

DIARIES OF A SERIAL KILLER



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Some people like to think, some don't, and I am one of the first group. I think people of the world are divided into good people, bad people, good people fearing turning bad, bad people thinking they are good, and this fifth group, the group of the evil. And to this last group, I myself belong.

I am a serial killer. I only kill women, women who look like my mother.

But I am not a woman hater. On the contrary, I think I like women, especially when they smile to me.

Before I turned into what I am today, which was about one year ago, I lived with my then girlfriend, with whom I had to break up when I found myself keep looking for the women I wanted to kill.

It was roughly at this time, one year ago, when that feeling got into me for the first time. I guess it was how it started. The feeling - like a disease, or more precisely, a parasite - invaded and then dominated me, ruining everything I had created, succeeded, and achieved before, driving me towards this insane addiction. Now, I have to keep killing people in order to breathe in peace. And what is more thrilling, I enjoy it.

I thought it was the killing part to which I was addicted at the beginning, but it all changed when I discovered the truth, the truth about what I exactly expect from those women. It is not the screaming, not the torturing, not the confidence I get from their begging for living, not the blood, not the dead corpses, not their lifeless eyes, not those bruises I may carelessly leave on their arms, in fact, not anything regarding the actual murders at

all. It is something, a feeling of achievement which brings me satisfaction. I have drawn a portrait sketch of each of them right after they were dead, with a pencil I usually keep in the back pocket of my jeans. Though their faces all resemble the one of my mother, it is extremely rewarding when I capture those differences, those differences that only belong to themselves, making them unique, special, and sometimes exquisite. I know that's the moment I am looking for all the time, to find the tranquillity in me when I put the sketch of a victim on the wall of my studio, to enjoy the feeling of myself being in heaven.

But the instant serenity passes so quickly, then anxiety, fear, and the thirst to kill will take over my mind soon again. Sometimes I would feel pointless to live my life this way, and have tried to cure this disease for a few times since it started. Once I even tied myself to my bed when I knew I was about to step out of the apartment door to commit another murder. But the feeling was so strong that I tore all the ropes and tapes around my arms, neck, legs, and came back with a new sketch a few hours later. I have thought about taking my own life in several occasions, though having never made a serious attempt. I don't think that is how I want my life to end, or perhaps I am just afraid to kill myself, fearing the pain and ashamed by the sense of quitting.

And I am deeply troubled also, by this problem, that every morning after I open my eyes, there will be this few minutes of terrifying semi-coma. I am not sure if it is related to my serial killer identity. I didn't have this issue before and it just started three months ago. After I wake up, I can do nothing but lie on the bed and wait for something to come. At the beginning, it feels as if my arms and legs don't belong to me. I will first try to get off the bed, but it doesn't work as I want. The thick greyish fog above my eyes will create this thrilling vision of myself being lost in a life-threatening smog. And when the fog goes away in a few minutes, I will feel myself again, with sweat covering my whole body, a painful migraine in my head, and an unusual fast heartbeat that goes up to 130 bpm.

I have tried to see a few doctors to get rid of this annoying issue, describing the symptoms to them and telling a half untruth that I live an ordinary life as an artist. At first, they told me my problem was probably associated with a high stress from my life and prescribed a few tablets which worked against that. I kept taking their pills for ten weeks but nothing got improved. The doctors were a bit confused when I told them

their therapy had totally failed, believing I should be perfectly normal, in physical terms, according to the results of those scans and blood tests. So in the end, they reached the final conclusion that it should be a mental illness and I had to see a psychiatrist.

Two days later, a letter from the psychiatric care arrived at my apartment, coming in through the mail hole on my door.

‘Monday 10 December 2012 10:00 am to Margareta Burström.’

This was the appointment written on the paper, which I have kept in my drawer instead of tearing it to pieces as I have done to all the letters from the hospital. I have always liked psychiatrists. I know this profession, and have learnt a bit about it from movies, novels, and television programs. As a teenage boy, I dreamed of being one of them as my adulthood occupation, before I realised my grades from high school were so bad that it became impossible for me to study anything decent in the university.

With a mixture of curiosity and caution after reading the letter, I quickly put her name in Google to see if I could find any information about this Margareta. I guess the intention was due to a certain level of hormones and the fear that she might look similar to my mum. Disappointingly, she didn't have a Facebook account and there was no photo of her on the webpage of the clinic. Having the hope that I might find something on the internet she had written - which could reflect her intelligence, personality, or life experiences - I spent six hours that evening going through nearly all the links on those Google search pages, and finally reached the conclusion that she was not an internet user.

I didn't sleep well that night, and had a terrible morning wakeup the next day. The semi-coma was so bad that I thought I would never become conscious again. It lasted for nearly ten minutes before I got my mind back, giving me the worst exhaustion, having me fall to the floor when I tried to get up from the bed. I crawled to the kitchen and used all the strength left in my body to reach the half pack of chocolate on the table that I didn't finish the day before. After I stuffed two pieces of chocolate into the mouth, my body didn't have any energy left to do anything else. So I just lay on the kitchen floor, begging for the sugar to get into my blood a bit sooner. It was nearly half an hour later when

I finally stood up. And in the toilet mirror, I saw the tear traces on my cheeks, indicating that I must have been crying for a while on the kitchen floor, during the worst disorder I have ever had.

After a shower and breakfast, my day began to go normal. When I was taking the dishes out of the sink, I made my decision to pay a visit to the clinic at lunchtime. I thought maybe I would be lucky enough to spot my psychiatrist. And if she had a face similar to my mother's, then I had to call the clinic up to cancel the appointment and try to get another one for me. It's too risky to see a psychiatrist who I desperately wanted to kill, especially there might be some circumstances during which I would be hypnotised, when I could be unable to restrain the animal instinct that would probably escape from my mind control and go straight to end the other life in the same room, which would then be the end of everything.

So I turned on my computer after the dishes were done, and went to the webpage of the clinic. Next to its address, there was a click that was linked to Google map. I took a glance at the address and clicked the button next to it. After a few seconds, the street view around the clinic appeared on the screen. It was at the corner of a building block close to Norra Bantorget, by which I passes for a few times every week. I remembered that I once bought a cup of cappuccino from a cafe called Espressini around that place. So the idea came, that I could sit in the cafe and take a look at every face of those who would walk out of the clinic in the afternoon.

I checked the opening time of both Espressini and the clinic before the computer was powered off, and moved to the kitchen to fetch the sandwich, which I made while preparing my breakfast. Having checked everything I needed to carry in the bag for the plan(notebook, mobile phone, pen, camera, sandwich for lunch, and a novel to read in the cafe), I left home to catch the bus.

It is a long way from my place to the city. I have to switch from bus to commute train to metro to bus everyday. During a summer day, it is not a big problem. But since it's winter time now, to wait for transportation in the cold for ten to fifteen minutes at a time shouldn't be one of the most pleasant experiences I could expect.

After an hour's traffic, I first arrived at my studio on the east end of Södermalm. It is in the basement of an old house. The rent is reasonable and there aren't many people living in that part of Södermalm. I have had that place since I started my life as a serial killer. And I have another studio in the post-industrial area close to Globen, where I keep the most part of my career as an artist. Both places are relatively small, the one in Södermalm is around twenty square meters, and the other one is even five square meters smaller. However, I find them big enough since I don't paint on big canvases.

When I went down to the studio on that day, the light in the staircase was dimmer than usual. It took quite an effort to open the slightly distorted wooden door of the studio, and there was a creaking sound when I turned the key counter-clockwise. With the light from the lamp in the dungeon staircase faintly illuminating my studio, I saw those face sketches of all the women I had murdered hanging on the wall after the door was opened.

Those metallic frames around all the sketches make the room look glittering every time I enter, giving me a sense of vanity and pride for all the great and shameful things I have committed. I usually don't switch on the light in the studio, because it is a pleasure to be surrounded by those spirits in the dark. I believe the space becomes more intimate when it gets dark, leaving possibilities for mysteries to happen, triggering imaginations, cultivating sensitivities, and strengthening my reckoning of self existence. Sometimes in the dark, I would feel I am the centre of the whole universe.

But on that day, I made an exception as I switched the light on when I slinked in the room. There were a few glasses I had left on the cold concrete ground the last time I was there. I remembered that, so I had the light on in case I might have otherwise smashed them into pieces with my blind strides. I picked up one glass on my left, poured some water from the sink tap, and sat down in the armchair in the corner to have a rest.

And I left the studio as soon as I finished my lunch sandwich. The day was still clear when I went out of the building to catch Bus 53, partly because of the big storm Stockholm had two days ago.

So the plan got carried on as how it was supposed to be. I went to the cafe, paid for a cappuccino, spent five hours sitting by the window. At five past six, the light of the clinic went off and the last person walked out of the entrance. It was a man in his fifties. There were three women who left the clinic together ten minutes before him. One was in her forties, and the other two in their late fifties. It was too dark for me to have a clear sight of their faces, so I took a photo with my camera. From the zoomed-in image on the digital display screen, they all looked very different from my mother, which was indeed a big relief.

Till this moment, I have actually spent my whole afternoon writing the first journal of my diary. From my experience, I know keeping a diary is a very good therapy to analyse and solve problems. And now I am feeling more confident and relaxed than when I just started writing. Tomorrow is an important day, that I have to get to the clinic at ten o'clock. I hope Margareta would help me, otherwise I don't know for how long I could keep living this life.

What a hopeless prick I am, being a serial killer who couldn't manage to get up from his bed every morning!

I wish one day I would feel much better, to be free again, to breathe without this burden, and to live, without this awful pain.

22/12/1990 Östersund

My name is Sebastian, and I had my tenth birthday exactly one month ago. Ahlqvist is my family name, which I got from my mother. You may wonder why it isn't my father's. And the truth is that I don't know anything about him. It has been only me, my little brother Gudmund, and our mother Katarina living in the house since I could remember anything.

Today is the last day of the school semester. I am at the fifth grade, and my school is in the town area. Before everybody left school in the afternoon, our headmaster gave a talk in the hall, telling us that writing things down helps us to keep joy, release sorrow, or just take it as a hobby. It is the same talk she has given to us at the end of every semester. I didn't take that seriously before, but now I decide to give it a try. It would be nice to find a hobby during the cold and dark winter break.

About the place where I live, it is a house which sits on top of a hill in Frösön. When I stand on the porch of our house and face the path going down to the traffic road, I can see the river and the huge forest on the other side of the water. If I turn left, I will have the lake in my sight, and I always think there should be the end of the world if I go across the lake. There are a few farms around us, where those farmers keep their cows and horses, except in wintertime.

We don't have any neighbours. There used to be a family living in the house about two hundred meters on our left, who were very friendly to me and would sometimes invite me to play in their house.

But one year ago, they moved to Göteborg and only came back for the summer. So for me, it means that during this winter holiday, I don't have any other place to stay.

It's bad news to me, because I don't like being in the same house with my mother. Unlike my brother Gudmund, who is two years my junior and has the similar look as mine, I have never had any click with her. He prefers to stay with her more than to play with me, and we don't talk much to each other, though we sleep in the same room. Some days I will be the only one in the room when he stays with our mother during the night. I used to feel jealous of it, but now I am happy that I don't have much to do with either of them.

Though brothers as we are, Gudmund and I are very different from each other. Every time I go to my friend's house after school, Gudmund will get on the bus and go home. I like playing those toy cars and he prefers those silly dolls Katarina has made for him. Yes, for him, not for me. My favourite thing during summertime is to lie on the lawn by the water, with a sketchbook and a pencil, to draw whatever I see or imagine on the paper. And Gudmund likes to stay in the house, even when the weather is so good outside, which makes me think he is allergic to flowers or something.

Unlike other brothers I know from school, I never fight with Gudmund. He is such a little pale boy and I wonder if his bones will be broken if I hit him with my both fists. I am quite strong and play sports nearly everyday at school, so it's always hard for me to understand why my little brother is so weak. When we are in the same room, he doesn't even want to have any eye contact with me. But I don't look scary and would even like to protect him if he needs it.

It was two days ago, for the first time during the past few weeks, when we talked to each other for more than three sentences. He asked if I was the one who put the poster of a naked woman under his bed, and I was so embarrassed and turned mad after I heard it. So I told a lie to deny it and then shouted at him, yelling at him, warning him to mind his own business. Gudmund didn't say anything afterwards, but just jumped off the bed and ran to our mum. Thank god he didn't tell anything about the poster and my shouting to Katarina, for which I really owe my little brother a big favour.

And right now I am the only one in the house. Katarina has taken Gudmund for the Christmas shopping and won't be back in the next two hours. So I can keep writing quite a lot before they come back. I don't want either of them to see what I am doing. I know a little about what Katarina can do to my little brother when she is angry, and that will be the least thing I want in my winter break. Sometimes from my mother's room, which is next to ours, I can hear my little brother screaming and crying in a painful way. I have never asked Gudmund about it, because I am too afraid to know any of it and he wouldn't be happy to talk about it either.

It's true that we have never met our father, and we don't even know what he is called. I have tried to ask Katarina about him for several times. At the first few times, she didn't want to tell me anything. But I kept asking. And finally, she had enough of my questions so she told me that our father was a sailor and an asshole and died in a sea accident when she was pregnant of Gudmund.

I then told the story to my little brother, and we both cried afterwards. It is one of the most terrible things for a child to know that he will never have the chance to see his own father in life. There isn't a photo of our dad or anything belonging to him in the house. Either he had never lived here before he died, or Katarina hates him so much that she has thrown everything of his away. And the answer to this mystery remains unknown.

I guess, for other kids, it will be the worst thing not to be loved by their own mother. For example, Gudmund's life will be in chaos as soon as Katarina stops paying attention to him. But for me, maybe because I have never been loved by her or I had forgotten about her love a long time ago, I don't even want to know what maternal love is from her. As long as I don't have any problem with my everyday life, I won't be bothered by living with a woman I don't like and a brother I know very little about. And to avoid meeting her, sometimes I even escape the dinner in the house.

And in a strange way, I find it's a good thing to have a dead father. Every time I visit a friend's house in town, their parents will usually give

me many candies or cakes when they find out the tragic story about him. And when I get back home, I will be full and don't need to eat anything from the dinner table in the house. I always bring candies home for Gudmund, doing what a big brother should do.

It's always tough when starting a new thing, and I have written enough for today. I have to stop writing and put the diary book somewhere safe in the room before they get home. I really hope that I don't have to spend my whole winter break at home with them. And if I have to, I wish there could be a place where I can hide and write my journals.



10/12/2012 Stockholm

About writing, there is this tip that when you find it hard to have it started, try to begin with whatever you have done in the last few minutes.

In this case, I have just finished my dinner, as usual, a pack of grilled ribs, a half garlic banquette, and some tasteless vegetables from Coop. That's what suits me the best for dinner, cheap and quick. I don't even need to cook, simply finishing everything from the packs and leaving those dishes untouched. There is no need to eat anything good and proper anyway, as I have always thought, especially for a serial killer. According to what I have found out so far, cooking and eating are the least exciting part of my life.

Having put those paper and plastic packs in the garbage bin, I immediately sat on the wicker chair the previous tenant has left in the apartment. I can't wait to write down what have happened today, not because something utterly important has turned up, but as a matter of fact, I start to feel the desire to write again, which I have lost for so many years. I put my phone to the charger and took a look at the screen while my computer was starting up. Not a phone call or a message from Harriet, the woman I am going to kill next.

This morning began as usual. I had a semi-coma but managed to stay in shape afterwards. There was a big snow fall last night, which caused a traffic chaos this morning. Luckily I knew, after waking up and seeing the snow outside, what was usually to happen in this situation, so I left my apartment twenty minutes earlier than I had planned the night before. The bus was five minutes late, during which time I missed

one commuter train to the city. And instead of every fifteen minutes, the train went every half an hour this morning. So as a result, I waited twenty minutes with a big crowd of commuters in the station.

It was already ten minutes to ten when I started queueing to pay for my breakfast in the Pressbyrån at T-centralen. I bought a croissant with a cup of coffee and left the shop. Few seconds later, I walked up the stairs and got to Vasagatan. And as I stood on the street, this image of aesthetic beauty jumped into my eyes. Everything I could see was covered in the purely white snow. It was the sense of unity and harmony that held me for half a minute, and also the quietness from the street, which calmed me down from the annoyance given by the crowd, their cold faces, and the noises from them. The traffic was blocked, due to the heavy, thick snow on the road, so there was no cars or buses polluting the peaceful image. I nearly forgot about the appointment for which I was about to be late, just standing there, letting the environment swallow me, make me as vulnerable as the snow.

A business man bumped into me from my back and had all the papers he was holding spread on the sidewalk. I looked at him and saw his frustrated face, which reminded me of the world of reality. After saying sorry to him, I moved forward.

There were only a few people on the way, all wearing black woollen coats and keeping their heads down. It's a depressing thing to look at people on the streets during wintertime, who don't have a mood to smile when they come across you. Sometimes I will try to imagine what sort of miseries they live in while walking behind them, which I didn't do this morning. I kept walking in long strides and passed those who were before me, leaving my coffee and croissant untouched. My watch said it was already ten o'clock when I reached Norra Bantorget.

