Marx and his theories about the nature of the capitalist world order. All of that ended when he had to go underground. The soles on his shoes are extra thick to hide the fact, that he's not much higher than 1.70 m.

The door opens a crack and an eye appears.

"It's just me," Borge says.

The door opens just enough to let him in and is closed and locked behind him before anybody says anything.

"Do you have the article for me?"

A young man. Blonde hair and that good, clean, brave Danish twinkle in the eye. The dream of every mother-in-law.

Borge pulls the article from the lining of his jacket and hands it to the man. "We need to talk, Jorgen."

"Oh," Jorgen says, skimming the text. "This is good work, you know. Can we talk some other time? I'm a little busy today."

"You never used to be busy before."

"No, but I am now."

“Jorgen, goddammit!” Borge says, grabbing hold of his shoulders. “Look at me! What happened to us? I miss you. Can’t you understand that?”

Jorgen places a hand on Borge’s chest, pushing him back, making him stumble into the door. “Stay away from me. There isn’t any us. Get it?”

“But Jorgen...”

“There’s an informer in your group. One of the comrades who was arrested by the Germans a couple of weeks ago managed to get a letter smuggled out of the Gestapo prison at the old Shell house. Do not come here anymore.”

Borge is paralyzed. “Did he write anything about who the informer was?”

“No. Beat it!”

“But I love you ...”

A deep sigh. His hands at his sides. “Goodbye, Borge.”

He heads straight into the first pub he sees and buys himself a red Tuborg. He can’t afford anything stronger. Sits in a dark spot. Grinds his teeth. He won’t cry. He won’t. He won’t.

15

The backyard is dark; however Poul-Erik’s eyes have had plenty of time to adjust to the darkness on the long walk home from work. Ice cold rain drizzling from a pitch black sky, makes his cheeks and ears so cold, they hurt. His hands are deep inside his pockets. His clothes are wet and heavy. He looks up at the dark windows of the back building, looking for the two windows of his home. It is where his mum and siblings will be. They are probably going to bed right now. It is that late. He has been working long hours.

A rat scurries over the cobbles and down the stairs to the basement. There are three rows of back houses behind the building facing the street. Every time you pass through a gateway, arriving at a new backyard, you go one step deeper into poverty. Poul-Erik is the eldest of six siblings. The whole family lives in a two-bedroom apartment in the second back house.

He doesn’t go up. Instead, he heads for the outhouses. His one ear is humming. He’s been working by the circular saw most of the day. You don’t hear how much noise it makes before you turn it off and your ears start to ring.

He bangs the privy door hard using his fists to scare off the rats before he opens the door and slips in. There is no light in there. You have to do your thing in utter darkness. The stench is intense. He shuts the door behind himself and locks the bolt. The floor is rotten wood covered in piss. He doesn’t sit down on the seat; instead he takes a box of matches from his pocket. The box is wet and the first match fails to ignite. He throws it down the loo and takes another one. This one lights up, making the shadows dance on the wooden walls. There are words like *cunt* and *pussy* carved into the walls. He steps up on the seat groping under the roof until he finds the pistol. He lets the match fall and closes his eyes just standing there, holding the pistol. He has shot two men with this gun. Two Hipo. After that, he made love to Alis K. He is a man now. More than that. He is a warrior. The pistol is cold in his hands. He lets the barrel touch his cheek. His heart is beating fast. He can’t wait for the next hit.

Ten minutes later, he puts the gun back. He could use a better place to stash it, but where would he find that? With seven—sometimes even eight—people living in a two-room apartment you don't get that many secret hiding places.

The rats are fighting violently over something down the basement shaft, when he leaves the privy and walks to the stairway. The door to the stairway has been broken for years. It is impossible to close it properly. The green paint is coming off the crumbling wood. When it rains, the alley cats take shelter there, making the whole place reek with cat piss. Some steps on the stairs are broken, and somewhere between the second and the third floor, a piece of the railing is missing.

He finds his mother sitting in the small kitchen with a fag in her mouth breastfeeding the baby. "So, the master finally arrives?" She speaks quietly so as not to stir the sleeping children, but there's danger in her voice.

"I had to work late," Poul-Erik whispers, looking into the dark living room. He only gets a glimpse of his two smaller brothers, Bjarne and Knud, sleeping on blankets on the floor. "Then I had to walk all the way home." He takes off both his jacket and pants and hangs them to dry in the kitchen.

"What happened to your bicycle?"

"It was stolen yesterday." One of his sisters, Bente or Jytte, moans in her sleep inside the bedroom. Poul-Erik wraps a blanket around him himself.

"Stolen? What's that supposed to mean?" She carries the sleeping baby into the bedroom. Her eyes strike lightning in his direction. "Your father worked very hard to be able to give you that bicycle. What are you going to say to him when he gets home?"

"It wasn't my fault."

"Your fault." She squeezes past him. Sweaty and angry. "You should be ashamed. You'll never become a real man, Poul-Erik. You're nothing but a sissy." She snorts and sits heavily on the stool by the kitchen table. "You ain't good for shit."

Poul-Erik stares at her rough washerwoman hands, the dry, damaged skin. He feels the tears building, as the rage boils in his belly; he keeps it all inside.

"I've been washing stairs my whole life. One day after the other." Her fat fingers drum the table for each word. "Since I was five years old. I've never complained. Shame on you. I'm embarrassed to have a son like you...can't even look after his own bicycle. You just wait until your dad comes home. Then you'll be in trouble, I can tell you that much."

"I know."

"Did you report it stolen?"

"To who? The Germans took the police, remember."

"To the Hilfspolizei. To the Hipo."

"No, I am not going to have anything to do with those bastards."

She stares at him. "Sit down, my boy," she says in a completely different tone of voice. "Are you hungry? There's some porridge left in the pot. It's cold, but you can still eat it." She doesn't wait for him to answer, but scoops some porridge into a tin bowl. "Here, eat."

Poul-Erik eats the cold, lumpy porridge.

"The neighbor's little boy, Gunnar, died today," his mum says, lighting a new cigarette. The smoke smells more like burnt hay than tobacco. She talks on for a while about the neighbor and other small kids who have died in this part of the city the last couple of years. Dead infants are a common thing living in the slum. Poul-Erik doesn't listen. He has gotten used to his mother's strange moods. At least his father is far away in Germany. That has made Poul-Erik's

everyday life a bit easier the last few months. Now it is only at work where he gets beat on.

“... you understand that?” She pokes him with a finger.

“What?”

“Are you even listening?”

“Sure am.”

“No, you’re not. I can tell. I’m your mother. I can read you like an open book!”

“You can’t read at all, mum.”

“Are you being cheeky?”

“No, I’m not. Thanks for dinner.”

“Oh, my.” She stares at him with her bloodshot and watery eyes. “You just hang in there, boy, hang in with that apprenticeship of yours, do you hear me? You are lucky they would even take someone like you. You’re a child of the slums. A ragtag. On top of that, you’re a whining piece of shit. Nobody will ever do anything for you. Do you understand what I’m saying? They’ll let you starve to death, no problem. Nobody is going to cry on your grave.”

“I’ll get by.”

“You just be happy you weren’t forced to go to Germany to work like your daddy was. Do you think he ...” And again Poul-Erik shuts off. Now she will repeat the story about Poul-Erik’s dad—that honorable working man—who had to go all the way to Germany to work because he was unemployed and couldn’t provide for his family. The longer he is gone, the better a man he becomes.

In the bedroom, the baby, little Henning, starts to cry.

“Oh, goddammit!” She takes a pacifier made from an old cloth and dips it in schnapps, before pushing her way into the bedroom, to give the pacifier to little Henning.

“Now, he’ll sleep the rest of the night,” she smiles, coming back into the kitchen. Poul-Erik puts the tin bowl away and goes into the living room to get ready for sleep himself. His bed is the four dining chairs pushed together with a pair of blankets on top. This has been his bed for the last ten years.

“Do you want a tiny shot to sleep on?” she asks, pouring schnapps into two small, dirty glasses.

“Yes,” he whispers, sneaking back into the kitchen.

“You’ll be a man soon enough.” She laughs quietly to salute her own joke.

“If you find a way to get your bicycle back, I won’t tell your old man. After all, you’re my little sweetheart. I’ll keep my mouth shut.”

Poul-Erik takes the glass of schnapps and washes the hot fluid down his throat. “I’m not afraid of him.”

She laughs even more. “You got to be kidding.”

He lies down on the chairs and closes his eyes. Now he can hear the humming sound in his ear again. Sleep comes quickly, almost like an embrace. On the verge of sleep, he still hears his mother moving around in the kitchen. She is also getting ready for sleep. He knows the sounds. She is about to pee in the kitchen sink.

"Indeed, indeed I tell you." BB's voice echoes through the empty church, as she quietly slips in the door, spotting him high on the pulpit. He doesn't see her. "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives his life for the sheep. He who is a hired hand, and not a shepherd, who doesn't own the sheep, sees the wolf coming, leaves the sheep, and flees. The wolf snatches the sheep, and scatters them. The hired hand flees because he is a hired hand, and doesn't care for the sheep."

She calmly moves down the church, trying to rub some warmth into her hands. There's not a single cloud in the sky today, but it's windy. The wind is coming in ice cold from the East. The church seems bigger in daylight. She unties her scarf and pulls it from her head.

"So the Lord Jesus spoke according to the gospel of John. And he continued his speech: I am the good shepherd. I know my own, and I'm known by my own; even as the Father knows me, and I know the Father. I lay down my life for the sheep." BB smiles, as he finally sees her and comes down from the pulpit to greet her. "I'm rehearsing the Sunday sermon. It's good to see you. I got your message the day before yesterday. That is my *wife* did. Sit down."

She sits while he lights up his pipe. A curl of his dark hair falls down his forehead. He aims his blue eyes at her and she refuses to feel anything.

"Why do sermons have to be so boring?" she asks, looking away.

"Because."

"Oh." She crosses her legs, straightens her skirt. "But he isn't going to get me—that Jesus guy—if that's all he got."

"I'm sure he won't." He takes the pipe from his mouth. "How beautiful you are and how pleasing, O love, with your delights! Your stature is like that of the palm, and your breasts like clusters of fruit. I said: 'I will climb the palm tree; I will take hold of its fruit. May your breasts be like the clusters of the wine, the fragrance of your breath like apples, and your mouth like the best wine.'"

"Isn't it a sin to say something like that in a church?" she says, staring at his lips.

He smiles. "Can't be. It's from the Bible."

"Oh, my."

"However, I am positive it did count as a sin what we did right there on the floor the other night." Now he whispers, as he takes her hand.

"You got my message?" She leans towards him, clenching his hand in both of her hands. "We were betrayed again!"

"Yeah, I got your message. And, thank you so much. I had to tell my wife everything."

"Everything?"

"About the sabotage."

"Oh."

"I don't know what to do. She's terrified."

"I had the kid to take care of. He shot two Hipo. He totally lost it. They were expecting us, but we got there early. Took them by surprise. If we hadn't we would have both been killed. We've got an informer at our throats."

He coughs. "Tell me what happened."

She tells him how she met Poul-Erik (who she calls Willy, of course) in front of the municipal hospital. The telephone call Willy had to make to cancel an appointment with his master. The tailwind on the ride to Frederiksberg. The backyard where they left their bicycles and finally the van, disguised as a plumber's car.

“Of course, no plumbers drive on gasoline. So, I pulled out my pistol and walked up to the van. Tore the doors in the back of the van open, and found two little Hipo pigs sitting behind a heavy machine gun. I shot them both.”

“Why did you do that?”

“What do you mean? They would have shot us.”

“Not if you had abandoned the mission when you smelled the gasoline. You knew it was a trap, and you went straight in nonetheless. There was no reason at all to do that. In fact, it was a very stupid thing to do, Alis K. Yesterday, four innocent Danes were gunned down by the Schalburg Corps in the streets of Valby as vengeance for the four Hipo you and Willy killed. There was no need for that to happen.”

“The Hipo and the Gestapo are fair game. They are cleared to be killed by the resistance at any time.”

“Nevertheless, you should have aborted the operation. Understood?”

“But—”

“No! No buts. Do you understand? The mission was to terminate one specific Hipo officer. Not four by random. You didn’t get the one you were after so the operation was a failure.”

“Well, I’d say four dead Hipo pigs is quite a bonus.”

“No.” Lightning shoots from his eyes. “It was not.”

She sits there for a long time, staring down at the floor, feeling his gaze, but too angry to return it.

Long minutes of silence, then he sighs. “Tell me the rest.”

Not wasting too many words, she tells him about the missing bicycles. About the other two Hipo, who came after them in the van, and how they got her. She doesn’t tell him about the way they beat her up nor about the scratches and bruises she has got as a reminder. What she does tell him is about Willy’s two amazing bull’s-eye shots and about the escape in the van, ending with the telephone call and the message to BB’s wife.

“It’s strange about those bicycles,” BB says.

“No, it is not. Someone stole them, that’s what happened. You haven’t been able to turn your back on anything since the police were taken away. If it was the Hipo who took the bicycles, they would have been waiting for us there. They must’ve been able to figure out that we’d come back for the bicycles, right?”

“Sounds about right.” He lets a hand slide through his hair. “Is he going to make it, the boy, Willy?”

“He just needs a little time, that’s all. He’s a good boy.”

“Good. What did you do after you called my wife?”

She tilts her head and smiles. “I couldn’t just leave him shaking like that on the street, so I took him home with me. Made him some tea, talked a while.”

“Wasn’t that quite risky?”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“Now, he knows where you live. It looks like we got a traitor among us, and it might be him.”

“The boy had just killed two Hipo to save my life! If he’s the informer that would seem a little ...” She waves her hand. For some stupid reason she feels like crying.

“We have all killed some Germans or Hipo.”

“Sure, but ...”

“What did you do after the tea?”

“Why?”

“Just asking.”

She gets up and walks to the altar to straighten the altar cloth. “I was expecting a customer. He couldn’t stay for long.”

“A customer?”

“Now you’re jealous?”

“Ingrid, goddammit!”

”My name is Alis K when I’m talking to you. And if you, *Johannes*, of all people, are going to be jealous, then this conversation is over.”

His shoulders collapse. “It’s only because I love you.”

“So you keep saying.”

“You don’t believe me?”

She returns to her seat, smoothing her skirt once again. “I do not believe in anything, my good reverend. I am trying to survive.”

“The informer,” BB says after a while. “Who do you think, it is?”

“Jens.”

“Jens?”

“No doubt. He made himself disappear last time we got betrayed. And he was the one who assigned me to liquidate that Hipo pig yesterday. They knew what time we’d come. They were expecting us.”

“Sure, but—”

“He’s a dirty cop.”

“That doesn’t necessarily make him an informer.”

“It’s Jens I tell you.”

“Alis K, you hate him just because he’s a police officer. Don’t accuse him unless you can prove it.”

“Oh, but it is either you, me, him or Borge. Nobody, but the four of us, has had sufficient knowledge about both operations.”

“*And Willy.*”

“And Willy, sure. If you insist.”

“There could be others. One of us obviously couldn’t keep their mouth shut. Or maybe someone has been eavesdropping on us. You see, I can’t figure why the Gestapo hasn’t shown up at any of our homes or hideouts. I know all your real names, except that boy, Willy. So does Jens. You know some of our real names, and so does Borge.”

“Only Willy doesn’t. Well...now he knows my address.”

“Exactly.”

17

The puddles are covered in ice this morning. Poul-Erik walks against the wind along Norrebrogade. In the black sky high above, the stars are still sparkling. Dawn is still hours away.

However, the city is already awake. Bicycles are rushing by, heading in the opposite direction towards the center of Copenhagen. People like him dressed in their work clothes trot along the sidewalks holding the first or the second beer of the day in their hands. An overcrowded tram starts up, leaving a guy in a

light jacket behind. The bakery is open today, which means that they must have found some way to obtain some kind of flour. Probably barley flour.

