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Pain Itself

Sample
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Translated from the Danish
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Chapter 1

Friday, 18:01

Peter Horsfeldt nurses the weight of the knife's sixty-three layers of Japanese steel before putting it down on the butcher's block and washing his hands. Everything is as planned. The copper pot shines on top of the big gas cooker. He is waiting for the evening's special guest. Ingredients and utensils have been laid out ready, and Mahler streams from the built-in speakers next to all his pictures. The juice from the roast has filled the groove in the solid slab of wood. He wipes it up. Expectation ripples through his body, and yet he has performed the ritual so many times during his fifty-six years: first, the woman is selected, then comes the approach. Conversations, real-life, or an e-mail correspondence. The date. Almost always at his place. The dinner. And then afterwards. Tonight he wants to surpass himself.

He runs a slender finger along the inside of the pod and the peas tumble into the salad. He is proud of the way he can vary his method. Proud of being able to make the experience so new each and every time. Some of the women remain inside him, others vanish like cheap white wine on a balmy evening in summer. Not that he drinks cheap wine. He strives for the best, and as he looks around the spacious kitchen with its oblique and slanting lines, seeing his range of appliances and his bottles of fine wines, oils and vinegars, he feels at ease. He is away from the cramped and foul-smelling rooms of his childhood home. Peter Horsfeldt is proud that he is here. In this rear building. His elegant home. Here, the traffic on Store Kongensgade cannot be heard, the city's throbbing pulse only faintly discernable. As a boy, all he wanted was to get away from his petty little town in South Jutland. He found contacts and retained them, people who could help him into the right circles. He excels at talking to people, and he has never looked back, concentrating instead on refining his particular taste. Especially his

taste in women. He washes the knife and attends to his final culinary preparations. Everything is good.

Peter Horsfeldt thirsts for sublime experiences. He has yearned so deeply to lose himself in knowledge, taste and greatness, that the thought of ever being sated seems impoverished. How absurd, if there were only a limited portion for him. The more he has taken, the more he has received and the greater his enjoyment. He checks the lamb in the oven. Normally, he takes his time, swathing his women in conversation, food and wine, making the transition ever more brutal. He enjoys the sudden departure from all his many layers of cultivation to the primitive urge that is the evening's very point. Sometimes he is astounded that it all should be so easy. So many women. A few remain so vividly within him he can almost touch their bodies still, and smell their scent of their skin. He may recall the way they laughed, the look in their eye, or a well-worded comment. Or perhaps a scream. These women are his collection, though he may only have been with them for a night. He remembers their features so vividly, and is touched by the peculiar affection he feels for them. And yet his pleasure is shattered should he only think of the few who prove unworthy. Women who speak coarsely, or who chew their food displeasingly. Women who would prefer the inferior, someone more ordinary than he. In these cases, they sit at the table, and the candles burn down. Both conceal their disgust: she at the situation, he at her. Some, however, are so delicately repulsive as to fascinate him. He will not expend the good wines on those who cannot appreciate them. Instead, it amuses him to serve ones that are wholly inappropriate to the food they dine upon. He waxes lyrical of their attributes, encouraging them to put words to hideous disharmony, words that will always fall short. He prods politely and unrelentingly at these women's shortcomings until the distance between them is a chasm into which he may unceremoniously consign them. He wallows in the awkward atmosphere as they plunge.

Peter Horsfeldt wipes the knife clean dexterously in the heavy tea cloth, his mouth twisted slightly in annoyance. Once he has seen

through them, they either leave or sacrifice themselves. Dutifully, they head towards the epilogue, and he allows them to, though without pleasure. Not that he makes short work of it, if it should come to that. Rather, he is patience itself, for they cannot surprise him any longer. One day, though, he will strike the perfect moment with one of them. It will feel like the ring of Bohemian crystal, the slam of the door of a Karmann Ghia or the sobbing of a beautiful woman. He is good at waiting. He is good at knowing when the moment is ripe. This is his metier. No matter whether it is with a camera or a woman in his hand. Or in bed. A person must create such moments, and abandon themselves to them. To the experience.

There have been many. Many women and many experiences. The circumstances have changed. From the eighties in Paris, black on black, nothing ever decadent enough. The modelling career that morphed into something else. Long-limbed, pale women. Drama. Home again. The house here. Making sure to be so interesting that all would come. Endless parties, so many people throughout the years. The rear building is his. Women and men have opened themselves to him, and have been sent away again. He is more private now and invites fewer than before. Sometimes, he will draw the curtains and sit upstairs listening to whoever might be there outside, waiting for them to leave again. He feels secure here.

