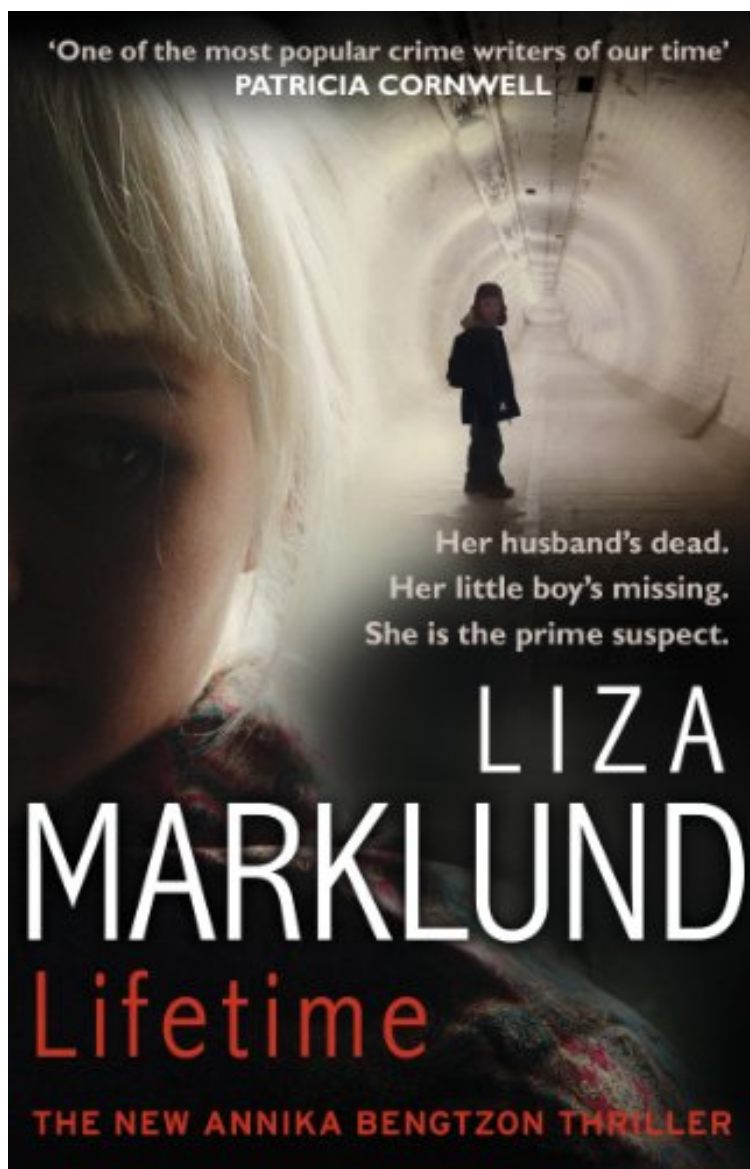


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# Lifetime



*Par Liza Marklund*  
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## Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurThe most famous police officer in Sweden is found murdered in his bed. His four-year-old son is missing. His wife is suspected of killing both of them. No one believes her when she says she is innocent.No one except for news reporter Annika Bengtzon. Her personal life in turmoil, she turns all her energies to her work, investigating the life of the murdered man.But if his wife is innocent, where is their son? And will the truth be uncovered in time to find himbefore its too late?ExtraitLifetime THURSDAY, JUNE 3 The call went out at 0321. It was sent from the regional communication center to all patrol cars in the center of Stockholm and was short and lacking in detail: Control to all units, report of shots fired on Bondegatan. Nothing more. No house number, no information about casualties or who made the call. Even

so, Nina felt her stomach clench in a way she didnt quite understand. Bondegatans a long street, there must be a thousand people living there. She saw Andersson in the passenger seat reach for the radio, and she quickly grabbed the mouthpiece of the S80 system and pressed the transmit button on its left-hand side while at the same time turning up onto Renstiernas gata. Patrol 1617 here, she answered. Were one block away. Have you got a house number? Andersson let out a theatrical sigh and looked demonstratively out of the side window of the police car. Nina glanced at him as the car rolled toward Bondegatan. Okay, sulk if you want to. Control to 1617, the operator said over the radio. Youre the closest unit. Is that you, Hoffman? Over. The number of the patrol car was linked to the number on her police badge. One of the routines before each shift started was to feed the cars registration number and your badge number into the Central Operations Planning System, handily abbreviated to COPS. This meant that the operator in the communication center could always see who was in which vehicle. Affirmative, she said. Turning in to Bondegatan now... How does it look? Over. She stopped the car and looked up at the heavy stone buildings on either side of the street. The dawn light hadnt reached between the buildings yet, and she squinted as she tried to make out shapes in the gloom. There were lights on in one top-floor flat on the right-hand side, but otherwise everything was dark. It was evidently a street-cleaning night, no parking allowed, which made the street look particularly empty and abandoned. One rusty Peugeot stood alone, a parking ticket on its windscreen, halfway down toward Nytorrgsgatan. No visible activity, as far as I can tell. What number was it, over? The operator gave her the address and she went completely cold. Thats Julias number, thats where Julia and David live. And hes got a flat on Sder, Nina! God, itll be nice to get away from this corridor! Dont just take him because of his flat, Julia... Take a look, 1617, approach with caution... She wound down all the cars windows to make it easier to hear any sounds from the street, put the car in gear, turned off the headlights, and drove slowly down the familiar street. Andersson had perked up and was leaning forward intently. Do you reckon its anything, then? he asked. I hope to God it isnt anything! She stopped outside the door and switched off the engine, then leaned forward to peer up at the gray cement faade. There was a light on in a window on the second floor. Well have to assume the situation is dangerous, she said tersely and grabbed the radio again. Patrol 1617 here. Were in position, and it looks like there are people awake in the building. Should we wait for 9070, over? Patrol 9070 is still in Djursholm, the operator said, referring to the operational command vehicle. The Nobel murderer? Andersson wondered, and Nina gestured to him to be quiet. Are there any other cars in the area? Or the armed response unit? Over, she asked over the radio. Were switching frequency, the operator said. All concerned, switching to zero-six. That whole Nobel business was quite a story, Andersson said. Did you hear theyve caught the bastard? Silence spread through the car, and Nina could feel her bulletproof vest rubbing at the base of her spine. Andersson squirmed restlessly in his seat and peered up at the building. This could very easily be a false alarm, he said. Oh, dear God, let it be a false alarm! The radio crackled, now on the designated frequency. Okay, has everyone switched? Come in, 1617. She pressed the transmit button again, feeling her tongue stick to the roof of her dry mouth as she clung desperately, anxiously, to the procedures and routines. Zero-six, were here. Over. The others responded as well, two patrols from the city center and one from the county force. The armed response unit isnt available, the operator said. Patrol 9070 is on its way. Hoffman, you have operational command until the command unit gets there. We need a considered response, hold some units back. Well form a ring around the location, get cars in place. All units to approach in silence. At that moment a patrol car swung into Bondegatan from the other direction. It stopped one block away, the headlights going out as the engine was switched off. Nina opened the car door and stepped out, her heavy boots echoing in the street. She pressed her earpiece tightly into her left ear as she opened the boot of the car. Shield and baton, she said to Andersson, as she tuned in to frequency zero-six on the handheld radio. She saw two policemen get out of the patrol car over at the next block. Is that you over there, 1980? she said quietly into the speaker microphone on her right shoulder. Affirmative, one of the officers replied, raising his hand. Youre coming in with us, she said. She ordered the other patrols to take up positions at opposite corners of a square to ensure they had all lines of sight covered, one at the corner of Sknegatan and Sdermannagatan, the other over on stgtagatan. Andersson was rummaging around among the bandages, fire extinguishers, shovels, flares, lamp, antiseptic gel, cordon tape, warning triangles, files full of forms, and all the other clutter that was stuffed into the boot of the car. Patrol 1617 to Control, she said over the radio. Do you have a name for the person who called in? Over. A short silence. Erlandsson, Gunnar, second floor. She looked up at the faade of the 1960s block, with its square picture windows, and noted a light on in a kitchen on the second floor, behind a red-and-white-checked curtain. Hes still up. Were going in. The other officers came over and introduced themselves as Sundstrm

and Landn. She nodded curtly and tapped in the entry code on the keypad beside the door. None of the others reacted to the fact that she knew what it was. She stepped through the door, turning the volume on the radio down to barely audible. Her colleagues filed in silently behind her. Andersson, who was bringing up the rear, wedged the door open wide so that they could retreat to the street quickly if need be. The stairwell was dark, deserted. The only source of light came from the lift, seeping through the oblong glass window in the metal door. Is there a courtyard? Landn asked quietly. Behind the lift, Nina whispered. The door on the right leads to the cellar. Landn and Sundstrm each checked a door. Both were locked. Open the lift door, she said to Andersson. The officer wedged the door open so no one would be able to use the lift, then stopped by the stairs and awaited her order. She could feel panic thudding at the back of her head and took refuge in the rulebook to conquer it. Make an initial evaluation of the position. Secure the stairwell. Speak to the man who made the call and find out where the suspected shooting occurred. Okay, lets take a look! she said, heading quickly and carefully up the stairs, floor by floor. Andersson followed her, keeping one flight of stairs below her the whole time. The stairwell was gloomy. Her movements were making her clothes rustle in the silence.

There was a smell of cleaning fluid. Behind the closed doors she could sense the presence of other people without actually hearing them, a bed creaking, a tap running. Theres nothing here, no danger, everythings fine. Finally, slightly out of breath, she reached the flats on the top floor. It was different from the others, with a marble floor and specially designed security doors. She knew that the housing association had renovated the attic space as luxury apartments in the late 1980s, just in time for the crash in property prices. The flats had stood empty for several years, almost bankrupting the housing association. Today, of course, they were hysterically expensive, but David was still angry at the poor judgment shown by the previous committee. Andersson came up behind her, panting heavily. Nina could sense her colleagues irritated disappointment as he wiped his forehead. Looks like a false alarm, he declared. Lets see what the man who called in has to say, Nina replied, going back downstairs. Sundstrm and Landn were waiting on the second floor, beside a door marked ERLANDSSON, G A. Nina stepped up to the door and knocked quietly. No response. Andersson shifted his feet impatiently behind her. She knocked again, considerably louder. A man in a blue-and-white-striped toweling dressing gown appeared through the crack behind a heavy safety chain. Gunnar Erlandsson? Police, Nina said, holding up her badge. You called about some suspicious noises? Can we come in? The man closed the door, fumbled with the chain for a couple of seconds. Then the door swung open. Come in, he whispered. Would you like some coffee? And theres some of my wifes swiss roll, with homemade rhubarb marmalade. Shes dozing at the moment, she has trouble getting to sleep and took a pill...