Poul-Erik hasn't had any breakfast. He walks as fast as possible, holding his breath so he won't catch the smell of freshly baked bread. His stomach hurts.

A couple of gas generator cars chug by. A horse-drawn garbage truck carries the stench of decaying waste down the street.

There are posters on the long, decorticated cemetery wall encouraging the public to report any member of the resistance to the Gestapo.

The saboteurs haven't made any contact since he left Alis K, and it's starting to worry him. He wants to fight. Do something. It wears him out to wait. There is no rest anywhere.

A German military convoy crosses Norrebrogade at the end of the cemetery, and he has to stop and wait as it goes by. While he stands there, blowing warmth down his folded hands, a big, black Ford stops at the intersection. He eyes it. Doesn't need to smell the fumes to know it is a Hipo car. The car has no doors. They have been removed to make it faster for the officers to get out of the vehicle. There are four of them inside the Ford. Black uniforms, black caps. One of them speaks, making the other three laugh. The driver looks straight at Poul-Erik, who immediately looks away.

Instead he glances down the crossing street, Jagtvej. There are still seven or eight trucks left before the military convoy has passed. The light from their headlights is dimmed and is only just visible on the cobblestones. Suddenly he is sweating like a pig. He glances back at the Hipo Ford from the corner of his eye. The driver is smoking now. The commander, who always sits in the front seat next to the driver, gets out of the car and walks over to have a look down Jagtvej. Putting a finger to his black cap, he greets a German officer passing by in a VW-Kübelwagen before he returns to the black Ford and jumps inside. He says something to the others. He is a big man, well over two meters tall. Rosy cheeks. Big hands.

Poul-Erik is unable to breathe. He turns away, looking at the dark morning sky. It is him. The Hipo bastard. It is him. The man he was supposed to have killed. Einar Hovgaard. The man on the photo, Alis K showed to him. It is him.

The last vehicle of the convoy crosses Norrebrogade, and Poul-Erik hurries across the street. Using all his will not to look back.

Behind him, the Hipo car speeds up. He has never been this afraid before. Walking too fast, nearly running, but he doesn't. He can hear the car approach from behind and wishes he had brought his pistol, but it is hidden back home inside the outhouse in the backyard.

And then the Hipo car passes him. It just passed him. He stares as the red glow from the sole dim taillight heads on down the dark city street. They didn't recognize him.

Only as he passes the church of St. Stefan further down the street, does his heart return to its normal pace, and he realizes that he is still walking far too fast, stumbling by actually, and he slows down. His stomach is a tight knot.

Later, by the S-train station, he meets the black Ford once again. It is blocking the street. Continuing along the sidewalk, Poul-Erik aims his face straight ahead, only his eyes turn to look. The driver is standing by the car, gun in hand. The car's headlights are pointing at a group of people being body searched by the other three Hipo. A woman is thrown into the street, collapsing on the cobblestones. The huge Hipo Commander kicks her in the gut, again and again. He snatches his long truncheon from his belt and pounds her head with it.

Chased by the screams and cries of the poor woman, Poul-Erik hurries through the viaduct and away as the S-train passes over him on the bridge.

Ten minutes later, the smith slaps him in the face for being late at work. He's just lucky the Master Smith hasn't arrived yet, as he would have been beaten by him as well.

Then he has to get back at the circular saw to continue yesterday's work while the smith opens another beer and the blue flashes from the welder light up the workshop.

18

Frost flowers cover the windows in the allotment house. Nothing but shadows and spots of light can be seen through them. But that's all he needs to tell that somebody is sneaking around the garden.

Listening, holding his big revolver in his hand, Jens is sitting on the bed. He doesn't feel the cold, doesn't see his own breath hanging around his face like fog. He listens to the sound of cautious steps on the frozen grass. Slowly, he cocks the hammer on his revolver.

A shadow passes the window. A male figure. He can see that much. It is not a hungry fox looking for food; it's a man. He listens carefully, but the hissing of his own breath is too loud and makes it impossible for him to hear anything else. He opens his mouth to dim the sound. The cold creeps in on him. He has a strange feeling...like falling.

The sounds are now coming from the shed behind the allotment house. The clinking of bottles. The garbage! He has gathered all his waste inside the small shed. There is not really that much despite the fact that he has been living here for a couple of months.

Living underground, you can't leave your waste for the garbage collector, as he might become suspicious receiving trash from an unoccupied allotment house. You can't leave it in a mess at your hideout or just dump a bag of waste around the neighborhood either. Someone would notice. The shed seemed as a reasonable solution to the garbage problem. Hide it there for Harald, the owner of the allotment, to burn it along with his own garden waste when he starts using the allotment again in the spring. Nobody will notice.

However...

Somebody is messing around with the trash in the shed right now.

Probably the owner of one of the other allotments. He might be out here to get a bag of potatoes he had been storing in the cold for the winter. Something must have caught his attention.

The sound of the shed door closing. Then steps. Branches scratching the sides of the house.

Jens is as quiet as a mouse. He will need to find another place to stay. He can't stay here. It is not safe anymore. Jens is following the sound of the man outside with his revolver. Indecisively, he points it down at the floor for a few seconds, only to raise it back at the sound again. Finally, he uncocks the hammer and lets the revolver slide back under his pillow.

Holding his breath, he reaches out for the kitchen knife instead. His mouth all dry. A headache coming on. Damn hangovers. He badly needs a drink. The steps outside continue around the house. Maybe he can gain some time by killing the trespasser? A silent kill with the kitchen knife.

The man is trying the door now. It is locked. Staring as the doorknob goes up and down, Jens throws a quick glance back at his pillow. Should he get the gun? He's sweating. Feeling sick.

The man outside is knocking at the door. Two hard strokes. Dong dong.

Jens clutches the knife, making his knuckles turn white. Still holding his breath.

"Jens?" A whisper. "Jens, are you there?"

Putting the knife away he goes to unlock the door. "Come in."

Borge is quick to get in. Wearing a knitted hat, cheeks red from the cold.

"What are you doing sneaking around like that?" Jens snarls as he finally grabs the bottle of schnapps. "You scared the shit out of me. You're lucky you didn't get shot!"

"The fox," Borge says, pausing as Jens drinks from the bottle. "You're drinking too much."

"That's none of your business."

"That's right. The fox must have found your garbage last night. The place was a mess with cans and paper everywhere. I took it back inside the shed. You'll have to find some way to lock up that shed."

"What do you want?"

"We got to be extra careful now. We have got an informer right in the center of our group."

"You've got to be kidding. It's sure as hell is none of us, but you're right about one thing, we got an informer on our necks. It's just not one of us. I'm an old policeman. I know what I'm talking about."

"Bullshit. Don't waste my time. The fact is that nobody but the four of us and the new kid knew about our last two operations, and the Germans or the Hipo were waiting in ambush both places. They knew what was going to happen, and when it was going to happen."

"How did this boy know about the hit on *Super*?"

"The garage? Well, you see, I told him."

Is that so? And, that's my point, that's what I'm saying. One of us trusts the wrong person. And it is this wrong person who's the informer."

"The boy. Willy. It's him."

"I'm not so sure. I'm told that he shot down two Hipo to save Alis K."

"I don't buy it. He was too far away. It might be fake. It might be a set up, it might have been staged. Maybe he had blanks in the pistol."

"You acquired the pistol for him."

"Sure, but he could have changed the clip. It's not impossible. The thing is, nobody can hit a target at that distance using such a shitty pistol. It's not possible. This kid claims to never have had a gun in his hands before. It doesn't smell right."

A new sip from the bottle. "You're right about that. Do you want a sip?"

"No."

"What do you have in mind? What should we do? Waste him? Might be a little premature. If he's not lying, he'll be just the kind of guy we need."

"Agreed. We could set a trap for him. See if he goes for it."

"How would we do that?"

19

The red lamp is hanging on a white cord from the ceiling. Lying on his back in the bed, BB is looking up at the lamp. The ceiling is stained.

The heater is on. The room is warm. Alis K is playing with her fingers on his chest and stomach.

“When all of this is in the past,” he says not looking at her, “the war, everything, then we’ll run away together, the two of us. Go to America and start over.”

“Don’t.” She puts a finger on his lips. “I’ll just end up believing you. I don’t want to.”

“But I’m serious. I mean it!” He turns to gently cradle her head. “I love you.”

“You love the thrill of danger, BB. Nothing else. Without the cheating on your wife, I wouldn’t be exciting. I know you better than you think.”

“That’s not true.”

“I’ve seen you in action, BB. You get turned on by danger. You are seeking danger. The only reason you’re with me is the risk of getting caught by your wife.”

He rolls to his back again...frowning, he doesn’t say anymore. He listens to the rain against the window.

20

Drumming the privy roof, the rain drips through a small hole and onto the slippery floor. Poul-Erik is sitting in the dark, caressing the pistol. He can hear a baby crying somewhere in one of the apartments as water spills out from the broken downspouts by the backstairs.

Touching the barrels, the crosshairs, the bulky magazine in front of the trigger and the grip, he thinks about his father. Imagines him stamping along in his big wooden shoes. You can tell his mood by listening to the clatter of the wooden shoes. Quick and hard steps are bad news—then you would be wise to make yourself invisible. That can be difficult being six kids on thirty-four square meters.

He hits you in the head using an open hand, he prefers to hit you in the back of the head. He is a big man, a smith, a real smith, like he always says: ‘A blacksmith’. Swinging the hammer all day long, he doesn’t need to strain that much to send a ten-year-old child flying through the air.

He lost his right index finger to a circular saw back in the day when he had to take another job. His teeth are black, the eyes watery. He roars as he speaks. The food is to be on the table when he enters the door. Or else. Punishment for the whole family. The potatoes can’t be over-cooked. Mother has no way of

knowing when he will arrive, as he often stops for a drink on his way home from work.

Poul-Erik hates him. Can't even remember a time in his life where he didn't hate his father. There are no extenuating circumstances at all. The man is a dictator, and even if his kingdom is nothing but a small, two-room apartment, he is as evil as any dictator the world has known. He accepts no disobedience of any kind. His wrath is unpredictable, the punishment random. You can get severely beaten for having the hiccups or for spilling some water on the floor. But then, you can break great-grandmother's old china vase—the only thing of any value in their possession—and believe for sure you are going to die. But then it is just, 'Never mind, my boy, it is just a thing.' And for some reason, that just makes it worse. There is no justice in this family. There are only the whims of Karl Smith.

He can't spell his own name. Though he loves the name Smith. 'I was named Smith, and a smith is what I am!' he often shouts when he's drunk. And a smith he is. If he catches you not listening when he is talking, he will swing his four-finger hand at you.

You can't reason with him. You can't explain to him that he is making a mistake. His only answer is more beatings. If you don't nod your head and say, 'yes, Dad,' in all the right places, you will have to feel some pain. There are no rules to go by, no refuge anywhere. You can get beatings for doing something he told you to do himself, if he has forgotten it, or if it turned out to be a bad idea after all.

Even mom used to get her share until she developed a habit of making herself disappear when trouble was brewing. She goes to the privy or something—she just disappears, only to return later and continue whatever she was doing as if nothing had ever happened.

When Father is not home, she is the boss. And that is better. She only hits the little ones, and only if she gets really mad; but then she will use the coat hanger until her arm tires. She has ruined a few brackets that way. However, none of the children hate their mother. Maybe it is too tough to accept both your parents being mean brutes. Maybe it is the fact that she is not as bad as their father. Most of the time it is possible to understand what made her angry. There is some sense in her madness. She is no angel; there are very few angels in the slum. To be an angel requires some kind of surplus which most people in need do not have. But, place her next to Dad, and she will get the looks of an angel. Gray can seem very white next to black.

Besides, she understands how to benefit from the situation. She is a victim of Karl's whims herself. The children often get to feel more pity for her than for themselves or each other, even if she is really the only person who could save them from his terror. Her life is martyrdom. And as long as she stays put, she can hide inside the role of the martyr. A victim can get away with anything. It would be so much harder to get by on your own account.

The best thing Poul-Erik's dad ever did for him was losing his job. A resistance group blew up the smithy, and that was the end of that job. The next four weeks was a living hell for everyone in the family, but if he had not lost his job, he wouldn't have been forced to take a job in Germany.

It has been almost six months by now. He has only been back home for one weekend in all that time. The only person in the whole family who misses him is their mother. It is hard to stay a martyr without the abuse.

Nobody seems to know exactly what kind of work Poul-Erik's father is doing down in Germany. Poul-Erik was told something about a smithy in

Berlin, but his dad was shouting something about Hamburg during the time he was back home for the weekend. He didn't speak of any kind of forging whatsoever. Of course, he never writes any letters. He just sends an envelope with some money every other week.

There will be a big surprise waiting for him when he eventually comes back home. The sissy he calls his son has been transformed into the saboteur, Willy. A hero who has killed two Hipo in close battle. Nobody is ever going to violate Willy again. The times have changed. Poul-Erik can feel it deep within, as he stands there holding the pistol. He is no longer the same boy.

He puts the pistol inside his coat pocket and instantly feels so much better. He steps out of the outhouse, into the rain, and hurries over to the gateway where an ally cat hisses at him. He kicks the air near the cat's head and it rushes out of the gateway.

He pulls his cap down his forehead, turns up the collar, and moves out into the dark city. Running inside the shadows, making himself disappear in the darkness. Through backyards, over fences.

Several hours pass by before he returns.

21

Rolling on to her stomach, the widow Mrs Skrab takes a cigarette from the pack on the nightstand, next to the framed photograph of her late husband. Johannes lights up his pipe, his glance lingering on the widow's nice and round backside.

"What are you looking at?" She smiles back over her shoulder, confident about the beauty of her ass—and she should be.

"I am just enjoying the pleasant view," Johannes says, taking a long pull on his pipe.

She strikes a match and lights the cigarette. She stays that way, looking at the picture on the nightstand. Letting her fingers slide over the glass in the frame.

"Do you miss him?"

"Not really." She takes the photograph and rolls back in the bed. Her breasts are firm and have the funniest little pink nipples. They are something special, not at all like other women's breasts. "Well, sometimes I do miss him. The children miss him a lot, that's for sure. He was a good father."

"He sure was."

"And a good husband. He never cheated on me. That's just the way he was."

"Oh, well," Johannes mumbles, looking at the silly display of porcelain figurines on the dresser. In his private theory, if a man can brag about being faithful to his wife, the odds are that the wife's been cheating on him. He keeps this to himself for the moment.

"But he was boring," she says, throwing the picture back on the nightstand.

"He was so fucking boring." She rests her head on Johannes's stomach.

Stroking his chest. "Am I going to hell for my sins?"

"Yes."

"Asshole."

They lie in silence, smoking for a while. She's been his mistress for some years now. They met at the baptism preparations for her youngest child. Johannes knew right away that he needed to have this woman. And he got her. Frederiksberg is populated by respectable women; neglected and bored. Johannes can choose as he pleases. Blondes, brunettes, redheads, and a bag of chips. Frederiksberg has it all. Many women feel delighted by a visit from the reverend.

Mrs Skrab's late husband never suspected anything fishy about the reverend stopping by when he wasn't around. He seemed to regard it as a special honor. He was the owner of a hotel in the heart of Copenhagen and regarded himself a significant and highly respected man. He had a strong faith in the Lord, always there in Johannes's church for the Sunday service with his beautiful wife at his side, like he wanted to show off his success—like the walking stick, the shining polished shoes, and the tailor-made suit. It was all so perfect and neat. Who would have guessed that the doll at his side loved when the reverend came inside her mouth, making the semen drip from her lips?

The hotel proprietor Skrab died in the first year of the war from a heart attack. The funeral was held five days later by Johannes. There he was shoveling dirt on the man he made a cuckold.

From dust to dust...

"Do you believe in God?" The widow kills her cigarette in the ashtray.

"Sure." He lets his hand slide down her back. "Who else could have created something as beautiful as you?"