There is one in particular. A woman he has broken down and recreated, like the house. Done with as he pleased. And most importantly: because *she* wanted it. A woman who understands that what he seeks is what this evening is about, and who is more than flesh, desire and pain. It is a process that requires years and which more than likely will never be complete. Peter Horsfeldt has never touched her. He does not know her real name, only her desires. He can demand of her anything he wants. Others use her on his behalf. It is sufficient for him. She is perfect. Untainted by his hand. But he has her soul, and it is exposed and trembling. He has spent eight years penetrating her body and mind. Words alone have changed her. It is not to be ruined by fucking. She was looking for

something when he found her. She was playful. An open space. Now, her desires and experiences are his without restriction. His word has become her law. But sometimes he fears that she has escaped. He wonders whether he should let her go. Perhaps she has found a man. Perhaps she does as he when on occasion he condescends to something reminiscent of a relationship. Waits. Misses. Yearns. She will return to him. It makes him proud and sorrowful that she has also changed him. Made him more raw. And this evening it will be taken out on a young woman.

He unclenches his fist at the thought of she who is to come. She will be good for him. She is not a stranger, but this will be the first time he has her. He will take and take again, until there is nothing left. It was the surprise of their meeting, the way she looked at him, spoke to him, that made him want her so. He is excited, more than he has been in a long time. He is hungry. For a few intense hours she will belong to him. The thought of sitting opposite her in just a short while makes him smile. He pushes the thought of this unfamiliar lover aside, feeling only moderately guilty.

Peter Horsfeldt pours himself a glass. A lively Charles Heidsieck Brut Reservé that will pair well with the starter. Rather on the amusing side, nothing extravagant. He wants to see if she deserves better first. He tastes. Definitely worth serving. The tingling hint of apricot tells him the champagne is its own, despite lack of vintage. Full of character. He imagines her soft lips, glistening from the shellfish sauté with herbs as she lifts her glass. He hopes she will hold it by the stem in order that the warmth of her fingers should not detract from the wine's finest moment. He imagines her tongue sensing the nuances, the richness of the liquid. When she lowers the fork from her small mouth his eyes will devour her pleasure as it shows in her breathing, he will drink in the reactions of her body and face as, seduced, they crave for more. And he will provide. His own body thrusts against the fabric of his clothes and he rubs himself up against the worktop, the image of her in his mind, but feels only himself against the cold steel. Peter

Horsfeldt takes his glass and goes upstairs, into the bedroom. He pulls off his cashmere jumper, tossing it into a corner and finding a simple, white shirt. The bedroom is cool and clean. The height of the ceiling is not the only reason it reminds him of a cathedral. His hand smooths across the heavy linen on the bed, and he thinks of her body against the crisp, cool sheets. Held tight, pressed down into 600 thread-count Egyptian cotton. The clinical silence of the room will soon be broken. He checks the drawer in which the instruments lie. Everything has been made clean and ready for her.

The roast can look after itself for a while yet. No loose ends. As he empties the glass he touches himself through his trousers. He looks at the clock, wonders if he should switch on the computer and see if *she* might be there, but resists. His excitement will simmer inside him as the evening progresses.

Monday, 06:12

Not a suit. Nothing jazzy. Definitely no tie, thank God. Never again. His time as an advisor has at long last come to an end. His arm pokes around in the wardrobe and produces a pair of expensive, dark blue jeans. His fingers remove the pins from a brand new white shirt, and his hands, slothful in this early hour of morning, unfold it, the white bright in the dimness of the untidy bedroom. All is silent inside the apartment. The fifth floor has never been as still as on this morning, the dawn gradually breaking above the rooftops of Nørrebro. The rear courtyard is as yet a body of black outside the windows.

His fingers form an arrow and thrust through the sleeves towards the perfect opening of the cuff. The first of his hands emerges, accidentally striking the bulletin board, which becomes a pendulum, swinging from side to side with rustling notes and reminders until coming to a halt. He buttons the shirt and looks beyond the tabloid's front-page glee at a conviction. *Rape*. He recalls the feeling of pride over the six-year sentence, the debate

that had gone on before and after. And the tiny sliver of shame at having furthered his own career on the back of other people's misfortune. It had been easy, convincing the investigator to make use of his services when they had been without a clue. He can still taste the fumes of the dry-cleaned linen that stuck in his throat and skin as the hours ticked away beside a worn-out hospital bed in conversation with a broken, tattooed man who refused to witness against the lover who had beaten him up. *His* words changed that decision. They remembered him. That is why they have called, and it is why he is starting this morning. He pulls his trousers up his long, well-formed legs, dark hairs thinning out towards the thighs, contours drawn on muscle. His shirt falls into place, he zips his trousers and feeds the leather belt through the loops. He stares critically at his twenty-nine-year-old frame in the mirror. The shirt is too narrow, too smart for his new place of work, but it suits him. His unruly dark curls are still wet after his shower. They could do with a trim. But there is nothing wrong with the rest of him. He inhales deeply, holding his breath and releasing audibly. Three times.

'I'm good. I'm strong. I create positive change around me. And I can fucking do this.'