Nina stepped into the hall. The layout of the flat was exactly like David and Julias, but this one was considerably tidier. Please, dont go to any trouble for us, Nina said. She noted that Gunnar Erlandsson had been addressing Landn, the largest of the men. Now he was looking anxiously from one to the other, uncertain of where to look. Gunnar, Nina said, gently taking hold of his upper arm, can we sit down and go through what you heard? The man stiffened. Of course, he said. Yes, of course. He led them into a pedantically neat living room with brown leather sofas and a thick rug on the floor. Out of habit he settled into an armchair facing the television, and Nina sat down on the coffee table in front of him. Tell me what happened, Gunnar. The man swallowed and his eyes were still flitting between the officers. I woke up, he said. A noise woke me up, a bang. It sounded like a shot. What made you think it was a shot? Nina asked. I was lying in bed, and at first I wasnt sure if I was dreaming, but then I heard it again. The man pulled out a pair of glasses and started polishing them nervously. Do you hunt? Nina asked. Gunnar Erlandsson stared at her in horror. Good grief, no, he said. Murdering innocent animals, no, that seems utterly medieval to me. If youre not familiar with firearms, Nina said, what made you think that you heard a shot, precisely? Could it have been a car backfiring, or some other sudden noise out in the street? He blinked several times and looked beseechingly up at Landn. It didnt come from outside, he said, pointing at the ceiling. It came from the Lindholms. Id swear thats where it came from. Nina felt the room lurch and stood up quickly, clenching her teeth to stop herself screaming. Thank you, she said. Well be back later to take a formal statement. The man said something else about coffee, but she went out into the stairwell and up the stairs to the floor above, taking the steps two at a time, to David and Julias door. David and Julia Lindholm. I dont know if I can go on, Nina. You havent gone and done anything silly, have you, Julia? She turned and gestured to Sundstrm and Landn that they should cover the stairs in both directions and that Andersson should approach the door with her. They took up position on either side of the door, leaving any line of fire clear. Nina felt the door gently. Locked. She knew it closed automatically if it wasnt held open. She fumbled for the ASP baton in her belt, then opened it with a light flick of the wrist. She pushed it gently through the letterbox and peered

in cautiously. There was a light on in the hall. The air smelled of newsprint and cooking. She could see the morning paper on the mat. She quickly moved her baton, laying it horizontally so that it held the letterbox open. Then she pulled out her pistol and made sure there was a bullet in the chamber, gesturing to the others to be on the alert. She nodded toward the doorbell so that Andersson realized she was about to make their presence known. Pointing her weapon at the floor, she pressed the doorbell and heard it ring inside the flat. Police! she called. Open up! She listened intently to any sound from the letterbox. No response. Julia! she called in a slightly quieter voice. Julia, its me, Nina. Open up. David? Her vest was tight across her chest, making it hard to breathe. She could feel the sweat breaking out on her forehead. Is that... Lindholm?

Andersson said. David Lindholm? You know his wife? Nina holstered her gun and pulled out her personal mobile from the inside pocket of her jacket, and dialed the familiar number to the flat. Andersson took a step closer to her. Listen, he said, standing far too close to her. She resisted the impulse to back away. If you have a personal connection to anyone in there, then you shouldnt... Nina stared blankly at Andersson as the phone started to ring on the other side of the door, long, lonely rings that seeped out through the letterbox.

Andersson took a step back. The ringing stopped abruptly and the answer machine clicked in. Nina ended the call and dialed another number. A cheerful tune started to play on the floor just inside the door. Julias mobile must be on the hall floor, probably in her handbag. Shes home, Nina thought. She never goes out without her bag. Julia, she said once more as the mobiles voicemail clicked in. Julia, are you there? The silence was echoing. Nina took several steps back, pressed the transmitter on her radio, and spoke quietly into it. This is 1617. Weve spoken to the informant, and according to him he heard what he thought were shots, probably from the flat above. Weve made our presence known but theres been no response from inside the flat. What do you advise? Over. There was a short pause before the answer reached her earpiece. The armed response unit is still unavailable. Your call. Over and out. She let go of the radio. Okay, she said quietly, looking at Andersson and the other two officers on the stairs. Well force the door. Have we got a crowbar in 1617? Weve got one in our car, Landn said. Nina nodded toward the stairs and the officer hurried off. Do you think its appropriate for you to be leading the operation if... Andersson began. Whats the alternative? Nina cut him off, more harshly than she intended. Handing over command to you? Andersson gulped. Wasnt there something funny about Julia Lindholm? he said. Wasnt she involved in some sort of scandal? Nina took out her mobile and called Julias number once more, still no response. Landn returned to the landing with the necessary equipment in his arms, a length of metal almost a meter long that was basically an outsized and reinforced crowbar. Can we really do this? Landn said breathlessly as he passed her the tool. Any delay could just make things worse, Nina said. Paragraph 21 of police legislation. The police have the right to gain entry to a property, room, or other location if there is reason to believe that someone inside may be dead, unconscious, or otherwise incapable of summoning assistance... She passed the crowbar to Andersson and clicked off the safety catch of her pistol, nodding to the others to take up their positions. As Andersson inserted the end of the crowbar beside the doorframe, she put her foot down close to the door so that it wouldnt fly open and injure her colleague, in the event that there was actually someone inside who might try to force their way out. After three carefully judged attempts, the door gave way, and the lock broke. The air that streamed out into the stairwell carried with it the last smells of cooking. Nina listened intently for any sound within the flat. She shut her eyes and concentrated. Then she jerked her head quickly to her left, taking a first glance at the hall, empty. Another glance, this time toward the kitchen, empty. A third, toward the bedroom. Empty. Im going in, she said, pressing her back against the frame of the door, turning toward Andersson. Cover me. Police! she called again. No response. With her thighs tensed she slid round the doorframe, kicking the newspaper aside and stepping silently into the hall. The lamp hanging from the ceiling was swaying slightly, presumably from the draft. Julias bag was indeed lying on the floor to the left of the front door. Alexanders jacket was next to it. David and Julias coats were hanging from hooks on the rack to the right. She stared straight ahead, toward the kitchen, hearing Anderssons breathing behind her. Check the nursery, she said, gesturing with her gun toward the first open door on the left, without taking her eyes from the entrance to the kitchen. Her colleague slid in; Nina could hear the fabric of his trousers rustling. Nursery clear, he said a few seconds later. Check the wardrobes, Nina said. Close the door behind you when youre done. She took a few steps forward and took a quick look inside the kitchen. The table was bare, but there were plates with the remains of spaghetti bolognese on the worktop. Julia, Julia, cant you be a bit tidier? Im so damn tired of clearing up after you. Sorry, I didnt think. The draft was coming from the bedroom; one of the windows had to be open. The curtains were drawn, making the room completely dark. She stared into the shadows for a few moments, detecting no movement. But there

was a smell, something sharp and unfamiliar. She reached out a hand and switched on the light. David was lying on his back across the bed, naked. Where his genitals should have been was a bloody mass of entrails and skin. Police, she said, forcing herself to act as if he were still alive. You have a weapon aimed at you. Show your hands. Thundering silence in response, and she noticed that she had tunnel vision. She looked round the room, the curtains were moving slightly, there was a half-full glass of water on the bedside table on Julias side of the bed. The duvet was in a heap on the floor at the end of the bed. On top of it lay a weapon identical to hers, a Sig Sauer 225. Nina felt mechanically for her radio. This is 1617 to Control. We have one casualty at the scene, unclear if hes still alive. Looks like gunshot wounds to the head and groin. Over. As she waited for a reply she went over to the bed, looked down at the body and realized the man was dead. His right eye was closed, as if he were still asleep. In place of the left eye was a gaping entry hole into his skull. The flow of blood had stopped, his heart had stopped beating. His bowels had opened, leaving a brown sludge of acrid-smelling excrement on the mattress. Wheres the ambulance? she asked over the radio. Didnt they get the same alarm as us? Over. Im sending an ambulance and forensics, Control said in her ear.

Is there anyone else in the flat? Over. Andersson appeared in the doorway, glancing at the body. Youre needed out here, he said, pointing toward the bathroom door. Nina put her gun in its holster and hurried out into the hall, opened the bathroom door and held her breath. Julia was lying on the floor next to the bath. Her hair was like a pale halo around her head, partially smeared in a mess of vomited spaghetti and sauce. She was wearing pants and a large T-shirt; her knees were pulled up to her chin in a fetal position. She was lying on one hand and the other was cramped in a fist. Julia, Nina said gently, leaning over the woman. She brushed her hair away from her face and saw that her eyes were wide open. Her face was covered with pale-red splatters of blood. A string of saliva was hanging from the corner of her mouth down to the floor. Oh

God, shes dead, shes dead and I didnt save her. Im sorry! A rattling breath made the woman jerk, as she gasped before her stomach retched once more. Julia, Nina said, loudly and clearly now. Julia, are you hurt?

The woman retched in vain several times before subsiding back on the floor. Julia, Nina said, putting her hand on her friends shoulder. Julia, its me. What happened? Are you hurt? She pulled the woman up into a sitting position, leaning her against the bath. Patrol 1617, Control repeated in her ear. I say again, Are there other casualties in the flat? Over. Julia closed her eyes and let her head fall back against the enamel. Nina caught it with her left hand as she checked the womans pulse in her neck. It was racing. Affirmative, two casualties, one presumed dead. Over. She let go of the radio. Andersson! she called over her shoulder.

Search the flat, every inch. There should be a four-year-old here somewhere. Julia moved her lips, and Nina wiped the vomit from her chin. What did you say? she whispered. Julia, are you trying to say something?