She chuckles. Caressing his balls. "No, I mean it. Do you believe that he's sitting somewhere up in the sky, judging our actions?"

"You are asking your reverend about that, Iris?"

"You're not like any other reverend, Johannes."

He places the pipe in the ashtray. "Maybe not."

"Do you believe in God?"

"Why's that so important to you?"

"Just answer my question."

He rubs his face. Looks at his watch. "I think it is becoming increasingly difficult to believe that there is a God in control of everything, and at the same time believe this God to be good."

"Maybe we just don't get the big picture?"

"Maybe."

"I loved my husband. Isn't that the strangest thing? I mean, it wouldn't have been the same sin if he'd been an evil man, and I'd hated him, would it?"

"I love my wife."

"Would you forgive her if she saw someone else?"

Johannes blinks his eyes. "No, I do not think so."

"What'd you do if you came home one day and found her in bed with another man?"

"I don't know ... I might do all kind of things." He frowns. "What are you getting at?"

"Just wondering. There's so much deceit in this world. I'm trying to understand."

"Don't."

"Did I upset you?" She takes his soft penis in her hand. Smiling. "Don't be mad." Her tongue feels good. He closes his eyes and gently holds her head. But he's got a special reason for being here today, and he needs to be back at the church before long to teach a class of confirmation candidates.

"Iris, stop," he gasps, pushing her away.

She looks at him all confused. Hurt too. "But you love that?"

"I do. I love it. But we need to talk. It's important."

"Talk?"

"The third floor."

"The third floor?"

"At the hotel. You know."

"I might start to wonder, Johannes. You ask a lot of questions about the third floor."

"I have a friend who is...afraid."

Less than a year ago, the Gestapo in all secrecy rented the whole third floor of the Daisy Hotel which Iris Skrab had inherited from her late husband. The place was used to house German and Danish agents who specialized in infiltrating the resistance, and controlling a spider web of informers in every corner of Denmark.

"I don't get to hear that much," Iris says sulkily. "The maids have been told that they'll execute them all if anything gets out."

"And you?"

"I hardly ever visit the third floor. I let my employees handle that."

"So, you know nothing at all?"

"Well, I might. I had to go in to fix some stupid incident regarding a German agent who'd taken certain liberties with one of the maids. We can't accept something like that. It's a respectable hotel. I had to lay off the maid."

"What's that got to do with anything?"

"I had to talk to all my employees to find out what's up and down in that whole mess. The agent might have been after some of the other girls as well. I even got a few words with some of the agents. I was offered coffee, *real* coffee, by one of the superiors, an Obersturmbannführer, I think."

"I see."

"The poor man seemed to miss having someone to talk to. He'd hardly seen his family since the beginning of the war. Had a wife and two sons in some village down there. Stalzbürgerswingerwalsen or something like that. This is his fifth deployment. He'd been to Latvia, Poland, Yugoslavia, Holland, and now Copenhagen. He was a lonely man a long way from home."

Johannes smiles. The sad and lonely soldier far away from home. Women are so easy. "Poor fellow."

"He also told me a little about his assignment here in Copenhagen."

"Oh, he did?" Now it might get interesting. Iris was a little beauty, and if only she got to unfold a bit of her oral potential, any man could end up in trouble. "What did he say?"

"I don't really understand these things, you know. He did mention some group of saboteurs called BB. They were more like criminals than resistance, I guess. If your scared friend is a member of that group, he might want to get away. They have an informer inside the group telling the Germans everything the group plans to do."

"Did he mention the name of the informer?"

"No." She looks at him from the corner of her eye. "Are you a saboteur, Johannes?"

He laughs. "Me? Could you imagine me running around in the middle of the night blowing up factories? Iris, you got to..."

She just keeps looking at him.

“Do you have the money?” Jens looks at the man leaning against the wall with a cigarette hanging from his mouth. The shine from the full moon gives a cold and blue sense to the whole area. In the distance, on the other side of the sound between Denmark and neutral Sweden, the lights twinkle.

“Is that really all you care about, copper?” He flicks the cigarette out into the water. “You’re a fucking capitalist.”

“You got the money?”

“Maybe.”

“Maybe’s not good enough.”

“Oh, well,” he says, scratching his neck. “That’s all you get.”

Jens stares at the man he only knows by his codename, Knud. Knud is the leader of a minor fraction of the major Communist sabotage and resistance organization called *Bopa*.

“What are you saying?”

“We can’t pay you at this point. We have a major sabotage operation in the making, and we need all our resources.”

“I don’t give a fuck.”

“You’re a saboteur yourself. The common cause. The common enemy.”

“I still have my expenses. I delivered the goods almost a month ago. My suppliers do not give a shit about any common causes. If I don’t pay, I end up at the bottom of this harbor. Do I make myself clear?”

“You are a real asshole, pig.”

“If you say so.”

“Listen, we’re planning a major act. More than fifty men. We could use your little group as well.”

“What’s the target?”

“The Torotor factory out in Ordrup.”

“No kidding? Torotor produces components for the German V2 rockets. It might be the best guarded factory in all of Denmark. You don’t have a chance. It’ll be a suicide mission.”

“We’ve managed several large actions before.”

“Right.”

“You’re not in?”

“No way.”

“Many of the other groups are in on it. Even the Conservative groups... *Holger Danske* and so on. We still need more men to pull it off, though.”

Shaking his head, Jens finds his cigarettes and lights one up. He glances at a dead seagull sloshing at the edge of the water. A dog barks somewhere in the vicinity. Jens pulls hard on the cigarette.

“Can you get me some pornography?”

Lifting only the right eyebrow, Jens winks at him. “Pornography?”

“You know. I’m a lonely man. Living underground eats on a man.”

“Right. The moment you’ve paid what you owe, I’ll see what I can do.”

“I’ll get you the money soon enough, I promise.”

“What kind of pornography do you want? I can get most of it.”

“Lesbian.”

“I’ll do my best. Next time we meet, you will bring me my money, you hear me? *All* the money. What you owe me *and* for the pornography.”

“Deal.” Turning up his collar, he is about to leave when Jens grabs hold of his arm.

“Look at the dark and murky water, Knud. The eels are big and fat here in the harbor. There won’t be that much left of a dead body after a few days in these waters. It goes very fast, I can tell you that much.”

He pulls himself free, stumbling away. “Asshole!”

“Just bring me the money.”

23

Borge is hiding in the dark of the gateway across the street as the boy leaves the workshop, waving to somebody still inside. Pulling down the front of his cap, the boy starts walking down the street. The dark is creeping in from the east. A working man doesn’t get to see much of the daylight during November. It is dark in the morning when he heads off to work, and it is dark in the evening when he goes home. Borge feels his chest swelling with solidarity for the working class. He had never had to do a day’s work himself, but he has been visiting quite a few workshops and factories (most of the time in order to plant explosives, but nevertheless), and they are dark and dirty places.

He gets on the bicycle and goes after the boy. The chain guard rattles, *klonk, klonk, klonk*.

“Willy!” he shouts, closing in on the boy; the boy does not react. “Willy!” He pedals harder, goes up on the sidewalk, blocking the boy’s path. “Willy! Are you deaf?”

The boy starts in terror. Jumping back.

“You have to learn to react on your codename, boy. This is stupid.”

“Sorry. I was lost in my own thoughts.”

“Let’s take a walk,” Borge says, getting off the bicycle.

They start walking. For a while, neither says anything. Keeping his eyes on the road ahead, Borge can feel the boy glancing at him.

As they turn around the corner, Borge says, “Alis K told me that you won two points the other night. Good job. You should be proud of yourself.”

“Thank you.”

“Someday this war will be over. A new order of the world will appear in its place. The idea of Socialism will prevail. In the future they’ll remember us as heroes.”

The boy stares at him, eyes twinkling. “Heroes?”

“Yes, heroes who fought for a better world. They might even make statues of us.”

“We were betrayed. They were setting up a trap.”

“I know. Informers and traitors are scum. They’re worse than the enemy. But don’t worry about that. We’re on to the informer, he’s about to be unveiled. It’s a matter of days before we get him.”

They fall into silence again. Rubbing his face, Borge feels the stubble on his cheeks. It has been a couple of days since he has had the chance to shave. It is difficult to maintain any sort of personal hygiene living underground.

“Brink’s Sewing Factory,” Borge says, as they pass under the viaduct. “It’s on Christianshavn. Do you know the place?”

The boy nods his head. The excitement flickers inside the boy’s light blue eyes. “Down by the canal.”

“Exactly. They make uniforms for the Hipo and the SS. Tomorrow night. We need someone to watch our backs. All you need to do is to stand guard and keep an eye out for somebody sneaking up on us while we go into the factory to place the explosives.”

He nods again, this time eagerly. Just as Borge knew he would. “I’m in. When shall I be there?”

24

Later the same evening, Poul-Erik runs through the darkened city. Heavy clouds scud past, showing glimpses of the moon as they go by. The pistol is in his coat pocket, hitting his hip as he runs into the park, down by the lake. The trees are hanging out over the water like weird silhouettes of tired trolls.

His heart is racing inside his chest, the blood rushing through his veins. He can’t keep from smiling; it feels like bubbles bursting inside of him. Trembling all over, he has to sit down in the grass. Gasping for air. Sweat dripping from his nose.

A car passes by outside the park, tires screeching as it turns around at the intersection. Holding his breath, he listens in alert until he is certain the car is not stopping. Releasing his breath, he laughs out loud in the night. The sound scares up a duck on the lake, making it chatter out there in the dark. He goes quiet. Shaking his head. He has never felt this alive.

Lying down on the grass, he feels the cold creeping in, but he doesn’t get up. Staring up at the clouds as they pass the moon, he thinks about Borge and the sabotage operation tomorrow. He wonders about the informer. The way Borge looked at him. Hoping Alis K will be there tomorrow, wanting so badly to see her again, wanting to make love to her again, he almost feels her soft body, as he’s lying there. Her scent. Her lips.

Stirring at an unfamiliar sound, he gets up and rushes over to hide under some tall trees. The sound doesn’t reappear; still the park no longer feels safe and he soon exits through the opposite gate.

He can’t wait for tomorrow to come. Brink’s Sewing Factory. Even if all they will let him do is guard the escape route. He had begun to worry he would never hear from them again, and now he is in on a new operation. They are going to blow up a factory. It is real sabotage. He is really one of them now.

He slides into the dark of a gateway as a car comes down the street, the dim glow of the headlights sweeping the cobbles. Luckily, it is just an ambulance. He is back on the street the moment it passes him, watching the sole red taillight disappear around the corner.

Later, as the noises from a party catch his ears, he looks up at the building from where the noises are coming. The blacked out windows reveal nothing but playful voices and laughter, a girl whining, and loud music.

It is a noble building. Large residences. The living room at least twice the size of the apartment Poul-Erik's family lives in. The young and the rich party their way through the war. They have never gone to bed hungry. Never seen dead babies.

Just standing there on the sidewalk, looking up at the darkened house and the sandstone decorations, Poul-Erik listens to the noise of excited young people partying without a care in this world with a stinging feeling inside his chest. He will never be able to party like that. No matter what happens, he will never be able to enjoy life so carelessly, so painlessly. He wonders what they are celebrating. The twentieth birthday of some stupid executive's daughter? Maybe they don't need a reason to party; maybe they just party because they can?

Suddenly, standing there in the moonlight he feels very lonely. He touches the pistol in his pocket. At that moment, it seems like a foolish thing, a meaningless thing. Now they are shouting hurrahs. The music has stopped.

He should be heading home. It is late. He needs to get some sleep. Be ready for the operation tomorrow. But he can't move. For some reason he has to stay, has to listen to all that joy.

An idea pops up inside his head. He walks across the street towards the building and pulls down the handle to the gate. It swings open. He silently closes the gate behind him and sneaks through the gateway into the backyard. Only, it is not a backyard. It is a garden with grass, a huge oak tree, and white benches.

He hides behind a bush, watching the back of the building. It is, of course, blacked out as well. The music is dim back here, the happy, laughing voices a distant hum. The clatter of glass. A guy singing so poorly it is almost painful to listen to.

Not understanding his own feelings, Poul-Erik swallows, as his throat tighten with the urge to cry. He is paralyzed by a stream of emotions. Torn apart. His soul ripped to pieces. Envy, self-pity, inferiority, and a nasty sensation of having been cheated. Cheated like fuck. What did they do to deserve all that joy?

He could take the pistol and go up there and shoot them all like dogs. They might not feel so important then, so goddamned happy. He should do it. He fucking should. But he doesn't. He just keeps standing in the dark behind the bush, staring up at the back of the house.

The backdoor swings open and a man and a woman exit the backstairs. She is wearing a light dress and long white stockings. A ribbon in her blond hair. The man has a pencil thin mustache, he is holding the door for her. Dark suit. Butterfly. Cigar. No more than twenty-four years old.

He leads the way to one of the white benches. They are both holding wine glasses in their hands. Cheering. Laughing. The woman says she is cold. The man pulls her close.

Poul-Erik looks in all directions at the same time. What if they spot him there? But there is no escape. He has to stay put behind the bush. They will spot him the moment he starts to move. He swallows. Breathing through his mouth, trying to be silent.

"No! Not here!" the woman gasps as the man slides a hand up her legs. Removing his hand, she pushes him away.

The man takes both glasses, placing them on the ground.

“What are you doing?” The woman asks.

The man is smiling with glee. Poul-Erik is watching as the man’s hand returns to the woman’s legs, and this time she doesn’t push him away. Soon, she sighs out loud. Whining. The hand is moving back and forth under her dress. The woman grabs the man behind his neck. Removing the cigar from his mouth and throwing it down on the grass, she pulls the man down to her face.

Having an erection in a not-so-comfortable angle inside his pants, Poul-Erik tries to shift it into a more pleasant position. He takes the pistol from his pocket, not knowing what to do. Looking up at the almost full moon. Looking back at the couple on the bench. The man is on top of the woman now, taking her roughly. His hair is a mess. One of the glasses has toppled. The man is still fully dressed. The woman arches her back. Whining, gasping.

Then the air raid siren goes off.

One by one, the sirens on the city roofs start howling their bleak song. Slowly rising and dropping through the scales. The music from the party is replaced by feet stumbling down the stairs.

“Hey, remember to bring the wine, ha ha!”

Still so full of joy. Still not having any worries at all. Of course their house won’t get hit by an English bomb. They have said their evening prayers as they went to sleep in their freshly made beds. None of them has ever slept on four dining chairs pushed together. God will look after them. Like always.

The couple on the bench is busy with their buttons and smoothing down their clothes. Forgetting the wine glasses, they hurry to the backstairs and down to the safety of the raid shelter in the basement.

Soon the place is all quiet. Walking with caution to the bench, purposely stepping on the glasses, Poul-Erik finds some relief in the sound of the breaking wine glasses. He spots something white lying on the ground. The woman’s panties. He picks them up, sniffs the smell, and shoves them down his pocket.

He walks out the gate and down the street. He can hear the deep rumbling from the English bombers coming closer and watches as they fly past in the sky above him. Flying Fortresses. Huge airplanes. At least twenty. Flying low, real low. Barely over the city roofs. The thundering noise makes him smile. He can feel it vibrating in his legs. He salutes them. Waving his hand. He is fighting at their side. They are his allies.

Only an instant later he hears the blasts from the German anti-aircraft guns.

Running through the streets. Home. Stopping once in a while to listen, but the city is all quiet now. The bombers were probably heading for Germany or Poland. They hardly ever bomb the city of Copenhagen.

His hand is covered in something. He stops to smell it. The metallic smell can’t be mistaken. Blood. How could he not have noticed this earlier on? Spitting on his hand, he rubs the dried blood off using the woman’s white panties.

Satisfied with the result, he throws the panties on the street, pulling down his cap as he hurries home, only stopping at the outhouse to hide the pistol under the roof.