I took a sip of my coffee from the lid while waiting for the traffic light to turn green. The coffee was already cold, which gave me a choke. The croissant was almost frozen as a stone, so I had to throw both of them into the bin before crossing the street.

A few seagulls were resting on a long bench at the entry point to Norra Bantorget, and next to the bench, a student was buying something from the burger vendor. Nobody else was in the park, so

my only companion, after I entered the park, was the crispy sound of my shoes stepping into the snow. On my right was the Branting's monument, which stood on a recently renovated terrace. That statue is a huge bronze piece with Hjalmar Branting's figure in the centre, which is twice big as his followers around, giving me the impression that Branting is portrayed almost as a fascist leader. Olof Palme's memorial piece stood on my left when I approached the other end of the park, behind which was Clarion Hotel, one of the most luxurious places in Stockholm, where I killed Ellinor four months ago. And it's one of the most exciting killings among all the murders I have committed.

Ellinor

It was somewhere in May when I met Ellinor by chance in a nightclub called Under Bron. She got my attention when we were both waiting to buy a drink from the bar. After the first glance at her face, I became completely stunned that I forgot to take the drink from the barman. Her delusive eyes made her look fragile, and she didn't notice anything when I was glaring at her face. Those two eyes were beautiful, but that's not what electrified me. It was the same vagueness I had seen from my mother's eyes, which gave me enough motivation to add this pale beauty to my murder list, even though the profile of her face looked very different from the one of my mother.

I followed her during the rest of the night, leaving the girl to herself on whom I had managed to land a few kisses. And when I saw her taking some green pills outside the toilet, I knew that was the perfect moment to make the self-introduction, not as a killer who was going to end her life some time later but a fake identity I quickly came up with in a few seconds - a drug addict. She gave me a mischievous smile when I initiated the conversation by asking her what pills she was taking, and then passed quite much information about herself to me, which enabled me to engineer an unpolished murder plan in a second.

Ellinor was the youngest child of a very rich family who owned a vast area of farm yards in Småland. She moved to Stockholm to study Management in Handelskolan, while all her siblings had finished their studies in the same school and returned home to take their positions in

the family business. Her family owned an apartment in Östermalm, where Ellinor and all her siblings stayed during their studies. I asked about her studies and soon realised the topic made her feel uncomfortable. She told me that she was doing alright in the class. But since her eyes kept moving away when she talked and she had no intention to keep the topic developing, I figured out that her academic life was one thing which gave her depression and led her into the use of drugs. We moved on to talk about relationship later, in which she had more interest. Ellinor then told me about the breakup she had with her boyfriend two months ago. And when the topic turned into drugs, Ellinor informed me that she used to take a few pills of Amphetamine during the weekends when her studies began to give her too much stress, but started to increase the dose and take the pills more frequently when her relationship with her then boyfriend was entering the critical point, and fell into addiction three weeks after their breakup.

Since I was faking and all my knowledge of drugs was from films, when Ellinor asked me what drugs I was on, I nearly had a panic attack. As a quick reaction, I raised my beer bottle up to my face, to cover up my awkwardness and have some time to come up with a solution. And during the next ten seconds while I was taking in some beer from the bottle, I built a new lie and told her that I took weeds every time before I started a new painting, which immediately directed her attention from drugs to my being an artist. That is the safest trick I always play to fool my victims. As soon as I tell them I am an artist, they would believe in every reckless lie I have made up and irresistibly fall in love with me in the end. So the rest of that night became very easy after I played the trick of revealing my artist identity to Ellinor. She kept smiling to me till we went back to her apartment in Östermalm, and her foolish and innocent smile nearly put away my hatred of her face.

After the first night we had together, I started seeing her twice or three times a week. We met at her apartment most of the times. And to be careful enough, I didn't take any of her pills until having spent several hours going through every detail about Amphetamine on internet, to make sure I wouldn't let its effects and side effects lead my actions. We would take a few pills before we had sex. And after two weeks of taking that drug, I managed to adjust my mind to its effects, to have a loose hold of my thoughts while all the senses and the rest of my body

were going mad. As long as my mind could block the killing instinct, my body wouldn't go out of control and ruin my plan.

As I now look back with honesty, it would have been a quite romantic relationship if she had something totally different in her eyes. I still remember how she looked when she was asleep. The long, silky, brown hair would cover her pretty face, highlighting her juicy, pinkish lips. Her body was so soft and warm as I held her in my arms, the feeling of which I have missed a lot since she died. For a few times when Ellinor and I were lying next to each other in bed, I even had the illusion of starting a life with her.

Yet she had my mother's eyes, which was the only reason why her life ended in Clarion Hotel. So wounded and dependant on outside forces as she was, it didn't take a long time until I worked out the plan to kill her.

And the plan came into my head after an unexpected incident.

Having taken the same amount of Amphetamine for three weeks, we decided to double the dose. At the beginning of our first daring try, Ellinor seemed quite alright when we were making love. But suddenly, her eyes rolled upwards to the back and her body started to shake. I thought she was going to die when I helped her lie down on the floor, since the shaking didn't stop and there was saliva streaming out of her mouth.

It came to me as a total shock. One part of me wanted to do everything to bring her back to life, and my other part was intrigued by the idea of watching her staying in the coma till her breathing stopped.

Having a quick thought for several seconds, I slightly lifted her head and did the best CPR I could to save her life. I wanted to save her life, so afterwards she would full-heartily hand me her life, the ending of which I could plan by myself with a great joy. And when the colour of her lips turned from purple to palish after five minutes of CPR, Ellinor opened her eyes and looked terribly in horror, with her body still shivering feebly. Her eyes looked secure again when she found me checking her pulse and breath, but to me, that was the moment I detected she had a rather serious heart problem. And some minutes later, I had the plan for the ending of her life.

I hugged her and had her sob in my arms for a long time. She was really scared by the incident that had never happened to her before, and kissed my shoulder nearly a hundred times, thanking me for having saved her life. Promising it was only a terrible accident, Ellinor refused to go to the hospital. She told me, to her, what was more terrifying than death was the blood test, which would discover her drug addiction, could be sent, from the hospital, to her school and her family in Småland. I kept hugging her and rubbing her back gently, lying to her, or telling her the truth, that I would do my best to take care of her.

After she fell asleep in my arms, a clear and cunning plan came into my head. Her weak health condition had written her own end. I fixed my eyes on her wet hair for a long time, fantasizing about the ending bit of my plan, in which Ellinor was to struggle through a lot till the last moment of her life. At that point, I strongly believed it was actually the destiny for Ellinor's young life to end in the way I had settled for her. The vision got revealed naturally and smoothly, as if it was designed by the mysterious nature, to have Ellinor's heart broken first, by a combination of her stressful academic life, the collapsed relationship, and the family's torturous influence on her, then bring us to each other in such a coincidental situation of buying a drink in a nightclub, and finally put up a dramatic episode, during sex, which was full of soul-stirring moments, to help me plant the ending of this young but already exhausted woman's life. Even Ellinor would have been convinced by her unchallengeable destiny, I think, if I showed her what was on my mind, and what remained unresolved was how she was about to die, physically.

Two weeks after that incident, Ellinor finally got well enough to start taking pills again. Her desperate need for drugs would have driven her, if she waited any longer, to either a fatal overdose or a fatal self-harm, to both of which I paid most of my attention during those days. I didn't want her life to end in an unexpected way. I wanted it to be done under my control. And I had to be the master who terminated her life in the end. So every day in those two weeks, I didn't do any work but just stayed by her side, being her faithful company. As the only positive result coming out of those two weeks of care-taking, Ellinor had become undoubtedly dependent on me, while the rest outcomes just increased the difficulty of my self-control, as I realised, which went harder for me to retain my aggression when I stared into her eyes.

More often than before, the intention to strangle her to death would come into my head while we were having sex. And the urge was partly released after those two weeks when I finally didn't need to be with her every day. In order to divorce my mind from that way too intimate relationship so I could have time to work out the murder plan in every detail, I made an excuse, telling Ellinor that I had to work for an important exhibition in a month time, while she was begging me to stay. Because I knew, soon her life had to end.

And this is what happened, as the ending chapter of Ellinor's life story. On July 20th, a Friday, we planned a silly hotel holiday which Ellinor had been dreaming of - as a romantic short escape from her life in Östermalm - for quite some time. I prepared two shots of Amphetamine in a black plastic case, which I carried with me for the romantic and murderous date in Clarion Hotel at Norra Bantorget. She looked so excited when we met on the roof terrace of the hotel, swinging in the bubble chair with the nicest smile I had ever seen on her face. However, the appreciation of her physical beauty didn't overpower my strong desire to kill her. I was wearing a boyish smile, while walking towards her, yet having a bitter laugh inside, about how ironic the scene seemed and what was gonna happen a few hours later.

After two hours of our petty joy on the sunbathed terrace, the ending part of Ellinor's life was finally put on show when her drug addiction started to delude her consciousness. She leaned towards me, looking at me with her weary eyes and whispering to me that she was tired and wanted something. We stood up, and walked slowly through a big crowd of people who were wasting their pointless lives in the indoor area, where a bunch of middle aged women were sitting, seductively, in those couches, wearing their bathrobes, having horny eyes land on every man who passed by. Ellinor didn't want to stop, so we continued our steps to the corridor, at the end of which the stage for the final chapter of Ellinor's life show had already been set up.

While walking through the corridor to our room, I encountered a terrific incident which turned the day into a more thrilling game later. Right before the elevator stood a woman in a tight pink dress, who made a pass to me while I was carrying the semi-conscious Ellinor slowly forwards. Immediately, a complex chemistry was activated in my brain, after I received the message of that hot stranger.

It was fear in the beginning. My initial plan for Ellinor's death was to put the shot of Amphetamine into her arm, leave the room while she would be suffering the overdose reaction, walk out of the hotel to make sure the cameras in the entrance lobby would record my trace of leaving, come back to the room in fifteen minutes with some takeaway food, then get into the room to draw a quick sketch of her face after her life had ceased, and finally, call the emergency and the police. It would have been a perfect plan if the woman in the pink dress wasn't there. The fear in my head was that she might follow us and listen to what would be happening in the room through the wooden door, and my plan would be ruined if she heard the scratching sound Ellinor would be making while she was passing out on the floor.

It was this second of horrifying terror that gave a leap to my heart, before my rich experiences of being a serial killer exempted me from my insecurity, by providing a more exciting change to the plan. But I had to be quick, I had to compete with time, I had to win the race from this pitiless dimension which always leaves everyone behind.

And we were just about to pass that stranger when I figured out how things should turn out in the next fifteen minutes, with a more dangerous game forming into a clear shape in my head. I stopped and looked at the woman with a smile. Using one of my best tricks to start a conversation, I asked if she needed any help of mine. She hesitated for a moment before moving her eyes up to give me her response, then asked which room I stayed in. I pointed at the end of the corridor, and then invited her to join us for having some drugs. Ellinor didn't look up, giving me a sign that her physical organism was shutting down and how desperate she was longing for Amphetamine.

The stranger didn't give an answer to my invitation, so I decided to press on. After taking a few steps towards her, I was able to have a closer look at this woman. She was in her thirties, blonde, medium hair, mature, feminine body, and undoubtedly sexually experienced. A quick portrait of her was drawn, telling me that she had been picking up men, and possibly women as well, in hotels for quite some time. A woman who was obsessed with having sex in hotel rooms.

She noticed my aggressive moves and turned her eyes away. And the next moment we had eye contact, I found myself sympathetically related to her, by realising we were having the same problem with

obsession, except our consequences were different. Hers would be drying up most of her spare time in life, from hotel to hotel, until she became old enough that her body couldn't get any attention from other people; while mine would be spending every minute of my life living in a huge stress, worrying about every step which I had to make right, to complete every murder before I got caught by the police or turned myself in so my life would end in prison.

Still, no answer from her.

So I turned myself away from her and walked towards the room with Ellinor. After five steps, I heard a move behind me. It was her following us. Then after the door was opened, I dragged Ellinor in the room and put her onto the bed. Three seconds later, the stranger pushed the half closed door open and entered.

Then this was the scene after the first few seconds of reluctance between me and the stranger. Ellinor was on the bed, the stranger was in the couch, and I started to take the black case, in which there were the two shots, out of my messenger bag. I first offered the woman in the pink dress some water to drink, and asked if she would like to take the shot before Ellinor. She looked hesitant and wondered what was in the syringe. After I told her what was in it with a securing look, she said yes and began to take her dress off. And I was stunned after she folded her dress and placed it on the couch seat beside her. In that black sexy lingerie she was wearing, her beautifully matured body, the sweetness of which could be caught just by my watching, looked very different from the slim body Ellinor had.

I couldn't resist the temptation to touch her skin. I put my hand on her arm, which felt so warm and a bit firm, indicating that she had the routine of taking excise in gyms. The fantasy of having sex with her occupied my brain for a while before I realised there was a much greater game for me to play and I had to play it carefully. So I moved away from her, and cleared my mind quickly when I took one syringe out of the case.

And it only took two seconds for the rush to dominate that mature body. Her face started to ease and put up an expression of enjoying herself as if she was in heaven, or having an orgasm, and at the same

time, her previously crossed legs got separated, sweeping left and right on the floor. She stared at me with her hungry eyes, which made it harder for me to concentrate on the plan, while my lower half was dragging me away, trying to put my hands on her skin and draw my face closer to kiss her fleshy lips. So I had to cut off the eye contact before picking the other shot from the case. Everything was ready, for the final show to be put on stage.

When Ellinor saw me holding the syringe, she got a bit confused and looked at me with those hateful eyes I could no longer cope with. She tried to open her mouth and say something, but was too disorganised to do so. I gave her a kiss and whispered to her that everything would be fine. Of course she trusted me, and then left her arm to me, not knowing the existence of another being in the same room. And I knew the stranger was, as I wanted, watching me doing the injection to Ellinor. I had never had an audience during any of the murders before, and was so exhilarated with the idea that there would be a beautiful woman watching another beautiful woman struggling and suffering until her life reached its completion. Maybe some people would call me a pervert because of this, but I am not, I only did that once, just because I was curious to see a woman's reaction to the dying process of my victim.

After I put away the empty syringe from Ellinor's left arm, I lowered myself and gave her a long kiss. It was such an amazing experience to explore a woman's dying process from a kiss. I felt her lips turning unusually warm after a few seconds. Then I had to withdraw my tongue from her mouth when her teeth started quivering. Very soon, I noticed that her mouth was producing a lot of saliva, which were running into my mouth, or falling out of the gaps between our lips. From what I saw at that moment, her eyes were reacting in the same way as the last time it happened. Then I had to put my mouth away from hers when Ellinor's body began that terrifying shake. She put her head upwards to the back, and used the top of her head and her both feet as the supporting points to push her body up, forming the shape of an arch. Leaving her mouth and eyes wide open, Ellinor kept shouting out my name in a muttering way. And her face was badly distorted due to her overdose reaction, which raised my feeling of amusement. I put my face close to hers so I could record every detail of the best part in the whole relationship, during the past few weeks, between her and me.

The stranger waited for nearly fifteen seconds before exploding into a series of high-pitched screams. So I stopped staring at Ellinor's face to check up the source of the creaming. She was totally in shock, but couldn't manage to stand up and run away because of the rush she was still in. Instead, she sat there and kept screaming. I told her to calm down, but it didn't work. Then I turned my head back to look at Ellinor and continued my observation.

Out of a sudden, Ellinor lost the strength in the muscles around her neck, and dropped her body back onto the bed. Her eyes remained wide open, but the life in them was ticking away. I could still feel the grab of her hand on my wrist, but her clenching was getting weaker and weaker.

And when I looked into her eyes again, I finally saw what I had been expecting to see during the process. Tears were rolling in her eyes, sending out the final message of Ellinor's life. It was a look I will never forget, saying to me that she had finally figured out what I had been planning during those weeks, showing me that her broken heart was breaking into pieces again, accusing me of being a murderer and a traitor to her ultimate trust, expressing her disappointment and sorrow, and finally, passing me the message that she was happy with getting emancipated from all the pains she had lived through, while approaching the end of her miserable life. The next moment, she let go of her hand, after pressing her sharp finger nails into my wrist in the past few seconds, and stopped shaking, leaving the mydriasis to fill in her eyeballs.

From the moment I knew she would never come back, I started doing the CPR. Tears were dropping out from my eyes at the same time, purely because of joy.

Though the stranger kept screaming from the couch and didn't seem to stop. I didn't mind if anybody else would notice what was happening in the room, because everything had been done in a secure and considerate way, and Ellinor's death would only be considered as an accident. After half a minute, I stopped the CPR and moved from the bed to the couch, to calm down that screaming woman by giving her a kiss. It worked. After five seconds, she looked at me in terror and started crying. I patted her on the back gently, and at the same time,

took the phone from my trousers pocket to dial the emergency number. Very clearly and briefly, I reported everything to a girl called Linda at the other end of the phone within half a minute.