Nina looked around and made sure that there was no sign of a weapon in the bathroom. How much do we want to cordon off? Andersson asked from the hall. The stairwell, Nina said. Forensics are on their way, and people from the crime unit. Start questioning the neighbors. Take Erlandsson first, then the others on this floor. And check to see if whoever delivers the papers saw anything, he must have only just been. Have you searched all the rooms? Yes. Even checked the oven. No sign of the boy anywhere? Andersson hesitated in the doorway. Is there something you dont understand? Nina asked. Her colleague shifted his weight from

one foot to the other. I think its bloody inappropriate, you being part of this investigation, he said, considering that... Well, Im here and Ive got it, she said curtly in a sharp tone of voice. Get the cordon sorted. Okay, okay, Andersson said, and lumbered off. Julias lips were moving nonstop, but she wasnt making any sound. Nina was still supporting her head with her left hand. The ambulance is on its way, Nina said, as she examined the woman with her free hand, following the outline of her body under the T-shirt, tracing her skin. No wounds, not even a scratch. No weapon. In the distance she could hear the sound of sirens and was gripped by panic. Julia, she said loudly, slapping the woman on the cheek with the palm of her hand. Julia, what happened? Tell me! The womans eyes flickered and cleared for a moment. Alexander, she whispered. Nina leaned down close to Julias face. What about Alexander? she asked. She took him, Julia gasped. The other woman, she took Alexander. Then she fainted. As Julia Lindholm was being carried out on a stretcher from the flat she shared with her husband on Sdermalm, Annika Bengtzon was sitting in a taxi on her way into the center of Stockholm. The sun was rising over the horizon as the car passed the city limits at Roslagstull, coloring the rooftops a blazing red. The contrast with the black, empty streets hurt Annikas eyes. The taxi driver kept glancing at her in the rearview mirror, but she pretended not to notice. Do you know how the fire started? he asked. I told you, I dont want to talk, she said, staring at the buildings flashing past. Her house had just burned down. Someone had thrown three incendiary grenades through the windows, first one at the foot of the stairs, then one into each of the childrens rooms. Shed managed to get her son and

daughter out through the window of her own bedroom at the back of the house, and now she was clutching them tight as they sat on either side of her in the backseat of the car. Both she and the children smelled of smoke, and her cornflower-blue top had soot stains on it. I bring death and misery with me. Everyone I love dies. Stop it, she thought sternly, biting the inside of her cheek. I made it, after all. Its all a matter of focusing and then acting. I never usually drive anyone on credit, the taxi driver said sullenly, pulling up at a red light. Annika closed her eyes. Six months ago she had discovered that Thomas, her husband, had been having an affair with a female colleague, an icy little blonde called Sophia Grenborg. Annika had put a stop to the relationship, but she had never confronted Thomas and told him that she knew. Yesterday he had found out that she had known all along. Youve been lying and pretending and fooling me for months, he had yelled, and its the same with everything you do. You decide what the world looks like, and anyone who doesnt agree with you is an idiot. Thats not true, she whispered, aware that she was about to burst into tears in the backseat of the taxi. She wanted us to meet again. Im on my way there now. Her eyes were stinging and she opened them wide to stop the tears from overflowing. The stone faades of the buildings flickered and shone. If you go now, you can never come back. He had stared at her with his new, strange, narrow gaze; his red, terrible, dead eyes. Okay. And she had watched him cross the parquet floor and pick up his briefcase and open the front door and go out into the gray mist. He walked out the door and closed it behind him, and he didnt look back once. He had left her, and someone had thrown three firebombs into the house. Someone had tried to kill her and the children, and he hadnt been there to save her, shed had to cope alone, and she knew perfectly well whod thrown the bombs. The neighbor on the other side of the rear hedge, the one whod ruined her lawn by driving across it, dug up her garden, and destroyed her flowerbeds, the one whod done all he could to get rid of her: William Hopkins, chairman of the villa owners association. She held the children more tightly. Im going to get you back for this, you bastard. Shed tried calling Thomas, but his mobile was switched off. He didnt want to be reached, he didnt want to be disturbed, because she knew what he was doing. So she hadnt left a message, shed just breathed into his new, free life and then clicked to end the call. It served him right. The betrayer. The deceiver. What number did you say it was? The taxi driver turned into Artillerigatan. Annika stroked the childrens hair to wake them up. Were here, she whispered as the taxi pulled up. Were at Annes. Come on, darlings... She opened the door, and the night chill swept into the car and made Ellen curl up into a little ball. Kalle whimpered in his sleep. I want your mobile as security, the taxi driver said. Annika shepherded the children out of the car, turned round, and dropped her phone on the backseat. Ive turned it off, so you can forget about making any calls, she said, slamming the door. Anne Snapphane turned her head to take a cautious look at the man lying on the pillow beside her, at the dark, gelled hair sticking out over his forehead, his quivering nostrils. He was falling asleep. It was a long time since shed slept next to anyone, actually not since Mehmet got engaged to Little Miss Monogamous and abandoned their open, functional relationship. How pretty he is, and how young. Scarcely more than a boy. I wonder if he thinks Im too fat, she thought, checking to see if her mascara had run. It had, but not much. Too fat, she thought. Or too old. What had been most exciting for her had been the taste of strong lager in his mouth. She felt rather ashamed at the realization. It was six months since she last drank any alcohol. How come it wasnt longer than that? It felt like an eternity. She rolled onto her side and studied the profile of the young man beside her. This could be the start of something new, something fresh and fun and good. It would look great in the little boxes of basic information when the papers interviewed her: Family: daughter, 5, and boyfriend, 23. She reached out a hand to touch his hair, the hard clumps almost like dreadlocks. Robin, she whispered in a soundless exhalation, moving her fingers just above his face. Tell me you care about me. The angry buzz of the doorbell out in the hall woke him with a start, and he looked around in confusion. Anne pulled her hand back as if shed burned herself. What the fuck? he said, staring at Anne as if hed never seen her before. She pulled the sheet under her chin and tried to smile. Its just the doorbell, she said. I wont bother to answer it. He sat up in bed, and she noticed that all his hair-care products had left a big stain on the pillowcase. Is it your old man? he said, looking at her skeptically, anxiously. You said you didnt have a bloke. Its not a bloke, Anne said, and got up, still holding the sheet, trying in vain to wrap it around herself as she stumbled out toward the hall. The doorbell rang again. All right, for fucks sake, Anne said, feeling disappointment rising. Shed wanted this for so long, had tried to appear experienced, sensual, but now he was just embarrassed. Shit. She fumbled with the lock and swallowed something which may have been a sob. Annika was standing outside with Kalle and Ellen. What do you want? Anne said, and she could hear that her voice sounded broken. Annika looked tired and cross, sighing like she didnt have the energy to explain what they were doing there. Do you know what time it is? Anne said. Can we sleep here? Annika

asked. Our house burned down. Anne looked skeptically at the children. Burned down? Behind her she could hear Robin flush the toilet. This isnt a good time, she said, hoisting the sheet further up her chest. Kalle started to cry, which started Ellen off as well. Anne felt the chill from the stairwell around her feet and tucked the sheet around her legs. Can you just be a bit quieter, she said. Its the middle of the night, after all. Annika was staring at her with her big, moist eyes. Christ! Dont tell me shes going to start as well? We havent got anywhere to go. Robin coughed from the bedroom. Please, dont let him go now! But, Annika, Anne said, glancing over her shoulder. Thats hardly my fault, is it? Annika took a step back, drawing breath as if to speak, but nothing came out. Anne tried to smile. I hope you understand. You cant be serious, Annika said. Anne could hear Robin moving in the bedroom. Im not on my own right now, and youve no idea how much this means to me. Annikas eyes narrowed. How selfish can you get? Anne blinked. What? Who? I didnt manage to take any money out of the house, Annika said, so I cant even pay the taxi. Perhaps you think I should sleep in the street with the kids? Anne heard herself gasp as she felt herself getting angry. Who the hell is she to accuse me? Time for me to pay you back, she said, is that it? Because you paid for this flat? Is that what youre thinking? Annika Bengtzons voice rose to a falsetto. Is it really too much to ask for a bit of help, just this once? Hes getting dressed, hes going to leave. She knew it, he was going to leave her now, and to get him to stay a bit longer she went out into the stairwell and closed the door behind her. After all the times Ive had to listen to you! Anne said, trying to restrain herself. Year in, year out, Ive had to put up with your constant whining, everything going wrong, your boring husband and your awful job. Ill tell you one thing, Im not the one letting anyone down! She could feel her legs beginning to tremble. You cant be serious? Annika said. Anne could hardly keep her voice under control when she replied. All the energy Ive wasted on you, she said unsteadily, I could have spent it on myself instead. Then Id have been the one who made it, Id have been offered a presenters job and found a sack full of money. Presenters job? Annika said, looking confused now. Dont think Ive forgotten, Anne said. I remember how bloody arrogant you were. After Michelle died, when Highlander rang you and offered you her job, but I was the one who should have got that job! Whos the one who put in all those years of toil at that shitty company? What on earth are you talking about? Annika said, her eyes welling up once more. You see, it didnt mean anything to you! Nothing Ive achieved is good enough. Annika started to cry, her tears spilling over and running down her cheeks. Shed always been such a crybaby. I realize that its completely irrelevant to you, but now Ive finally got a chance that could lead somewhere. Do you begrudge me that chance? Do you? Annika lowered her eyes and head in defeat. I wont bother you again, ever, she said. She took hold of the childrens hands and turned back toward the staircase. Good, Anne said. Thanks! She went back into her hall, but was so full of rage that she leaned out again. Book yourself into a hotel! she shouted at Annikas back. Youre rich as Croesus, after all! Robin was standing behind her as she closed the door. He had pulled on his jeans and top and was doing up one of his trainers. Where are you off to? she said, trying to smile through her anger. Got to get home, he said. Ive got an early start in the morning. Anne fought an impulse to pull the sheet tighter around her. Instead she tried to relax and let it fall to the floor, reaching out her arms to him, to show him that she was opening herself to him. He leaned down, embarrassed, looking for his other shoe. But, Anne said, her gesture stiffening, I thought you were unemployed? He glanced up at her breasts. Ive got a band rehearsal, he said, and the lie was so heavy it never left the ground. Anne picked up the sheet again and wrapped it around her. I like you, she said. He paused just one awkward second too long. And I like you too, he said. Just dont say: It isnt you, its me. Call me? she asked. He swallowed and looked down, then kissed her quickly on the ear. Course, he said, then went out, shutting the door behind him. The doctor stepped into Accident and Emergency with his white coat flapping behind him. Nina was surprised at how young he was, younger than her. He gave her a quick glance as he walked over to the gurney where Julia was lying. Do we know what happened? he asked, shining a little pocket torch in one of Julias eyes. The door closed behind him. She was found in her flat, Nina said. Thered been a murder, her husband was found shot on the bed. Have you made any contact with her? the doctor said, moving the torch to the other eye. Nina suppressed an urge to unbutton her bulletproof vest. Negative. At first I thought she was dead. Her pupils are reacting normally, he declared, switching the torch off. Do we have an ID for the patient? He reached for a computer tablet. Julia, Nina said. Julia Maria Lindholm, thirty-one years old. Maiden name Hansen. The young man glanced up at her, made some notes, and put the tablet down. He hung a stethoscope round his neck and put a blood-pressure monitor around Julias upper arm. Nina waited quietly while he took Julias blood pressure. Slightly high, but stable, he said. Then he picked up a pair of scissors and cut off Julias T-shirt. Where there any traces of blood where the patient was found? Apart from the splatters of blood on her face I didnt see any, Nina said. I dont