Everybody is asleep when he lets himself in the door. Lying awake on the four dining chairs, he stares at the ceiling for a long time, waiting for sleep to arrive.

“Can I see the reverend, please?” Alis K asks, trying to smile. The woman in the door—*his wife!*—is staring at her for a long time. The blond hair arranged at the top of her head. A single wrinkle on the forehead.

“Of course.”

Leaving Alis K standing in the rain, she goes to get her husband. Muffled voices reach her ears from inside the house. Alis K shifts the umbrella to her other hand. BB appears in the door.

“What are you thinking, showing up here?”

“It’s important.”

“It’d better be. Come inside.” Turning around, he walks down the hallway. Alis K folds her umbrella and hurries after him into a small study. There is a desk in the center of the room and bookshelves along the walls. Carpet on the floor. Looking around, she touches the porcelain figure on the windowsill. An elephant. White.

“Was that your wife?” she asks in a low voice.

“Yes. She’s in the kitchen now. What do you want?”

“Brink’s Sewing Factory tonight. Borge has convinced Jens that Willy’s the informer. It’s crazy. The boy saved my life. He shot and killed two Hipo scum! How could he possibly do that if he was the one who told them we were coming?”

“Borge thinks the boy might have tricked you. Maybe he fired blanks at them.”

“He shot one of them in the face, BB.

Most of the cheek and one of his eyes were blown off right in front of me. It wasn’t just some ketchup or stage blood leaking from a hole in his chest. It was *real*. The other one shit his pants when he died. I could smell it. I was this close to him as I had to get his gun.”

Taking a pipe from one of the drawers in his desk, Johannes strikes a match. “Sit down.” He points to the chair on the other side of the desk. “The boy’s father is in Germany. I’ve been asking around. Nobody seems to know exactly what his father’s doing down in Germany.”

“You can’t judge people by their parents,” Alis K whispers.

“Of course not, but it’s part of the big picture.”

“Borge and Jens have made a trap for him. Borge made him believe that he’s to guard a hit on Brink’s Sewing Factory tonight. Everybody except Willy knows we aren’t hitting anything. We’re just there to see if the bastards have been informed again. If they are, then it must be Willy who’s the rat as he is the only one not knowing the hit is fake.”

“All right. We’re supposed to be there?”

“Of course, but I don’t want any part of this.”

“That’s why you came here?”

“Yes, we need to stop it.”

“Don’t you ever come here, Alis K.”

“Don’t worry. I wasn’t followed.”

“My wife.”

“I thought you told her ...”

"I did. Only she freaks out. I don't want her doing that. I can't do this to her."

"You can't do *this* to her?"

"Exactly."

"Oh." She looks down at her wet shoes. She shouldn't have come. She has only made things worse than they were to begin with. She feels chaotic today. Falling apart. It hurts to sit down. A customer got out of control yesterday. He had brought a horsewhip. She couldn't stop him. It stings like hell. She feels like crying. Something deep within has been ruined. Something she has been hiding way down her soul is coming out. She can't cope much longer.

"You'll be there tonight, and so will I. End of discussion."

"I can't ..."

"If we haven't been ratted out, then it'll prove Willy's innocence."

She lifts her head to look at him. He looks confident, he even smiles. She stands, nodding her head. "Forgive me for coming here. It ..."

"Don't worry about it."

She nods again. It is a struggle not to run out of the house like the devil was chasing her. She walks, walks calmly and restrained towards the door.

"Goodbye."

He gets up. "Let me follow you out."

She walks down the hall. A quick glance through the open kitchen door. BB's wife smiles at her. She looks like a nice person—even lovely with dimples and kind eyes. And that just makes everything worse. Alis K is unable to return her smile; all she manages is a silent nod. At the door she turns to look at BB. She has known all along. Of course she has. She knows men. She knew all along, but she was unable to keep from hoping.

Stepping out into the rain, she doesn't look back as she walks away. Letting the tears flow, she feels the rain wash them down her face.

Sitting on a bench, getting soaked, she cries for BB, for Willy. For her life. For the hundreds of men who have spilled their semen inside her abdomen. For the illegal abortions she has had done. For the whippings. For the people she has killed. For the constant fear of getting busted. For her loneliness. For the schoolteacher who took her virginity at the after-school detention when she was eleven. For the beatings her father gave her for telling lies like that when she told him about the abuse, hoping he would make it stop. For the many after-school detentions that followed until she ran off from home and finally got to Copenhagen. She cries silent tears. No sobs, no sounds. She is sitting straight up in the rain while the tears wash down her face.

Later she stands, looking at the closed umbrella. A deep sigh. Then she unfolds it and walks away drenched to her skin under the open umbrella. Coming home, she gets out of the soggy clothes, hanging them to dry by the heater. She examines the stripes on her buttocks, the many traces left by the horsewhip. She lights a fire in the heater and creeps into bed. Asleep in seconds.

A couple of hours later a knock on the door makes her stir. "Come in," she says in a voice hoarse from sleep.

A man in a black uniform enters the room. "We have an appointment," he says, shutting the door behind him.

She smiles at him, as convincing as she is capable of. "Put the money on the table."

Finding his wallet he places a few banknotes on the nightstand. "The usual," he says, unbuttoning his uniform.

Pushing the duvet aside, Alis K spreads her legs. "Come here, baby."

“Now, what?” Grete stands tall with a stern frown, hands at her sides.

“Johannes!”

Returning her glance, he sees the fear hiding in her eyes. The shivering lip. He shrugs. “Take it easy.”

“That woman! She was the one on the telephone the other night, right?”

“Sure.”

She looks up at the ceiling. Down at his shoes. At the door to the study. “Are you having an affair with that woman?”

“An affair?” He shows her his most innocent smile.

“It written all over you, Johannes.”

“I have no idea what you’re talking about. I think you need some rest. You haven’t been sleeping so well since you found out about the sabotage.”

“So, there’s nothing going on between you and that woman?”

“No, there’s absolutely nothing going on between me and that woman.”

She blinks away the tears as he pulls her into his arms whispering: “Hush, hush” into her hair. But she doesn’t surrender, she doesn’t cry. Soon she breaks free from his embrace and walks back into the kitchen.

“Maybe we can adopt a child,” Johannes says later on. “There’s a lot of children in this world who could use a loving mother like you.”

“Oh?” she says.

Through the window he catches a glimpse of the maid, Linda, going out the back on her way to the butcher to see if there’s any pork today. She is a large monstrosity of a woman from the island of Bornholm with a great lump for a nose and a nasty breath. It was Grete who hired her. Some might say that was a wise decision.

“It’s not a bad idea to adopt a child. I know a reverend up in Hillerod, who has two little girls from Finland.”

“I’m not having any girls from Finland.”

“I think it’s possible to get boys as well.”

“I don’t want any boys either.”

“Oh.”

He stomps into the living room and throws himself down his chair. Grabs the newspaper and flicks it open by random. Grinding his teeth. After a while she comes to him.

“Brink’s Sewing Factory!” she says.

“So now you’re even listening at the doors?” he asks behind the newspaper.

“If the husband has secrets, the wife might do a thing like that.”

He sighs. Flips a page in the newspaper, slowly. “What do you need to know then?”

“Are you going?”

“Of course I am. I have to.”

“Johannes, please...”

“No.”

“Why?”

“Because.”

“What is going to happen to me if you get caught by the Germans? Do you even care about that?”

“Nothing will happen.”

“Someday, it will.”

“Nonsense.”

“Johannes...”

“When you were listening at the door, you might have heard that this is not really an operation. We are just going to see if we got ratted out. Then we go home. There’s absolutely no danger.”

“I’ve started biting my nails,” she says, showing him the jagged fingernails. “I’ve never done that before. I can’t sleep at night. My stomach hurts. Johannes, this has to stop. I can’t take it.”

“Why don’t you support me in this? You’re no fan of the Nazis?”

She stares at him.

“I’m afraid too, Grete, but I can’t just sit and do nothing. Somebody’s got to fight evil. If not me, then who? I’ve got no children. And if something bad was to happen to me, you’d get by. I know you would. You’re a strong woman.”

She turns her back and leaves him sitting there. Johannes shakes his head. Maybe he should go after her? Grab her, hold her. Carry her into one of the bedrooms. Make love to her for the first time in months. Maybe that would make her relax a bit. In times like these, sex is the only comfort left. That is why, there are so many children being born nowadays. You have got to find some consolation.

He puts the newspaper down on the table. Smiles to himself. “I might do that!” he whispers to the living room, getting up from the chair.

Grete is in the bitterly cold dining room. They only heat the room when they have guests coming over. She has taken their wedding picture from the wall. Johannes walks to her and starts to rub her shoulders tenderly.

“We were so in love,” she says.

“Hm,” he hums, his lips against her ears.

“What are you doing?” she shivers.

“Kissing your ear.”

“It tickles.”

Lowering his mouth to kiss her neck, he lets his hands slide down to her breasts.

“But Linda?”

“She went to the butcher.”

He tries to find her nipples through the fabric of her shirt, but he can’t.

“Put the picture back on the wall.” His hands go down her stomach.

“Johannes, please.”

He removes the picture from her hands and places it on the dining table. Then he lifts her from the floor and carries her into the nearest bedroom. His own. Gently letting her slide down on the bed, he kisses her on the mouth. Trying to push his tongue inside, but she won’t let him.

“What?” he asks.

“I can’t.”

“Why not?”

“I’m bleeding,” she whispers. “I’m sorry.”

“It doesn’t matter.”

“It does.”

“Grete...” But it is over. He knows it all too well. He has been there so many times before he stopped trying. “We’ll never get children if we don’t...”

“I can’t get pregnant while I’m bleeding.”

He snorts, pushing himself away from her; he goes out into the hallway.

Grabs his overcoat and hat. The umbrella.

“Johannes? Where are you going?” Grete yells after him.

He doesn’t answer. Stepping out into the rain, he listens, as the rain drums on the umbrella and chuckles down the gutter. The air feels fresh and wonderful, but he’s not in a mood to appreciate it. Keeping a steady pace down the street, he feels black inside. Black as the soot from a chimney.

27

“Are you alone?”

Iris Skrab eyes him from the wet shoes all the way to the tip of the umbrella before nodding her head. “Yes, I’m alone. Get in.”

He folds the umbrella and steps in the door. Walking into the living room, Iris Skrab wriggles her butt, sending him a long glance over her shoulder. She is wearing a skirt and a blouse. The radio is on. Jazz. She lights up a cigarette while he gets his overcoat off.

Standing in the middle of the living room, she is smoking when he enters. “Sit down, Johannes,” she says, pointing to the chair.

He sits. Thinking about Grete, about Alis K, about tonight’s operation; he lights up his pipe, trying to stop thinking so much. He needs to relax, let it all go before it starts to eat him up, bit by bit.

Iris unzips her skirt, lets it fall to the floor, and steps out of it. The blouse covers most of her panties, and the stockings stop only a few centimeters below, letting Johannes glimpse the naked skin of her thighs.

The tobacco in his pipe tastes like a mixture of old newspapers and horse droppings. His mouth is dry. The bullet wound from the failed hit on the garage *Super* is sore today...even a bit swollen. Maybe it’s getting infected.

Iris unbuttons her blouse. She’s got nice hands, short nails.

Johannes wonders about the new boy, Willy. Is he the rat, or could Alis K be right about him being innocent? He only wishes he had met the boy. It is difficult to judge someone you haven’t even met.

Iris has reached the lower buttons. One of her breasts is showing, the cute little pink nipple is hard. She smiles at him. Eyes heavy now. The blouse joins the skirt on the floor.

Johannes shifts his weight, while she scoops off the stockings. Again he tries to empty his head, pushing the thoughts away.

She comes to him. “Pull down my panties,” she whispers, her voice hoarse.

He places the pipe on the table and grabs her firm butt, kissing the soft skin of her belly only centimeters above the rim of her panties.

Gasping for air, she steps back as he pulls the panties down to kiss the pubic hair.

Alis K has usually got a brilliant sense of the human character. He can’t remember her ever misjudging anyone, except Jens of course; but that’s

understandable. Hookers don't care much for the police. And Jens wasn't exactly an exemplary officer.

Iris turns around.

He gently slaps her behind. Then she squats down to sit on his lap, rubbing her butt around. He kisses her neck. Grabbing those tiny perfect breasts. He feels the hardness of her nipples against the palms of his hands, thinking about Grete's larger breasts, and how he had grabbed them no longer than an hour ago.

All of a sudden, Iris stands, stubbing out the cigarette in the ashtray. Johannes is groping for his pipe while she goes down on her knees to unbutton his pants. Pulling out his floppy cock, she frowns as she looks up at him. He pretends to be busy inspecting the pipe. She takes his cock in her mouth. She loves doing that. Licking it, she's purring like a kitten.

Ten minutes later, she gives up.

"This has never happened before," he says, and leaves without looking at her. He is quite sure he will never show his face around here again.

28

"Brink's Sewing Factory is located on the upper floors of this building." Pointing at the map, Borge glances at the faces of the other four leaning over the map. They are in an abandoned building, which housed a small taxi company back before the Germans came. His voice echoes in the empty room. There is a jerry can and a spare tire lying against the opposite wall. The map is placed on an old oil stained folding table. "In the daytime the customers visiting the factory come in here through the gates and up the main stairs...right here. We will go in using a different path." He smiles, enjoying the show. He made the plan; he is the one to explain the details. BB lights up his pipe, signaling for him to continue. "We go in the back through the gate on the other side of the building...here. Up the factory elevator to the third floor, the fourth floor, and the fifth floor. It's a very old building—several hundred years old. The supporting pillars are solid wood. We need bombs attached to each of these pillars. It has to be done quickly. There's a stairway all the way down here. That's where we meet. Light the fuses and get out."

"Guards?" Alis K asks, lifting a single eyebrow.

"Two in front...two in the back. We only need to worry about those in the back. They're located in this shed, here."

"Dogs?" Alis K again.

"No dogs. And the guards aren't worth shit. I was out there yesterday. Went into the back, looked inside through the shed windows. They didn't even notice. Both of them were sleeping. We stick a gun up their noses and that'll be it. No trouble there."

Borge looks at them one by one; BB seems sad, Alis K a bit tired, Jens has a cold and keeps sneezing all the time. The boy, Willy, is so fired up, he looks electric. Nerves? Is the Gestapo setting up a trap at the factory? Has he informed them again this time? He meets Borge's glance with an insecure smile. Sweating.

“Willy,” Borge says, placing his index finger on the map, “your task tonight is important. You are to stand guard right here. If the Germans or the Hipo show up while we’re inside the factory, we might not get out alive. I hope you realize this. So do not, under any circumstances, leave your post. You do not slip around the back to take a piss or something. You stay on your post. Right here. There’s a gateway that will allow you to stay hidden and still be able to spot anyone coming our way. You’ll be too far away from us to shout any alarm, so if you spot the arrival of German soldiers or the Hipo or the Gestapo, you shoot at them—shoot their cars—five or six rounds, and then you slip away around the back. You’ll be able to climb the fence in there to get to the next backyard. You’ll be gone before they even know what hit them. With a fog like tonight, it should be quite easy to disappear. We, on the other hand, will hear the shots. That’ll be our signal to get the hell out. If we’re lucky, the Germans will be distracted by the shots long enough for us to slip out of the factory unseen. The fog will be our cover tonight.”

Jens sneezes violently. Alis K steps away from him. “If I get infected by that, I’ll kill you,” she mumbles.

“Ha!” he says, blowing his nose into a well-used handkerchief.

“Jens,” Borge says, “you’ll handle the guards. Alis K, you’ll carry the explosives in this bag and place them on the third floor. BB, this bag, the fourth floor. I will do the fifth floor myself. We do not assemble after the operation. We all go straight home afterwards. I will get in touch with each of you during the next few days. Any questions?”

They all shake their heads. He folds the maps, putting them into his pocket. “Well, let’s get to it.”