The half naked stranger continued sobbing, and couldn't manage anything else. So I left her there and took the sketchbook out of my messenger bag, to draw Ellinor's beautiful face in peace. She didn't question about what I was doing, nor did she even notice. I knew it would roughly take ten minutes for the ambulance and the police to arrive, which was enough for me to finish the sketch of Ellinor's face.

My tears of joy didn't stop falling when I was drawing the sketch, and a few teardrops even landed on the high-quality acid-free paper. I didn't mind. I wanted my tears to be kept in my sketchbook.

When I finished the sketch, a new piece to my whole collection, I closed my sketchbook and put it back in my messenger bag. Then I moved my head to that terrified woman in the couch. Her panic had stopped, and the sympathetic part of her was brought up by the tears that were still rolling down my cheeks. She couldn't get back the control of her body. So instead of standing up and holding me to ease the massive sorrow she thought I was having, what she did was to give me a comforting look she could at least offer. At the moment, I knew, for a great deal of certainty, that I had achieved my dangerous plan, and what I had to deal with later would be the simplest thing in the world.

Carrying the joy of such achievement, I leaned forward to see Ellinor's face, which was at its most beautiful stage in her entire life. All the vagueness and weakness were gone from her eyes, and what I perceived from her exquisite face was her boldness and stillness. Then I opened my sketchbook again, after taking it out of my bag. Yes, those characteristics were all there, all on the paper that had my undried tears.

Not minding her saliva that was hanging out of her mouth, I gave Ellinor the last kiss. Then I moved my hand from her forehead, which was covered by her hair, to her pinkish cheeks, the colour of which was gradually fading away, to have her eyes closed, to make her face look more surreal and serene. After a few seconds of staring, I put the blanket over her body and moved to the couch. In the following ten minutes, I simply sat there and held that stranger till the ambulance came.

Then the doorbell rang, after which I opened the door to let in two guys with a stretcher, one of whom being a doctor. He quickly checked the sign of life on Ellinor, then shook his head, and gave me a look that suggested they couldn't do anything to save her life, which, to me, was like an acknowledgement from the authority for what I had just achieved. I watched him when he was checking the room. And with what I had earlier described on the phone, he soon found out what probably was the cause for the death of a brown hair, good looking, skinny shape girl in her early twenties. I caught his eyes when they landed on the woman next to me. And I knew he had quickly got the knowledge of what had happened to her as well.

A really smart doctor.

Finally, he walked away from Ellinor's dead body, to bring me the news of her death, which I had already known before their arrival.

About ten minutes later, the police arrived. Two officers, a camera woman, an evidence technician, who apparently had been informed of how the situation in the room was before they headed towards the hotel, by Linda, who picked up my emergency call. Those two officers had a brief conversation with the doctor and made the decision that I and the woman should be taken to the hospital without delay, while the body of Ellinor shall remain in the room to be examined by the evidence technician. They didn't reveal anything more to me before I went into the ambulance with the two guys from the hospital who carried the woman on the stretcher. Then the engine of the ambulance got turned on, taking us away from the hotel, the place where I had said goodbye to Ellinor, the place where I had just played the most dangerous game ever, and the place where I had left my messenger bag, which would be later examined by the police.

We arrived at the emergency room of Karolinska Hospital some time later. Though I didn't have anything in my blood, they insisted on tying me to the hospital bed, taking blood samples, measuring my blood pressure, and attaching a few monitor wires onto my chest. I am sure I didn't look vulnerable at that moment, only a few weeks of drug-taking was not a big deal for me at all. And the next morning, after being monitored for a whole night, I was asked to get off the bed and go to an office in the administration section for a police inquiry.

The inquiry was held in a small room with a desk, a few chairs, and a couch of bad quality. A man and a woman were in the room. I recognised the man, who was one of the two officers in the hotel room the day before. They poured me a cup of coffee after I came in, and introduced themselves to me after I sat down on the side of the table opposite them. The man was called Rutger and the woman's name was Petra. First few questions were about my personal background and the relationship between Ellinor and me, to which I answered briefly, giving them the details that were true and safe, and keeping the rest to myself. After I finished, they continued with further questions regarding Ellinor's death, from how we planned the date in Clarion Hotel to what I was doing while waiting for the ambulance to arrive. Again, I gave the answers I could offer, detaching myself from the whole sequence, only describing what could be perceived by a neutral observer.

A safe play. I reduced the risk to the minimum.

In brief, I told them Ellinor had the idea of having a day off for pleasure in a hotel, so we planned it and met each other in the hotel. Then purely as a coincidence, we bumped into a woman on the way to our room. I invited her, and gave her one shot and the other one to Ellinor. After a few seconds, I noticed that everything was going wrong, and fell into a huge anxiety and despair after finding out her breath was gone. Then I started the CPR, which didn't work. So I phoned the emergency, feeling terrified by the fact that I might have killed Ellinor by accident. But I loved her so much that I couldn't believe I had forever lost her, though I knew she was gone. And having known she was gone, I drew a sketch of her in order to remember her. And in the end, I waited, having that stranger as my company until the ambulance arrived.

From how they reacted to my answers and how they added further questions when I was giving the narrative, I could tell that they had already talked to that sexy stranger before the inquiry. And by reading their attitudes throughout the inquiry, I clearly got the point that they were not suspicious of the possibility of the incident being a murder case. I knew, before the inquiry ended, that there wasn't a slightest chance for me to get into any big trouble, since firstly, I acted with a very convincing shock when they told me the poor heart condition Ellinor had; secondly, Ellinor was using drugs for a much longer time than me; thirdly, she hadn't told anybody else about the overdose incident she

once had; fourthly, it was Ellinor who booked the hotel room, which therefore should be evident enough that she was aware of the risk she was to take before I put the shot into her vein; and finally, they had found out, or would soon discover, that the amount of Amphetamine Ellinor took was exactly the same as what I put into the arm of that stranger, which didn't cause a slim sign of side effect on her, who wasn't even a regular drug user.

The inquiry lasted for half an hour. They said thanks to me and recommended me to remain in the hospital, telling me that they might come back with more questions when their ongoing investigation needed my assistance. I gave my promise that I would stay. And after signing my signature on some papers, I went back to my hospital bed.

My prediction of the direction of the police investigation got proven two days later. The same officers came back and informed me that they had more or less reached the final conclusion, that Ellinor's death was an accident. What they were interested to know, this time, was how we obtained those pills, about which I honestly didn't know anything. Ellinor was the one who had all those pills and she had never mentioned how she bought them. So I gave them the truth, which they took without any doubt. It all finished very quickly, and soon I was free to go home. And they promised, before we said goodbye to each other, that they would send my messenger bag to my apartment as soon as they could.

During those three days when I was waiting for my bag, an aggravating anxiety perplexed my mind, bothering me with the fact that I was not in possession of that sketch, the sketch of Ellinor's face, which I desperately wanted to have back. So when the postman had finally delivered it into my hands, I felt, when I was cutting the wrapping open, as if I was a child receiving a long expected birthday gift. My bag was there. I opened it, and my sketchbook was there. Without opening the sketchbook for a check, I put on the bag and headed for my studio in Södermalm. There was a strong force driving me to hang the sketch on the wall as soon as possible. And when I had finally done it, the long lost peace returned.

During the following week, I spent almost every second sitting in the armchair and staring at Ellinor's face, sketched, when I was awake. As a brand new member to the family, that piece of paper was shining

some extra light, so warm since it was fresh, overpowering the chill, the darkness, the unmanageable hollowness that had possessed me for a long time. And I was back in heaven again.

I called Ellinor's family after I went back home from the hospital. With a bit of acting, my crying voice soon broke down their barriers. I knew Ellinor had talked about me with her sister for a few times when she was still alive, describing me as one of the most gentle and caring persons in the world, which afterwards got passed on to their parents. So after a few minutes of self blaming, I totally got both of Ellinor's folks on my side, who even invited me, before the phone call ended, to pay them a visit in Småland.

I took a few deep breaths after I hung up the call, celebrating the release of a big burden. There wasn't much guilt undertaken, I just treated the phone call as a piece of responsibility I had to fulfil. And I didn't pay her family a visit afterwards, neither had they phoned me back. Perhaps there was a solemn agreement being reached in the call I made, that everyone involved had decided to seal the past, leave it behind, and move our lives forwards.

There is nothing more about Ellinor that can be told. Though the story might seem quite long by counting the words I have put down in my macbook, when I passed Clarion Hotel this morning, all of the images just flowed through my mind within a few seconds, rushing me, back in time, through the past I had almost forgotten. Then there came the moment when I got scared, wondering whether I should see my psychiatric today or not.

'What if I alluded to something about Ellinor to Margareta? What if I couldn't manage to seal those images of her death scene, which played a powerful impact on me, making me feel as if everything had happened a minute ago?'

By these questions, I was petrified.

Luckily, if there is anything at which I could be one of the best in the world, it would be my special talent to control fear and horror. So after

seconds of deep breathing, I moved on, passing another long bench at the exiting end, heading towards Lilla Bantorget where the clinic is situated.

I was five minutes late when I entered the front door, and it took me another few seconds to wipe off the water on my glasses. When I put my glasses back on, I saw an office door opening outwards, and out walked the woman I had seen while sitting in the cafe on the other side of the square yesterday. The youngest of the three who I thought to be in her forties. As a matter of instinctual reckoning, I realised she was Margareta.

After calling out my name twice, she landed her eyes on me as I walked towards her. She looked beautiful, and more excitingly, unusually confident.

‘Good morning, Doctor Burström. Sorry I am late.’ I gave my greeting, in a tone that indicated my slight embarrassment.

And I remember her response in exact words, ‘Good morning. Nice to see you, Sebastian. Come in please. And just call me Margareta.’

We then shook hands, and I found out that the top of her head reached the level of my eyes.

After the handshake, she reached out her hand to pull the door open. It was a thick wooden door, clearly well sound-proofed. I took a glance, after she turned around, at the shoes she was wearing. A pair of brown leather cone heels. After a quick calculation, I figured out she was about one metre and sixty-five, a height which wouldn't stand out of the mass in Sweden. Her neatly braided blonde hair on the back of her head caught my eyes, and at the same time sent out the nice smell of the shampoo she used this morning. When she was dragging the handle to open the door, I saw the gold ring on her left ring finger. Margareta held the door for a while to let me walk into her office first, and softly shut it after she stepped in.

It was a big room. There was a desk, an office chair, a bookshelf, two single couches, a tea table, an armchair of an expensive look, and

a small kitchen in the corner. The room had a huge window, covered by the heavy dark curtains. And the light was on.

After I walked in, the first thing I literally did was opening my mouth and saying a 'Wow'. Margareta smiled, and invited me to sit in one of the couches, while at the same time fitting herself in her office chair behind the desk. I was wrong about her age yesterday. She was younger than I thought. And I did the miscalculation because she was in a heavy coat, a furry scarf, and wearing a face that was unhappy with the sudden temperature drop after she stepped into the cold street. When I looked at her face today, I realised she was between thirty-five and forty. And the grey suit and the white shirt she was wearing - which went well with the light make-up on her face and the two small star shaped earrings on her ears - made her look even a few years younger.

I didn't stare at her for a long time, and moved my eyes away, very quickly, to the bookshelf on her back. It had five levels, on four of which stood the collection of her psychology books. I glanced through the book titles and found out that I had read a few of them myself, Sigmund Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams*, *The Uncanny*, C.G.Jung's *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, and *The Red Book: Liber Novus*. And on the top level of the shelf, she placed a photo of a boy, who was very likely to be her son, and a few other personal belongings. There was a clock on the wall, a few plantations by the window, and a paper bin beside her desk.

Margareta was going through a few papers, keeping her head down while I was doing the room check. And she put those papers aside and raised her head after half a minute. So I withdrew my eyes from her bookshelf, only to spot a smile on her face.

'I guess you like my office, Sebastian?' She asked.

I felt a bit embarrassed as if I got caught shoplifting, and then nodded, to give her a confirmative answer. Of course, I turned up a smile, suggesting that I wasn't incapable of basic social skills. Then Margarita stood up, picking up a pen and her notebook, and moved to the couch next to the one I was sitting in. Having asked if she was sitting too close to me, Margarita began the conversation, by asking the questions that were listed on the page she had prepared earlier.

Age, place of birth, occupation, location of residence, relationship status, history of family illness, and so on, which were more or less the same questions those doctors had asked me. And same as I replied to those doctors, I gave the briefest answers to Margarita, showing a bit, covering quite much, and twisting some into protective lies. Though I knew lying wouldn't help to solve my morning disorder, the fear of leaving some contradictory information - which might leak any detail of those murders - prevented me from speaking more about my life as an artist or those relationships I had ever had. Margarita kept taking notes, and very briefly, drew a digram which contained the facts about me on the next page.

When she had finished the last question on the page, Margarita flipped to two new blank pages, trying to write down some new questions at first, but lifted her pen from the paper and fixed her eyes on mine. During the pause, I spotted a feeble flash in her eyes. She had just found a new path to get into my case.

I thought there was going to be another question from her, but instead, she closed her notebook and asked me to stand up and lie in the armchair.

'Just close your eyes and relax, Sebastian.' Her voice became very soft and penetrating, which sounded so convincing that I could do nothing but to obey.

At the moment my back touched the armchair, I had a striking thought in my mind that I was about to be hypnotised. Margareta kept talking in that persuasive voice, telling me to imagine as if I was walking into a thick forest near my childhood house. Doing my best to resist her requests, I concentrated my mind on the everyday life I am living in, while some unknown, imaginary flashbacks kept intervening. And at the same time, I had to perform my face and body to show her that I was following her therapy.

To my surprise, she didn't try to take me deeper in the hypnosis. Using a snapping sound made by her fingers, Margareta woke me up, after which I found her eyes glaring at me. My first thought was maybe my amateur faking performance didn't fool her, and she had figured out

that I was deliberately resisting her therapy. So I looked at Margareta, with my pretended innocence, to see what would be coming from her.

And she smiled. Yes, she just smiled.

Her notebook got opened again, after a relatively long pause. And Margareta started talking, still with that same soft voice, 'Sorry that I didn't ask before we started the hypnotherapy. And how did you feel before I woke you up?'

I made a laugh in my head, after finding out she had been convinced by my acting.

'It was like a dream.'

It was not a lie I gave because it did feel like a dream. In that dream, I could feel the struggle between my consciousness and the distractions created by Margareta's attempt to take me to an imaginary world, and the struggle resembled the situation I have suffered every recent morning, after waking up. In my head, she planted a scenery which felt so similar to the toughest part in my life reality, in both of which, as I have experienced, I am on the edge of losing the control of my consciousness.

'Did you feel that you were about to pass out?' asked Margareta, which revealed to me the purpose of her hypnotherapy, that she was trying to simulate the process of my morning wakeup.

'No, it felt quite good actually.' I told her.

There was a quick frowning on her forehead while she heard my reply. Margareta wrote some notes down, which she instantly crossed out afterwards. Then her head was raised, and I saw her eyes blinking.

'Were you feeling safe when you first saw me after waking up?'

I hesitated for a few seconds, and moved my head backwards while I was trying to reconstruct that moment from my recollection. And when I moved my eyes back to Margareta, I said, 'Yes, I think I was feeling safe.'

On Margareta's face, there was a winner's smile, which lasted for a second before she shrugged her shoulders and started speaking to me again. I was really impressed when she told me what had been discovered from her experiment on me. Just after fifteen minutes since we said hello, she had managed to direct me through my waking up process without the usual blackout, and shared her understanding of the problem with me.

Unfortunately, as she admitted, the root of my disorder remained to be studied, but one of the possible reasons for the occurrence of my disorder had been worked out, that it's because I feel being in danger when I wake up. And one temporary solution, suggested by her, was that I shall live with someone who could look after me, for instance, any family member or friend I trust who could help me feel safe when I wake up every morning.

The first name that went across my mind was Harriet, when I was asked by Margareta if I knew someone who could do that job. Funnily, I genuinely had my trust on Harriet, though she is the woman I am going to kill next, the twenty-seven years' old graphic designer I had picked up from one of those internet dating sites.

However, as another self-defence strategy, I didn't give her name to Margareta. Though from the look on her face, I got the message that she knew I had the choice.

Our meeting went on for a few more minutes, covering some small details about my daily routine. Margareta was very happy when I talked about the diary I had started to keep. From her knowledge and experience, doing what I am doing at the moment is a very efficient path to get into my own psychological interiority. Then we talked about my previous drug addiction, which she had studied from those reports formulated by the doctors. And she suggested there might be a possibility that my disorder was a postponed side effect of Amphetamine.

And just before the meeting was over, she handed to me her business card, on which I could find her mobile number and email address. Very solemnly, Margareta informed me that she was going to make a plan to help her get deeper into the maze of my mind, a more

specific hypnotherapy which would be based on the information about me she had collected, a presumably more intimate direction to conduct our conversations, and perhaps some prescriptions which could lock up the anxiety during my wakeup. Though not predeclaring her success in my case, Margareta promised me that she would give her best try.