think shes physically wounded. No entry or exit wounds? No cuts? Nina shook her head. She could have been hit by a blunt instrument that hasnt left any visible traces, the doctor said as he moved his hands over her body, squeezing her abdomen and chest firmly. Julia didnt react. He felt her neck. No stiffness, pupils normal, she hasnt got concussion, he stated. He raised her legs and muttered, No fractures to the hips. Then he took her hand and stroked it. Julia, he said, Im going to check your level of consciousness. I want to see if you react to pain. It isnt dangerous. He reached over her and squeezed her rib cage. Julias face contorted and she screamed. There, there, the doctor said, and noted something on his tablet. Okay, I need to do an ECG, then Ill leave you in peace... He fastened some electrodes to Julias chest, then wrapped her in a thick blanket. Do you want to sit with her? he asked Nina. Nina nodded. Hold her hand, stroke it, and talk to her. Nina sat on the edge of the gurney and took Julias hand; it was damp and cold. Whats wrong with her? Just dont let her die! Tell me shes not going to die! Shes in a state of psychological shock, the doctor said. They sometimes get like this, mute and paralyzed. They stop eating and drinking. You can look them in the eye but they dont notice youre there, the lights are on but no ones home. He glanced up at Nina, then quickly looked down again. Its not dangerous, he said. Itll pass. Itll pass? Will everything get back to normal? Nina stared at the womans white face, her pale eyelashes, her hair. The blood on her face had dried up and got darker. Fragments of their last meeting were rolling through Ninas head like short film sequences. I cant bear it any longer, Nina. Ive got to do something about this. Just tell me, whats happened? Julia had looked desperate, chapped red marks on her cheeks. They were still visible under the blood. How long ago was that, three weeks? Four? Julia, she said quietly. Its me, Nina. Youre in hospital. Everythings going to be all right.

Really? Do you believe that? Nina looked up at the doctor, who was sitting by the end of the gurney, focusing on filling in a form. What happens now? she asked. Im sending her for a CAT scan, he said, just to rule out any other sort of injury to the brain. Well give her a sedative and she can go up to the psychiatric ward. With a bit of luck, shell get a course of therapy. He stood up, his wooden sandals clattering on the floor. You know her personally? Nina nodded. Shes going to need a great deal of support over the coming months, the doctor said, then went out into the corridor. The door closed slowly with a sucking sound. In the silence after the young mans crackling efficiency every sound seemed much louder: the rumbling fan, Julias gentle breathing, the bleep of the ECG machine. Steps hurrying past in the corridor, a phone ringing, a child crying. Nina looked round the sterile room. It was cramped and cool, windowless, harsh light coming from flickering tubes in the ceiling. Nina freed her hand from Julias and stood up. Julias eyelashes fluttered. Julia, Nina said quietly, leaning over her friend. Hello, its me. Look at me... The woman reacted with a little sigh. Listen, Nina said. Look up, look at me, I want to talk to you... No response at all. Anger rose through Nina like acrid vomit. Youre just giving up, she said in a loud voice. Thats so typical of you, you just lie back and leave everyone else to clear up your mess. Julia didnt move. What do you imagine I can do? Nina said, taking a step closer to the gurney. I cant help you now! Why didnt you tell me? Then at least Id have had a chance... Her radio crackled, making her take a couple of steps back in alarm. Car 1617 from 9070. Over. Her superiors trying to locate her. She turned away from Julia and stared into a cupboard full of bandages as she pulled out the microphone and pressed the transmit button on the side. This is 1617. Ive gone with Julia Lindholm to Sdermalm Hospital. Shes just been examined in AE. Over. You cant just sit there waiting, her superior declared. We need your report as soon as possible. Im sending Andersson with the car, and he can stay until Ive found someone else who can guard her. Over and out. Nina let go of the radio, fear clutching at her throat. Someone who can guard her. Of course, Julia was a suspect. The prime suspect in a police murder. She left the room without looking at Julia again. [www.eveningpost.se](http://www.eveningpost.se) BREAKING NEWS DAVID LINDHOLM MURDERED Updated June 3, 0524 Police Superintendent David Lindholm, 42, is reported to have been found murdered in his home on Sdermalm. Lindholm is Swedens most well-known and respected detective, not least for his role as an expert commentator on the television program Criminal. He was also personally responsible for several of the most remarkable police operations of recent decades, helping to solve the most brutal and complex cases in Swedish criminal history. David Lindholm grew up in a well-to-do home in Djursholm on the outskirts of Stockholm. In spite of his background he opted for a career as a regular police officer. After several years in the tough environment of the rapid-response unit of Norrmalm Police, he was promoted to detective and chief negotiator. He became familiar to the Swedish public as the straight-talking and fair-minded police superintendent in the television program Criminal, but it was his handling of the hostage crisis at the Cowslip Nursery School in Malm five years ago that made him a legendary figure in the police force. A desperate armed man had barricaded himself in the toddlers room and was threatening to kill the children one by one. David Lindholm established contact with the man, and after

two hours of negotiation he was able to walk out to a waiting patrol car, arm in arm with the disarmed criminal. Evening Post photographer Bertil Strand won Picture of the Year in the category Best News Image in Classic Photography. While questioning an American who had been sentenced to life imprisonment two years ago, David Lindholm successfully extracted information that led to the robbery of a security van in Botkyrka being solved. Five men were arrested and the majority of the takings, thirteen million kronor, was recovered. (updates ongoing) Andersson came roaring up to the entrance to AE, skidding to a stop and leaving black lines on the tarmac. Nina opened the drivers door before he had come to a halt. Julia Lindholm has just been examined, she said. Stay here and keep an eye on her until youre relieved; it shouldnt take too long. Andersson swung his heavy legs to the ground. So whats wrong with our killer, then? he said lazily. Period pains? Nina clenched her fists to stop herself from hitting him. Im heading back to write my report, she said, getting into the patrol car. Have you heard the preliminary evaluation of the cause of death? he said to her back. First she put a bullet in his brain stem, then she blew his cock off... Nina shut the door and let the car roll down toward Ringvgen. It was daylight now, and the traffic was already building up. She glanced at her watch twenty-five minutes to six. Her shift ended at six, but it would probably be seven, eight o'clock before she had finished her report and filled in the P21 form... A form? How can I be thinking about what forms need filling in? What sort of person am I? She took a deep breath that ended up as a sob. Her hands were shaking on the wheel, and she had to make a real effort to calm them. Right onto Hornsgatan. Change gear. Pull away gently. Then the thought that had been lurking at the back of her mind since she walked through the door into the flat: Must ring Holger and Viola. She would have to talk to Julias parents as soon as possible. The only question was what justification, what excuse she could find for telling them what had happened. None at all, really; she obviously couldnt spread any information about what shed seen at the crime scene to anyone not involved in the case, but this was about something else. Decency, possibly just basic morality. Shed practically grown up with Julia and her parents. They had probably saved her from the life that her two siblings ended up with. She had spent many long weeks each summer out on the farm while her mother worked shifts in the chicken factory in Valla. During term time, she would often go home with Julia and have tea at the big gate-legged table in the farmhouse kitchen. She could still remember the taste of the oxtail soup and sandwiches, the faint smell of farmyard that always hung around Holger. Then, when her mothers shift ended, she would leave the warm surroundings and take the bus home to Ekeby... Nina shook herself to stop herself from getting too sentimental. I didnt have it hard at all. I was lucky, having Julia. Some drunk teenagers wearing school-graduation caps were staggering about on the pavement to her left. She sharpened her gaze and looked at them carefully. They were walking along, arm in arm, three boys and a girl. The girl could hardly stand, and the boys were more or less dragging her along. Watch out, little one, take care they dont take advantage of you... One of the boys caught sight of her and started making obscene gestures at the police car, first one finger, followed by rutting movements. She switched on the blue lights and siren for three seconds, and the effect on the youngsters was instantaneous. They ran off like antelopes in the other direction, the girl as well. So much for being drunk. She pulled up and parked outside the station, switching off the engine. The silence that followed was so great that it echoed. She sat there for several minutes, listening to it. Then she sighed, undid the seat belt, and picked up Anderssons hamburger wrapper and her own Diet Coke can to throw into the rubbish bin in the car park, the can as well. There had to be some limit to her responsibility for humanity on a morning like this. Pettersson, the station head, was on the phone when she went in, and waved at her to sit down opposite him. At five? he said into the phone. Isnt that a bit late? A lot of our officers... yeah, thats true enough. Yes, youre right. Okay, 1700 it is, then... He put the receiver down and shook his head. What a terrible business, he said, rubbing his bald head. Whats happening to this society? He sounds like Inspector Wallander, Nina thought. Were going to have a minutes silence for David Lindholm, Pettersson went on. At five o'clock, the evening shift will have turned up, but the day shift wont have left yet, which means that most people will be able to take part. Every police district in the country is joining in. After all, Lindholm was known and respected everywhere, and after all those years lecturing at the Police Academy hes got friends throughout the force, new recruits and older officers alike... Just dont tell the media, Nina said. Pettersson lost his train of thought with a look of surprise, then irritation. Of course were going to inform the media. Apparently radio news want to do a live broadcast. If you were planning on robbing a local shop, when would you choose to do it if you found out that all police activity throughout Sweden was going to be idle between 1700 and 1701? Anyway, how do you do a live broadcast of a minutes silence? Wont it be a bit... bleak? Her boss stared blankly at her for a few seconds, then leaned back, making the Ikea chair creak. Okay, lets get down to business, he said. Nina took out her