He nearly slips on Chet Baker, who is on the floor among the evening's LPs of eighties new wave, a collection of soul and a couple of singles. He wriggles into his leather jacket and edges out through the door into the weary stairwell with its worn-down stairs.

The reverberating slam of the door follows psychologist Mickey Lierbermann all the way down to the bottom.

1982

The girl is sitting on the sofa in the afternoon sun. She is breathing quietly, making the apartment still. She walks home from school on her own. Mummy isn't back yet. She likes being alone. She pretends it all belongs to her. She looks in the drawers and cupboards,

remembering to put everything back so Mummy cannot see where she has been. *It's best.*

She listens. To those at play, voices in the courtyard. Cars in the street. When she concentrates hard, she hears a rushing sound inside her. The cat jumps up into her lap and curls into a soft, warm ball of vibrations. She buries her fingers in its fur and feels how it purrs even more.

She sees Camilla's pink pencil case in her mind's eye. Her fingers sneaking a glittery eraser from inside. It was so fine, and smelled so nice and strongly of apples. And Camilla has so many. No one saw her, but Camilla became *hysterical*. The others came to comfort her. She stood with them. Until they all looked at her and she felt her cheeks grow warm. *No, she hadn't stolen from stupid Camilla!*

The classroom door slammed behind her and she hoped it had frightened them. She becomes angry again when she thinks about it. She doesn't like it when inside her gets dark and tight and hot. She feels she can hardly breathe. Sometimes she sits quite still until it goes away. But other times she can't, and then she goes herself. If it got bigger it would definitely be *bad*. When Mummy tells her off, she imagines the black and red like a lump in her body. She keeps it to herself. Otherwise, they would be angry at the same time, and that wouldn't be good.

She can smell the apples in her palm. She looks down at the cat. It can't sense how she is feeling. It lies so safe and sound in her lap, completely at ease. So soft.

She thinks about putting her hands around its throat. Or pressing the eraser into its mouth. She can stop its purring against her thigh. It is a brand new, sparkling thought. For a brief moment, the feeling is a light that flares inside her, filling her up.

Her hands are sticky in the fur, and she gasps for breath.

Chapter 2

Monday, 07:10

Mickey turns on the music in his pocket and cycles along the City Lakes from Nørrebro to Police Headquarters between Central Station and Kalvebod Brygge. The city is beginning to stir and venture out to work. He thinks of mornings in summer when he came the other way. Happy and drunk. Passing this exact spot, or sitting in a park to people-watch in his blissful state of intoxication as the light came, and with it warmth. Allowing himself to be seen as the sun rose and the dew departed from the air against his skin. Sometimes he was not even drunk. Now the remains of winter pinch at his nose, clearing his head before releasing their grip on Copenhagen. Shadows of naked chestnut trees flicker around him on the path.

He glances at the song title as he pedals. With over five thousand songs on the small device, the occasional title vanishes from memory. He prefers the peace of morning that lingers upon the blue-grey oblongs of water at this time of the year to the sunshine parade of new relationships that will soon be presented on the paths. The times he has done so himself were nothing but empty gestures. Something expected. A coffee-shop breakfast with whoever you had slept with. Promenading as an element in the ritual of dating. Measuring each other in conversation, mirroring one's couplehood in others walking the same route. He doesn't do it now. It cannot give him what he cannot do without. It is never enough. Not quite.

He tightens his scarf, as though the wool alone could expel the cold from against his throat. His legs pump at the pedals as his mind toys with snippets of knowledge. Pop culture, management theory, and the murder cases he reads in paperbacks in the evenings, that make him feel like a new voyager into the pathless land of sick human minds. A dead body, or one mutilated, is a

tangible thing that can recalibrate all neuroses. There are the steps that have led two people to a place, always a who and a wherefore. A logic to be followed.

The head of the Psychology Support Unit does not resemble the efficient-looking men and women Mickey noted on his way through the imposing building after the interview. Flemming Mogenstrup, a small, stocky man with untidy hair, somewhere in his mid-fifties, opened a hatch for him. Words about leadership, roles in power relationships, trauma processing and the role of the police in an increasingly complex society were laid on a plate. It had been sufficient.

At the weekend, the lads had sat in a bar and laughed about his new job. *Rigspolitiet*, Denmark's national police force, was bound to crumble once he stepped through its doors. It had been a good night out.

The traffic has increased now. Central Station is behind him and he turns down Bernstorffsgade. The smog-coloured sandstone and marble of the square looms up into the rising sun ahead of him and he feels a slight sense of awe. The building looks like a clenched fist. He parks his bike.

Through the round courtyard, entrance G, up the stone staircase in the rotunda to Mogenstrup's messy office. They chat among removal boxes and piles of documents. The coffee cup is comfortingly warm in Mickey's hands. The cold of outside exits from the backs of his hands and Mogenstrup's eyes come to rest upon him. A row of wide, regular teeth appears behind the beard, and he grunts pensively.