We shook hands before Margareta led me to the door. I could feel the warmth of her from the grip as the pat of her other hand landed on my back. She was behaving like a man.

On one hand, I was happy, because I somehow felt hope that my problem would be fixed; but on the other hand, I was scared of this intelligent, courageous, and creative woman. The biggest fear in me was that she would eventually take control of the hypnosis, in which I might be unconscious enough to spill out the facts regarding those murders.

I maintained a long-lasting eye contact with Margareta for a few seconds when we were walking out of the room, and from the confidence I got in her look and the warmth in her both hands, strangely, I was feeling safe, as if she was taking good care of me.

She went back to her office and closed the door, after we waved goodbye to each other.

Not hovering around in the waiting room for a second, I walked straight towards the exit, following one safety rule I have made for myself: The less chance for me to be seen by anyone, the safer my life of being a serial killer would remain.

It was cold outside, always this dramatic temperature shift when you switch between indoor and outdoor spaces during wintertime. I took a look at my watch as I put on my coat, it was a quarter to eleven.

I got on Bus 53, not heading for T-centralen, but Asplund's City Library. Some minutes later, I stepped off the bus and walked up the big staircase in front of the library. There were not so many people in the library on Monday morning, especially in a freezing day after a big storm. I knew the place where sit the least people, the reading hall for Art and Architecture. And I was right, no one was there as I walked in. The seat in the centre of those long tables became my choice, where I

could work through everything that had happened in the clinic, without being disturbed by those who would pass the four sides of the seating area. Of course, it was a careful choice.

I moved in, took the chair out, and switched on the reading lamp. Out of my messenger bag, I took my pen and my notebook, putting them on the table, then buried my face in my both hands for a long while. The haunting fear from meeting Margareta was overwhelming, nearly giving me a panic attack. The dark, gloomy space around me was frightening, which I had never felt during my previous experiences in the reading hall. All the energy in my body got frozen in a sudden, without which I could do nothing but keep my face in my hands, brooding, contemplating every detail, which had taken place in the clinic, over and over again.

Fortunately, that moment of despair didn't last long. An alarming voice kicked into my head, dragging me out of frustration, turning up the gifted rational thinking part of me. I opened my notebook, and began to sort out how I should react to what had just happened. Firstly, I had to know more about hypnosis. For start, I would need a few specialised books from the library. Secondly, I wrote down all the lies I had given to Margareta, which I had to remember as solid facts. Thirdly, I shall develop a strategy, so I could be able to direct the future conversations, while being hypnotised, between I and Margareta. Fourthly, I needed to spend time searching for anything written by her. And at last, I wanted to try the suggested solution and see if Harriet would be able to get my disorder under control.

After listing down those notes, I closed the book, put it back in my bag, got up from the chair, and headed towards the service computer at the entrance of the hall.

The pages of the search results popped up on the screen after I typed in the key word 'Hypnosis' and clicked the search button. There were around eighty books on the subject in the archive, which took me half an hour to go through each of their short descriptions. In the end, I selected five of them which I thought might be useful. It was good that they were all stocked in the same bookshelf, so it would save me a huge amount of time from looking for them. Afterwards, I typed in 'Margareta Burström' for the machine to search, but there was no result,

not a single article had her as the author. It was just a strange thing, I wondered at that moment, that such a competent psychiatrist like her hadn't published anything that would be stored in libraries.

As I thought it further, two explanations for that wonder came out. One was that she had used a pen name while writing articles or reports, which was very unlikely to be true since only novelists and poets do such things; and the other explanation was, being far more likely than the previous one, that she didn't get her education in Sweden, and had published her articles where she had studied, or worked, before coming to work in Stockholm.

Being a bit upset by the dead end of the investigation into my psychiatrist, I walked to the bookshelf, to pick out those five books I had selected, carrying them to the check-out machine afterwards. I finished the check-out on the automatic machine, and asked for a plastic bag from the reception. It was a fake library card that I used for the check-out, which I applied from the library by submitting the personal information in my fake foreign passport.

That's another rule I have made for myself to follow: Leave as few traces as possible, and if I do have to, better when they are fake.

I then went to the cafe of the library, and found out there were actually more people in the cafe than the rest of the library. It was lunchtime.

I ordered a hem bagel with a cappuccino, and sat down on the couch to read the crime novel I had been carrying in my bag all day.

After lunch, I returned to the reading hall, and for the most of the afternoon, kept going through those prefaces of each book I had just borrowed, getting quite fascinated by the development in the study of modern hypnosis. Though there were, in total, around three thousand pages in those five books, as long as I could keep my curiosity in the world of hypnosis, it wouldn't be a torturous experience to go through all the important essentials in them, which would definitely help when I deal with Margareta in the future.

And when I was about to leave the library after a few hours of reading, an idea flashed into my head, telling me how foolish I was that I had forgotten to check Margareta's information on 'hitta.se'. There were many vacant computers in the lobby, so I picked one and sat in front of it, typing her name in the search bar of that website.

No result, or to be more precise, there were eight search results, but none of them was in Stockholm area.

Then I wondered, thinking that with that big amount of salary she gets from her job, she must have a nice place in the city.

'Has she just moved to Sweden recently, or did she ask for all her personal details to be removed from the website?' I asked myself.

Either of the two possibilities could be true. It would be more reasonable if she was barely new in Stockholm, which fits better the result I got from the search of her articles. Yet, it is also possible that she could have been involved in some cases, with her clients, for which she had to put her personal information off every public domain, otherwise her life would be in some trouble. And from the meeting in the morning, I can draw the conclusion that Margareta is not an insecure person, so if the latter was the case, it should be something serious which might indeed cause an actual danger to her and her family.

'What could the incident be then?' I let my imagination flow.

When I walked down the marble staircase to the entrance, my mind was like a sink whose plug hole got stuffed and covered by many hairs, the water above which kept turning stinky and muddy. All the unsolved mysteries regarding Margareta remained as the muddy water, refusing to go down to the pipe until I found a way to drag those hairs, those unknown facts about my psychiatrist, out of the plug hole.

And as I pushed the entrance door open, a cold wind blow cleared my thought, reminding me that there was one more thing I had to do, to call Harriet. I dialled the number but she was not answering, then I sent her a short message.

Outside the library, there were a few boys skating on the big frozen pool, chasing each other, not afraid to fall. After passing them, I walked into Rådmansgatan station. After an hour of switching from metro to commuter train to bus, I went into the centrum around where I live and bought my dinner from the supermarket.

It is shocking to find out that I have been constantly writing for more than ten hours. The alarm is ringing, telling me it is already seven in the morning. I reach out my left hand to switch off the annoying buzz. Then suddenly, I become very sleepy, and it seems I have no energy left in my body at this moment.

There was still no message from Harriet when I checked my phone ten seconds ago, so I switched it off afterwards. I need a lot of sleep now, and it will be very annoying if she rings me up when I am asleep.

And just after the phone was turned off, I remembered Harriet had told me last week, that she would be on a business trip to London from Monday to Wednesday, working with a carpet company there, drawing some pattern designs for the new season. So very likely, she had forgotten her phone at home before leaving and is now using a business one provided by that British company. And I know how concentrated Harriet could be when she is on a commission as this.

She is a mad workaholic now, so probably I have to wait till Wednesday to test Margareta's suggestion. I literally don't know anyone else in the city, and none of those I used to know is still breathing. Then if I could manage to sleep for around twenty-four hours and wake up on Wednesday morning, there will be one less annoying blackout for me to go through before I meet Harriet again.

24/12/1990 Östersund

Today is Christmas eve.

It was a really busy day yesterday. Though I didn't enjoy either preparing food or decorating the Christmas tree, I did both of them because I was asked by Katarina to help her and Gudmund. And what I have learnt from school can explain why I became so exhausted at the end of the day, even more exhausted than my little brother: You save half of the energy when you are doing something you enjoy, and spend an extra amount doing something you don't.

Our life is getting harder. Katarina hasn't yet mentioned it, but I know we are running out of money. She used to buy us Christmas presents in the past years, but this year, we didn't get anything.

Three years ago, Katarina lost her job in that beauty salon close to my school. And from then, we started to live on the government money.

In the first two years, there were customers visiting our house every now and then. They were Katarina's loyal clients, several school teachers and shop assistants, a few nurses and one policewoman, who would pay a bit less since no tax needed to be added onto their bills. And another reason why they kept coming to our mother was that she is the best makeup professional in the whole Östersund, for which I have always been curious of how she actually lost her job in the first place. I have never asked the question, neither has she ever talked about it.

So with the money from her customers and the government, we used to have a quite good living condition at home. Just before the last spring term started, Katarina would buy me a toy car once in two or three months, and bring new clothes home, nearly every month, for Gudmund. For my last year's birthday, I got a scale model of the Ferrari Formula 1, the racing car Ayrton Senna was driving in those competitions. And Ayrton Senna was the first role model to me as a father figure.

But this year, everything has turned very different. Katarina's customers come much less frequently. Gudmund hasn't got any new clothes since the Mid-summer, and the only toy car I have received this year was the second-handed Bentley during the Easter. When I had my birthday a month ago, there was not even a present for me.

However, it is not something that has only happened to my family, some of my classmates' parents have also lost their jobs somewhere in the year. The beauty salon Katarina used to work at was closed three months ago, the sign that hangs at door says it's under renovation, but I know what they are saying is they don't have any money to run the place before the next spring comes. So mainly, we are living on the government money now, which is just a bit more than the rent we have to pay for our house.

Luckily, my life isn't getting much worse since I mainly only sleep in the house everyday. But for Katarina and Gudmund, it is not an easy year. Our mother goes out of the house less and less, and always wears a depressed face, even when she is talking to Gudmund, or listening to our jokes. More often than before, I could hear my little brother crying in the next room to ours.

And on some days, I would find Gudmund, one of the nicest boys I know, ripping off arms, heads, or legs, of those dolls Katarina has made for him. I told him to stop every time I caught him doing that, and what Gudmund did was staring at me with his eyes pumping out tears and continuing his violent action. After a while, Gudmund would calm down, quickly returning to that nice boy he usually is, but refused to tell me anything regarding why he was behaving like a violent maniac. In the end, I would help him to sew the pieces together, repairing them

back into those nice dolls they used to be, otherwise more terrifying things would have been done to Gudmund by Katarina, as I feared.

I believe the most scary thing in the world is not some actual thing itself, but the feeling when you know something scary exists around you and you just don't know anything about it. So it scares me that my little brother doesn't want to tell me anything about what Katarina sometimes does to him, especially when he returns to our room right after it has happened.

It is about thirty minutes to midnight. We, three of us, have finished our Christmas dinner hours ago. Some smoked hem with salad, no herrings or shellfishes.

There has never been more than three of us during every Christmas we have ever had. Katarina lost her parents when she was very small, and grew up in an orphanage in Gothenburg. Just as little as we know about our father, his parents remain as a myth to us also. They were only mentioned once, by Katarina, to the social worker who came around and asked how everything in our family was. She told the man that our two remaining grandparents were living in some old people's home in America. Gudmund has no idea where that country is. And from the geography class at school, I know it's on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean. So we still have two grandparents, but they live really really far away and Katarina doesn't like to have them, or any topic related to them, in our house.

*She is asleep now, Katarina, who went to bed after reading to us a few chapters from *The Bible*. Gudmund and Katarina both believe in Jesus, while I don't. Therefore, to me, it was like listening to a series of really bad stories, or cheap jokes, when she did that. And I had to do my best to not burst into laughter.*

But the truth is, the harder you try to hold your laughter, the more likely you are going to laugh. So at the end, I failed. I didn't contain myself and laughed out. Like how they had reacted at this exact point of every Christmas eve before, they both stared at me as if I was occupied by some sort of demon. I know that's what upset Katarina,

also the reason why she sent Gudmund to our bedroom immediately and punished me for the first time in this year, leaving me to clean all the dishes by myself. That's what happened at the end of all the other Christmas eves also, which makes me wonder if it is Katarina's trick to avoid the dishwashing. She brought me to the sink and walked back to her room, without saying goodnight to me, or quite strangely, my little brother.

I was really tired after I finished the dishwashing. And Gudmund was already asleep in his bed when I sneaked into our room. I was afraid that I would have awakened him if I switched on the ceiling light, so I brought a lit candle from the dinner table with me as I came in.

It is great that I can be writing again since the day before yesterday, even I am very sleepy now. And there is another reason for me to stay awake. In a few minutes, the church bell will be ringing, which is one of the few things I do enjoy during Christmas. I like listening to the penetrative sound of the fresh start of a new year, the sound of the church bell that would fill me with a lot of new hopes.

And it is ringing now. Ding-dong, ding-dong, ..., with much energy of the sound being taken by the thick snow on the way. So when the bell ring has traveled all the way from the church to our house, it is not loud anymore, but a lot clearer than how it sounds in summer. I think it is because the snow is keeping all the echoes away, making it clean and comforting, harmonising the sound of the church bell.

I am happy again. And now, I shall sleep.

12/12/2012 Stockholm

I woke up early this morning. And indeed, as I wished, I did sleep through the whole Tuesday. The sound of a taxi cracking into the snow pulled me out of a horrible dream I was having, and then the usual morning routine took over my body for a few minutes. It was less worse than the last few times, so perhaps the meeting with Margareta two days ago has made some progress.

After the shower and breakfast, it is still six o'clock in the morning.

And when I lifted the curtain a minute ago, outside the window, the light from the lamp posts, helped by its reflections from the snow, illuminated the whole street. Then as I drew my hand back, the curtain fell off to cover the window, giving me one of the most precious things in the world, the darkness. And it is absolutely still and quiet at this moment, as if the whole universe has stopped its pace, only leaving my ticking watch to remind me what I have just hoped is a pure fantasy.

Stillness can give me peace, but only for some seconds. There is too much going on in my mind now that I wouldn't find the darkness, the stillness, or the quietness enjoyable enough to stop writing down what my head wants to tell.

It is the dream, the nightmare, which is terrifying me. And it is also confusing, because it doesn't make any sense. In the beginning of the dream, as I could remember, I was running down a mountain, and something kept chasing me from behind. It didn't make any sound, but I could feel it. I could feel it, but I didn't dare to turn back my head to figure out what it exactly was. Between the trees and the bushes, the

path looked endless. So I had to keep running, not letting the pain or tiredness from my feet slow down my speed. The only feeling I had was fear, the fear of confronting that stalking thing behind my rear.

Yet, I just stopped, not falling or getting trapped by anything. It was not my own intention to stop, and I don't even believe anyone could actually make a decision in their dreams. I just couldn't move my legs.

Then there followed the most soul-stirring situation. I stood there, being helpless, waiting for that thing to get closer, and then closer. And out of a sudden, it touched me. First, my both elbows felt the freezing coldness, then it went to my shoulders, and my back, and my legs. I fell down, backwards. And as I hit the ground, I saw what it was, the threat that had been chasing me and now was hovering above me. It was a thick black mist.

As the last thing I know from the dream, the mist thundered down like a hungry wild beast, and then wrapped me tightly, holding me stronger and stronger to smash me into quarks. I didn't feel anything, and then the sound woke me up.

'Am I scared of something that is chasing me in my real life? The police? The families of those I have killed? Or the inevitable ending that awaits me?'

'No,' I don't think any of these could explain the dream.

The more I have killed, the more confident I feel with this nasty business. And I don't believe the police would find it out if I didn't turn myself in, neither could any journalist or private detective.

'Could it be guilt?' This can hardly be true either, since I don't feel any remorse for any of my victims.

Quite on the contrary, I believe that I have done the right thing to put them off this real world. They don't belong here. The real world couldn't give them what they genuinely deserved, and the excruciating life they were living in would have mainly left more ugliness on their faces. Their bodies would have turned from being soft and sweet to going loose

and stinky all the way, and eventually no one would wish to put any attention on them. And their hearts would have been carved by every disappointment of their daily lives, remained bleeding, and finally healed up, leaving all those depressing deep scars, which would then live with them till the end. So from this aspect, I would consider myself more as a 'saint' than a 'devil'. By transforming them from destroyed mortal beings into forever glittering spiritual eternities, I have freed up their souls from their lives that were polluting and twisting their existences. From the moment their spirits left their bodies, the beauty of each of them would never age, just like those sketches of their faces on my wall.

I couldn't figure out the reason behind the dream, and that's why it's bothering me so much.

And I have to do something else to distract me from this agonising feeling. I checked my phone first, there was still no messages or voicemails from Harriet. Today is the day of her submission, so I guess she must have been working through all night to get things done for the best they can be.

Sadly, the idea of having some petty romance to cheer me up failed. I have to work it out by myself, by writing as I wish, at this time in the morning.

After taking another cup of coffee, I have got something else in my mind that I want to put down in my diary. It's about the difficulties in my life.

To live as an artist is never an easy job in any corner of the world, especially when not so many people know about you and your work. My paintings don't sell well, because not so many people could enjoy so much violence in an artwork as I do when I am putting it onto the canvases. And those few who could taste the essence I desperately want to express, they don't have the money to buy any of them.