notebook. She ran through all the facts in a monotonous voice, the call at 0321, suspected shots heard on Bondegatan. Because the command unit and rapid-response squad were both out in Djursholm, Hoffman in 1617 was put in charge of the operation. The informant, a Gunnar Erlandsson, a resident of the building in question, reported that he had been woken by what he thought were shots in the flat above. When there was no response from the apartment in question, patrol 1617, together with patrol 1980, gained entry under paragraph 21 of police regulations, suspecting that any delay could exacerbate the situation. In the flat they found two people, David Lindholm and Julia Lindholm. David Lindholm was lying on the bed, shot twice, in the head and torso. Julia Lindholm was found in the bathroom in a state of severe shock. She had been taken to Sdermalm Hospital for treatment. Nina closed her notebook and looked up at Pettersson. He was shaking his head again. What a terrible business, he said. Who would have thought it would end like this... Theres one more thing, Nina said, looking down at her closed notebook. Julia said something odd before she fainted. What? She mentioned her son, Alexander. She said: She took him. The other woman, she took Alexander. Pettersson looked up, eyebrows raised. The other woman? What the hell did she mean by that? Was there anyone else in the flat? Nina felt stupid. No, she said. Were there any signs of a break-in or struggle? Nina thought for a moment. Off the top of my head, I dont think so, but forensics will... And the door was locked? It closes automatically if you dont wedge it open. The station head let out a deep sigh. Bloody hell, poor David. Looks like she was more crazy than anyone imagined. Alexander is missing, though, Nina said. Who? Julia and Davids son. He wasnt in the flat. His room was empty. Her boss inserted a dose of chewing tobacco. And? he said. Where is he, then? Dont know. Has he been reported missing? Nina shook her head. Do we know if anything happened to him? No, Nina said. Its just that... we searched the flat and couldnt find him anywhere. Her boss leaned back. Well, then, he said. Obviously the information about the other woman and the missing boy will have to go in your report. Just choose your words carefully. She could feel her cheeks starting to burn. What do you mean by that? she asked. Pettersson looked at her intently for a few seconds, then he stood up and stretched his back. You werent supposed to be on patrol last night, were you? he said. Werent you meant to be off? I was doing an extra shift, Nina said. I go back on my normal rota at 1600 hours. Her boss sighed. The papers have already started calling, he said. Dont talk to them. All comments go through the press officer, no leaks to that woman on the Evening Post... Nina got up and walked away down the corridor, past the staff room, and into a small office containing a desk and computer. She sat down, switched on the computer, and went into the database for reporting incidents. She systematically set about clicking and filling in the relevant information in the correct boxes, time of call, personnel involved, address of crime scene, injured party, deceased, suspect... Suspect? She would be listed as the author of this report. It would be attached to the case of David Lindholms murder forever, would probably be examined and investigated at the Police Academy in fifty years time, and she would be named as the person behind it. She was the one who had to record all these first, preliminary details, she had to formulate the case. Suspect: Julia Lindholm. She pushed the keyboard away and went out into the corridor, taking a few aimless steps to the right, then turning and going left instead. I need something, she thought. Coffee? Then she wouldnt sleep. A sandwich from the machine? The very idea made her feel queasy. She went over to the confectionary vending machine instead. All that was left were bags of sour sweets. She found a ten-kronor coin in her pocket and bought the last-but-one packet. Then she went back to the station heads office and knocked on the doorframe. Pettersson looked up from his computer screen and glanced at her. Sorry, she said, but who should I put as the injured party? The murder victim, or his family? The murder victim, Pettersson said, and went back to his screen. Even though hes dead? Even though hes dead. Nina lingered in the doorway. Theres one more thing, she said. Alexander... Pettersson sighed. He ought to have been in the flat, Nina said quickly. I think we should... Her boss let out a small sigh of irritation and leaned toward his screen again. If mummy did shoot daddy, then its probably a good thing the kid wasnt around to see it, he said, and Nina realized the conversation was over. She turned to leave. Listen, Hoffman, the station head called after her. She stopped and looked back over her shoulder. Do you need a debriefing? he asked, and his tone revealed that he thought a debriefing would be the most ridiculous thing she could ask for in a tragic case like this. No, thanks, she said breezily and went back to the little room, opened the bag of sweets, and gasped as she put the first one in her mouth. They really were sour. Instead of clicking in the box for suspect, she picked up a form for recording instances where paragraph 21 of police legislation had been applied. It was easier to fill in than Julias name. In the end she had filled in all the forms she could find to fill in, including the spontaneous interview with Erlandsson on the second floor. She stared at the screen. Clicked on suspect. Quickly typed Julia Lindholm. She logged out and closed the program, then hurried out

of the room before her thoughts caught up with her. Mummy, Im hungry. Do they have peanut butter here? Annika opened her eyes and found herself staring at a white curtain. She had no idea where she was. Her head was like a big lump of rock, and there was a big black hole in her chest. And milk chocolate and jam, have they got chocolate? The hotel. Reception. The room. Reality. She rolled over in bed to look at her children. They were sitting next to each other in their pajamas, bright eyed, hair a mess. Did our peanut butter burn up in the fire? Kalle asked. And Poppy, Ellen said, her lip starting to quiver. Poppy and Leo and Russ burned up in the fire too... Oh God, what can I say? How can I answer that? Groggily, she fumbled her way out of the damp sheets and pulled the children toward her without a word and held them, held them in her arms and rocked them gently while the hole in her chest grew. Theyve probably got some chocolate, she said in a thick voice. And jam. Im not so sure about peanut butter. My new bike, Kalle said. Did that burn up as well? The computer. All the emails stored in it. My phone book and diary. Our wedding presents. The pram. Kalles first shoes. She stroked the boys hair. Weve got insurance, so we can get them back again. Poppy too? Ellen asked. And we can rebuild the house, Annika said. I dont want to live in that house, Kalle said. I want to go back home and go to my proper preschool. She shut her eyes and felt the world lurch. The family had only been living in the villa on Vinterviksvgen in Djursholm for a month when it went up in flames. Their old flat on Kungsholmen had been sold to a gay couple who had already moved in and ripped out the kitchen. Lets go and have breakfast, she said, forcing her legs over the side of the bed. Okay, lets put some clothes on. Ellen wiped her tears and looked at her reproachfully. But Mummy, she said, they burned up in the fire too. By the time Annika got back down to the street after Anne had refused to let them in, the taxi had driven off. She couldnt call for another one and they didnt have anything else left to barter with, so she had no choice but to pick the children up and start walking. She had a vague idea that there was a hotel in the neighborhood, but she spent three quarters of an hour walking round in circles before she found it. She was on the point of collapse when she stumbled into reception. The receptionist got a scared look in her eyes when Annika explained how they came to be there. They were given a room on the second floor. Now she let the door of the hotel room swing shut behind them, took the childrens hands in hers, cold and sweaty, and got into the lift. The restaurant was a minimalist, ambitious affair with a glass wall onto the street, walls covered by bookcases and steel and cherrywood furniture. The clock behind the counter said quarter past nine, she had slept for about four hours. The breakfast buffet had been stripped bare, a real mess, and the room was half empty. The businessmen had all gone off to their important meetings, leaving just one middle-aged couple and three Japanese tourists to stare at her and the children, at her torn jeans and soot-stained designer top, at Kalle in his silky Batman pajamas and Ellen in her flannel pajamas with butterflies on. Sorry if were disturbing your lovely breakfast with our unbrushed teeth and bare feet. She clenched her jaw and filled a teacup with coffee, then helped herself to a yogurt and three slices of gravlax. The yogurt was the only thing she managed to get down, but she took the salmon because it was included in the price, 2,125 kronor for a twin standard room that was more like a lift shaft than a room. I cant do this on my own. I need some help. Thats impossible, Berit Hamrin said. You sound completely normal. The alternative is just lying down and dying, and if I was going to do that I might as well have stayed in the house, Annika said, checking that the bathroom door was closed. She had found the Cartoon Network on the hotel television perched up near the ceiling, and had put the children back to bed, each with a little box of frosted cereal in place of sweets. Then she had shut herself inside the bathroom, where there was another phone, and called her colleague in the newsroom. And you didnt manage to take anything with you? I read about the fire on the agency feed, but I had no idea it was your house. Bloody hell! Annika slumped onto the toilet seat and leaned her head on her hand. According to the news agency, the house was completely burned out, Berit said. Hasnt anyone from the paper called to ask what happened? Dont know, Annika said. I left my mobile as a deposit with Stockholm Taxis. But I dont think anyones been in touch. No one died, after all. Berit fell silent. Annika could feel the chill of the porcelain creep up toward her neck. So what do you need help with first? her colleague asked. The children have only got their pajamas and I didnt take any money with me... What size are they? Berit asked, clicking a ballpoint pen. Theyre 110 and 128. And shoes? Her throat tightened and Annika was finding it hard to breathe. Dont start crying, not now. Ellen takes size 26, Kalle 31. Stay where you are. Ill be there in an hour or so. She remained seated on the toilet, staring at the towel rail, feeling the hole in her chest throb and ache. All around she saw drifting veils of self-pity and hopelessness, bitter tears at how everything had been taken from her, but she didnt want to give in to them, because in amid the fog there was no visibility, and she was bound to get lost. Your life is gone, the fog whispered, but she knew that wasnt true, because she was sitting here and Scooby-Doo was howling that he