Everybody except Willy takes out their weapons to give them the final check. Jens rolls the drum of his new revolver. The clicking sound gives Borge the creeps. He shoves his own Sten gun down his bag in a hurry while BB whispers something into Alis K’s ear, making her laugh quietly. Willy is shuffling his feet awkwardly.

Willy was waiting outside the building when Borge arrived ten minutes early. Borge had taken the liberty of being early as he had the key to the place and had to set things up before the others came.

“How long have you been standing there for everyone to see?” he asked, hurrying to unlock the door.

“Five minutes, I guess.”

“You always come at the exact time. You do not stand there waiting. People will notice. Understood?”

The boy just nodded his head. The other three arrived one by one...at the exact time. No more than thirty seconds between the first and the last to arrive.

“Can I ask a question?” Willy asks in a thin voice.

“It’s your last chance.”

“What do you do if you don’t have any bullets left?”

The room goes silent.

Alis K: “You had plenty of rounds left in the pistol after the last operation. You only fired the gun twice, right?”

“Sure, but...I might have used them all by now.”

“You what?” Jens.

“What have you been using them for?” Alis K again.

“Shooting Germans.”

All quiet. No sounds to be heard at all.

“We are at war, right?” He shrugs, waving his hands. “I’m pretty good at it. A shot in the head and down they go.”

“How many Germans have you killed?” Borge asks, feeling his balls contract. Not liking any of this, he looks at BB who is obviously just as shaken by the boy’s words.

“Five.”

“Five? Counting the two Hipo?”

“No, five after them.”

Jens whistles through his teeth. “You’ve some character. How did you do it?”

“I’ve just been wandering the streets at night. If I came by a German soldier out alone, I would follow him, shove the pistol to the back of his head, and shoot. Once, I even did two at the same time, but they were really drunk.” His eyes shining with pride.

“This is madness,” BB mumbles. “It’s plain murder!”

“It’s the enemy, right?” Willy says, a perplexed frown coming on.

“Have you ever heard about retaliation killings?” Alis K stares at him. “The Germans kill a Dane, sometimes at random, for every German soldier killed by the resistance.”

Willy looks at her, surely not getting it. “The five I’ve shot won’t kill any Danes.”

Borge turns to Jens. “What do we do?”

“I’ll be damned if I know.”

“BB?”

BB sighs, turning towards Willy. “You’re right, we are at war. But from now on, you’ll only kill if it’s strictly necessary. Do you understand what I’m saying?”

The boy gapes, then he nods his head. “Sure.”

“Give me your pistol.”

Willy hands him the gun. BB releases the magazine. Empty. “Did someone bring a couple of extra rounds?”

“I did,” Jens says. “But they don’t fit in that thing there.”

BB takes out his own Walther P38, ejects the magazine, clicks out two rounds, and places both in the magazine of Willy’s Danish military pistol. He hands it back to him.

“Only two?” Willy asks with disappointment in his voice. “Borge said I need to fire five or six times if the enemy comes.”

It’s Borge’s time to sigh. “Okay. Hand me the gun.”

Hesitating a bit too long, he gives the pistol to Borge, who puts it into his own pocket. Then he opens his bag, pulling out the Sten gun. “This is a Sten gun. It’s an English submachine gun. Take it.”

Willy accepts the Sten gun like it was the crown jewels. His smile gives Borge the creeps. Willy even pets the barrel of the weapon. It is made of iron pipes and looks like something that fell off a garden gate.

Borge touches his shoulder. “Let’s get moving,” he says to all of them. And just for Willy’s ears, he whispers, “Remember, we’re the heroes of the future. We should behave as heroes.”

The boy doesn’t answer. His eyes shining like he has a fever, he lets the weapon slide into his shoulder bag.

On the way out, Jens puts a hand on Borge’s arm. “You think it was wise to give him that Sten gun?”

The fog outside is thick.

The clattering noises from a freight train fill the night for a couple of minutes. Then silence. The dim sound of their own feet against the cobblestones. Somebody is shouting in the distance. The humid fog dampens their clothes, moisture runs down their faces. Jens is the last in line, sneaking along the foggy streets behind the other three, freezing like hell. The boy is standing guard at the gate back around the corner, and they are now heading towards Brink's Sewing Factory to determine if the Germans are setting up a trap for them.

The fog is so thick, you can't even see the buildings on the other side of the street. And here, at Christianshavn, the streets are narrow. The dark gives the fog a strange, dark gray feel. Dull and wet.

Jens turns up his collar. Had this been a regular operation, the fog would of course have been their friend as Borge said back at the old taxi company. It would have been easy to sneak into the sewing factory unspotted. There had been no need to worry about nosy neighbors. But, this is no regular operation, and the fog is not on their side. They might sneak right into a German ambush, not detecting anything before the first man literally stumbles over a German soldier.

Jens is not happy. The plan is to observe Brink's Sewing Factory at a safe distance, from one of the apartments in the building facing the backstreet. He has acquired access to the apartment himself. Through an old contact, who is willing to do amazing things for a pack of cigarettes and a bottle of schnapps. Now, with a fog as heavy as this, Jens doubts they will be able to spot any Germans, waiting in ambush from the windows of the apartment. And the guy even got the cigarettes and the schnapps in advance.

BB and Alis K are walking close together in front of Jens. He can hear them whispering. BB's resonant voice first, "Did you realize he was running around killing Germans at night?"

"No. I haven't seen him since he got the gun."

"Five. He did say he killed five, right?"

"Right."

"We've created a monster, Alis K. We are to blame for this. He's far too young for this kind of work."

"Will the two of you shut up!" Borge whispers from up ahead. "We're getting close."

"Oh, there's not going to be any ambush," Alis K says. "The boy's no informer. He's killed seven enemies in a week, goddammit."

"So *he* says," Jens whispers, lifting his finger schoolmaster style. "So *he* says."

"I was there when he wasted the two Hipo. I saw it with my own eyes!"

"Maybe. Maybe not. Be quiet now." He returns her stare. He can feel her contempt; it's right there in her eyes, but he doesn't back down. At last she does.

In the silence that follows, the sound of a man cursing waves through the fog. It is impossible to tell where the sound is coming from, impossible to understand the words, but it makes them all quiver a little. Was that German?

Soon after, they go up the staircase to the first floor and sneak into the apartment. It has two small rooms and a tiny kitchen. There is nobody home... as arranged. They do not switch on the light. Borge goes straight for the bedroom, gently pulling the blackout curtains to catch a quick glance down the backyard at the Brink's Sewing Factory in the next building.

"No Germans," he whispers.

"Because there's no ambush." Alis K slips over by his side. "It's not him, he's not the rat. I just know it."

"The great expert of the human soul, I see." Jens is in no mood for her crap. He goes into the living room to scan the cabinets. Nothing of interest. His nose is dripping. He wipes it with the back of his hand. The handkerchief is soaked anyway. You can hear the radio from next door through the thin walls. BBC.

BB enters the living room. "What are you doing?"

"Just looking around." He takes a stuffed pigeon from a shelf.

"Do you think Willy's our rat?"

"We'll find out soon enough. He makes a damn good bet if you ask me. Who else could it be? Her, the hooker, Alis K? But then, why hasn't the Gestapo been at your place?"

"She'd sell your ass out before mine, I think."

"But she doesn't know the location of my hideout."

"Borge?"

"He's too damned obsessed with being a hero. I don't think so. If it isn't the boy, it has got to be someone in our proximity. Not one of us, but someone we trust. Or at least one that one of us trusts."

"Like last year with Robert, the porter at the state hospital?"

"Exactly. One of us trusts the wrong person."

BB takes the pigeon out of his hands and puts it back on the shelf. "My wife found out. She's been suspicious for a while. In the end, I had to tell her about us...the Sabotage Group BB."

Jens gives him the eye. "That sucks, BB. Can she handle it?"

"I'm not sure. I might have to quit doing this."

"Seems a wise thing to do." He puts a hand on BB's shoulder. "It really sucks. It wouldn't be the same without you, but I think you should consider pulling out. Most often the wife knowing means a lot of trouble. Women talk. They can't help it."

BB sighs. "You're probably right. What about you? Seen your family lately?"

"Magda don't give a shit if I live or die."

"She might."

Wiping his nose, Jens goes out into the kitchen. It's filthy as hell. A mountain of dirty dishes. Something dark that might once have been food on the floor. The place stinks like old waste. At least his wife Magda keeps the house clean.

"Shit! They're here!" Borge says from the bedroom. "The Germans. They're here. There's a soldier hiding down the basement shaft."

Jens goes to the kitchen window, sliding a finger under the blackout curtain to lift it carefully. He can't see the basement shaft from this window. But, he can see something else. "Look at the truck," he says.

"What about it?" Alis K asks from the bedroom.

BB enters the kitchen, but does not find any room for him at the small window. He won't be able to see for himself.

"The tarpaulin is unfastened. The truck sways a little...from time to time. Now! Did you see it?"

"Sure. There's somebody in the back of that truck."

"With one of their heavy mounted machine guns. Those things we know a little too well." BB sighs. "For some reason, I was hoping he wasn't the informer."

"Me too," Alis K says. "Me too."

"What do we do?" Borge enters the kitchen. "Do we take him out tonight?"

"And you gave him the Sten gun! Feeling happy about that now? If he suspects his cover is blown, he can take us all out in one big sway of that gun."

"I know, but what do we do?"

"I'll go back alone," Alis K says. "I'll get him on a boat to Sweden tonight. I've got connections. It'll be possible. He can't hurt anybody in Sweden."

"I'd rather have him shot." Borge looks down the floor. "I don't want that little prick walking away from this. We're the heroes, goddammit."

"Can you kill him, Alis K?" BB asks, taking her hand.

"Of course I can."

The place is deathly quiet the next few minutes.

BB finally breaks the silence. "We've better stay put until the Germans are gone. I think it'll be safer."

"Agreed." Jens nods his head and returns to the living room to sit in the couch. "I guess we can turn the lights on now."

30

Oil is slowly dripping from the engine of the German military truck parked at the ramp in the back of Brink's Sewing Factory where the fabricated uniforms are loaded onto trucks and horse wagons in the daytime. But, this truck has the front against the ramp, not the back. One of the front tires has got a dent. It is losing its tire pressure.

There is a heavy machine gun in the back of the truck. A MG42 loaded with a belt of ammunition. Two German soldiers from the Waffen-SS are sitting behind the machine gun, waiting. The loose tarpaulin is silently swinging from side to side. The machine gun can fire up to twelve hundred rounds a minute. The number one problem using this weapon is that you might end up having used an enormous amount of ammunition in no time. One of the soldiers shifts his weight. Sitting like that, all still and waiting, makes your legs go numb. The truck sways a little. The springs are old and worn. The truck is an old wreck.

Back here, the fog is not as thick as out in the street. It is more like waving cotton threads or tangled spider web. Time is standing still.

Several soldiers are waiting down the basement shaft as well as inside the factory elevator and behind the ramp gate, ready for the signal.

The signal will be given by the Gestapo, who have two officers at the scene, both wearing SS uniforms. Long, black coats, and skulls on their caps. One has an eye patch and a nasty scar going down the side of his face.

The two Gestapo officers are inside a dark office in the building—which is also housing Brink's Sewing Factory—sitting in silence, as they too wait. The

office belongs to a bookkeeper, who only too willing to let the Gestapo use the premises. Not that he had any choice.

The office is located at the ground floor and has a direct view to the gate, which offers the only way into the backyard.

In a matter of minutes, the complete core of the Sabotage Group BB will come in through that gate. This time they will not escape. They will be allowed to get almost all the way to the factory elevator before the signal is given; they'll be gunned down, leaving no survivors.

There is coffee on the table. A minor Gestapo luxury—real coffee. Sadly, it is impossible to smoke. The glow from the cigarettes could be seen through the windows even if they had smoked in the back of the office.

Time goes by so slowly. They should have been here by now. He starts to hum a melody inside his head, he's feeling homesick.

Spotting a movement by the gate, he frowns and glances at the other Gestapo officer who shrugs. Confused.

One person is coming in the gate, only one person, not a group. It is a man. Walking casually with his hands down the pockets of his overcoat, the cap pushed all the way to the back of his head, he is impossible to recognize in the dark, looking like a moving shadow.

Taking the radio to give the signal, the Gestapo officer hesitates, looking back at his colleague, grimacing. What do we do?

The man stops to look around in the middle of the backyard. Takes his cap off. Maybe he is not one of the saboteurs; maybe he is just a simple fool who has picked the wrong backyard to pee in. Something like this always happens when you have set up an ambush.

The man moves towards the truck. They can hear the sound of his steps. Everything is all quiet, it is like the whole world is holding its breath, waiting for this guy to get out of there. Reaching the truck, he stops to unbutton his overcoat.

The two Gestapo officers sigh with relief, smiling to each other. "He just needs to pee," the first one whispers, putting down the radio.

"What if the saboteurs come while he's standing there pissing on our truck?"

"Then he's in trouble."

Quiet giggle. "More coffee?"

In that exact instant, the silence is broken by the crackling noise from a submachine gun.

31

"What the fuck was that?" Jens shouts from the living room. Alis K is looking into BB's blue eyes in search for an answer, only finding confusion, fear, and horror. Another volley from the submachine gun outside in the backyard. A man screaming in pain, wailing, crying. Then a new volley. Then silence.

"Kill the goddamn lights!" Borge yells from the bedroom.

"Let's get out of here." Sticking his head in the kitchen door, Jens glances at Alis K and BB, nodding his head back towards the front door. "Get moving."

"Kill the lights, *now!*" Borge is shouting.

BB frowns. "Why don't we stay until we know what's happening out there?"

"It's not our problem, BB." Jens buttons his overcoat. "I am out of here. Whatever's going on out there, it's none of our business. It'd be a meaningless waste to get killed just because some fucked up fifteen-year-old German soldier with his nerves on high alert mistook one of the ally cats for a saboteur."

Behind Jens, Borge runs into the living room killing the lights. Someone starts shouting in German out in the backyard. It is followed by the hollow hammering from the machine gun hidden in the back of the truck. Screams. More shooting. Smaller weapons. Submachine guns, rifles. The constant racket from the heavy machine gun firing. BB says something, but the noise drowns his words. The kitchen window shatters. Bullets and pieces of glass flying around their ears. BB pulls Alis K along, down on the floor, maybe saving her life. The lamp explodes, the kitchen gets dark.

The front door slams. Jens is gone.

They crawl to the bedroom where Borge is tearing the blackout curtain from the window.

"It's Willy," he gasps, diving away from the window. "That boy's insane!"

"What?" BB is over by the window, sliding up against the wall. Alis K rises to her feet. Not thinking, she just stands there right in the window—an easy target—staring at Willy sitting behind the mounted heavy machine gun in the back of the truck shooting like a maniac. Dead Germans everywhere. Willy is now aiming at one of the basement shafts in the building they are standing in. She can almost see the mad twinkle inside his eyes. She has herself believing that she can even see him smile. She is paralyzed, unable to really believe what she is seeing. Two soldiers are moving down the right side of the truck. Both carrying MP40 submachine guns. They step away from the truck, pointing their weapon at the tarpaulin covering the back of the truck.

Then the noise from the heavy machine gun all of a sudden stops. She stares as Willy begins messing with the machine gun, trying to load a new belt of ammunition into the weapon.

Looking at each other, the soldiers next to the truck hesitate as Borge steps in front of the window, holding Willy's Danish military pistol in both hands, firing two rapid shots through the window glass. Off target. The soldiers turn their weapons at him. He fires again, desperate now, but the pistol is empty—clicking aimlessly. Then the Germans start shooting. Alis K throws herself down on the floor, as the German bullets smash the window, ripping up the woodwork, hitting Borge in the chest, making him shake violently for a couple of eternal seconds. Then he falls to the floor.