'How many cups a day? Four?'

'At least.'

'It's really only a prop, isn't it? Something to cling to. I'd hate to think how many cups I've brewed on the verge of a breakdown.'

Mickey instinctively stops stirring and gulps a mouthful. He scalds his tongue only slightly, but feels immediately how its surface roughens. At first, Mogenstrup looks serious, but then his face

cracks into a smile amid a deep rumble of laughter. The room falls silent again. As though the piles of work absorb all sound.

‘What did you do, exactly, in your last job?’

‘I was an advisor. I worked in change management.’

It was a parenthesis. It has not defined him. This is what he wants.

‘Well, you’ll love it here. It’s nothing but change and lots of management.’

Mickey laughs politely as required.

‘You made something of an impact with that case of yours, I must say. A good job of work.’

‘Thanks.’

‘Where are you from, anyway?’

The question crops up every time in new surroundings. Mickey looks down at his shoes.

‘Aarhus, but I’ve lived over here for nine years.’

‘What about the German surname?’

‘It’s not German, it’s Yiddish. Actually, I’ve no idea where the family’s from. But my father grew up in West Jutland.’

He puts the cup down on the desk, intending it to be a sign. Mogenstrup looks like he wants to delve. But Mickey has no answers for him.

‘Interesting. We try to be an inclusive organisation with diversity.’

‘You have to say that, don’t you? It’s in the times. I’m a bit divided myself. Monoculture has its benefits, diversity has others.’

‘Profound thinking for your first day on the job, before the birds are even up. All right.’

Mogenstrup looks pleased. Mickey takes a deep breath, awaiting what comes next. His nostrils flare. A wry smile appears on his face, his coarsened tongue remaining behind his teeth. He observes the rather shabby suit fall meticulously into place as Mogenstrup heaves himself upright.

‘Shall we? Bring your tackle with you. You probably won’t be back here today.’

‘Isn’t this where I’ll be?’

The chief psychologist shakes his head vigorously and waves a dismissive hand.

‘No, we’ve got something much better. I’ve got big plans for you.’

Shadows and light from the many doorways and windows divide sharply along the length of the endless corridor. Their footsteps echo as they walk.

‘Mostly, we’re used in debriefing. When people are in crisis. But we can be put to work anywhere. That’s where you enter the picture.’

Mickey nods. His tongue feels like a cat’s inside his mouth. Mogenstrup walks on through a heavy green door and up a flight of stairs. Mickey follows. They stop in the rotunda on the second floor. The acoustics are different in the round passage. More intimate.

‘You’re going to be with the Homicide Unit for a week or two. It’ll give you a sense of what they do. Talk to them, go out with them on the job. Be discreet. The whole department’s been feeling the squeeze, what with the new structure and the restoration work going on. They’re all a bit on edge. But now’s the time we can make a difference for them. Find their soft spots.’

Hit the ground running. Mickey feels like he’s cast to the lions. But he can do this.

‘Okay. I know a couple of them, so that’s fine by me.’

‘Department A also deals with violent crime, arson, vice, political stuff and a lot more besides. Murders aren’t that frequent. Bloody brilliant, they are.’

‘Any ideas about how to get a foot in?’

Not that Mickey needs advice, but asking will make Mogenstrup feel he can help him along. It’s important. Mogenstrup halts and steps aside, nodding to a short-haired, middle-aged woman in a skirt suit. She apports them a fleeting smile as her heels click by, the sound gradually merging with the murmur of

people arriving into the edifice to begin the day's work. Mogenstrup lowers his voice, which acquires an insistent, rusty tone.

'Listen and observe. Compare what they say with what you see. Assess how things work. You know all about leadership, conflict management and all that.'

His disappointment at not being rid of his advisory role remains beneath his shirt. Mickey is perspiring slightly. The perfume is turning pungent, he senses as the situation sinks in. His way in, his way on. There is a path. He must follow.

'But it's still me you answer to. And you're to come by my office and fill me in on how things are going, understood?'

'Of course.'

'Help me turn them into even better cops. That's it, okay?'

Mickey has his own thoughts about it as they step inside.

Wednesday, 14:00

The group are exuberant, four desks away. Maybe he should go over. Mickey tries to avoid looking like he's stealing glances at them. He attends to some notes. He smooths away the chip in his vanity. He looks like someone doing something. The desk is the one nobody else wants, next to the door. And he has taken his place there, treating it as a haven. But it is hard to maintain focus when the others are celebrating.