was scared of ghosts out in the hotel room. Youve got nothing left! Of course I bloody have, she said out loud. Home was important, the place you belonged, but it didnt necessarily have to consist of four walls. It could just as easily be people, or projects, or ambitions. Youve got nothing that means anything. Was that true? She didnt actually have much less today than she had yesterday. The children had no clothes, and her computer had gone up in flames, but pretty much everything else was still there. Apart from Thomas. And Anne. She got up and looked in the mirror. Only the children left. Me and the children, everything else has been stripped away. She had lost. Shouldnt it feel worse than this? The editor in chief of the Evening Post, Anders Schyman, had surrendered his privileged corner office in the name of cutbacks and installed himself in a cubbyhole behind the comments desk, something he regretted more with each passing day. The only advantage of the reorganization was that he was in direct contact with the newsroom, and could sit in his office and watch the work in progress out there. Even though it was only eleven oclock in the morning, the level of activity going on out there would have been unthinkable just a few years before. Nowadays the website was updated round the clock, apart from a few hours of downtime around four in the morning, and not just text had to be updated, but video content, radio, adverts too. The ever-earlier print deadlines for the paper meant that the whole production process had been brought forward, and these days everything was done during the day, which was new. Tradition dictated that the evening papers were put together at night, preferably by a gang of hard-drinking, weather-bitten editors with red eyes and nicotine-stained typewriter fingers. Today there were hardly any such relics left on the paper. They had either adapted to the new age, kicked the booze, and polished their shoes, or been cleared out during one of the rationalization programs and sent off with a redundancy package and early pension. Anders let out a deep sigh. Over the years the feeling that something was slipping from his grasp had been getting stronger and stronger. Recently he had begun to get an idea of what it was: the very point of what they were doing, the fundamentals of journalism. Nowadays it was so important to keep the website updated above all else that occasionally everyone forgot that you actually had to have something to say as well. He remembered the old mantra that their rivals used to throw at the Evening Post in the old days when the paper sold more copies in Sweden than any other: biggest, but never first. Most, but never best. Now everything was done much faster, at the cost of truth and good reporting. But it isnt all crap, he forced himself to think. Todays paper was another bloody good edition, with Annika Bengtzons inside story of the Nobel Killer, Berit Hamrins incisive articles about terrorism, and Patrik Nilssons interview with a docu-soap star speaking out about her eating disorder. The problem was that all this was old news. Even though the paper had scarcely reached the newsstands, the articles were already boring and uninteresting, because now David Lindholm had been found murdered in his bed, and his wife was suspected of murder. There was an endless torrent of praise for the dead police officer on the net. His talent lay in his insight into human nature, and in his astonishing ability to communicate. As a interviewer he was unbeatable, he was the most loyal friend ever, his intuition was staggering. How do I handle this? Anders wondered, realizing that his thoughts were going slowly in a brain that was no longer particularly used to wrestling with ethical dilemmas. His marrow, which should have been dominated by basic journalistic principles like news evaluation, checking sources, and reflecting upon whether or not to identify people by name, had little space for anything but financial analysis and sales figures. He looked out over the newsroom. The first thing I need to do is get an awareness of the situation, he thought, standing up decisively and striding out into the newsroom. What are we doing with the murdered supercop? he asked Spike, the head of news, who was sitting with his feet up on his desk, eating an orange. Front page, newsbill, seven, eight, and the centerfold, Spike replied without looking up. And the fact that his wife is a suspect? Schyman asked, sitting down on the desk, demonstratively close to the head of newss feet. Spike picked up the hint and dropped them to the floor. You mean what point size were making the headline? he asked, tossing the orange peel in the recycling bin. If we name David Lindholm as the murder victim, and then say that his wife is a suspect, were identifying her as the murderer, the editor in chief said. And? Spike said, looking up at his boss in surprise. She hasnt even been taken in for questioning, Schyman said. Just a matter of time, Spike said, staring at his computer screen once more. Besides, its everywhere already. Our rivals and the oh-so-refined morning rag have already got character assassinations online. Okay, Spike thought, so much for taking the ethical initiative. Can you really get oranges at this time of year? he asked. Theyre a bit chewy, but then so am I, Spike said. Berit Hamrin came over to the desk with her handbag swinging from her shoulder and her coat over her arm. Bloody good articles in todays paper, Schyman said, trying to look encouraging. Has there been any response? Berit stopped in front of him and nodded toward Spikes screen. Julia Lindholm, she said. Have we taken a conscious decision to identify her

as the murderer on the Internet? We meaning the collected journalists in Sweden, Spike said. As far as I understand it, only the other evening paper and one of the morning papers are running with the story that his wife is a suspect, Schyman said. We dont have to give the name of his wife, Spike said. The reporter took a step closer to Schyman. The very fact that were publishing David Lindholms name, describing how he was shot on his bed, and then writing that his wife is a suspect, means that we dont have to give her name.

Anyone who knows Julia will know that shes the person were referring to. We have to be able to cover sensational murder cases, Spike said indignantly. I wouldnt exactly describe what weve got on our website right now as coverage, Berit Hamrin said. Its called gossip. So far the police havent confirmed anything, so all were publishing is rumors. Anders Schyman could see how the journalists at desks around the main news desk were raising their heads to listen. Was this good or bad? Were ethical discussions at the news desk a sign of rude health, or did they made him look weak? He decided it was probably the latter. Well continue this discussion in my office, he said firmly, ushering them toward his cubbyhole with his hand. Berit Hamrin

responded by pulling on her coat. Im heading out to meet a source, she said. The reporter turned and disappeared toward the stairs leading down to the garage. Schyman realized that he was still holding out his hand toward his office beyond the comment section. So weve already put what weve got about his wife being under suspicion on the website? he said to Spike, letting his hand fall heavily to his thigh. Who made that decision? Spike looked up with an expression of wounded innocence. How should I know? No, that was true enough, the printed paper and the online edition had different editors. Anders Schyman turned on his heel and went back inside his office. A thought took root and chafed against his ego: What am I actually doing here? Berit was carrying eight big bags. I tried not to get too caught up in gender stereotypes, she said as she squeezed her way into the crowded room and dropped the bags on the floor. Hello Kalle, hi Ellen...

The children looked up at Berit for a moment, then went back to the television. Annika switched it off. Look, Kalle, she said. Arent these great jeans! Those are for Ellen, Berit said, sitting down on the bedside table and unbuttoning her coat. Underwears in that bag, and that ones got some bits and pieces, soap, toothbrushes, and so on... The children got dressed of their own accord, silent and serious. Annika helped Ellen brush her teeth and caught sight of her own eyes in the mirror. Her pupils were enlarged, almost covering her irises, as if the hole in her chest were visible in her eyes. How much do I owe you? she asked Berit. Her colleague stood up and pulled an envelope out of her handbag, and handed it to Annika. I went past a Cashpoint and got some money out. You can pay me back later. The envelope contained ten thousand kronor in five-hundred-kronor notes. Thanks, Annika said quietly. Berit looked around the cramped room.

Shall we go out for a bit? The children put on their new outdoor clothes. They walked silently through reception and out into the street, crossing the road toward Humlegrden. The clouds were hanging thick and gray in the sky; the wind was gusty and cold. Annika pulled her new cardigan more tightly around her. How can I possibly thank you? If my house burns down, Ill be in touch, Berit said, turning up her collar against the wind. You have to make a start by phoning the insurance company. Theyll cover any costs you have to pay for staying somewhere until your house is rebuilt. They reached the park. The children were a bit hesitant in their new trainers, Kalles green, Ellens blue. Annika forced herself to smile at them. You run ahead, she said. Berit and I will wait here. Carefully, looking back over their shoulders, they headed off toward the playground. Wheres Thomas? Berit asked quietly. Annika gulped. I dont know. We... we had a fight. He wasnt home when it happened. I dont know where he is. His mobiles been switched off. So he doesnt know whats happened? Annika shook her head. You have to try to get hold of him. I know. Berit looked at her thoughtfully. Is there anything you want to talk about? Annika sat down on a bench, pulling the cardigan around her. Not right now, she said. Berit sat down beside her and looked over at the children, who had slowly started to take possession of the playground. Theyll get over it, she said. But you have to hold yourself together. I know. They sat for a while without talking, watching the children play on the slide.

Ellen was laughing her little head off. By the way, have you heard who got shot this morning? Berit said. David Lindholm, that police superintendent. What, the one on the television? Annika said, waving to Ellen. Married to Julia Lindholm? Do you know them? Berit said, sounding surprised. I spent one night in a patrol car with Julia. Do you remember that series of articles, about women exposed to danger in the course of the their work? Berit shook her head and pulled a bag of foam sweets from her pocket. Theyre allowed sweets, arent they? she asked Annika. Kalle, Ellen! She waved the bag and the children came running. How many can we have? Ellen asked. You cant even count, Kalle said scornfully. They each took a handful, she picking out the pink ones, and he the green. I was actually doing a profile of Julias colleague, Annika said, as she watched the children walk away. Nina Hoffman, that was her name. It was the night we stumbled across that