Unlike most other serial killers who can do what they are famous for in their low budget lives, I need money. I need a lot of money to keep that bloodthirsty monster within me alive.

To start the connection with my future victim, I usually need money. Dinners, drinks, and sometimes hotel rooms, these cost money. And to develop the story into a stage when they would put their trust on me, I usually need money. Presents, holidays, more dinners and drinks, these cost money. Finally, when their endings are designed, which I would preferably turn into tragic accidents in a foreign land, I usually need money. Yet, I have forgotten to mention, that before I start seeing a new victim at most of the times, it costs money to have a highly emulated identification. There is a whole chain of business in the country to help you plant your fake identification into every social database, so in the end you could make that fake version of you have more proofs of existence than some real people. It's complicated, but not impossible. It just costs a lot of money. So to live as an artist, as how I used to live, couldn't fulfil the demand from the expensive serial killer life I choose to live in.

Therefore, in order to keep my finance balanced, I had to start doing commercial trash to get money, after I realised this insane life couldn't be stopped. I thought, for quite a while, about what I should be doing to earn money. I couldn't do acting, which would have caught too much attention and put me in those tight shooting schedules. Having some sort of business was also out of consideration. So far as I have discovered about myself, if there is something I don't possess at all, that will be the entrepreneur instinct. I just don't know how to talk about business with others.

And I couldn't get a fixed job. I have never liked the idea of having a permanent desk in some office at any point of my life, and the professional life of meeting those equally frustrated colleagues everyday would have brought down my mood for life, from the first second of my walking into the room. Finally, after several long nights of looking for a way to make ends meet, I came up with an idea which could, at least, be tested.

I decided to write screenplays of some shitty television series. There are millions of people in this country devoting their lives to those fruitless rubbish, and no one cares about who is the screen writer of the series that they wait twenty-four hours everyday in the other six days of a week, just to watch the new episode on the seventh day. Rising with its financial promises, that idea certainly had every fibre of my body convinced. And what was more important, it meant I didn't need to work with other

people. It would just be me sitting on a chair by a desk, writing something down from my limitless imaginations, sending scripts to some TV series producers after a few weeks, and having money transferred to my bank account, without any TV watchers noticing my name that would turn up in the beginning and the end of every episode. People are so impatient nowadays that there is no chance for them to wait through the first few minutes of a new episode. Either they switch to other channels or move away from their couches to fetch a drink. If they use computers to watch TV series, it would be easier because they could always click the mouse to skip the beginning and ending part of every episode. Anyway, I just felt that taking a career in writing could be the right solution.

Two weeks after I put the idea into practice, I finished my first script, six episodes, a story about a few miners in Kiruna of the 1940s getting locked up in a cave after a sudden collapse of the mine, who had to kill a person in the group to feed the rest, to survive, after being totally disconnected from the outside world for three weeks. In the original script, it was a Jew who got killed, sliced, and freshly eaten by the other miners, which became a major problem as I submitted the story to several producers. They all thought the story contained too much racism and immoral violence, especially in the ending part, which was the reason why it couldn't be put on the television screen. But I insisted that was what could have been the actual reality, at that time of the world crisis.

Most of them rejected my script, but two were really fond of the story, only asking me to rewrite the ending part. One of them even invited me to a few meetings with him, to discuss the alternatives. He was truly intrigued by how people could behave in such extreme condition like that and wanted to present it to the audience. After those meetings, we agreed that the Jewish minor could be kept in the story and the first half of the story could remain as it was. The changes would be made from after some of the others had decided to kill that Jew, whose secret lover stood up and sacrificed his life for him. The producer believed this romantic or reality detached twist would work in the public domain, and explained to me the general sensitivity on the racial issues, with which I had to agree because I needed that story to be shown on the screens so I could get paid with the money I earnestly had to have.

After one week of rewriting quite a big part of the story, I got paid with two hundred thousand kronor, which was a really handsome amount for

a rookie screenwriter. The series got finished three months later, and to everyone's surprise, it boomed up to be unbelievably popular, for which I immediately started to write the second season after the release of the second episode. And that was the moment I decided to have an agent, who would be the first long term professional contact in my entire life. The producer recommended a guy called Peter to me, describing him as a man in his forties, confident looking, sociable and relatively modest.

When we met at last, I couldn't draw anything against him during the first few seconds, so I reached out my hand and said to him, in my toneless voice, 'Hi, Peter. I am Sebastian. Looking forward to working with you.'

'Me too. And I hope you were not joking.' From his reply, I got the message that he had sensed the sarcastic tone I usually carry in greetings. So I did what I was supposed to do as my response, performing a typical middle-class smile. He also laughed, which turned the whole situation between us less awkward.

After that day, Peter became the person who I only contact with for my screenwriting business. I send every chapter, as soon as I have finished one, to him, and he would let me know the comments from the producer and the director a couple of days later. It is the way how I like things to run. To have only one person to discuss things with is way much simpler and better than to do it with several others. Peter has also introduced other producers to me, who were impressed by my first story and wished to have a new story from me, a story of the quality that could level with the one of the successful Kiruna Miners series.

For one of the producers introduced by Peter, I wrote my second screenplay, which told the story about a group of children in an orphanage, around some mountainous area in Norway, struggling with their brutal lives, suffering all the abuses done by their maniac principal and everyday hardness. I wrote two seasons and ended the story with a child's death which subsequently caused a serious police investigation, leading the case to the criminal prosecution of the principal and the closure of the orphanage.

In general, Peter is quite a fun person, especially when we go for a drink in a pub and not talk about our business. And professionally, he is a well talented business type, which is what in him I despise the

most. His entrepreneur intuition is so dominant among his other senses that his first reaction to almost everything that has just happened is to initiate a promotion strategy out of it. For most of the matters, I could tolerate as long as it doesn't reveal much of my personal details to the public. But it really turned me outrageous once when he suggested that we should use my involvement in Ellinor's death to heat up the second season of the Kiruna story, before its release. Peter believed it was a fantastic idea to put me in front of different cameras and share what I know about Ellinor's death with the public.

I kept my patience until Peter finished talking about his idea, then told him to fuck off. Of course he couldn't understand what was behind my rage and kept arguing why I should do as he had suggested. So I lied to him, in my strong language, threatening him that he shall never dare to use anything about my beloved Ellinor who tragically died right in front of me. He apologised, then gave me a look, indicating that he was hugely impressed by my loyalty and dedication to Ellinor, as well as my deeply rooted ethical standards, both of which were fraudulently presented with the help of my acting skills.

And that head-on confrontation had a further impact. Since that incident, Peter has become quite circumspect, every now and then, when he has just come up with a new commercial strategy.

However, I owe a lot of thanks to Peter, because my income began to escalate since he stepped in to help out. In July, he managed to get a contract done so the plot of that miners' story could be readjusted to make a Hollywood film, which brought me the biggest amount of money I have ever seen on my bank account. And one rule for Hollywood screenwriters is exactly the same as the one for television series writers, that we will never be famous, which suits me fine. What was even greater, it was Peter who sorted out everything with the American producer so I didn't need to meet any of those money centred creatures myself.

The money made by my screenwriting career has opened up a world of freedom to me, where I can realise every bit of detail in my plans, allowing me to dramatise all the murders in whatever way as I can wish. Meeting those women-to-die with my costly fake identity; buying new clothes and accessories, from time to time, for me, for them, to have a fresh look; paying for dinner in their favourite fancy restaurants;

having sex in boutique hotel rooms or the most expensive suites in those pointless massive boats; buying jewelries or fashionable shoes to lock up their hearts; booking a ski holiday to the Alps or any other mountainous area where I could deliberately engineer the accidents for their departures from life; traveling to Strasbourg, Florence, or Venice, and killing them in hotel rooms, dark midnight alleys, or abandoned industrial buildings; and occasionally, taking a real holiday, for myself, from the stressful life in which I have been living in Stockholm.

Money has made all the fantasies come true, from which I have got a lot of inspirations for my screenplay writing as well. I have found out that it is such a safe way to finalise those murders abroad. All the tickets and hotel rooms will be booked under my fake identifications, and when the murders are complete, I will travel back to Sweden immediately, using my real identity. And about fingerprints, I get those fake ones made of emulsion every time I buy a new identity. So no matter it is a murder or an accident I want to make it look like, in the end, the police would just spend a huge amount of time and energy looking for my traces outside Sweden, while at the same time, I, with a new fake identity, have probably started seeing a new woman who is later to be killed.

It always feels rewarding and refreshing when I go on a real holiday by myself, which hasn't happened very often so far. I have been to Berlin, where I had an unforgettable night out, during which I had sex with three different girls in the toilets of the most stylish nightclub in the world, Berghain; Barcelona, where I accidentally got involved in a terrifying shootout between the police and the drug dealers in the town centre; Milan, in front of its cathedral, I beat a guy to the ground who threatened me to pay for the silly colourful twines he, sneakily, wrapped around my wrist when I had just stepped out of the metro station. But above all those holidays, the most memorable one was my days in Paris.

And there's something I need to write down before moving on to my holiday in Paris, which took place during the break I had after killing the first woman on my murder list, Maria.

Maria

She was a waitress in the restaurant where I went with Elisabet, the woman who I was living with then, for dinner. It nearly paralysed me when I first saw her face, which looked almost as a replica of my mother's. My girlfriend noticed something was happening from the way I stared at the waitress when she was serving us, and had a fight with me on the street after dinner. I couldn't come with a good excuse to cool off her anger, so in the end, she slapped me in the face, and ran away, shouting that she didn't want to see me ever again.

It would have been probably fine, even my life wouldn't have turned that way, if I told Elisabet the truth, that the waitress's face was reminding me of the one of my mother. But I didn't. Instead, I just stood there and watched her storming away to take a taxi, as I found out later, to her mother's place in Vasastan. And when Elisabet had disappeared from my sight, I moved my eyes back to the restaurant, and saw that waitress was looking at me behind a huge glass, with her eyes telling me that she had witnessed everything that had happened between me and Elisabet. Not knowing how to behave, I kept standing still and looking at her, who smiled and walked away from the window. I am not sure what was exactly in my mind at that moment, but I decided to get in the restaurant and talk to her. We bumped into each other when I was on my way to the toilet. I asked if I could see her after work, and she told me to pick her up at midnight outside the restaurant.

For passing the time till the arrival of midnight, I went to a bar nearby. While I was waiting there, I dialled Elisabet's number but her phone was switched off. So I did nothing but ordered one drink after another within the next two hours before the midnight bell of the church rang.

It was actually a pleasant date for me and Maria on that night. We went to a quiet bar and talked a lot about ourselves. She looked really amused when I told her how her face got my attention. And I found out that I was a love at first sight to her. After a few drinks, we went to her cage size apartment in the outskirts of Stockholm for a romantic affair.

It all went very well and I didn't feel anything wrong before her eyes became floppy as we were making love. A rush of disgust, which

suddenly made me want to puke, broke into my mind. I had to move my eyes away from her face, while at the same time my lower body began to pound much harder. Her screaming raised its volume and became more desperate, which appeared to be quite easing and entertaining, for my mind to block off that feeling of disgust.

After we finished, Maria lay on my chest and told me a secret about herself. As I had earlier discovered from her East European accent myself, she was not Swedish, but from Moldova. Two years ago, Maria ran away to Sweden from her father who had been constantly abusing her. She didn't have a validate identification for living in the country, and had been a prostitute for more than a year, before one of those punters generously offered her a job in his restaurant as a waitress. She was paid with the minimum wage, forced to offer him occasional sex.

Her warm tears, which I put my hand to wipe off her face, kept falling down on me when she was telling her tragic life story. I did have some sympathy for what Maria had been through, but that sympathy got knocked out by what I had previously felt from looking at her face. Maria's life story, touching as it was, kept going, while at the same time, all I wanted was to have sex with her again. We had sex two more times on that night, during which I put on more rough and brutal thrusts while humping her. When we both completely ran out of energy, she put her head next to my shoulder and told me it was the best night that had ever happened to her. But in my mind, at that moment, something frightening was getting revealed. I was trying to figure out what that feeling of disgust was about, but couldn't get any further. All I had worked out, before I eventually fell asleep, was that the harder those trusts were, the less disgusted I felt from having sex with Maria.

I was still bothered by the feeling after I left her place the next morning, struggling to unwrap that indefinable enigma while sitting on the bus, on my way back to the apartment I and Elisabet lived in. My girlfriend was not there when I arrived, and her phone was still switched off. Not knowing any of her best friends' numbers, I phoned her family and talked to her mother, who told me that her daughter decided to live with the family for a couple of days and would let me know when she wanted to talk to me again.

So for the next few days, I stayed in Maria's place during the night. And that mystery still troubled me. Every time we were having sex, her face, which could be interpreted as being seductive if I was not the subject of seeing it, just made me want to throw up.

Besides sex, Maria liked talking to me a bit more about herself when we spent the night together, which turned out to be more amusing and relaxing than our lovemaking.

But the facts about my bizarre feeling remained undiscovered until Elisabet opened the door of our apartment in Bergshamra and demanded a frank explanation for what had happened on the night I met Maria, for the first time, in that restaurant. I suddenly realised there was only one way to have peace back in my life again, that Maria had to disappear.

I buried all the nights that I had spent in Maria's place, not revealing them, and confessed to Elisabet that my attention was caught by the beautiful face of that waitress. She questioned if I had seen that waitress afterwards, to which I denied with my well mastered face of innocence.

Her anger finally evaporated in a few minutes, when I promised to be her company for the shoes shopping the next day. An easy trick to ease Elisabet. She then agreed to stay, and we spent the night together.

I didn't worry about Maria at all, since I knew that was the day she ought to be staying with her boss, and I hadn't given her my phone number.

Elisabet was an art student, who I first met in an exhibition moderated by an old acquaintance of mine, in March last year. My friend introduced me to Elisabet, one of her best friends who willingly wanted to know an artist. One day later, we started dating and I moved in her place after two months. After I noticed that Elisabet was such an insecure and imaginative person, I did my best to avoid all the circumstances that could trigger her sense of jealousy.

Yet, the beauty of the human nature is, when a person is easy to be provoked, then she or he is equally easy to be pleased. As the result of knowing this nature of Elisabet, she became the first girl who I had

managed to live with longer than three months. That was the time when I wanted to settle with someone for a long term, and Elisabet's fascination for artists did fulfil the demand for vanity from the manliness part of me.

It took a few days before I met Maria again. I visited the restaurant during lunchtime and asked for her number so that I could call her when I had the chance. She saw Elisabet in the restaurant on that night, and told me that she totally understood my situation. At that moment, I almost regarded her as an angel, who I would have wanted to end my life with if I could get along with her face, which stimulated my memory of how sick it made me feel when we were having sex. I gave Maria a kiss and said goodbye to her, being amused with the fact that she would be waiting, desperately, to see me and make love to me, while all I wanted from seeing her was to figure out more details about her so I could put my plan into operation more safely.

Two days later, I dialled Maria's number from a street phone box, and told her that I could see her again since Elisabet would soon be away from Stockholm for a week.

Elisabet had been talking about this study trip to Iran nearly every minute since she came back from her mother's place, and did all her could to drag me in. Truthfully, I would have said yes to her proposal since that part of the world had been one of my dream places to visit for years, if Maria's case was not involved, and therefore I had to make up a lie to tell Elisabet that there was a serious project I had decided to work on during the week she would be away. As an art student herself, Elisabet knew how obdurate an artist could be when an idea was crystallised. And after I made the promise that we would at least talk to each other once a day, on phone or Skype, Elisabet got over the disappointment, which was given by my saying no to the romantic trip she had presumably planned for a long time, telling me that she would bring a gift for me when she was back. What the gift would be remained as a secret.

In the afternoon of the next day, right after Elisabet sent me the message, saying she was on board, ready to take off, I went to freshen up myself in the bathroom for seeing Maria in the evening. A few hours later, I found myself cooking dinner with Maria in her tiny apartment. And that was the night I worked out how easy my task would be, to make Maria disappear.

I took a look at Maria's phone when she was having a bath. There was a screen lock, which I hacked after trying four different codes. I typed in her date of birth first, then the last four numbers of her mobile phone, later the day she came to Sweden, and at last, to my surprise, I unlocked her phone by putting in the date I first met her in the restaurant, '1204'.

After running through her contact book, sms details, and in and out call records, I figured out, more or less as I had assumed before, that there were only three people Maria was connected with, among whom the most regular contact was her sadist boss, whose messages were mainly about imaginative violent sexual imageries in which he wished Maria to perform as a sex slave. And about the other two contacts, one had a male name, who, from what I had heard from Maria, was likely to be the pimp; the other had a female name who should be Maria's best friend, and they met when Maria was fleeing to Stockholm. Both of their messages were in Romanian.