The place is so different from when he was here last. Everything looser and a bit more stressful at the same time. Before, the department was a kaleidoscope. Now he can see the constituent parts and the individuals that make up the mechanism. Gone are the illogical transitions between functions and offices. From where he sits, he can see most of what goes on. The new conference rooms along one side, work stations in the middle. Sofa areas no one really uses. They could have gone over there, but instead they stand by an island of desks, seeming so very pleased with themselves. The tall windows along the other wall allow cascades of

light to pour inside from the deep sills and illuminate them all. He takes his time observing. They are all too busy to take notice of him. Observation is always easier when the observer is on the periphery. And there is so much to see. One thing is their physical attributes: strong, healthy bodies, tight as coils, ready to do work of importance. The uniforms, the way they walk. The way they smell. Another thing is their minds: analytic and quick. The way they are at once the keenest in their field and yet sound so down to earth when they speak. Magnificent specimens with the coarsest of voices. He could listen to them for hours without tiring. So many men and women, new impulses, new knowledge, new everything. He absorbs them all. Discreetly. And is enthralled, electric, when eventually he leaves the building and hits the streets at the end of his day.

He feels they have accepted him. More or less. The first early morning conference was awkward. No one knew he was coming. The homicide chief welcomed him in to his spacious office with its view of the Tivoli Gardens, the only place that had yet to be given a whiteover. A peaceful place, Mickey imagined. Not like now, with chattering voices and laughter, telephones ringing, doors opening and shutting.

The police reform has ploughed its way through the department, and yet its upheavals have gone down with relative ease. Most work their way through the frustrations. A number complain half-heartedly to him, the outsider appealing to confidence. Two familiar coping mechanisms.

She stands in the middle. The sheen of her hair a copper halo. She is smiling and unused to being in the centre, and yet it becomes her. She is one of those who have approached him with reservations about all that has changed, and he has listened and asked questions. He has discovered that what really bothers Gry Erichsen is that the amount of unimportant information has become greater now. Mickey likes the way she is so completely her own person. He sees her tall, athletic figure, her broad shoulders and clear eyes, and he feels good about her and rather aroused. He

ignores the feeling, but smiles, is available and marks his presence in respect of the group whenever possible. He familiarises himself with the department's tasks and its personalities in small, measured inquires without giving rise to suspicion. He listens in on the sly as cases are discussed and awaits his chance.

He senses how much he wants to be a part of them.

People here are so different from at the advisory office. Not so much talk, more practical, more graft. They are celebrating something they have done well. That must be it.

The coffee is hot and bitter in the cup in front of him. He no longer turns his nose up, but drinks instead. His finger turns down the corner of the page. An assessment of the Rigspolitiet's working environment, an important point concerning noise abatement that he wishes to apply. Personally, he can shut out anything if needs be.

The group four desks away attracts not only his own attention, but that of others too. Mickey puts down his papers and looks away from Gry at the two thickset men and the more slender one who are talking with such vigour. They slap her on the back. One of the men, a firm, fair-haired statue of muscle and dimples in tight jeans and a green checked shirt, laughs heartily. His large hand moves from her shoulder and forms a relaxed fist at his hip. Mickey can see the blond hairs of his strong forearms catching the light, vanishing into the casually hitched-up sleeves of his shirt as his arms move easily from the axis of his broad shoulders. Playful strength, residing in the body of an adult male. Bo Harris, detective sergeant, turns his head slightly and a dark blue, concentrated gaze falls upon Mickey, whose eyes dart away. *Damn it.*

He tosses the papers onto the desk and walks over, fully aware that he cannot take the liberty of slapping anyone on the back inside this room. Certainly not the man who now fills a glass with Gammel Dansk and hands it to him, his eyes fixed on him.

'What are we celebrating?'

'We've got him charged. The bastard from Damhus Pond.'

He knocks back the liquor in one, and his smile on account of their pleasure becomes a grimace at the bitter taste. He has heard

about the case. It reminds him a bit of the one he was on, though without the gay couple, an internal dispute ending in a killing.

‘Congratulations.’

The forty-one-year-old detective puts Mickey in the picture. He tells him how Gry saw a link and wrapped it up.

‘It’s open and shut now, Gry. The public prosecutor’s got it fucking gift-wrapped.’

‘Do you think so?’

‘The guy’s charged, so we’ll see, won’t we?’

The sparkle of her eyes in this testosterone semicircle tells him she knows it to be true. Mickey likes the way she underplays it regardless.

The group disperses. Harris smiles and sticks his chin out.

‘You got enough to be getting on with, Liebermann? Or do you fancy a bit more action?’

‘I’m okay. But I’d like to come along if you’re on your way out. It’d be nice to do something else. See you in your natural habitat.’

Harris smiles with a grunt. His attempt to strike a chord has fallen on good soil.

‘How about now? I’m off to see a man about a corpse. You can come with me.’

Harris seems so relaxed about the task ahead of him. It is what makes the man so good at what he does. He is not overwhelmed like Mickey. *Of course he’ll go with him.* He won’t get anything else done today, anyway.