triple murder on Sdermalm, if you remember. Berit took a handful of sweets and offered the bag to Annika, who declined. The ax murders? Hands chopped off and all that? Annika gulped. Bloody hell, yes, Berit said. Sjlander and I covered the court case. Annika shivered and crossed her legs. She had been heavily pregnant with Ellen that spring, and at the Evening Post pregnant reporters were treated as if they were suffering from severe senile dementia: in a friendly, firm, and utterly undemanding way. Eventually she had nagged her way into a fairly relaxed job, a series of workplace reports about women doing what were usually dangerous jobs for men. On the night of March 9 five years ago she had gone on patrol with two female police officers on Sdermalm. It was a cold night, quiet, and she had plenty of time to talk to the two officers. They had been close friends since they were children, had attended Police Academy together, and now worked at the same police station. One of them, Julia, revealed that she was pregnant as well. No one at work knew about it yet, she was only in the fourteenth week, and she felt violently sick all the time. Just before midnight they got a call about a disturbance in a flat on Sankt Paulsgatan, at the Gtgatan end. It was a routine call; a neighbor had phoned in to complain about fighting and shouting from the flat downstairs. Annika asked if she could come along, and they let her, as long as she agreed to stay in the background. They went up the stairs to the second floor, and that's where they found the mutilated woman. She had crawled out into the stairwell and was still alive when the police patrol turned up. Her right hand was missing and blood was pumping out of the severed veins, running over the stone floor and down the stairs and splashing the walls whenever she moved her arm. Julia had thrown up in a window alcove, and Nina had forced Annika back down to the street with astonishing force and efficiency. I didn't see much, but I can still remember the smell in the stairwell, Annika said. Sweet, and sort of... heavy. There were two men in the flat, Berit said. They'd both been mutilated as well. Annika changed her mind and reached for a sweet. They solved the case pretty quickly. Filip Andersson, Berit said. A financial expert. He denied it but was still found guilty. He's in Kumla Prison. Life. Berit tipped the last of the sweets into her hand and dropped the empty bag into a rubbish bin. If you're going to fall out with your friends, it's probably a good idea not to be a drug dealer, Annika said. Yes, but we're not talking about little bits of drug money, Berit said. These were serious financial transactions, between Spain, Gibraltar, and the Cayman Islands. Crazy, Annika said, leaving your fingerprints all over the place if you've just chopped up three people. Well, the criminal element of the population doesn't usually register as being particularly smart, Berit said, standing up to help Ellen, who had fallen over and scraped her hand. Annika didn't move. Her body felt heavy as cement, and she could no longer feel the cold. The wind was pulling at her hair, but she couldn't be bothered to brush it from her face. The last I heard before I left the newsroom was that they think Julia killed her husband, Berit said as she sat back down again. Really? She seemed so timid... Looks like their sons missing as well. Oh, so she had a boy, then... They sat in silence again, watching the children, who had evidently found something interesting beneath a large oak on the other side of the playground. Listen, Berit said, have you got anywhere to go? Annika didn't answer. Your mum? Berit suggested. Thomass parents? Annika shrugged. Do you want to come out to Roslagen with me? Thord is in Dalsland this weekend, fly-fishing with his brother. You can stay in the guest cottage, if you like. Are you serious? A couple of years ago Berit and her husband, Thord, had sold their house in Tby and moved out to some stables between Rimbo and Edsbro. Annika had been out there a couple of times. In the summer it was absolutely idyllic, with the lake, and horses in the paddock. Of course. It's only standing there empty. That would be so great, Annika said. I have to go back to the newsroom and finish my follow-up piece on the terrorist articles, but I should be finished by eight at the latest. I'll pick up your mobile, then collect you from the hotel, if that sounds okay. Annika nodded. Nina stopped in the doorway, feeling uncertain. There were an unusual number of uniforms in the small staff room. They were standing in small groups with their backs to her, their heads close together. The hum of their voices sounded like air-conditioning, low and constant. This is what grief sounds like, she thought, without quite understanding where the idea came from. It was quarter to two, and her shift didn't start until 1600, but she hadn't been able to sleep, hadn't wanted to sleep. When she eventually drifted off, her dreams had been so confused and unsettling that she chose to get up instead. She pushed her way in behind Pettersson, who was blocking the door, and made her way over to the coffee machine. In places she had to squeeze sideways between people, muttering apologies and stepping over helmets and boots and jackets. The further she got, the quieter it seemed. By the time she reached the coffee machine there was complete silence around her. She raised her head and looked round. Everyone in the room was staring at her. They looked skeptical, their faces closed. She got the feeling that they were all leaning back, away from her. Is there anything you'd like to know? she asked. No one spoke. She turned away from the coffee, stood with her legs

fairly wide apart, put her hands behind her back, and looked her colleagues in the eye. Is there anything you want to know that isn't obvious from the report? They started to look uncomfortable, and some of the officers standing closest to her looked away. How come you were first on the scene? someone shouted from the back of the room. All of a sudden there was total silence again. Nina craned her neck to see who had shouted.

Why I was first on the scene? she called out, loud and clear. And why would anyone wonder about that? Christer Bure, one of David's former colleagues from his days in uniform with the Norrmalm force, stepped forward. His face was dark from lack of sleep and grief, his shoulders were up by his ears, his heavy body moving only with difficulty. I just think it's bloody odd, he said, stopping half a meter away from her. I think it's bloody odd, that you're the one who storms into the flat where David was shot, and I think it's bloody odd that you're the one who whisked away his crazy fucking wife and hid her in hospital. How the fuck did that happen? How do you explain that? Nina looked at the man and suppressed an impulse to back away from him. She wouldn't get far anyway; the coffee machine was in the way. He was glaring at her with such undisguised derision and ill will that she had to take a deep breath before she spoke. The answer is perfectly simple, she said. Andersson and I were sitting in 1617, and we were closest. Anything else you'd like to know? Christer Bure took another step closer to her and clenched his fists. There was a ripple around him, as if several other men were following his example. His crazy wife, he said. Why did she do it? Am I really supposed to put up with this? Julia Lindholm is the prime suspect for David's murder, Nina said, hearing that her voice was trembling. I presume that the investigation will uncover the murderer's motivation, whether it was Julia or someone else who... Of course it was her, for fuck's sake! Christer Bure shouted, his forehead deep red. Why the fuck are you still pretending? A few drops of saliva hit Nina's face. She turned and forced her way toward the door. She could feel tears burning in her throat and had no intention of standing there and giving him the satisfaction of seeing her break down in front of the entire station. The press conference is starting! someone yelled above the noise that had suddenly erupted. The introduction to Swedish Television news flickered across the screen in front of Nina. Everyone fell silent and the uniforms turned in unison to face the screen. Nina stopped and looked at the television, where someone in a Hawaiian shirt settled behind a desk up on the rostrum of the large conference room of Police Headquarters over on Kungsholmen. Two men and a woman sat down beside him; Nina recognized the police press officer and the head of the National Crime Unit. She had never seen the woman before. A storm of flashbulbs broke over their clenched features, and the press officer said something into the microphone. Turn the volume up! someone shouted. ...by the murder of Detective Inspector David Lindholm, the press officer was saying as the volume was increased. I will hand you over to the head of the preliminary investigation, Prosecutor Angela Nilsson. The woman leaned toward the microphone. She had a blond page cut and was wearing a bright-red suit. I have today remanded one individual in custody, she said, on serious suspicion of having murdered David Lindholm. Her voice was cool and had a faintly upper-class accent. On serious suspicion, the higher level of suspicion. An application for the formal arrest of this individual will be presented to the magistrates court by Sunday at the latest, she went on, without changing her tone of voice. I would like to point out that as head of the preliminary investigation, I am keeping an open mind as far as this case is concerned, and that we are not focusing on just one scenario, even though we have made a breakthrough in our work at such an early stage. She leaned back to indicate that she had finished. Well, the press officer said, clearing his throat. In that case I will now hand you to the detective superintendent leading the case for the National Crime Unit. A large police officer with his cap still on moved to stand right in front of Nina, and she had to step to one side to see. David Lindholm was found shot in his home early this morning, the man in the brightly colored shirt said. One person who was found alive at the crime scene was taken to hospital, and has today been remanded on grounds of reasonable suspicion. We have secured some forensic evidence, but there is still one large question mark hanging over the work of our investigation. A blown-up picture of a small child appeared behind the people on the rostrum. This is Alexander Lindholm, the detective in the shirt said. He's David Lindholm's four-year-old son. Alexander Lindholm was reported missing this morning. The boy lives in the apartment that is also our crime scene, but he wasn't there when officers first arrived on the scene this morning. We are extremely interested in any information about Alexander Lindholm and where he might be now. There was feverish activity in the press conference as the photographers started taking pictures of the image on the wall. The press officer adjusted his microphone and spoke quickly to calm the press corps down. The boy's picture will be distributed to all media, he said, both digitally and as hard copy... The detective scratched his head, and the head of National Crime looked uncomfortable. Pictures and disks containing the image and other press material were distributed among the

journalists and the hubbub subsided. Murders of police officers are extremely rare in Sweden, the head of the National Crime Unit said slowly, and a heavy silence fell, both in the press conference in Police Headquarters and in the staff room of Sdermalm police station. David Lindholm is the first such victim since the murders in Malexander in the late 1990s, and we should be very grateful that we are spared such occurrences more often. He took off his glasses and rubbed his eyes. When he spoke again it was with greater focus and solemnity. But when one of our fellow officers is killed, he said, we dont just lose a person, but also a friend. Part of our social structure has been attacked, part of our democratic foundations. He nodded thoughtfully at his own words, and Nina saw several of her colleagues nod along with him. David was also... special, he said, lowering his voice. He was a role model for people far beyond the police force, an inspiration for people from every class in society, from every background. Now the head of National Crimes voice was almost trembling. I myself had the honour of watching David at work, and could appreciate the impact of his dealings with serious criminals, those with drug addictions and lifetime sentences, how he made people like that feel hope again, and believe in the future... Nina suddenly felt that she didnt want to hear any more. She turned away, pushed her way past two fellow officers, and hurried out toward the changing room. Thomas steered his heavy jeep through the streets of the suburban idyll and could feel the early summer rush in through his window, swirling through his hair and tugging at his clothes. Sophias smooth thighs were still burning on his skin, her scent was still in his stubble. He felt alive. Bloody hell, he felt so alive! He had spent the past twenty-four hours in Sophias big double bed. She had called in sick: For Sophia, some things were more important than her career. They had eaten breakfast and lunch beneath the sheets. Was it really only a day since he had been out here? Only one day, one night since he had lived here, among these birch trees? He saw lawns flash past, unfamiliar, as if they belonged to another world. All those years with Annika already felt like a long, dusty trek through a desert, a drawn-out ceasefire with regular skirmishes and protracted negotiations. How did I put up with it? Why didnt I leave her before? The children, of course; he had done his duty. He cruised through the cars parked outside the local supermarket, waving at a neighbor he thought he recognized. Practically the first thing that had happened in his relationship with Annika was her getting pregnant, so he hadnt really had much choice. He could either try to live with the mother of his child, or be one of those absent fathers whose child ends up disadvantaged and ostracized. But now that was over. He would never have to put up with her contrary outbursts again. He would just gather up a few clothes, pick up his computer and record collection, and on Monday hed get hold of a hot-shit divorce lawyer. Sophia had good contacts in that world, among doctors and lawyers and academics; she didnt have to sit down with the Yellow Pages like Annika did whenever she needed a qualified professional. No two women could be less alike, he realized. Sophia was everything that Annika despised, mainly because she could never be like that herself: educated, feminine, and well mannered. And Sophia liked having sex, unlike the frigid goat that Annika had become. Wow, that was mean. Was he allowed to be that mean? He turned right, into the area they lived in, his eyes roaming over the pale-green trees and white fences. Houses loomed up on either side of the road, patrician villas and big brick palaces in the national romantic style, with ornate verandas, pools, and summerhouses. Shell have to buy me out of the house, and it wont come cheap. He was prepared to fight, he really was, because the house was just as much his. Annika may have stumbled over a load of money when she uncovered that terrorist cell up in the far north of the country, but they had no prenuptial agreement, so half of that was actually his. Now that he came to think about it, he had no idea how much money she had actually found. She had handed the sack in to the police, which meant that she had only received ten percent as a reward. Which meant that they werent exactly talking about buying property in the smartest part of the city, stermalm. Sophia had been born into money; the building where she occupied the penthouse suite was owned by her family. He saw the turning to Vinterviksvgen ahead of him and felt his pulse increase; this was likely to be very unpleasant. Sophia had asked if he wanted her to come along, had said she would be happy to support him through this horrible situation. He had been firm and said that seeing as he had got himself into this mess, it was his job to sort it out. She had thought him very responsible. Ill sort this out. I can do this. He turned into the road with a heavy sigh. I dont want to fight, Ive just come to get a few things... At first he couldnt work out what was wrong with the scene that greeted him, what it was that didnt make sense. Reality took a few moments before it hit him, like a punch in the face, before his brain identified the smell of smoke and ash, before he worked out what he was looking at. He stopped the car out in the road, leaning over the wheel and staring through the windscreen, mouth wide open. His home was a smoking ruin. The whole building had collapsed. The remains were blackened and warped, charred roof tiles lay scattered over the grass. Annikas car stood