Very convenient for my plan as I discovered, the last time Maria contacted the pimp was two months ago, and in the last message sent by Maria, there were many exclamation marks, as I gathered, expressing the level of her anger towards him, which suggested that the connection between the two had been terminated. Regarding the other contact, when I stayed in her apartment for the first night, Maria talked to me about her best friend who was deported from Sweden to Moldova a month ago, after a punter in the custody sold her out to the police, and they found out that she had the illegal documents, as Maria. The story was proven to be true by their sms exchanges, which ended, exactly, on the same date of her departure. Better than I expected, besides me, there was only one person Maria was in touch with, and she hated him.

The moment after I pressed the lock button of her phone and put it on the side table, the most beautiful image of Maria emerged as she came out of the bathroom, having the bathrobe tied around her hip and looking at me with the most seductive expression on her face I had ever seen. She leaned on the door frame, one hand hidden on her back and the other slightly lifting up the bathrobe so I could almost see her whole right thigh. Her hair was not completely dry. And the bathwater was dripping down - from her medium long, curly, blonde hair - a few drops of which landed on her uncovered breasts and scratched down

from the top to the bottom. When the first droplets fell off to the floor, I couldn't contain myself any longer. I stood up from the bed and walked towards Maria, having my eyes fixed on hers. And the only message I could receive from those two hungry eyes was that she wanted me more than anything else in the world. When we stood face-to-face to each other and could feel the warmth of our breaths, I heard Maria whispering, 'I love you, Sebastian.'

And what happened in the next second was, as I can clearly recall, that she reached out her both arms to the back of my neck and landed her hot lips on mine, giving me one of the sweetest kisses I have ever had.

Then Maria pushed me, step by step, to her bed while we were kissing, and, at the same time, undid the buttons of my shirt. My hands were around her waist, which felt so soft and warm as if it was the best place in the world for my hands to stay. I didn't loosen her bathrobe when Maria had already separated the shirt from my upper body and started to take away my jeans. That piece of pink cotton fabric was what I wanted to save for the last bit of our exciting warmup game. Then the bed trapped me and made my back fall on it when my kneebacks hit it, after which I just lay on the bed to let Maria pull my trousers and underwear away. Her bathrobe fell off when she climbed up to lay herself on top of me, nestling her warm, silky skin on mine when she gave me another kiss. I kept my eyes tightly closed and enjoyed the trip to eden, couldn't think of anything else in my mind, since all my blood had been pumped down, to my genital.

And this time, when I accidentally caught her eyes as we were making love, I saw something totally different. There was this confidence and lust I had never seen, suggesting how crazy she had been after knowing I had been with another woman for a few days only. And for the first time, I wanted to be as gentle as I could with Maria while making love, for the sake of keeping the harmonious physical connection as long as possible. When we finished, having Maria's shimmering body lying on top of me, I stared at the ceiling that was softly illuminated by the street lights and said to myself, that I just had the best sex in my life.

When Maria had already fallen asleep in my arms, my mind started to struggle with itself, weighing the two opposite sides of arguments about whether I should reconsider the whole situation, or not. A part of

me said I should dump Elisabet and get on with Maria, who apparently could be the love of my life if she could maintain that controlling face; and the other part unstopably put up with all the other sexual experiences I had shared with Maria before, telling me that I should stick to my primitive instinct of ending Maria's life and carry on to figure out how to make it happen. I couldn't get into sleep. So I spent my insomnia looking at Maria's peaceful sleeping face instead.

The debate in my mind didn't stop till the moment Maria woke up in the morning, whose smiley face and weary eyes of that exact moment helped me make the decision, that I had to kill her, to have her life vanish from this world.

Maria saw that I didn't sleep well. I told her I was okay and gave her a kiss. When she got off the bed to the toilet, a plan, which would work excitingly with very low risk, knocked into my head and pushed out the image of Maria's beautiful back. When Maria walked out of the bathroom, the plan had already got well detailed in my mind, staying behind the eyes which were inevitably located on her naked body, rendered by the winter morning sun, to be truthful, like a faultless sculpture. I grabbed her hand when she got closer, smoothly folded her in my arms, and started the first step of what I had just planned. After a long and tender kiss, I invited her to come around to my place the day after. She said no first, and changed her mind after seeing my well-performed upset face. A dinner date was set up, before we had our morning sex.

The door bell rang a few minutes after I had finished all the preparations for cooking. Maria arrived with a bottle of white wine in a purple Systembolaget bag. She was wearing a nice printed dress for the evening, behaving a bit shy in my apartment which was unfamiliar to her. After taking her for a quick tour around my place, I led her to the kitchen, and opened a bottle of cider for Maria so she could have something to enjoy while I was cooking her the last super of her life. It was smoked salmon with salad for main course, and for dessert, a small strawberry cake bought from Coop. Maria didn't stay in the kitchen for more than five minutes when she had found out the chef was not well responsive to whatever she was saying. Instead, she switched on the light of my living room and started checking my CD collection after

putting one of them in the player. The music was on, Franz Liszt's piano works. And I heard her shouting out in an astonished tone, as if she had just found a pile of treasures in a seashore cave, every time she saw a CD of a band or a musician she loved.

Meanwhile, in the kitchen, as I stayed focused in front of the oven, it was not the cooking process but the big event after dinner that was stimulating my mind.

I called out Maria's name aloud when dinner was ready. The candles were lit up after she sat down, bouncing the mild light on her face to highlight her beauty. Out of the oven, I brought the fish and served it on the plates with salad. The smashed potato was already in a glass bowl.

Maria watched me when I was opening the wine she brought, with an expression on her face saying that she wanted to tell me something but decided to hold it back. I gave her a smile as I poured some wine into her glass, and bent over to give her a kiss after I put the bottle on the table. When I straightened up my body again, I noticed that some words were about to slip out of her mouth, for which I waited a second before Maria retreated her chin. After another second, Maria said something that was not what she intended to say in the first place, 'Thank you so much for everything, Sebastian.'

From her evasive eyes, I was certain that she was hiding something more important than a usual and friendly compliment. So I moved closer to her and squatted lower to have my eyes on the same level as hers, and put my hand on her arm gently. Her body was cold.

Getting the feeling that the piece of information - which with me Maria was not comfortable to share - could very likely drive the night into an unexpected direction, I kept looking, reassuringly, into her eyes and said, 'You know you can tell me anything, Maria.'

What came out of Maria's tongue in the next five seconds savagely knocked out my rational mind, leaving me as a lifeless husk being torn apart by the ultimate shame which I couldn't have ever imagined. Hopelessly, I kneeled down on the floor and almost passed out, after she said, 'Sebastian, I am pregnant.'

There was only one voice occupying my thoughts in the next minute, 'Sin! Sebastian. Trying to kill your own child? Sin! Shameful, shameful sin!'

I felt that I was about to throw up right in front of Maria, but I couldn't, because every muscle of mine was completely shut down. My despondent eyes were fixed on Maria's belly, and my brain suddenly collapsed, unable to register my understanding of anything in my life. Something ought to be said to her, I thought, but I just lost the skills to construct a simplest sentence. I didn't see what was Maria's reaction to my dramatic breakdown. And after being torturously burnt by that ultra-humiliating self-judgement for ten seconds, I felt Maria's hands on my both cheeks. She lifted my head slightly upwards to rebuild the eye contact between us. I saw some tears on her face and her lips pushing some words out, but I couldn't hear what she was saying. There was a huge noise of panic stuffed in my ears, blocking anything else away. Having noticed my hearing was not functioning properly, Maria moved her mouth close to my ear and whispered something which put all the broken pieces of my world back together, that I was not the father of her child.

Maria helped me to sit down on the chair, and explained to me that she had been pregnant for one and a half months, which she had just found out in the morning. So it couldn't be me who impregnated Maria, since I only met her less than ten days ago. All of a sudden, I felt a massive relief on my chest and got back the full sensibility of mine. Patiently, I kept listening to Maria's speculation about who she thought might be the father, being either her boss or a friend of his who both had unprotected sex with her during those days. While in my mind at the same time, the plan I had perfectly designed before came back on track again. I was certain, even without asking, that I was the first one, besides Maria, to know about her pregnancy.

She kept talking, saying that she wanted to have the abortion from some unauthorised surgeon - who could provide the service to illegal immigrants - but was too afraid to make the decision by herself. My opinion was asked, which she would seriously value. After a few seconds of thinking, I moved my palm from my chin to her cheek, and assured her that abortion was the right decision. But in her eyes there was still fear, which finally vanished after I promised her that there was nothing to worry about and I would accompany her during the surgery.

After I completed another lie, Maria bursted into tears and kept crying for a very long time on my shoulder.

Having my hand smoothly rubbing her back, I was gravely satisfied by the roller-coaster start of the glamorous drama that would be later staged with the ending of Maria's life. But I had to concentrate on my compassion with Maria, otherwise I could have turned on an inappropriate smile which would threaten to ruin the plan.

When Maria could compose herself again five minutes later, our dinner finally started, which was fully filled with a part of my joke bank and Maria's joyful laughters. I did my best to bring up her mood.

And when dessert was served, we had already finished that bottle of wine, so I poured some whisky for me and two shots of vodka for Maria to go with the cake. The creamy, sweet taste of the cake certainly managed to lock up the negative feelings within Maria, which were caused by the terribly unpleasant incident that had happened to her. She revealed her high spirits on the face while enjoying the great combination of sugar and liquor. After she had downed her two vodka shots, I saw the sparkles, again, in her eyes.

Abruptly, she jumped up from her seat and sealed my mouth, which was relishing a piece of cake, with her fervent lips, leaving me stunned by her unrivalled vitality. When our tongues were battling in a mouthful of silky cream, the feeling of swinging in heaven shook my vision of Maria's destiny off my head. I opened my eyes, gazing at her rosy cheeks and loosely shut eyes for a long time when she was still enjoying the kiss. Such a piece of perfection, which made me ironically fantasise about another possible future with Maria, if I could have been the father of her child.

The kiss lasted incredibly long and nearly gave each of us a terrible choke. Maria kept smiling when we were wiping away some cake cream around our mouths for each other, which made her look childishly cute. This time, I couldn't contain myself and initiate another kiss with her.

And as I have just figured out now, my mind at that moment was urging me to enjoy Maria's kiss more, which was soon-to-be irretrievably gone. My hand slipped down to feel the intimate knowledge of Maria's waist under her dress. And from her response, I caught the grip of her

increasing hotness. Her arms on my shoulders and my both hands on her waist, still keeping the intense kiss, we blindly moved out of the kitchen, knocking our chairs down, leaving them lying on the floor.

I pushed Maria to the wall of the corridor after we entered it, firmly pressing my hands into her thighs. She called out my name sensually when I suddenly lifted her body off the ground, withdrawing her lips from mine and placing her head on my shoulder, then blowing her deep and hot breath to my neck. The grab of her hands on my back grew stronger and stronger, spreading - through my nerves to my veins and to my heart - the indescribable message of how she fiercely wanted me. Having her both feet on the floor again, I naturally moved my hands upwards, from her thighs, to explore the ultimate adventure of a female body beneath her knickers.

And in the living room, Liszt's piano play was about to enter its climax.

Her hands were pressing the back of my head when I was tasting her vulva for the very last time. And as I rose to kiss her neck, her hands repositioned on my waist and started to free my lower half from the fabrics that were covering it. Her eyes couldn't contain the tears of joy any longer when I intruded into her territory, making me notice that she was crying as her tears hit on my cheeks. Her legs got wrapped around my waist when my hands lifted her up again, squeezing more tightly as time went by. And she was facing upwards when everything was happening, intensely breathing out her ecstatic gladness.

Then, an order took over the whole mind of mine, when my eyes were observing Maria's delighted and animated face, leaving one message to my highly excited body, that it was time for her to die. Having her legs steadily tightened around my waist, she didn't even notice when I removed my hands from her bottom. The stimulus she was consistently receiving from her lower half distracted her attention when my hands had already been placed around her neck. She appeared to enjoy it when I began pressing my both thumbs into her neck with a mild start, moving her eyes downwards to give me a sign of appreciation. But soon, Maria started to see more information from my aggressive and vicious face expression, when I nailed her neck to the wall roughly. In her eyes, joy fled away first, then it was confusion, and soon, was left only with terror. Her whole body started to vibrate, and she kept striking

my back with her both fists. I was afraid that she was about to shout, but it didn't happen. More tears dropped out of her eyes, when she tried to open her mouth to say something. There was no sound, but from the lips, I read the only word she kept making.

'Why?'

So I pulled my face close to her forehead, a few centimetres above her eyes, to open my mouth and whisper, 'I love you, but I am sorry.'

At the same moment, the music ended.

The next second, the hitting on my back suddenly stopped, so did the choking of her reddened head. I couldn't feel any stretching from the inside of her body, neither could I detect any pulse from the veins in her neck. There was nothing left in her eyes, no sorrow or happiness, no confusion or clarity, no horror or courage, no hatred or affection, no regret or satisfaction, no anger or serenity. There was no sign of vitality left in her body anymore, only peace and the status of life that would last in the whole eternity.

Gradually, I laid Maria's body on the floor. While appreciating her perfectly still face, I did have a moment of panic, not because of the possible murder investigation if my plan failed, but the thrilling fear of forever losing the treasured memories of the girl I had once loved. Just to think that I would never be able to smell her arousing scents, or caress her perfectly built soft body, could tempt me to form regrets. For a minute, I really blamed myself for having authorised my unpredictable instinct to take Maria's life, before another deep voice in my mind reminded me, that one of the most irritating issues in my life had just been resolved. From that moment on, when her heartbeat had stopped, Maria's emotionless dead face would overwrite all the repulsive expressions of hers - which had kept depriving my mind of peace - to register her as a piece of glamorous statue in my memory. And more importantly, what rescued me from the self-blaming, as I recalled later, was the revealed sensation I was going through when Maria slowly slipped towards her destiny. Watching life slipping away from her body did bring me the greatest admiration I had ever had for myself.

After bringing back rationality to my emotionally overheated mind, I left Maria lying on the floor and fetched the plastic carpet protection film with a roll of garbage bags from the storage. When I had finished covering the entire floor of the bathroom with the film and was about to carry Maria's body, an idea paused the on-going plan, hurrying me to get a new sketchbook from the living room. During the next ten minutes, I leaned against the wall, observing Maria's peaceful face and drawing it down on my sketchbook. As the pencil kept scratching on the smooth surface of my sketchbook paper, I realised what my intuition - which interrupted the plan - was all about.

To me, that was the only and best way to immortalise Maria's spirit. Her physical body would decompose, my memory of her beauty might fade, but her face would live on that piece of paper forever. And I would be the only one who could access that world of immortality.

And when the last details were added to her eyes and lips in the sketch, I closed the book and placed it back in the drawer of my desk that had a lock. Then it was time to continue what had been left unfinished, to take care of Maria's body. I held her shoulders with my left arm, and had her two thighs on the other. While lifting her up, I discovered that some urine left in her bladder had come out and spilled onto the floor, which didn't smell so bad since her urine was still fresh and warm. I came back to wipe it off right after I placed Maria's body in the centre of the bathroom. Then finally, I returned to the bathroom with three knives in different sizes, wearing a disposable raincoat, ready for the exciting and disgusting task, the dismembering of Maria's dead body.

I still feel queasy in my stomach as I just mentioned it. Mutilating someone's body is a disgusting business, which is why Maria is the only victim of mine whose body got destructed.

Her head got chopped off first, and it got a lot quicker for the rest of her body to be separated apart. The blood kept running out of her body, making the colour of her skin paler and paler. Once a part was separated from the whole body, I would fit that part in a thick black garbage bag and put it in the bathtub. The most vomiting part was dealing with the intestines and the stomach, the odours and images of which can still be vividly recalled.

I thought of cutting her womb open to take a look at what's inside, to know whether she was lying to me about her pregnancy, and if she told the truth, to see what a dead embryo would look like. But I gave up that idea as I moved my hands close to her bloody bell. I was too disgusted and afraid to do it.

It was one o'clock in the morning when I finally put the last piece of her body in a bag and wrapped the blood and her body residues around with that plastic film, which, together with my bloody raincoat, was fit into another garbage bag. Having myself and the bathroom completely cleaned, I carried the those bags, one by one, to the freezer that I had cleared in the afternoon.

When everything, except the unpleasant smell in the bathroom, was sorted, I couldn't hold my distorted stomach any longer. So in the next few hours until six o'clock in the morning, I systematically rushed to the toilet for the soul-strangling throw-up.

The next morning, it took a few hours' nap and a cup of black coffee for me to walk properly again. Since it would bring up those tormenting imageries of dismemberment if I tried to take in some food, I only stuffed some chocolate in my mouth to fill the stomach-drilling hunger. The window in the bathroom had been open for hours and there wasn't much smell left. After getting myself warmly dressed up, I took Maria's house keys from her bag and went out of the apartment.

It was eleven o'clock in the morning, the time of a day when there wouldn't be many people in any public domain. After getting some items from the supermarket, I first went to Maria's tiny place to take away all my traces. Fingerprints, hairs, footprints, etc. I cleaned her toilet carefully as well, in case any trace of my piss or dump would be discovered in it. In the afternoon, I finished my mission and left her place, not spotting another person in the whole building both on my way in and out. I went in a vegetarian restaurant on the way back and had some salad there, still having the vomiting reaction to the food, though it didn't feel that strong since it was only vegetable.