Alis K crawls to him. BB is shooting out the window. More shots slam into the ceiling, sprinkling the room in clouds of plaster dust. She can hear herself moan, can't help it, can't stop it. Borge is bleeding terribly. He has been hit in the chest at least four times. Blood seeps from his nose. He looks at her and blinks. She touches his cheek. He tries to speak, but she can't hear his word. She can't hear anything. The world is gone, there are only the two of them left even as BB fires out the window again, yelling at Willy. That is all in another world. It's got nothing to do with her. She puts her ear to Borge's lips.

"I'm cold," he gasps.

Alis K is feeling dizzy. She pulls up the collar of her white blouse, which isn't really that white anymore. She should be trying to stop the bleeding, but there are so many wounds, and she doesn't know what to do. She hasn't felt this helpless in years.

Pulling the blanket from the bed, she uses it to comfort Borge. What to do now? He will die if she doesn't do the right thing, but what is the right thing to do? The blood is soaking through the blanket almost instantly. Putting a hand on top of the largest bloodstain, she presses down on the wound, but she can't tell if it does any good. Besides, there are four quickly growing bloodstains on the blanket and she has only got two hands.

"I'm out of ammo!" BB shouts from the window. "Give me your gun!"

She doesn't even look at him.

"Your gun, *now*!"

"But Borge—"

"Your gun!" BB crawls to her and rips the small Walther PPK from her purse. She grabs his arm, staining his clothes.

"What should I do?"

"Pray," he says, glancing at Borge, before crawling back to the window.

The shooting outside has ceased. Now there is nothing but moaning. Someone is calling out for his mother in German. His voice sounding so young. Borge is completely still now. She touches his cheek. Is he dead?

"Willy?" BB shouts.

"Yes."

"Are you hurt?"

"No."

"Get the hell out of here."

Borge is moving his eyes, not dead yet. He is trying to speak again. Bending over him, she puts her ear against his lips.

"We were supposed to be heroes," he gasps.

She has got no words of comfort as his eyes turn to look up at the ceiling above her head.

"Alis K, this is it. We need to get away." BB is shaking her.

"But Borge..."

"He's dead."

Looking at Borge, his eyes still staring at the ceiling, she reaches out to shut them, whispering sadly, "There's no such thing as heroes."

32

Later that night, they sit in silence inside the shelter in the basement of BB's house. Nobody is speaking; the occasional clatter of footsteps from upstairs echoes through the silent shelter. Grete must be having another of her sleepless nights. The water pipes sing as she opens the tap in the kitchen. Feeling a distant ache inside his chest, BB turns to look at Alis K, who has been crying. Attempting to put on a brave smile, she fails completely. Willy is sitting at her side, moving one of his feet up and down, seeming lost in his own mind.

BB sighs, "Willy?"

The boy doesn't react until Alis K nudges him. Then he stirs, looking puzzled.

"What happened tonight?" BB asks him.

"Don't know."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

Unable to look at BB, he shrugs. His clothes are torn into pieces, the sleeves of his coat hanging loose. He has bloodstains on his pants.

Trying to find his pipe, BB claps his pockets, but the pipe seems to be lost. "There was no real operation tonight," he says in a flat voice. "We were just pretending."

"What?" The boy finally lifts his head to look at him.

"It was a setup made to reveal an informer in our group."

"And it did..." Alis K mumbles. Pulling a small mirror from her purse, she turns away to examine her face in the light from lamp on the wall.

Willy's eyes sway from BB to Alis K in astonishment.

"Borge planned this operation to reveal the informer. We all knew, except the one person we suspected to be the informer, that this was a fake operation. There were no explosives in our bags. We were not going to blow up anything. We were just there to see if the Germans had been informed. And if they had, we'd know who the informer was."

The boy's foot moves even faster up and down. He frowns, fear showing in his eyes now. "Me?"

"You."

"You suspected *me* to be the informer? But...but...but..."

"I didn't," Alis K says, putting the mirror back inside her purse. "Borge and Jens did."

"But the Germans were informed...I didn't..."

"No." BB puts his one leg over the other. "I suppose, Jens must be the informer. He has a habit of disappearing every time the Germans are setting up an ambush. At least lately."

"Like I've said all the time." Alis K straightens her skirt. "Now Borge is dead."

BB can't find the words. It is hard for him to comprehend the fact that Jens seems to be the only possible informer among them. How could he be? They started Sabotage Group BB together; they have been running it for more than a year. Side by side, they have faced death several times. They have saved each other's lives. They have revealed and killed other informers along the way. How could Jens be the informer? He couldn't. Only, there is not really any other possibility left, and lately he *has* been disappearing as the Germans showed up. He never did that before. It is not like him at all.

"I have not ratted on anybody..." the boy says in a thin voice. "I've fought the Germans every single night. I've shot them down until I had no more bullets. And I'm not going to stop. Borge said I was a hero. I've killed all the Germans I've ever had the chance to kill." His eyes blink as he waves his hands. "I'm no rat."

"No, you're not the informer, but you need to get away. We've got to get you to Sweden as soon as possible. You're too dangerous. You don't just walk around the streets at night killing random soldiers."

"They are the enemy."

"We do not achieve anything by doing that. We need to be an invisible army hitting their weak spots. The factories, the trains. In that way, we can do significantly more damage to the German war machine, than we do by just killing a couple of random recruits. Besides, sooner or later you will get caught killing Germans like that, and we will all need to go underground."

"I won't get caught. I'm good at this."

“That’s not up for discussion.” BB leaves the shelter to see if he might have an extra pipe lying around somewhere in the basement. He really needs his tobacco.

“Can we spend the night here?” Alis K asks through the door. “I’m not that eager to go out tonight. The Germans must be like mad dogs after that bloodbath.”

“You’ll stay put. You need to be very quiet. Neither my wife nor our maid must find you here.”

BB finds an old pipe on the shelf next to the toolbox and returns to the shelter, putting tobacco into the pipe.

“We’ll need some clothes.”

BB nods his head. It will be a difficult task as Grete is awake upstairs, but they can’t walk the streets looking like this. He has to manage getting some of Grete’s and his own clothes down here without Grete noticing it. He lights up the pipe, thinking

“Tomorrow, you and me will pay a visit to Jens to take care of things,” he says to Alis K.

“When?” Willy asks.

“You’re not coming. We’ll fix it.”

The foot starts moving again.

“I’d still like to hear what happened tonight?”

“What do you mean?”

“You had an assignment. You were to stand guard while we were placing the explosives inside the factory. Suddenly, you are right in the middle of everything killing Germans with a conquered heavy machine gun. How did that happen?”

“It was the fog. I couldn’t see anything.”

BB stares at him. There is something about the boy he will never understand. All he does understand is that they have given a gun to a boy and created a monster. Billy the Kid from Copenhagen. A desperado. Is he going to stop his killing if they get him away to Sweden?

“The fog was so thick. How was I to stand guard if I couldn’t see? So I went over to you guys. I had seen it all pointed out on the map, remember? But you weren’t there. Instead there were German soldiers everywhere.”

“So you decided to kill them all?”

“Well, they’re the enemy, right?”

33

Poul-Erik walks the streets, his head lowered. There is ice on the puddles. The sun is so bright it hurts his eyes. Rosenborg Castle lurks behind the wall and the naked trees on the left side of the street. His breath is hanging in front of his head like fog. He is too small for the suit he is wearing. It belongs to BB. The trousers are being held up by a piece of string around his waist, the jacket flops from his shoulders. He is unarmed. He lost the pistol at the operation last night. He guesses he should have taken one off the dead Germans. There sure were enough guns lying around for grabs. If he had only thought of it in time.

BB told him he would arrange for him to travel away to Sweden tonight, but he is not sure he will go. Will they try to make him go? By force? The way they stared at him, like he was some kind of freak. He made them feel unsafe. Even Alis K had that look.

Maybe he should go to Sweden. He has never been out of Copenhagen. It could be like an adventure. Get to sail the sea, see a foreign country. He can always come back.

He can also stay. Try to get into one of the other resistance groups. *Holger Danske*, maybe. They might need a new liquidator. Why quit now? The war isn't over yet.

He turns around the corner at Borgergade and stops dead in his tracks. A large, black Ford is parked in front of the gateway leading to his home. Hipo. Definitely Hipo. They have come for him. He has been recognized. He swallows an imaginary lump, as he scans the street. The car is empty.

"Poul-Erik!" Beckoning him to come, his mother suddenly appears down by the Ford. She is all smiles. He has never seen her this happy in his entire life. At first, he can't even recognize her. She has even got new clothes. A floral dress. She has had a bath as well, and it is not even Sunday. What is going on?

Beginning to walk towards her, he waves his hand.

"I was just out buying some open sandwiches," she says, lifting a white cardboard box. "Your father is back home."

"Oh."

"Have you seen my new dress? I'll bet this'll make Mrs. Madsen next door a little envious, don't you think?"

"Right." She is so ecstatic she doesn't even see that he is not wearing his own clothes.

"Well, there's none for you!"

"Sorry?"

"Sandwiches. I had no way of knowing when you'd show up, young man. Have you got yourself a little girlfriend?"

"No."

"Oh, come on. I'm your mother. You can tell me stuff like that."

Poul-Erik doesn't answer. She is not her usual self. She's not his mother. He doesn't know her. She makes him feel unsafe. His stomach aches. They walk side by side through the gateway, past the first backyard, into the next gateway. She is still talking when a huge man appears at the other end of the gateway. Black uniform. Hipo. Poul-Erik can't breathe. It is Hovgaard. The Hipo officer he was assigned to kill not so many days ago.

"Oh, but Mr. Hovgaard, are you leaving already?" his mother twitters.

"I'm afraid so, Mrs. Smith, duty calls." He tilts his head politely, lifting the cap. "A gentleman has to do his duties."

"Indeed so, Mr. Hovgaard." She gestures with her hand towards Poul-Erik. "My oldest son, Poul-Erik. He's got an apprenticeship so he can become a smith like his father."

Offering him a gigantic hand, Hovgaard turns to Poul-Erik with a flattering smile. "Good day, Poul-Erik. It sure is a couple of magnificent people you've got for parents."

"Thank you." Reluctantly accepting his hand, Poul-Erik gives it a quick squeeze, trying not to pull his hand away too fast. "Good day, sir."

"Mrs. Smith." The Hipo lifts his cap again and heads out to his black Ford.

They are halfway up the stairs, before Poul-Erik's heart starts beating again.

Karl Smith is sitting by the dinner table holding a beer in his hand. He looks older, but he still has the same mean eyes, the same crew-cut hair, the same way of twisting his mouth askew, the same missing finger. Only the Hipo uniform is new.

“We’ve got some great news, my son!” Poul-Erik’s mother cheers. “Your father is going to be a police officer here in Copenhagen. He will not have to go to Germany to work anymore. Now, everything is coming our way!”

Poul-Erik just stands there.

“What do you say, son?” his father growls. “Doesn’t your father look great in his new uniform?”

“Here, have a beer, my boy,” his mother smiles. “Sit down. Now, we’ll have a real pleasant day. All of us.”

“Where are the little ones?”

“They’re with grandma.”

“How’s your apprenticeship coming along?”

“Okay.”

His father raises the bottle to toast him. “Cheers, my boy.”

“Cheers.”

“What are those clothes you’re wearing? A suit? How’d you get a suit?”

“I borrowed it from a friend.”

“So my son’s got friends who wear suits?”

He shrugs, sipping from the bottle.

“He lost his bicycle,” his mother says, placing the box of sandwiches on the table.

“It was stolen. It wasn’t my fault.”

“I’ll get it back for you.” His father sends him a confident smile. “And when I do find it, it’s going to be a sorry bastard sitting on it.”

“Right.”

“By the way, shouldn’t you be at your apprenticeship?”

“The Master Smith heard you were back in town. I got off early.” A quick lie.

“Oh, he did, did he? Word travels fast, eh?”

“You’re not just anybody, Karl. My private police officer.”

“Olga, my Olga.” He smacks her behind, laughing out loud. “Come sit down. I’ve sure got some stories to tell from Germany.”

“Doesn’t it make you proud of your father, Poul-Erik? Look at him in that uniform. Our dad is a real man!”

“That I am. There was no beating around the bush down in Sachenshausen when I was on guard. I can tell you that much. I had my way of getting their respect. Once, we had an attempted escape; nine Polish prisoners... Oh, wait, get me another beer, Olga. This one’s empty.”

Poul-Erik watches as his mother rushes for the kitchen. His dad in the Hipo? This can’t be happening. He can’t be sitting here, drinking with a Hipo. His dad is a Hipo pig. He is still afraid of him, but he is a hell of a lot more man than his father. He has killed more German soldiers than that jerk is capable of counting. He can’t be sitting here.

He closes his eyes, touching his forehead. Suddenly he realizes that he can’t live here anymore. He has to go to Sweden. There is no choice left for him. He has to get away from this.

“I’ve got an appointment,” he says, getting up.

“Aren’t you going to congratulate me?”

“No.”

His father takes his time getting up. Staring at him. Olga comes in with the beer, as he does so.

“No, Karl, not now. Take it easy. It’s our happy day.”

“He refuses to congratulate me, that puppy.”

“Poul-Erik. Congratulate your father!”

“No. I’m ashamed you’re my father. A Hipo pig for a father. That should make me feel proud? You make me sick!”

“You...you!” The bottles topple and the beer spills out as his father fails to grab him across the table.

“Poul-Erik, congratulate your father!”

“No.”

The first blow hits Poul-Erik in the stomach, the next one throws him back into the wall. Now everything is back to normal. Now, Poul-Erik recognizes his family again.

34

“Stop!” BB shouts as Jens steps out of the allotment house carrying a cardboard box. Frowning, Jens stops dead in his tracks to examine their faces. BB is about three steps ahead of Alis K. Both have one hand deep within their coat pockets. “Put the box down, gently.”

Jens tilts his head, licking his teeth. “What’s going on?” he asks. Alis K moves her hand inside the pocket to point her pistol at him. Jens turns to BB.

“Get in the house, Verner. I need to talk to you,” BB says, obviously using Jens’s real name trying to intimidate him. This has a bad ring to it.

“Johannes, Ingrid,” Jens answers calmly, putting the box down on the grass. “Then come in.”

“Are you about to leave this place?” Alis K asks, when all three of them have made it inside the tiny house. His suitcase is lying open on the floor, clothes inside, a couple of boxes of booze and tobacco next to it.

“The neighbor was out in the garden looking in through the windows a few hours ago. I can’t stay.”

“You got another place to hide out?”

“Sure.”

“Where?”

“Somewhere. A basement in Gentofte. Is this an interrogation?”

“Yes,” Alis K says. “Borge is dead.”

“Your revolver, Verner.” BB holds his hand out to receive it. “Now.”

“But...” He shrugs, pulling the revolver out from behind the couch cushions. Holding it with just two fingers around the butt, he drops it into BB’s hand. “Here you go.”

Letting himself drop heavily on to the worn out couch, he shakes a cigarette out of the box. “You think I killed Borge? That’s why you come here all pushy, pointing your guns at me, calling me Verner? Sit down, please. Have a smoke, dammit. I haven’t touched him.”

BB sits, Alis K settles for a cigarette. She is keeping her hand down her pocket. He must be careful not to make any sudden moves. She is on the verge

of shooting right there, he knows that look in her eyes—has seen her kill before. She is a talented killer.

“The Germans shot him last night after you ran off.”

“I didn’t run off.” He holds the match for BB to light up his cigarette. “I told you. It wasn’t our battle. It wasn’t worth getting killed for.” He strikes another match and raises his hand to light up Alis K’s cigarette. She hesitates, not sure if she is willing to risk moving a step closer to him. She looks at BB. Jens settles with lighting up his own cigarette, killing the match with a quick wave of the hand. “Here!” He throws the box of matches to her.

“It was our battle,” Alis K says. “It was Willy.”

“Willy? But he should be standing guard for fuck sake. He... Oh!” Now he gets it. The pistols in their pockets, the use of his real name, the desire to kill inside the eyes of Alis K. “You think I’m the informer...the fucking rat? Me?”