‘It’s not going to help you much sitting around here. You need to get out there, don’t you? It’ll be nice, you’ll see, and I promise to behave myself. But I’m driving. You’ve been drinking.’

He breaks into a laugh that makes Mickey laugh with him, and the rest of the department look up at them.

‘And you haven’t?’

‘Wouldn’t dream of it.’

Harris says no more, but smiles wryly in Gry’s direction as he moves lithely towards the door. He waits patiently as Mickey logs

off his computer, picks up his jacket and joins him. Inside the leather and metal interior of the car, Bo Harris looks at him. He is serious now.

'I've been on the wagon for a year now, so I have to look the other way when it comes to traditions here. There's always a dram when someone gets charged. Just not for me.'

'Well done. Where are we going?'

It feels better to shift the conversation to what lies ahead.

'Suicide. A photographer working for *La Semaine*. Girlfriend found him, he's been dead a while. We've had someone out there take a look, and he reckons there's something not right about it.'

Harris explains as he drives. About Department A taking on more than just killings in order to ease the pressure on other units. In times of change everyone must lend a hand. They are nearing Christiansborg, the seat of the parliament. Mickey feels nauseous, though Harris's driving is steady. The sun glares in his eyes. Harris is concentrated. The rush hour approaches.

'Who is he, anyway? The dead guy?'

'Peter Horsfeldt. Ring any bells?'

'Yes.'

1989

Nordhavn Station is cold and windswept on this evening in autumn. The S-train platform hangs in limbo, suspended in the air and without shelter. Like a bridge from the Øresund sound to the city. From the posher Østerbro to the shabby concrete blocks where the girl lives.

She shivers on the bench in her painted motorcycle jacket and scrapes her army boots across the flagstones of the platform. Like a frightened little elf in a tatty tortoise shell. She looks out at the Sound, the water lashing in the harbour below and against Langelinie's abandoned skeletons of warehouses in the distance. On the opposite side of the platform is a large, dark space filled

with overgrown rubble. The few odd lights shining from rooms in the rented flats frame the rectangle. The platform is deserted apart from herself and Mum's boyfriend, who stands slightly removed, smoking at an angle.

They have been to the cinema, all three of them together, but Mum and Ole had a row. Mum has gone and now she and Ole stand silently in the cold and are in no hurry to return to the warmth of home. They have taken the wrong train and are waiting for another. The S-trains are infrequent now. The next one in their direction doesn't even stop.

She likes Ole, and the things about him. His laughter. The way his legs carry him. The angle of his hands thrust into his pockets. His eyes and the lines around them. Most of the time he is good at making Mum happy. So things have been fine for a long time. But this will change now. She senses it. The way it always changes. To begin with, they fall for the silly things Mum does, her green eyes and infectious laughter. She is good at finding them, the men. But when she starts to row with them it doesn't take long before they're gone again.

On their way to the station he said it wasn't always fun to be with her mother. The girl knows this. For when Mum drinks, things become complicated. And Ole has done his best to make them easier, but now he is tiring of it. He is going to tell her when they get home. The arch of his back makes it look like he is carrying the weight of the world on his shoulders. Soon they will be on their own again in the flat, just the two of them. The nights will be long and drunken. Mum will wake her up to talk, cry and shout at her, and she won't be able to stay awake at school. The girl has been hoping Ole was one of those who would stay. Just a bit longer. Mum, too, has most likely sensed that Ole is thinking of leaving.

It's your fault. I've seen the way you look at him, you little cow. Why do you always have to ruin things? You can't begrudge me a bit of happiness, can you? Don't you look at me like that. Get out of my sight!

The outburst and the slap in the face had come suddenly while they were watching television. Ole had been out and the girl was so

engrossed in Friday's entertainment programmes that she had forgotten to keep an eye on how much Mum had been drinking. And then it happened. Only a single slap, but so hard it knocked her against the corner of the coffee table and onto the floor. She could see the light from the television flickering on the floorboards, until the shadow underneath the sofa became a bar of black. Beyond it, right at the back by the wall, lights sparkled in the dark. Pretty lights. The film went on. The little sparks danced in time to the television and the pain inside her head. She lay there for a long time and wondered what it was. And then she realised. Bottles. She said nothing, but gathered them together after a while before going to her room, listening to records and staring up at the concrete ceiling. Thinking. Feeling the lump in her throat get bigger. Her head rang metallic as the taste in her mouth, long after the pain had stopped. The blow had opened something up.

'Ole?'

The girl got up from the bench and went over to him.

'I'm sorry. Everything's so stupid. Can't you stay with us a bit longer?'

Ole flicks away the end of his cigarette, a little orange firework in the dark. He shivers.

'It's not your fault, love. But I have to think of what's good for me, don't I? It's not as if we're a proper family, is it? We just pretend.'