When I had entered my apartment, the first thing I did was to call Elisabet, asking what a great day she had lived during her study trip. She kept talking excitedly about every single thing she had been

through before bringing up her concerns of my work. I lied to her, telling her it was going a bit slow. And after a few more greetings, the phone call was ended. Then I brewed myself a cup of coffee and drank it, after which I gained enough courage to count the bags in the freezer.

Fifteen. And all of them kept lying in the freezer more or less in the same position as how I piled them up in the morning. Then I went to fetch Maria's handbag, woollen coat, dress, boots, and her underwear. When all Maria's personal belongings got sorted out, I carried them in a bag to the community storage room, which was filled up with those tasteless things nobody wanted, which therefore made it the best place if you had something to hide.

Having the window in the bathroom widely open for nearly a whole day, the revolting smell there had finally disappeared after I returned from the storage room, though I could still feel my stomach flinching as I walked in. Then I walked to the kitchen, boiling some warm water and drinking a whole glass of it. After that, I fell on the couch to have a nap, before the start of the final show of Maria's physical existence in my life.

At two o'clock in the morning, not the useless alarm I set but hunger called me up from the couch. I first did a bit freshening up and then entered the kitchen. In the beginning, I was about to cook something to fill my stomach. But that idea totally blanked out as the freezer caught my eyes. So I put back the pan I was holding in the cupboard and brewed some coffee to go with a pack of chocolate instead. When my nerves were accelerated by the dose of cocoa and caffeine, I got my mind sharp and sensible again, for operating the big task.

The weather was clear outside, which meant it could be incredibly cold around that particular time during the night. I had myself well dressed as if I was on my skiing holiday, put all the garbage bags from the freezer to an Ikea plastic shopping bag, wrapped a hammer and a pry with a piece of brown package paper and placed them in the same bag. More or less, I was ready.

And when I went out, I closed the front door as quietly as I could, carrying the heavy bag with me. Our neighbours were a married couple who were both primary school teachers, so three o'clock in the morning, for them, was the golden period during sleep. The freezing coldness

of the air made me clench my teeth as I stepped out of the building, and then my body had a shiver, which nearly had the heavy Ikea bag dropped onto the ground.

It was really bright on the road. The light of the strong sodium street lamps and its reflection from the thick icy snow around me made it impossible for my actions to be covered. However, with the good timing and a bit of luck, there was no one on their way home from a party and all the windows were curtained. I walked slowly and steadily on the icy way before I arrived at the entry of the forest, which I had to go through before I could reach the long lake in front of the Ulriksdal Castle.

The forest was a lovely place to take a walk around if not during wintertime, the fresh oxygen and the lively green colour always helped me to relax when I went through it on a hot summer day. But after I took my first step into it on that night, all those positive feelings I had collected from the forest didn't seem to escort me. Instead, I was thrilled by the cracking sound coming from the crunchy snow on the path, the horrific deadly darkness ahead, the bag of the chopped body of Maria I was carrying, the dim light on my back that went fainter and fainter, the superstitious fear of some big creatures waiting in the woods to hunt me down. Especially it turned more terrifying when I was passing in front of the grave yard - at the point of my mind being at its weakest - I really believed there was a possibility that Maria's body would have a reaction to the spirit below the headstone.

It turned darker as I went deeper in the woods. The trees were blocking the moonlight from the sky so it wouldn't reach the ground, leaving the feeble flashes from the snow to be the only source to illuminate my way out. The feeling of crawling in the cold and dark, on a terrifying and endless wild path, did elevate the cowardice within me, which kept persuading me to drop the whole scheme, to flee. And then there was also fear - this fear of committing one of the most notorious crimes that would put the whole society against me and probably end my life in a prison cell - pushing me to overcome my cowardice. When I finally saw the light coming towards me from the road, all those tumbling emotions suddenly got released. And my rational and executive mind was, again, back in control.

On my way to the lake, I picked up many big stone pieces, so the bag was nearly impossible for me to carry when I was about to reach the lake bank. It was an extremely poetic image displayed right before me when I had cut through the tall reeds, that the dark, frozen surface of the lake, rendered by the blur reflection of the clear starry sky, was shining like a pool of jewelries. Then I put down the bag on the ice and dragged it carefully as I slowly glided away from the bank.

It was already four o'clock when I gave the first hammer hit on the pry to dig a hole through the frozen lake surface. And within the next two hours, in the most freezing situation I have ever been in my life, I managed to dig three different holes in three spots that were distanced from one another, through which all those garbage bags were stuffed to the water after I put a few stone pieces in each of them. Squatting by each hole of the three, I placed back the ice piece that I cut out to fill the hole right after I had squeezed the bags through, and the gaps got sealed up very soon.

While standing in the centre of the lake, with only a hammer, a pry, and two stone pieces left in my Ikea bag, though exhaustingly worn out and terribly frozen, I enjoyed the feeling of being swallowed by the enormous joy from accomplishing the life rocking show that I cowrote with the owner of those body pieces that were now lying on the lake bed, Maria. As if I was in heaven, everything around me at that moment seemed so trivial, because all I could see was the vision in my head. Every single image of the time I had spent with Maria flashed through, with only one strange thing, that there was a thick shadow on Maria's face in each of those images. And this strange thing happened every time I have thoroughly completed a murder.

Like nothing else in the world mattered to me any more, my strides were steady and firm when I walked back to the lake bank, even there was not much energy left in my body. I imagined what was gonna happen to Maria's body, and got mostly convinced by the scenario that the blood coming out of the bag would attract fishes and nothing but bones would be left lying in the bags when the ice began to melt in the coming spring. Even for the worst scenario, in which the bags were discovered by someone, it would also be exciting to see how the media would react to the discovery of an unidentified dismembered body in this country.

But something strange - a feeling I could have never thought of - struck me when I was walking out of the reeds. At the moment I lost the sight and touch of the lake, my choking began and was soon followed by crying. I didn't know what I was crying for, but somehow, it was just impossible to hold the tears to myself any longer. And I could feel the tears when they rolled on my frozen face, like warm springs crossing through a deserted land. My shoulders and chest, driven by a mysterious natural force, kept quivering. I had nothing in my mind, and no energy left in my body. It was only the feeling that occupied me wholly.

Having realised that I couldn't continue walking with such emotional status, I stopped and sat on a cold bench after I shovelled off the thick snow that was covering its surface.

'Is this because of love?'

I could hardly agree, otherwise it should have happened hours ago when Maria stopped breathing, or at least when I had put all the bags in the freezer. It was about something else, something which was beyond love and hatred, coming from the deeper part of each cell in my body. Maybe it was about the grief from a being within one space to another, which had been sealed under the unbreakable barrier of the freezing ice surface. It was also the complete separation in the physical term between me and Maria. Finally, I was absolutely cut off from the woman I had loved, unable to see her, to smell her, to feel her, any more. After I stepped out of the edge of the lake, Maria was forever left there, behind my back, lying deep down, alone in the cold.

Then I stopped crying, and all the rational senses returned to my head. When I went through the woods this time, all the negative feelings from the previous experience was not there any more. As if I was an unchallengeable existence in the universe, my fear and respect for the unexplainable mysteries of nature didn't possess me, even when I passed by the same graveyard, which nearly gave me a heart attack a few hours before.

And same as my way in, there was still no one on the road when I walked out of the forest. Some of the curtains were opened, which was not a worry to me since they would probably regard me, if they saw me, as a poor bloke coming back from the laundry room. Maybe because I

had been staying in the cold for too long, I literally fell into my apartment. And before I passed out on the floor, the last thing I knew was the hinge automatically closing the door.

Having slept through the only few hours of daylight, it was already late afternoon when I opened my eyes again. I took a hot bath in the tub that had hosted the bags of Maria's body pieces, not being scared by any superstition but amused by the victory I had achieved. It was a sensation of pure narcissism which I had never felt from any art piece of mine before. After the bath, I cooked the first meal since the dinner with Maria. The food tasted delicious, though it was only a plate of ordinary carbonara.

During the next few days, I cleaned the whole apartment, refilled the freezer that I had emptied, made a phone call to Elisabet everyday, who kept talking about her trip, and had a wonderful time playing through in my head every detail about the moments I had spent with Maria.

It was a remarkable period of recreational time for me before Elisabet came back with a lovely tan, and a whole bag of Persian closet. And she bursted into tears after noticing the recently cleaned apartment. Excitedly, Elisabet picked a colourful silk scarf from a huge pile of fabrics and wrapped around my shoulders with it, which I would have never worn if it was not for Elisabet. Therefore, I had to fake a smile of appreciation to show her that I really liked the gift. To be honest, I was expecting something like a Persian fabric artwork or a small painting as a gift, but clearly Elisabet and her girlfriends had invested their time and money in the exotic clothing instead of the subject they were supposed to pay attention to. I didn't mention this to her, but somehow she noticed that I was not fond of her gift, since I immediately folded it in the drawer where all my summer clothes were.

In the beginning, to have Elisabet back in my life was quite a joy. Listening to her stories from the trip, watching her dance in those exotic dresses, feeling her smooth, sexy, and tanned skin while making love, I was enjoying the time with the new Elisabet who was more confident, humorous, and lighthearted than before. But somehow I still knew, while lying in bed beside Elisabet during the nights, that something essential

was missing. Like the feeling people would have when they have taken some hard drugs and want more, I was desperate to experience all the sensations, given by Maria, once more.

A week later, Elisabet's feminine intuition helped her spot my low emotional level. She asked for the reason behind the fact that I was cooking less, going out less, talking to her less, and painting none. I told her a lie, saying I was stressed because my ideas for the project were not coming up, which convinced her for two days before I turned down her invitation of bringing me to her family for Christmas. We had a huge fight, and Elisabet went completely hysterical when I used the same excuse I made for saying no to the trip. After the fight, I suggested that we both needed some time to think about our relationship seriously, which made Elisabet hysterical again, who shouted out that I had just made up the same rubbish lie twice for hooking up with that waitress.

Though impressed by her sensitivity, I kept playing the liar and arguing that she was accusing me of the things with which I had nothing to do. So, same as what happened outside the restaurant when I met Maria for the first time, Elisabet gave me a tough slap and raged out of the apartment, having the door slammed. She came back a few hours later, and kicked me off the bed to have me sleep in the couch in the living room. Though I was told nothing about what she had been doing during those hours, the answer was obviously clear, that Elisabet went to the restaurant with the hope of confronting Maria, which, apparently, she would never succeed.

When I woke up the next morning, there was a note lying on the tea table, left by Elisabet, saying that she didn't want to see me for a long while. I checked her wardrobe, quite a few of her clothes went missing, so did her suitcase, informing me that she had already headed to her family house in the countryside for Christmas. After a second of anxiety, I accepted her decision with ease.

Before Maria broke into my life, things like going on a trip far away with Elisabet or spending Christmas with her family would be ideal during a relationship which I had expected for a long time. But as I had confirmed to myself, that the huge crisis was taking us apart from each other, because the anxiety that was supposed to possess me in such situation didn't come.

I realised that I didn't care for Elisabet as much as when our relationship had just started, and more profoundly, there was this more dominating revelation, which had shown up in my head, telling me that I was relishing more the touches and incidents with Maria than those with Elisabet, when they were both gone, though in two very different ways.

My rational mind definitely knew what I did to Maria was a serious crime which should never happen again, and at the same time, the same rational mind also argued that my life wouldn't end up in the absolute and confined solitude, as long as no one else could discover the crime, the latter thought of which kept feeding the essential beast within me, the beast that drove me, with an insane idea, to enjoy more of those incomparable sensations Maria had given to me.

After the whole day of trying to figure out what I actually expected from the future of my life, without reaching a conclusion, I decided to take a city break in Paris to have some distance from my life in Stockholm, with the hope to find a clear answer.

So, instead of going deep into the sea of my unsolvable and unforeseeable future, I booked a three days' holiday in Paris, starting from the Christmas Eve.

And for Elisabet, in case she might return while I was away, I left a note in the kitchen with the brief information about my holiday before I went to the airport, to begin, which I didn't expect to be, my best escape ever in life.

Chloe

My best holiday didn't start from my getting on a Ryanair plane and sitting in a tiny seat while listening to the constantly repeated commercials from the stewardess before landing. And it didn't start from my catching the shuttle bus for two hours, browsing through the greyish outskirts of Paris until it stopped in front of Galeries Lafayette, the biggest shopping mall in the city.

The first episode of that life-changing holiday actually began when I was staring at the metro map to sort out my way to the hotel, at which point, this caring female voice from behind slipped into my ears, saying something in French, which, as I found out later, was an offer for helping me. I turned around and got completely terrified, as if I had just seen the ghost of Maria, pushing up my upper eyelids and retreating a step backwards, as my reaction. Apart from her petit body, that stylish French nose, and those more aggressive looking postures, her appearance was so similar to Maria's that I wouldn't argue if I was told that she and Maria were identical twins. She smiled at my awkward behaviours and didn't walk away, keeping staring at me with a caring expression.

Then the massive panic disappeared, and my mind was refilled with a dangerous excitement, cheering for the start of a wild, surprising adventure. Finally, I managed to get back my confidence and started the conversation with that attractive, petit, exotic, young woman, who had immediately become the main subject of my holiday plan.

While she was telling me how I should switch between three different lines to get to my hotel, my mind had already begun to draft out a plan about how to suggest a date with her, how to hook up with her after a few drinks, and how to kill her safely within my short holiday of those three days. When she had finished the description and was about to say goodbye, I caught a glimpse of her hesitating look, and told her that I was up for a drink, since I was alone in the city, by which, she got flattered, and turned on a flush on her pretty face. I was certain that she wouldn't turn me down, but it took a few more seconds before she took out a pen and a post note to write down her phone number. Then she ran away, with her blushed face, after passing me the note, without saying anything. Her name was on the note as well, Chloe.

So for those three days in Paris, instead of visiting museums and art galleries in the daytime, spending money in bars and clubs during the nights, and waiting for a genius idea - which would solve my life puzzle - to hit while having sex with strangers on my hotel bed and other beds, I had come up with a more exciting game for me to play.

Briefly, what happened afterwards was that I called Chloe from a phone box to fix the date, picked her up at a community library two blocks away from the office at which she worked, went to her favourite bar in town for a few drinks and a conversation, to which I didn't contribute much after giving her the very brief information about myself, moved to a nearby nightclub later where we cuddled and kissed during the second dance, got on a taxi to her apartment at three o'clock in the morning, had sex with her - while feeling both exciting and excruciating at the same time - during those two nights and two early mornings, strangled her to death while we were having a bath together eight hours before my back flight departed, drew her face - when it was still floating on the bubbly bath water - on my sketchbook, and finally, finished wiping out every trace of mine in her apartment, with the cleaning gears I bought from a big supermarket in the afternoon.

I stopped at Chloe's kitchen when I was leaving her apartment, staring into it, and couldn't resist taking away those little chocolate guys from her glass cupboard. She wouldn't mind, and even if she did mind, I wouldn't have found out a way to know it.

Though it was more or less the same way and the same time and the same shitty weather as on my way to the city, when I sat on the shuttle bus to the airport, what was happening in my interiority was totally different from the day I just arrived. I was leaving Paris as a king who had conquered the whole country within three days. What was more embarrassingly amusing, I, inadvertently, laughed out aloud when the plane was lifting its tires off the runway. My laughter caught some unnecessary and potentially dangerous attention from the passengers around me, especially regarding the fact that I had placed Chloe's chocolate guys on my thighs and they were falling off to the floor, rolling everywhere afterwards.

To be honest, I did feel worried, for a few days, that I might have failed to clean some of my traces in Chloe's apartment, or there could be someone, in the bar or the club, who remembered seeing me being with Chloe. From the day back in Stockholm to the New Year's Eve, I spent a few hours everyday going through those Paris centred newspapers, online, to look up any update regarding Chloe's murder investigation. But my worry turned out to be an oversensitive concern, since there wasn't even a single article mentioning her name. The tragic story of a

young woman's death was not attractive enough for one of the biggest cities in Europe to report.

As one of the first things I checked after returning to the apartment in Bergshamra, my note for Elisabet was still lying on the kitchen table as how I put it there before I left for Paris. She had not come back. And from the answering machine in the living room, there wasn't a single message. So to avoid unnecessary arguments with Elisabet in the future, I tore off the note and used a few seconds to make up a story, about how I had spent a boring Christmas on my own in the undecorated apartment, which she wouldn't even have the patience to hear through.

In the evening, I cooked myself a dinner. And when my first post-holiday meal was eaten up, I went into Elisabet's closet and took a phone out of an empty shoebox from the high shelf. The shelf was the place where my then girlfriend kept all her shoeboxes which she had never used or dared to throw away, and the size of the shelf was twice big as the one of the bookshelf in the living room.