“Willy strolled into the backyard among all the waiting Germans. Captured the heavy machine gun in the back of the truck,” Alis K says harshly. “We were trying to assist him when *you* ran off. Borge got shot. He died almost instantly.”

Jens sighs. This is bad. He is thinking like crazy. But what can he do? What can he say?

“Then Willy’s not the rat.” He says tiredly. “And now, you think it is me. You are here to kill me. Did I get that much right?”

“I would like to hear your explanation,” BB says.

“My explanation? Fuck you!”

The small house is all quiet for a while. Jens stares at the burned matchstick inside the ashtray. “Borge came around after the hit on the *Super* garage making the same kind of accusations. I laughed at him. I know all your real names, I know where you live. If I was the rat, then why hasn’t the Gestapo been around your places to arrest you?”

“Because you are one hell of a business man, Verner,” Alis K says. “If you sold it all at once, there’d been nothing left to sell. This way, you’ve been able to sell our asses operation by operation. As long as you didn’t tell them who we were, those of us who got away would soon be planning a new operation you could sell.”

35

The radio is playing Mozart. Grete is sitting by the window, looking out, while mechanically rolling up a ball of yarn. It is freezing outside. Ice crystals along the edges of the window. Heavy, dark clouds in the sky above. Soon, it might begin to rain. Or even snow. The postman passes by the window on his bicycle.

Johannes had of course been unable to hide the two saboteurs from her. She had heard them sneaking around in the basement shelter at once. You hear every sound in this house at night. She had had another sleepless night sitting right here in the same chair, but with the blackout curtains drawn. She had even heard them walking down the basement shaft. She had feared they were burglars for a moment, until she recognized the sound of Johannes’s voice and heard the key in the basement door. She was holding her breath, listening, as they went into the shelter. Then she went into the kitchen to make coffee. Johannes looked like

he was going to faint when she came into the shelter carrying a tray with coffee and cheese sandwiches. Johannes was in the company of two other saboteurs. A young boy and the woman who had been there the day before. Alis K. There was blood on their clothes. She stared at Johannes, who attempted a sorry excuse for an apologetic smile.

The woman and the boy both spent the night down in the shelter. Grete made them breakfast and gave them some clothes to wear. She hadn't spoken to Johannes. She couldn't. She could hardly look at him.

Of course, he is having an affair with this Alis K. That is just the way he is. She knows him too well. He is driven by a constant need for new thrills. That is his inner demon. He can't help it. It has been a long time since it stopped making her feel humiliated.

She was not a virgin when they got married. Of course she wasn't. You couldn't keep Johannes waiting. But she wasn't a virgin when she met Johannes either. There was a reason why she was sent away to Odense when she was seventeen. Odense was a punishment. She had brought shame upon her family.

A seagull flies by the window. She closes her eyes.

The first thing, she recalls, is the bulge in the young man's pants. She had been unable to take her eyes off it. Something happened to her the moment she saw that bulge. A weird sensation deep inside her abdomen. She felt weak, but felt so light. It was a lovely summer in 1929. The town of Struer in the western part of Jutland was showered in sunshine. The bees were humming, the butterflies fluttering. The bay, Limfjorden, was flashing in the sun, and the minister's daughter lost her virginity in an old tool shed, while the mosquitoes feasted on her skin.

Her father, the minister, was a big man with a beard and the Bible at his side. He sat at the end of the dinner table, towering over his family. Nothing was allowed without his permission. He would punish those who disobeyed him harshly in the name of God. They were five children, all girls. Grete was the second oldest. He would say the prayer before dinner. He read the Bible every day. He wasn't a man anybody wanted to stand up against. He had pride in the purity of his girls, emphasized it to his parish. Girls should be held on a tight leash. They had the devil inside their chests. He often had to beat it out of them with his belt, as God wanted him to.

Before Grete set eyes on the bulge in the young man's trousers, she had always followed her father's command; never once spoke against his will, never did anything without his permission. Virtuous, pretty, submissive. As God wanted her to be. She'd renounced the devil and all his works. She wasn't looking for trouble like her little sister Ruth who stole from the cookie box before Christmas, making all of them get the belt. He always punished all of them for one girl's sins. You had to repent your sins, and you had to stand side by side against the devil. The belt was black leather, the buckle replaced by a short stick to make it easier to swing at the girls. The minister was always crying as he punished his daughters. It was his severe duty to do this. It was what the Lord commanded him to do, like it was written by the Apostle Paul. Love was to discipline, and he loved his daughters so very much.

Grete had been on her way to church with a letter to her father from the Capital the first time she noticed the bulge in the young man's trousers. He was raking the gravel on the churchyard paths. Just a young man her own age. There were so many of those young men around. She greeted him and curtsied briefly, politely lowering her glance as she had been taught. If she had been allowed to

look him in the eye, she might never have spotted the bulge in his pants. It was huge. It almost looked like the guy had a cucumber down his trousers.

She was still trembling when she handed the letter to her father. In the days that followed she started inventing excuses to visit the church to get a second glance at the bulge in the young man's pants. She became obsessed with that bulge. Dreamt about it at night. Woke with her hands under the covers. She prayed the Lord to save her soul; she didn't want this to happen. But the sin was sweet.

And God wouldn't help her.

His name was Einar. He was from the small town of Lemvig, west of Struer. His parents had passed away in a fire some months ago, leaving him all by himself. The reverend in Lemvig talked to her father, wanting to help this poor young man whose parents had been active members of the congregation. So now, he had a job helping the old gravedigger at the cemetery and lived in a tiny attic in a house in Struer.

She was so in love, it hurt to even to look at Einar, but it was nothing like the pure and clean love her father used to preach about. It was something completely different, something dark, and forbidden. Deep within her soul. Something far stronger than she was, far more powerful than the fear of her father. There was no mercy. She was lost. Only seventeen years old.

And when it finally happened, it was almost like a rehearsed play where they only acted what had been predetermined. They didn't speak. Only one word was spoken as she walked to him, taking his hand.

"Come."

Silently they went into the tool shed down the remotest corner of the cemetery. The door was still closing behind them when she ripped his trousers open, releasing the huge—

The ding-ding-dong of the doorbell shatters the memory, bringing Grete back to the present. She stirs, blinking her eyes. Her heart pounding inside her chest. She puts the yarn down on the floor by the chair and stands up, as the doorbell sounds again.

She finds the boy from last night, Willy, standing outside the front door. He is still wearing Johannes' old suit. He is shaking. Just standing there, shaking all over.

"What happened?"

"I have...killed my father."

36

"He's never going to confess, BB," Alis K says tiredly. "Why don't we just shoot him and go home? I've got an important appointment coming up."

"An appointment!" Jens spits. "You're nothing but a fucking whore!"

Her eyes are cold. She takes another one of his cigarettes. "And you're nothing but a dead rat, Verner. Why don't you just tell it like it is?"

"Goddammit, BB, I was the one who started this sabotage group. We've been through a lot together, the two of us. Haven't I fucking saved your life?"

“More than once.” BB nods his head, crossing his legs. “But this has got a bad smell to it, Verner.”

“A bad smell? How much money did you make the night we sailed the Jews to safety in Sweden? I was the one contacting you. I was the one starting it all.”

“People change sides,” Alis K says. “You’ve always been a dirty piece of shit cop. You can be bought, Verner!”

“Just like you, Ingrid. Just like you.”

She stares at him, not saying anything, looking sick to her stomach.

“No, you’re nothing like me.” Her voice little more than a whisper. She pulls hard on the cigarette to make the glow grow long. Then she blows the smoke into his face while stubbing out the cigarette on the back of his hand.

He screams in pain, pulling away as she grabs an empty bottle ready to slam it into his face.

BB stops her. “That’s enough.”

Cursing her, Jens spits on the burn on his hand.

Alis K scrapes ice off the window glass, looking out the garden. “I’ve got to go, BB. I’ll be back in a couple of hours. If he hasn’t confessed by then, I think we need to get nasty.”

BB shrugs. “Maybe, you’re right. Let’s see what happens.”

She buttons her coat, ties the scarf around her head, and leaves.

They sit in silence, listening to the sound of her footsteps moving away down the garden path.

“Fucking bitch!”

“You asked for it yourself.”

“She’s got German customers, you are aware of that, right?”

“So what?”

“Never trust a hooker, Johannes.”

“Alis K’s all right.”

“Really?”

“At least she’s not the one who disappears every time the shit is about to hit the fan.”

Jens licks his teeth. “Are you going to torture me?”

“We’ve been through a lot, the two of us. Maybe I’ll be able to get you to Sweden if you confess to me.”

“I’m not the one, BB.”

Silence.

“I could take you out now. I’m bigger than you. You wouldn’t be able to stop me.”

“Only you won’t. It would be the same as to confess. We’ll come after you. The other groups would also be involved. Sooner or later, you will get killed.”

“I am not the informer.”

“Everything is pointing at you.”

“What exactly is pointing at me?”

“What? You can’t be serious.”

“I am. Let’s take it from the top.”

“You left your post at the action against the *Super* garage.”

“No, I didn’t. I dropped my revolver. The hammer was damaged. I was of no use without a weapon.”

“I’ve got your revolver right here. There’s nothing wrong with it.”

“That’s because that’s not the same gun. I got a new one. The old revolver is at the bottom of the harbor.” He shrugs. “Borge saw the damaged hammer.”

“Borge?”

“Sure.”

BB shakes his head.

“I know, I know. Dead witnesses saw nothing.”

“How did your neighbor manage to look through these windows? They’re all covered in ice.”

“Not this morning, they weren’t.”

“It’s colder in the morning.”

“Might be so. Still, there wasn’t this much ice on the windows this morning. That’s all I can say.”

“You were pretty eager to leave last night when the shooting started at the factory?”

“Well, I figured, we had unveiled our informer. There’s no reason to fight the entire German army. We’d got what we came for.”

“I still think it’s you.”

“Sure, that hooker has you all mixed up.”

Silence.

“Actually, my neighbor did go around the house looking through the windows. I don’t think it’s safe staying here too long.”

Silence.

“I’m not a rat.”

Silence.

“I’m not a rat.”

Silence.

“Alis K was the first to point the finger at me, right?”

“Might have been.”

“Of course she was. She hates the police. I know I would if I was a hooker, but think about it. She’s a hooker, goddammit. She’s got German customers. I’ve checked up on her. I check up on everybody. That’s part of my job in this group. Why do you think Borge came to me when he suspected Willy being the informer? Come on, you know all this, BB. I have checked up on the boy. His dad’s in Germany. Of course, we’d be suspecting him.”

“I know.”

“Alis K’s got German customers, BB.”

“Maybe...but what informer would dare to kill as many Germans as she has killed the last week?”

“You’ve got a point.”

“You are the sole member of this group who hasn’t killed any Germans lately.”

Jens presses the hand with the burn up against the ice on the window behind him to ease the pain.

37

“I’m sorry, but you can’t stay here,” Grete says, drinking her coffee. “It’s too dangerous. It’s as simple as that.”

Poul-Erik is not trembling anymore, but this is even worse. His eyes are red, but he hasn’t been crying. Not even when he told her how he had killed his

father with a chair, unable to stop hitting him. His mother yelling at him as he ran out the door and away from his father's dead body—away from the smashed face. Away from it all.

Now he is sitting here. Pale and silent. Dead eyes. "I need to go to Sweden."

She nods her head. "And you will. Johannes will take care of it, like he promised."

"Who?"

"My husband, Johannes. Oh...BB. BB will take care of it."

He stares at the table.

"Drink your coffee," she says, starting to clear the table. "BB will meet you tonight at exactly half past six on the corner of Osterbrogade and Jagtvej as he said. He'll be there. He won't let you down. Can you manage until then?"

"Sure."

She dries her hands in a dishcloth, looking out the window. It is a good thing that this was the maid's day off. The clock in the living room starts chiming.

38

"How's your wife?"

"My wife?"

"My wife?"

"Yes." Jens strikes a match to light up a new cigarette. "How's she doing?"

"Why do you want to know?"

"I've got something I want to show you."

"What's that? Now don't pull any tricks on me, Verner!"

"It's in the suitcase." Nods his head towards it, not taking his watery eyes from Johannes. "You can get it yourself. It's in the brown envelope under the pants."

Johannes looks at the suitcase. For some reason, he doesn't feel right about this. "What is it?"

"You want me to get it?" Jens says, slowly getting up.

Johannes puts his hand back into the coat pocket, grabbing a hold of the pistol. He has got a very bad feeling about this. "What is it you want to show me?"

"A photo. I'll get it."

"Get it."

Jens moves around the table to the suitcase on the floor. Johannes can smell him, a heavy and sour smell. He puts his finger on the trigger. Not really believing Jens is going to do anything stupid; still, sensing something is not right, Johannes stares at his broad back as he bends over the suitcase fetching a brown envelope.

"You want a drink?" Jens asks, placing the envelope on the table. "I don't know about you, but I'm freezing my ass off in this damned cardboard house."

"What is it you want to show me?"

Jens sighs, putting a hand inside the envelope. "This is my file on one of the worst Hipo, Einar Hovgaard. This envelope contains all the material I've collected about him. He's the one Alis K and Willy should've killed the other

day. I gathered most of this material myself. The only thing missing is a photograph of the man himself. I gave that to Alis K so she could be sure they got the right man.” Reaching down to get a bottle of schnapps from one of the boxes, he fills two small glasses, as he speaks. “I don’t care, BB. We need to stay warm.”

Johannes agrees.

“I broke into Einar Hovgaard’s apartment the week before we tried to kill him. I wanted to have a look. Thought maybe he’d have something lying about that might be of interest. Something like a list of their informers or whatever. I always do that. He’d been hoarding sugar, cocoa, coffee, tea, when it was still available. You should’ve have seen the pantry.”

“Get to the point.”

“Take it easy.”

“Verner, if this is some kind of subtle attempt to blame somebody else then...”

“I am not an informer.”

Draining his glass, Johannes stares in dread as Jens pulls a photograph from the envelope and hands it to him.

“How did you get that?”

“From a drawer in the Hipo’s desk. He had quite a collection, all with the same model. I only took this one.”

“This...how did he get them? How?”

“What do I know?”

“But...” The photo shows a playful and very young Grete. It was shot in Odense. He recognizes the train station behind his smiling wife. You can see the smoke from a locomotive in the air above the station. Grete’s standing in the middle of the street, looking so young and happy. He flips the photo to find words written in blue ink on the back: *Thinking of you...G.*

He drops the photograph, staring at Jens.

“You might want to have a chat with your wife.”

“Why haven’t you told me this before?”

“Hell, why should I? It didn’t have to mean anything. The picture must be twenty years old.”

“Fifteen.”

“Right.” He pours himself another schnapps. “You didn’t know about this?”

“No.”

“When did she find out about you being a saboteur?”

“She... Oh no! This can’t be true!”

“I am sorry, BB. I am really sorry.”

“What should I do?”

“Go home, talk to her.”

“What if...”

“Well, there’s always Sweden.”

“Sweden? Hell, I forgot! I need to get the boy to Sweden tonight. I’m to meet him at half past six at the corner of Osterbrogade and Jagtvej.”

“I’ll take care of that. Now, go home...talk to your wife.”

Johannes nods his head. “I think I’d better.”

A moment later, he is on his bicycle, heading home. The frost biting his cheeks. The clouds heavy and alive. Soon it will start snowing.

It is snowing. Big fluffy flakes of snow. This is how Christmas Eve should be. Johannes is pumping the pedals on his bicycle hard, close to his destination now. He rushes down the avenue, overtaking other cyclists, passing a tram. Snow is melting on his face, covering his eyelashes, but he doesn't slow down, not even when turning around a corner. The front wheel slips at the corner and he has to put a foot down, cursing through clenched teeth.