She is freezing to the bone. She doesn't want to understand. She doesn't know what a *proper family* is. But this nearly feels like one. She needs a hug. Someone who is good to her.

'Come here. Are you cold? It's all those holes in your clothes, I shouldn't wonder.'

Ole opens his arms and smooths his hand over her head. It feels so nice to be close to him. It is the first time she is so close to a man. The smell and the feeling of it fill her up inside. It feels right. She closes her eyes tight, as tight as can be, and absorbs the feeling of him into her body. Her trembling, adolescent frame reaches only to his chest. She puts her thin arms around him, and

her hands inside his pockets, as though she might keep the moment by holding on to him. As though she could make an impression of herself in his body, making him forget what Mum is like. Why does he have to go?

‘Come on, love. We’ll go home now. I’ll put it to her nicely, but it’s over. It’ll be all right. Do you hear me? You can’t ...’

He smells good. She can feel his muscles and can almost hear his heart through his sweater. The feeling of him, of him being there, living and breathing, makes her quiver inside. It’s as though he makes something melt within her by being so close. So precious, so close, so divine. She snuggles up to him, ravenously.

‘That’ll do. You’re warmer now, surely?’ His voice has changed, his body has become tense, but she won’t let go. He has to stay. Stay with her mum and with her. *Forever.*

‘I’m so fond of you, Ole. I’ll be good, I promise.’

She opens her eyes slowly and looks up at him. But he doesn’t look nice anymore.

‘What are you playing at? STOP it!’

He glances around. They are still on their own. But then the tracks are illuminated, the stillness is broken as the S-train approaches. She doesn’t want to go home. Ole is angry with her now. And she doesn’t know why. It had been so nice just a moment ago. Like it always should be.

‘Don’t go, Ole.’

She clings to him. As though life depended on it.

‘I told you, let go of me!’

Ole wrestles free and pushes her away. The cold tightens around her again. She steps back up to him, wanting the feeling to return. She feels his strength. The way he struggles, muscles tensing and releasing, until he falls backwards with a cry. Away from her, over the edge, onto the tracks. Her eyes release his gaze. She is blinded by the lights of the train as it squeals and rumbles up to the platform. Too fast. Too loud.

The iron brakes and the sound of Ole’s voice follow her as she runs up the stairs and out onto the concourse. She hears

someone scream for help, the sound of people running. But only the feeling of standing with him remains inside her all the way home. She will tell Mum that Ole went off with some friends and that she took the bus home. She goes through her lines as she walks. Her voice is calm.

Wednesday, 16:19

The constable seems young and unsure of himself as he puts them in the picture on their way through the deep courtyard at the rear. Perhaps Bo Harris was the same way a long time ago. But now he is angry.

‘It sounds to me like it might have been better if you hadn’t let them go in at all, yeah?’

Mickey only half-listens to the excuses. He studies the polished brass nameplates in the gateway, sees the painstakingly restored yellow buildings that seem almost to make the tarmac shimmer. He feels a twinge of annoyance at never having been among the select few who really knew the man. Or merely discussed important issues, lubricated by expensive wines. Horsfeldt’s parties sounded like symposiums where taste and intellect were two sides of the same coin. Mickey thinks about Jonas, who still speaks of the evening he spent in the rear building in front of them. For Mickey, Peter Horsfeldt is a man he has read about. A man others have pointed out to him in town. A tall, eminently clad figure. The tousled, silvery hair a conscious counterpoint to the expensive and perfectly crumpled suits. Always in exclusive company. He rearranged Mickey’s way of thinking with his photographs. Horsfeldt’s portraits in the magazine could be elegantly staged presentations of powerful individuals, or fleeting, precisely captured images of the creative elite to which Horsfeldt himself belonged. None of it matters any more. The man has put an end to his life. People are at work inside the house. Low voices

and the sound of heavy shoes can be heard in the spacious rooms, sounds carried outside to them.

‘Right, lads, we’re here. And woe betide anyone who’s had his mitts in the wrong place.’

Harris calls through the open door and walks in. A bear of a paramedic lumbers towards them. He looks wrong in such surroundings.

‘We’ve been careful. It’s a suicide, that’s all. If you don’t get in our way, we’ll not disturb anything. The medic needs to be getting on, so we’ll be taking him with us now.’

They go through the high-ceilinged passage of the hallway. Mickey recognises several of the artists whose works adorn the walls. Photos mostly, but also graphic art. He is impressed by the amount and the quality. A number of contemporary works, fine lines and vibrant colours, set off by older, more subdued pieces. A handsome young man with broad shoulders and angular features sharing a cigarette with a woman in an alley. Both have their hair drawn back, both are in dinner jackets. Grainy, monochrome, sexy. Helmut Newton. The few doors along the hall are closed, only that of the study stands ajar. He is afforded a glimpse of a desk: untidy piles of papers, newspaper cuttings, empty wine glasses and filled ashtrays. Remains of a life. He takes a deep breath. Sickly, rotten, wrong. *Death.*

‘He’s been dead a couple of days, maybe more. Upstairs.’