on the drive, a blackened wreck. He turned off the engine and listened to the sound of his own panicked breathing. What the hell have you done, you fucking witch? What have you done with the children? He opened the door and got out onto the road, as the car alarm shrieked to tell him he had left the key in the ignition. The noise followed him as he made his way unsteadily toward the police tape and stared helplessly at the shattered walls against the sky. Oh God, where are the children? His throat constricted and he heard himself whimper. Oh no, oh no, oh no! He sank to his knees, hardly noticing the damp creeping through his trousers. All his things, all his clothes, the soccer ball from that tournament he played in over in the States, his student graduation cap, the guitar from Sunset Boulevard, all his reference library and vinyl records... Terrible, isnt it? He looked up and saw Ebba Romanova, their closest neighbor, leaning over him. He didnt recognize her at first. She usually had a dog with her, and without it on the end of a leash she didnt seem herself. She held out a hand and he took it and stood up, brushing some wet ash from his trousers. Do you know what happened? he asked, wiping his eyes. Ebba Romanova shook her head. It was like this when I got home. Do you know where the children are? he asked, and his voice broke. Im sure theyre fine, she said. They havent found any... She fell silent and gulped. And when it comes down to it, its just possessions, she went on, staring out over the ruins. The only thing that really matters is life itself. Thomas felt his rage rising from his stomach. Easy for you to say. She didnt answer, and he saw her eyes fill with tears. Sorry, she said, wiping her nose. Its Francesco, hes dead. Francesco? My dog, she said. He was shot last night. He died in the living room. The woman pointed toward her house, and before Thomas could think of anything to say she had turned and started to walk unsteadily back toward her gate, sobbing. Wait, he called after her. What happened, exactly? She looked over her shoulder. They caught the Nobel Killer, she said, and carried on.

Thomas was left standing on the road, confused and lost. What do I do? What am I supposed to do? He fished his mobile from his pocket and checked the display. No messages, no missed calls. That told you, eh?

Well, it serves me right! He may have had his phone switched off last night, but only so she wouldnt call him screaming and crying. She could have left a message. She could have told him his house had burned down. Is that too much to ask? He went to call her, but realized he didnt know her mobile number. He had to

look it up, dialed, and was met by the automated voice message. She didnt even have a personalized message. He turned his back on the pile of ruins and went back to his car. Work at the station had slowly got going again, but the 1600 handover had passed without any great enthusiasm. Nina was told to go out with Andersson again, and couldnt think of a reason not to. None of the other young bucks was much better. Now they were sitting in the staff room talking, no one was going to head out before the minutes silence at 1700.

Nina walked silently down the corridor, glanced quickly over her shoulder, then snuck into an empty interview room. She listened at the door and heard Anderssons deep voice rolling along the walls. How am I supposed to handle this? How am I going to balance all this? She went over to the telephone, picked up the receiver, and listened to the dial tone for a few seconds. Then she dialed the ten-digit number and waited quietly as the phone rang. Eventually someone answered with a muffled cough. Hello. Its me, Nina. She could hear someone breathing heavily and sniffing at the other end. Holger? Is that you? Yes, Julias father said. Nina checked that the door was properly closed, then sat down at the empty desk. How are you both? she asked quietly. Hows Viola? Desperate, the man said. Utterly desperate. Were... He fell silent. I know,

Nina said when he didnt go on. Have you heard anything about Alexander? Not a thing. Silence again. Holger, Nina said, I want you to listen very carefully to what I say. Im about to tell you something that Im not supposed to, not to you or anyone else. You mustnt tell anyone what I tell you, apart from Viola. I was the one who took the call. I was the first into the flat. I found Julia on the bathroom floor, I looked after her and went with her up to the hospital. She wasnt hurt, Holger, do you hear what Im saying? She wasnt physically wounded at all. She was in deep shock, not really there, but theres nothing wrong with her. Julias going to be fine, shell soon be back to normal. Holger, do you understand what Im saying? Did you...? What were you doing in Julias flat? I was on duty, I was doing an extra shift. I was the closest patrol when the call came in, so I responded. I thought that was the best thing to do. And Alexander, he wasnt there? No, Holger,

Alexander definitely wasnt in the flat when I got there. But... where is he, then? She could feel the tears rising in her throat. I dont know, she whispered, then cleared her throat, there was nothing to be gained from her bursting into tears. Are you getting any help? Have you got anyone to talk to? Who would that be? No, that was true. Holger and Viola werent regarded as relatives of a murder victim, but of a murderer. There was hardly likely to be any crisis team ready to help them with their grief. Im working Saturday and Sunday, Nina said, but I can come down to see you on Monday, if you like? Youre always welcome here, Holger said. I dont want to intrude, Nina said. You never intrude. Wed like it if you could come and see us. There

was another silence on the line. Nina, the man finally said, did she shoot him? Was it Julia who shot him?

She took a deep breath. I dont know, she said, but it looks like it. The prosecutor has remanded her in custody. Julias father took several deep breaths. Do you know why? Nina hesitated, she didnt want to lie.

Not exactly, she said. But I think theyd been having problems recently. Julia hasnt really told me much lately. She hasnt mentioned anything to you? Nothing, Holger said. Nothing to indicate that things were seriously wrong. About a year ago she mentioned that she thought it was a shame that David didnt seem to like Bjrkbacken, but she never said anything else... She could hear noise out in the corridor, then Anderssons voice. I have to go, Nina said quickly. Call me whenever you like on my mobile, you hear me, Holger?

Whenever you like... The electronic bleeping was forcing its way inside Annikas head. She resisted the urge to put her fingers in her ears. She had used some of Berits money to buy the children a new Game Boy each.

They were sitting curled up at the head of the bed, staring intently at the small screens. Ellen was playing Disney Princess, and Kalle was playing a Super Mario golf game, to the accompaniment of much bleeping and pinging and popping. She didnt seem to be able to see any further ahead than a couple of minutes at a time. In some peculiar way this actually made her feel calmer. Now Im going to buy a new purse. Now were going to eat hot dogs. Now Im going to make a phone call... At that moment the phone beside her rang and she jumped in surprise. She went into the bathroom and picked up the receiver in there. It was Detective Inspector Q. How the hell did you know I was here? I spoke to Berit. Its about the fire. Forensics have just got back, and theyve got a preliminary cause. The level of destruction and the explosive way that the fire spread suggest that the fire broke out in several places simultaneously, and probably on more than one floor, and that in turn suggests that the fire was started deliberately. But thats exactly what I told you! Annika said animatedly. I saw him, I know who started it. Who? Hopkins. The neighbor. He was standing in the bushes

spying on us after we got out. I think youre wrong, and I think you should think very carefully before pointing the finger at anyone. Arson is a serious offense, one of the worst in the book. It can carry a life sentence. It would serve him right, Annika said. And insurance fraud is also serious, Q said. We investigate that sort of case very thoroughly. Annika snorted. Dont try that one, she said. I know exactly what happened.

Anyway, havent you got anything else to worry about but the fire? The Nobel Murders, for instance? Or David Lindholm getting killed? By the way, have you found the boy yet? There was a noise on the other end of the line, someone entering the detectives office. Annika heard voices in the background. The receiver was put to one side, she could hear rustling and clattering. Ill be in touch, Q said, then hung up without waiting for an answer. She was left sitting there with the phone in her hand, listening to the sounds of the computer games seep under the door. Suddenly she was overwhelmed by a desperate longing for Thomas. You never gave me a chance. Why didnt you say anything? She wanted us to meet again. Im on my way there now.

And he walked across the parquet floor, picked up his briefcase, opened the front door, and looked out at the gray gloom. He stepped outside and the door closed behind him and he didnt look back, not once. Mummy,

Kalle said from the hotel room. Theres something wrong with Mario. He wont hit the ball. She pressed the palms of her hands to her eyes for a few seconds, breathing through her mouth. Coming! she said, standing up. She ran some water in the basin and rubbed her face hard for a few seconds. Kalle opened the bathroom door. I cant press Hit, he said, holding out the computer game. She dried herself on a flannel and sank onto the edge of the bath, looking at the game and pressing various buttons before realizing what had happened.

You must have pressed Pause, she said, showing him the command to start the game again. No I didnt, the boy said, insulted. You probably didnt mean to, Annika said, you must have done it by mistake. No I didnt! her son cried, his eyes full of tears, and he snatched the game from her. For a moment Annikas eyes flashed black, and she could feel herself lifting her arm to slap him across the face. She stopped herself with a gasp, let her arm fall and looked at the boy standing in front of her, his lower lip trembling. Oh God, I mustnt fall apart. What would I do if I fell apart? Well, at least Mario can hit the ball now, she said breathlessly.

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