He is in such a hurry; he hardly recognizes the dark silhouette getting into a taxi further up the street as his wife, Grete. The only reason he does see her is the slipping front wheel makes him lose speed for a moment. He doesn't see her face, but that woman is without any doubt his wife. The worn coat that should have been replaced years ago and the patterned scarf she is always wearing when she goes out. The way she moves, getting into the taxi. He would recognize her anytime.

The taxi drives off, chugging down the street. Something turns deep in his stomach. Luckily, the taxi is an old Opel, rebuilt and fitted with a gas generator; cars like that rarely go faster than thirty kilometers per hour. It won't outrun a bicycle easily, not even in this kind of weather.

He tightens his grip on the handlebars, stomping the pedals. Doesn't even realize that he is gasping and moaning out loud as he struggles to keep up with the sole red taillight of the taxi.

"Is it snowing?" Alis K asks, holding the door.

The man smiles. "A bit." He removes his cap, using it to brush snow off his black uniform.

"You look like the abominable snowman."

He laughs as she takes his hand, leading him to her small room. The fireside has had plenty of time to heat up the room. The windows are steamy. She pulls the curtains and switches on the light.

"Let me help you undress."

"Oh, never mind my clothes. Just take off your own." The ambulance driver smiles, unbuttoning his wet uniform. He is from the rescue service Zonen and is one of Alis K's best customers. All he wants is the missionary position real slow. He is a good man, but lonely. His wife died of cancer last year.

Alis K puts one leg on the bed, rolling down her stockings. Then the other leg. Catching his glance, she smiles. His eyes go back to watch her hands. The fingers circling her inner thighs before she turns to unbutton her blouse.

A gentle knock on the door stops her. Probably one of the other girls not knowing she has got a customer.

"I've got a guest," she yells, rolling her eyes.

A new knock on the door. This time harder.

“One moment!” She pushes the ambulance driver in behind the closet while she quickly buttons her blouse and straightens her skirt. She then opens the door ajar, looking out the crack.

Out in the hallway stand four men wearing uniforms. One of them, a man with an eye patch and a nasty scar down his face, steps forward. “Gestapo, Fräulein. Are you Ingrid Norrestrand?” His Danish is not that well pronounced, and Norrestrand is almost incomprehensible, but Alis K understands far too well what he is saying.

“That’s me.”

She has been rattled out. She looks into the one eye the man has left and sees the pain, the torture, the humiliations that she will be put through the next several days. Will she break down? Of course she will. Everybody breaks down...everybody; but she will make sure to hand them Jens as the first. If she is lucky, they might settle for that.

“Alis K, jah?”

She swallows. Well, this might be the end of this life. A strange and heavy sensation fills her chest. She glances at the man’s polished boots. Will they kill her? They regularly execute saboteurs out in Ryvangen in Hellerup. Will they send her away to the concentration camps? You hear some terrible rumors from time to time.

“I’m sorry, I don’t know anybody by that name,” she says quietly.

Why didn’t she bring the pistol when she went for the door? It is hidden in the secret compartment at the bottom of the closet. It might as well be on the moon.

“There must be some kind of mistake. There is no Alis living here.”

But she knows there is no way out of this. The Gestapo need no evidence. Suspicion is more than enough.

41

Poul-Erik is sitting on the quay, looking down into the water. Small, black waves are coming in. The snow is falling around him, landing on his head and shoulders. He trembles a bit. It is not from the cold.

A German freighter is docked further down the quay, only visible as a black shadow in the falling snow. Sweden is so close. Just across Oresund. If the weather is clear, you would be able to see Sweden from here. Now, he can’t even see across the harbor to Amager.

The water is alluring. He is feeling lost, staring at the waves hitting the quay below his feet. It feels like the water is sucking him down. He can feel it in his chest. The pull. The water will be ice cold this time of the year. He can’t swim; he never learned how. It doesn’t matter anyway, with all the clothes he is wearing, he would be dragged down instantly, even if he could swim. The cold would numb his senses; he would feel nothing at all. Drowning is a gentle death, like an embrace or a kiss he has been told. But, wouldn’t you panic being unable to breathe?

He has still got splinters from the chair in his hands. The chair broke as he smashed it at his father again and again. He hasn’t removed the splinters. Hasn’t

even looked at the damaged hand. It might have bled at some point. Now it is throbbing. It hurts to move the hand. So he keeps moving it.

The hate in his father's eyes as he came at him. Poul-Erik knew what would happen next. Didn't fear the pain or the violence, only the humiliation. It was never about punishment, never about parenting. It was about power, and the humiliation had to be complete. There could only be one human being in the apartment: his father. Everybody else was nothing but things he could treat as he pleased. Nobody would ever come to their rescue; they had no value at all. The violence was only to make them understand these simple facts of life. Poul-Erik knew the drill. Had learned not to feel the pain, not to shed his tears.

Only this was as far as it went. Poul-Erik couldn't surrender anymore, couldn't accept the humiliation anymore. He had changed while his father was in Germany. It didn't take long killing him. He didn't even think, he just grabbed the chair and swung it at his father. It hit him at the side of the head, cleanly, and as he went down, Poul-Erik couldn't stop hitting him.

He remembers the expression on his mother's face. Even as he tries not to. She looked like a frightened animal. Like one of the rats down the backyard when the boys went at it with scissors. You could sell rat tails to the pest control—easy money for the boys from the slum. There were always plenty of rats around. Only, he supposed the pest control might have wanted them to kill the rats before cutting off their tails. The terror in his mother's face. He actually saw real tears in her eyes. That finally made him drop the chair, wanting to say something, but he had no voice.

"Out!" she hissed through her tears. "Get out, you filthy creep!"

He remembers the expression on the face of BB's wife as she opened the door. Contempt. Disgust. A child of the slum knows that expression far too well. He is alone. All by himself. Nobody will miss him. He is no soldier in any underground army. He is a killer. A murderer. They are not trying to help him by getting him to Sweden; they just want him gone.

Of course, he'd seen BB and Alis K glance at each other. He thought they would love him for killing all those German soldiers. Instead: *Sweden. Get him away. He is mad. We don't want him anywhere near us.* Borge died tonight. That too was his fault. He should have stayed at his post. If he had done so, Borge would still be alive, while he himself, Poul-Erik the Father Killer, he would be dead, lying in the gutter somewhere with a bullet hole in the back of his head like the rat they thought he was. The strangest thing, though, is that the more he shows his willingness to fight the Germans, the more he shows he is on their side, the more they want to get rid of him. It is like everything he does gets used against him. He can't do well. He is cursed. He wasn't put on this world to do good, he understands that now. He hasn't got the ability.

He is sitting there, quiet and trembling. Hunched over. Grinding his teeth. The cold from the quay stones hurts his legs and buttocks. It is hard to breathe.

The waves are rolling. The giant, black cradling nothing. No pain, no blame, no condemnation, no nothing.

Afterwards the snow keeps on falling.

The taxi pulls over in front of a small hotel in the Copenhagen suburb, Valby. The driver steps out and goes around the taxi to open the door. Grete exits, paying the driver, before entering the hotel.

Johannes gets off his bicycle and places it against the wall a block away from the hotel. His fingers are red and swollen from the cold, but he doesn't notice. Gasping for air, he stares at the hotel entrance. Even before the taxi is pulling away he hurries down the slippery sidewalk. Crashing through the door, not finding Grete in the lobby, he goes straight for the counter.

"Where'd she go?"

"I beg your pardon, sir?" The clerk shows exactly how well he masters that indifferent condescending glance only restaurant waiters and hotel clerks can manage.

"Where'd she go?"

"Who, sir?"

"The woman who just entered!"

"Oh, I see. I can't give you that kind of information, but I can make a telephone call to the room, asking—"

"*No!*" He grabs the clerk by the throat. "I need to know exactly where my wife went!"

43

Einar is sitting on the bed as she enters the hotel room. His black uniform is lying over the back of the chair. His shirt is open. He gesture for her to sit next to him on the bed, smiling with his eyes afire.

Her Einar. It tickles and bubbles inside her. She didn't realize she had never loved anybody else until he suddenly stood there right in front of her no more than a month ago. Sure, she cared for Johannes, she might even love him in some way, but that was nothing like what she felt for Einar. She knew that for sure. It was like they were teenagers again, like it hasn't been fifteen years, like all the time between back then and now was nothing but a blink of an eye.

All of a sudden, he had just been standing there. Right in front of her. Wearing his black uniform. A perfectly normal afternoon at the great square, Kongens Nytorv. The autumn wind stirring the trees. Turning her umbrella inside out. And there he was. "Grete, that's really you?"

Suddenly the wind was inside her, blowing away all kinds of things: reason, sense, order, obligations—blowing it all to pieces. She was lost again, like she had been lost when she was seventeen.

She steps over to the bed. Melted snow drips from her hair as she removes the scarf. Grabbing her by the hips, he pulls her towards him.

44

Room 214. The door is the same as all the other doors in the hallway. Johannes hesitates and pulls out his pistol. A Walther P38 taken from a dead German soldier last year. He looks down the hallway. Nothing. He turns back at the door to room 214.

The white paint is peeling off, and the brass handle could use some polishing. He carefully puts his ear to the door. He is unable to hear anything but his own breathing.

At first.

Then he does hear something. Quite clearly. Two people moaning. A bed squeaking. A woman whining in ecstasy, Grete. Then he is inside the room, bursting right through the door, shattering the frame, roaring like a furious bear.

They are in bed. Grete on her back, the Hipo with a firm grip around her thighs while his huge, hairy ass is pumping away.

Johannes fires the pistol instantly, fires and fires and fires and fires and fires. He keeps pulling the trigger long after the magazine is empty and the pistol just clicks and clicks and clicks.

The giant Hipo officer is sprawled dead on the bed, rolled halfway over to one side, his tongue sticking out.

And Grete...*Grete*...

Johannes gasps for breath.

She has been shot twice in her chest. Small bubbles form in the blood oozing from one of the bullet wounds. Looking at him, she makes no effort to speak.

He stares at the smoking pistol in his own hand and lifts it slowly to the side of his own head. Closing his eyes, crying, he pulls the trigger.

Click.

Followed by a deep sigh from Grete, her eyes go blank; the blood oozing from the wound in her chest stops bubbling.

Johannes drops the pistol; it hits the floor with a distant sound that might as well come from another world.

He turns and leaves.

45

A small fishing boat is pulled up onto the dark beach. It is still snowing, but now with tiny ice cold flakes that sting your face. A group of men rush toward the boat to help pull it out of the water. The waves hit the beach in slow and heavy bursts.

The fisherman speaks Swedish, instantly demanding to be paid. A lot of whispering follows. Pointing at one of the large, darkened massive villas high on the dunes, one of the men runs back, crossing the beach.

The Germans have seized all boats along the coast north of Copenhagen in an attempt to stop the illegal traffic between Denmark and Sweden. Even rowboats and dinghies have been seized. Now you will have to get a boat from one of the lakes or get a Swedish fisherman to risk his life. It is still possible to get over the sound; it's just gotten way more expensive.

"You ready?" Jens asks, holding Johannes by the shoulder. Johannes stares at him. Jens looks away unable to stand the look in his eyes.

"I can't cope," Johannes says. He is so pale, his face seems to glow in the dark. "I'll never be the same again."

Jens spits into the falling snow. "That's war. It won't let anyone get away unscathed. I'm sorry about Grete."

They are hiding behind a four-car garage along with a small group of silent men. Jens recognizes one of the men, Ib from BOPA, standing by himself, cursing under his breath, while he sips from a hip flask. He has got a fresh bandage around his head.

The man who ran back from the fishing boat enters the garden and hurries towards them. "The Swede wants his money before he'll let you folks get aboard."

Everybody pays. Nobody objects. The Swede has got them by the balls. He can even demand more money if he feels like it, and maybe he will later on.

"I don't think I can live with this," Johannes says.

Jens is stomping his feet to keep them warm. "You know what, BB? We've got dark spots on our souls. We have to live with that. War is not about doing what's right. War's about surviving."

"Thank you."

"For what?"

"For getting me to Sweden tonight."

Jens glances at him. "Willy didn't show up as arranged. It's his place on the boat you're getting."

They are silent the next few minutes.

"Do you think something has happened to him?"

"No idea. I'll try to find him. When you get to Landskrona, be sure to contact Astrid at this address." He hands Johannes a piece of paper. "I might go to Sweden myself. But I've got some business I need to take care of first."

"This is it!" A man carrying a German submachine gun in a shoulder strap comes to them. "You need to get down to the boat...now."

Jens gives Johannes's hand a firm squeeze, patting him on the shoulder. "Take care of yourself. I'll come in a few days."

"Thank you," Johannes says, following the man with the submachine gun down to the Swedish fishing boat.

46

Jens walks the city streets as the sun rises. He has been up all night. He is unshaven, tired, and a bit depressed. Lack of sleep always tends to make him depressed. He is cold.

Copenhagen is all dressed in white this morning. The sky is clear, it is going to be a beautiful day, but Jens is not in the mood to appreciate it. He has to get some sleep.

He is thinking of Willy. Why he didn't show up last night as they had arranged. Could he be in trouble? Hell, no. Jens would bet anything that the boy just didn't want to go to Sweden. Why should he? This is where the war is at. There will be no Germans to kill in Sweden. Willy isn't the first desperado kid

Jens has seen in the resistance. They often end up pulling the trigger with the gun inside their own mouths when they can't cope anymore.

A garbage truck pulled by a large, brown horse stops at the sidewalk. As he passes it, the horse lifts its tail, taking a dump.

Crossing the street, he spots his own reflection in the window of a fish shop. He stops, trying to straighten his hair using his comb and a fair amount of spit. His clothes are wrinkled and dirty. He is losing it. It is about time he gets out of this mess. He tightens his tie, trying to get it straight.

He crosses the old square Nytorv, kicking at a pigeon. The snow is heavy and wet, and it sticks to his shoes. He doesn't like to think about what the Gestapo are doing to Alis K at this moment. He is not really feeling sorry for her. She would have killed him yesterday; she was ready to pull the trigger and waste him, and she would have if it hadn't been for BB. Besides that, he is positive that when the torture makes her spill them out, his name will be the first words coming from her mouth.

Should he feel guilty?

No way.

The Sabotage Group BB was his private business. He formed the group aiming to make money on getting the fleeing Jews to Sweden, but the war is ending. It is only a matter of time before the Germans have lost the war. It is time to dispose of Sabotage Group BB.

'Never let your emotions get involved in business,' his daddy used to say, and he had always tried to keep it that way. 'You have got to know when it's time to sell.'

That time is now. He needs to get enough money to start over somewhere far away. Argentina perhaps, or maybe a farm in Africa. One thing is for sure, he is not going back to Magda and the terrible Saeby family. It is all too easy to imagine how that will be with all the brave Saeby men coming home as heroes from the concentration camps. Worse still if one of them died down there. And Jens did what? Why was he one of the few Danish police officers that was not taken away to Kz Buchenwald? Why didn't he try to warn the Saebys if he knew in advance what would happen to them? No, he had better be far, far away when they get back.

'It's not all about selling, my boy; it's even more important how you sell. It might often be wiser to sell bit by bit instead of letting it all go at once.'

He still misses his father. Not the drooling fool in the rocking chair, but his real daddy, like he was before the accident. If he had been alive today...but there is no use thinking like that.

And BB? Well, he was the one getting him to safety in Sweden. You couldn't blame Jens that BB's wife had a lover that happened to be a Hipo officer. He had only told BB because he was forced.

No, he doesn't feel bad about himself. War is war, and this war is the cruelest war in history. All is fair.

He walks the narrow streets to the Daisy Hotel, taking the elevator to the third floor. Knocking on the door to room number 311. Waiting for the "Herein!" before letting himself in.

Steen Langstrup

Award winning Danish author of more than 15 books so far.

Steen Langstrup lives in Copenhagen, Denmark, with his wife and two kids. He has had several works translated and published in foreign languages. His books have been filmed and made into radio plays.

...

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