The staircase up to the first floor is open and painted white. The stairs have footprints on them from large-sized safety shoes. The smell becomes more pungent with every step. The room is dark except for a chink in the long velvet curtains that allows light to cut across the floor, the bed and the wall. It means they can see the sloping ceiling and the wooden beams. Mickey’s eyes adjust to the light. But not to the sight in front of him.

Two men, the second paramedic and the medic himself, look up at them. A third figure, covered in blood, has its face turned upwards to the shafts of light that have entered from the afternoon. Peter Horsfeldt looks like he is being consumed by his bed. He is

on his back and naked. His stomach is green, framed in blue-black lines. The man in the photo. In colour. A yellow hand, partially severed, points across the bed to an upturned wine glass on the floor. The other is at his crotch. His penis is red and rust-coloured with blood from the wrist that rests upon his pelvic bone. His eyes are open, but strangely askew. Mickey feels like they are watching him. His white hair is plastered to his scalp. The face is sunken, skin brown and as thin as paper. It is not like a film, is all Mickey can think.

‘Well, as you can see, he seems to have cut his wrists and lain down on the bed to die.’

Harris doesn’t look at the doctor. He looks around the untidy bedroom. He crouches briefly by the bed, staring at the body. He makes Mickey feel that everything will be all right. Eventually.

‘You don’t say. What did he cut himself with?’

‘He’s probably lying on it. A razor blade’s only small.’

The medic puts on his mac. His eyes pass from Harris to Mickey.

‘If you’re going to be sick, the bathroom’s past the stairs on your left.’

Mickey shakes his head, but accepts a plastic bag from the bear. Harris and the doctor confer in low voices as the paramedics make ready to carry Horsfeldt down the stairs and away. The young constable tries not to get in the way, and nearly succeeds. Mickey registers the surroundings. Dried blood on the floorboards and the white sheets. The light seeping in through the curtains. The smell of food and death in the enormous room. A large picture next to the bed of a woman bound and in pain. He can hear music coming from the lounge, a couple of doors away. The song comes to an end, only to begin again. First bassoons, then strings fading in, a crisp baritone. An underscore beneath the metallic clatter of the trolley unfolding, the crackling plastic of the body bag. It seems some people need a soundtrack even in death. He is shocked by how small a man’s life can be when it’s over and the only thing left behind is a dent in a mattress and blood. The objects one happens

to have accumulated. Mickey turns away. He senses what remains of Horsfeldt inside the house. A soul pummelling against a veneer of nicotine, cooking fumes and spices covering the walls.

He focuses on the song in the lounge, the empty bottle and the champagne cork in the doorway. Props, in a life now ended.

Bo Harris looks at Mickey.

‘Are you okay?’

‘I’m all right. Thanks.’

The policeman’s eyes smile and he nods almost imperceptibly.

‘Well done. You weren’t prepared. The first time’s always rough, but ...’

Something that sounds like a final rattle of breath escapes from the distorted mouth. The sudden discharge of blood and rotten bodily fluids that slops from the gaping, meticulous incision along the length of the corpse’s back makes them turn towards the bed and causes the paramedics to halt the movement of body to trolley before returning it to the mattress. Peter Horsfeldt’s eyes are more open now, and Mickey cannot see any razor blade in the bloody, stinking mess. Bile rises in his throat. He suppresses it. Harris shouts, so loudly his voice reverberates around the courtyard outside, to the blue square of sky above the rooftops.

‘Out! Everyone out, for Christ’s sake!’

The doctor and the paramedics are propelled down the stairs by the sheer velocity of his vocals and told to wait outside in the street. The body remains on the stretcher in the bedroom. Harris and Mickey stand and wait on the step. He says nothing, grateful to be outside in the air. The man beside him is consumed with rage. Transparent rage that surrounds him and cannot be penetrated. It is best to let it die down of its own accord. Harris clenches his fist, draws back his hand, then hesitates before delivering a swift punch to the neighbour’s doorframe. They stand in silence outside the half-open door of Horsfeldt’s home. The courtyard eventually becomes still enough for the music from the lounge to be heard faintly, yet distinctly, drifting outside to where they stand.

'FUCK! The bloody idiots, they'll have messed everything up. How are we supposed to find anything now? That's no fucking suicide in there, I'll tell you that much. And what IS that shite, anyway?'

'It's Bobby Darin, *The Days of Wine and Roses*.'

Mickey sounds certain, his voice oddly comforting. Harris nods in surprise, curt and acknowledging. Everything is quiet. Between them, and among the houses. The lyrics emerge.

*... the golden smile that introduced me to
the days of wine and roses
... and you.*

Translated from the Danish
by Martin Aitken

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