After taking out the phone, I put the box back on the shelf, climbed down the ladder, and switched on the phone. It was Maria's mobile. After unlocking the screen, I saw there were two new messages, both of which were from her boss. The first arrived one day after I dumped Maria's body in the lake, asking why she hadn't turned up at work, in an erotic term if contextualised. And the second message came three days later, which expressed his assumption about Maria's disappearance as the brutal deportation by the state. He wished, in the end of the second message, best luck for Maria in Moldova and his chance of hearing from her again. Remembering him being an addicted punter, I believed he must have heard some deportations of women like Maria in that business. And very likely, he would soon offer Maria's place in the restaurant and her tiny apartment to another prostitute who would be his next favourite.

Staring at these two messages, a silly and wicked idea popped up in my head, making me feel excited about the self-destructive consequences of messaging him what had actually happened to his

favourite prostitute, just to enjoy the shocking reply that was unable to anticipate.

I wanted the message to sound poetic, so I wrote down, 'Come and save me, in the lake of frozen lust'.

As the immediate reaction to what I had typed in the message bar, a big laugh naturally came out, after which my rational mind intervened and stopped me from pressing the send button. Having known what damages could be done by my danger seeking character, I switched off the phone, took out the sim card and threw it in the toilet, then rebooted the phone with another sim card, newly bought.

While lying in bed, having hidden the phone back in the empty shoebox, I kept thinking, dipping into a pool of memories and emotions. I swam there, and dived, feeling being grabbed and wrapped, by the intensity of all the recent memories and my emotions that were triggered by them. When I floated up from it, a definite answer to my future - which I had been trying to sort out for a relatively long time - was also brought up to the surface, that I had to keep killing, and there was no other solution.

That was the only way of living, I figured out, which could keep my life active. Otherwise, I could only picture myself to be someone who wakes up every morning as a zombie, carries on a tasteless everyday life, falls into sleep every evening, regretfully, beside someone who could barely give him any sensation, and repeats it, over and over again, till the death bell rings outside his front door.

It is about feelings and sensations, which are the only essential items that have always mattered the most to my life. I couldn't think of living without them for the rest of my life, even that would mean I have to carry this risk, every second in my life, of being exposed, being charged, then being sentenced to a lifetime imprisonment. So that was it, as I got it clear at that moment of awakening, that being a killer was the life I had no choice but to live in, the only solution for me to keep having feelings.

As another rewarding result after I made my decision, the next morning, I managed to go through the cold and dark and arrived in my

studio to start painting again. And it was a series of paintings - inspired by the tragic and dramatic endings of Maria and Chloe's lives - about the life of a rose, from her birth, to her death.

Following the choice of my life, another big decision was made before the New Year's Eve. After two days of collecting my belongings into three cardboard moving boxes, I moved out of Elisabet's place, after leaving a breakup letter on the bed, and stayed in my studio till I got my first-hand contract apartment from a housing agency two weeks later.

And a few days after the New Year, phone calls from Elisabet, endlessly, kept coming in, which left me no choice but to switch off the phone during my time of painting. Not having answered one call from her in the first three days, there arrived her outrageous visit to my studio. I opened the door and said to her firmly, that it had been completely over between us, as it had been explained clearly in the letter. With a devastated cry, she asked to come in for using the toilet, to which I said no and bluntly asked her to leave. To my surprise, instead of turning into a bigger display of herself, she took my brutal rejection maturely and peacefully, as she said goodbye with a smile and then casually walked away. She hadn't looked back before getting out of my sight, letting me enjoy her elegant catwalk for the longest time since our dating started. I knew she would be okay, because, as I felt, she was only obsessed with her fantasy of keeping a romantic relationship with an artist. And according to what had just happened till I lost the sight of her crimson dress and her pretentious walk in the snow, I tended to believe that she would even be pleased with that dramatic ending of her fantasy.

Having cleared myself away from my flavourless life in Bergshamra, there were only two things which concerned me outside my chilling studio. One was to find a cheap apartment, and the other was I wanted to check what had happened to Maria's body under the cold lake. I started to have dreams about how her blood got unfrozen and blended into the lake, how a cluster of fishes were attracted by the smell in the water and bit off the bones every fibre of her remains, and how those bones would be forever left on the lake bed, being corroded by the acid and microbes in the water.

This summer, I actually dived in the lake to see how her body was doing, due to an unbalanced combination of my genuine curiosity and, what was more important, a long time of missing Maria's physical existence. All the bags were still there. I took a look into each of them, and found out it had gone roughly the same as I had imagined, that only her bones were left. After opening the bag that had her head in, I saw her skull. Nothing else was there, except some small fishes that were eating the residues which were too small for human eyes to see. I held the skull in one hand, using my other hand to wipe off the fishes and a few mosses that had grown, presumably, from the spring. After it was cleaned, I began to see Maria's face again, as how it looked the first time we met in the restaurant, curious and caring, with a smile. Though I knew it was only a result of my imagination and the lack of oxygen in my brain after staying under the water for too long, I kept staring at it, treating this pure composition of calcium carbonate as Maria's face, as if she was still alive.

Then I kissed her, on the place where her fleshy lips used to be, instantly having a bad choke when my mouth touched her teeth. The unexpected choke knocked off all the illusions that had been played in my mind. After dropping the skull in the bag hastily, I brought myself above the water very fast, kept throwing up for minutes when I had struggled back to the lake bank, and ended up lying beside my own vomit for hours till some students came and asked if I needed them to call the emergency. I got up and tried my best to stand still, telling them that I was fairly okay, since they kept suggesting to phone One-One-Two.

When I was leaving the lake by myself after getting my clothes back on, the feeling of touching Maria's cold teeth kept playing, in a loop, on the back of my head, as a metaphor for the unretrievable past, telling me a truth about the whole humankind, that it always feels cold when you want to retrieve the past, which you may feel warm in your memory and heart.

It is six o'clock in the afternoon. Harriet called half an hour ago, which reminded me that I had kept writing the journal for twelve straight hours, without having lunch or coffee break in the afternoon. Having come back to her apartment from the airport, Harriet saw the message

I had sent in the phone she had left in Stockholm and called me back. From her excited tone, I grasped that everything had gone very well in London. I suggested to meet her up in a few hours, mainly for keeping her as my company, to see how Margareta's idea would work out tomorrow morning. Harriet said no to my suggestion, giving being tired and still having things from work to clear up as the excuse, and invited me for dinner at her place tomorrow instead.

When she asked about how I had been doing in Stockholm while she was away, I simply said I was missing her for most of the time and skipped the meeting I had with Margareta. Actually the truth is that I haven't mentioned my morning disaster to Harriet, and she hasn't noticed it yet since every morning, if we spend the last night together, it would be the noise of her taking shower waking me up, and my semi-coma will already have ended, with my sweat having been wiped off my face, when she dries her hair and walks back to the bedroom to say good morning. And also it's because I haven't been Sebastian Ahlqvist since I planned to ask Harriet out for the first date on the website. It's my registered fake name, Henrik Carlson.

As I believe, it's too risky to inform Harriet, the contact of one identity of mine, of what has happened to Sebastian, my other and real identity. What is from Sebastian stays with Sebastian's life, and people in Sebastian's life don't need to know a thing what Henrik has been through.

It was quite tricky when I just started playing my life with more than one identity, I messed up here and there, especially while I was chatting with someone after a few drinks. Looking at their confused eyes, I would question why on earth I was previously talking about the life stories of my other identities, which had come to them as a total shock. When that happens, I usually put up a smile and say to them that I just made a joke, hovering with a terrible fear inside, while they are laughing away. But since I have been living with this life for nearly a year, it has become much easier to keep different lives to different versions of me. Especially, since my screenwriting career began, it has been revealed to me that living a life with different identities is the same as keeping the characters in a story and their creator apart, not letting them collide into each other. The more I have been writing, the easier I have found this tricky life could be.

And above all, Harriet's dinner invitation triggered some psychological button in my mind, making me realise the serious hunger alarm sent from my stomach, which pleaded me to fill it soon with food and possibly drinks. There is no decent restaurant around my place, so I guess before I pass out in front of the computer, it is time to put on all the clothes to get some low quality food and a pint of lager from the bar, The White Horse, near the commuter train station from which I usually go to town.



25/12/1990 Östersund

Same as what I did during all the other Christmas Days in the past, I made a snowman, in the afternoon this year. There's only one thing different from the other snowmen I had made before, that this time, without the help from Petter, the boy of our neighbour family, I did everything by myself.

When I was taking snow from the ground, piece by piece, and sticking them to the shapeless snowman, I saw Gudmund looking at me from the window in our room. He was not mean to me or anything. I asked my little brother to join me after lunch, and what he said to me today was exactly the same as what he used, as the excuse, for every other invitation I had made to have him come outdoors and play.

'I will feel sick if I go outside.' said he.

And another reason why I didn't have Gudmund's company while making the snowman is, that he, totally different from me, is not interested to make things. He likes playing with all his silly dolls, which he would sometimes place on his bed and turn them into a play. When he starts a play, either imagined by himself or learned from elsewhere, I will be asked to be his only audience, which I thought to be such a dull and boring idea, at the very first time, before he started playing.

But I was wrong. My little brother changes when he starts his play. He becomes so seriously dedicated when he moves all those dolls towards different directions, putting motions in all those fabrics to bring them to life, or talking with different voices to represent different personalities and emotions of every character in his extraordinary

performances. There will be a new story he plays at each time, with no exception, always having me applaud with tears in my eyes when his show ends. I have said this to Gudmund several times, that if anyone I know will become a great playwright like William Shakespeare, it will be him.

To be honest, I don't really get the point why it is so funny to make more or less the same motionless snowman every year. Maybe it is just a habit of mine now, or there is something that I enjoy when making it. Or perhaps it is the happiness coming in the end when a funny looking companion is born, a cold but loyal friend of mine who will stand in front of our house, guarding us till it melts when spring comes.

I think it's Petter's absence that gives me the doubts about the point of building a snowman. He is a lot better at making snowman than me. And losing a great snowman builder as the playmate does mean losing a lot of fun. Anyhow, I still felt proud of myself when I finished it, believing that I had the power of creating life, which gave me a lot of confidence and pleasure.

And through the clear circle on the steamy window, I saw Gudmund's smile - when the snowman had come to life - which I could only find on his face when he sees me applauding in the end of his plays. Then the next second, to my disappointment, his face disappeared from the window sill.

For every boy like me, to have our younger brothers feel proud of us is one of the important things we have to have. And I guess, for Gudmund, it should be as important to have my support for his doll plays and the understanding of it. So when I lost his smile in my sight, I suddenly fell off the stage of happiness. That reminded me of the times when I made a senseless joke during his play, interrupting his concentration and having him feel annoyed, to which he would react by walking out of our room and coming back after a few minutes' time. Though he never complained.

So after he walked away from the window this afternoon, the bad feeling I immediately had was that I had done something wrong and it had upset Gudmund.

Sitting by the desk while I write, I have taken a look at Gudmund, who curls up like a hedgehog under the blanket and is deeply asleep. I wish I could have been a properer bigger brother who should have protected him better from Katarina and given him more confidence, more care, and more support. I am not sure how much this feeling of guilt has to do with what has happened to Gudmund today, from the second his face got away from the window till Katarina brought him back to our bedroom a few hours later. But as I can remember how I was feeling when I saw what was on his body, as he stood in our room next to Katarina, that my heart was clenching, at that moment, for Gudmund having been treated so badly by the woman I hate.

And today was supposed to be a happy Christmas Day for everyone, after all.

I didn't notice anything wrong when I returned to my room after the snowman was completed, except my little brother not being there. With the hope to share my happiness with Gudmund, I went to look for him around the whole house, but had no result. I thought he was behind the locked door of our mum's bedroom in the beginning, and realised that they were not there, after leaning against the wall for ten minutes, without hearing anything from the other room. I kept wondering about where they had gone, and decided to leave the mystery aside since I could have no idea. I took out the book, which I had been reading, from the shelf and continued from where I had left the last time, a detective classics boys must read, 'A Study in Scarlet'.

It is always a great satisfactory when I read Sherlock Holmes stories, with time going by so quickly without my noticing it. Having no knowledge of how many hours had passed away, I kept flipping the book, page after page, feeling terribly intrigued by the story. When I went to the page where the young street urchin Wiggins showed up before my hero Sherlock Holmes, the door of our bedroom opened. Horrifyingly, there stood the mercilessly looking Katarina and the wooden Gudmund. Before I could ask anything, my little brother was pushed into the room and, without a pause, the door was slammed, by Katarina, from the outside.

As a quick reflex, I dropped down the book immediately and ran towards my little brother. He started sobbing when I put my hand on his shaking shoulder, not saying a word. I held Gudmund in my arms. His sobbing continued.

Though his wrists tried their best to hide under his sweater, I still saw the deep and dark bruises around them. There were also a few bruises - visible around his neck -which were clearly done by the scratches of Katarina's fingernails. And when his sobbing was eased, I let him sit in the armchair, in which I was sitting a minute ago, and crouched down before him.

With my both fists clenched, I asked Gudmund, for the first time, about what Katarina had been doing to him. And I asked it in the tone of anger.

Instead of answering me anything, he just said, 'I am tired.'

I went to the bathroom and brought a hot towel with me for Gudmund. After taking away all the tear traces on his face and the dirt on both of his hands, I began to undress my little brother before he could go to bed. As I found out while taking off his trousers, the same type of deep and dark bruises, as those his wrists had, were around his ankles. And on the front of his both thighs, some purple circles could be seen, which were very likely caused by tough and long thumb pressing. Having turned him around to see what was on the back of his thighs, I spotted two clear linear bruises on each of them, which, without any doubt, were left by the other four fingers of Katarina's each hand.

I looked up at his eyes, after moving back to his front, waiting for him to tell me something. But without showing any signs for speaking up, Gudmund moved his eyes away to stare at the door, still with some tears rolling in his eyes. Of course I was furious at what had happened to him. But what was more important, I suddenly realised, at the moment my eyes were focusing on the bruises on his legs, how much I loved and cared for my little brother who I barely knew.

Some seconds later, after cleaning his wobbling legs carefully with the warm towel, I brought his pyjama pants and put his legs, one after

another, into it. Gudmund resisted a bit when I was taking his sweater away, for the reason I could guess, showing me more bruises around his both arms that looked similar to the ones he had on his thighs.

By then, he had only a t-shirt to cover his upper body.

He ouches aloud when I put the towel on his arms, twisting his face a little, suggesting a painful look. Still, his eyes kept evading my questioning stare, and his body continued to stay alert, giving me an impression that he was either frightened, or mad at me, or both.

At that moment, besides taking care of Gudmund, what I could only do was to hate Katarina, and hate myself for having not protected my little brother from all the pains he had been through.

Then unexpectedly, his head turned back when I put my hands to undress his t-shirt, with his burning eyes glaring at me, to warn me off, while at the same time, his both wounded hands were holding the t-shirt tightly, against my will to lift it upwards. In a confused tone, I asked him what was the matter. And just as before, there was no answer.

Nearly a minute later, the fire in his eyes finally got poured off when Gudmund realised that I was not to let it go, and his fists dropped the edge of the t-shirt, allowing me to slowly raise it up.

When I had lifted the t-shirt to his neck, my brain was hit by a sudden blank. The horrifying image of his chest pulled out my tears that had been contained in my eyes for a long while. On my little brother's poor little chest, these wide and long bruises were covering and overlapping each other, which was what he had been trying to hide from me, making him slightly ache every time he breathed.

I didn't dare to see his back. I just knew it would look even worse than his chest.

Tears kept streaming down my cheeks when I gently press the towel on his belly. I knew I couldn't touch any of those bruises on his chest, for they were bad enough and about to seep blood out. And Gudmund, without having anything on his naked top, behaved just

as a seriously injured little animal, standing appalled, and looking aggressive at the same time, in front of me, ready to bite me at any time if I did anything wrong to have him hurt.

I badly wanted to ask about it, and nearly had the question slip out of my tongue. It was Gudmund's mad eyes that made me hold the words back. So instead, I put the pyjama jacket on him and sent him to bed, not taking a look at what was on his back. I didn't need to see. Just by the way he slept, by his lying sideways and curling up like a hedgehog, I could tell how badly his back was hurt. Though he kept his eyes tightly shut, I knew the pains were torturing him so he couldn't fall asleep. Having nothing else I could do but only a huge amount of anger I had to let it out, I returned to the armchair, picked up the book, and tried to read it.

But my tears didn't stop dropping, which made my eyes too steamy to read anything from the page. So I put it back on the tea table and heard a knock on the door. Then there came Katarina's voice, shaky and choppy, saying, 'Honey. Mummy is real...ly sorry. Could you please please forgive mum...my?'

He didn't say anything, neither did I. So Katarina repeated the same sentence again and again for five minutes before she turned into sobbing. I didn't open the door, and my little brother didn't make a move at all. Half an hour later, the sobbing stopped. And after another five minutes, I heard Katarina standing up from the floor, followed by the crispy sound of her bedroom door being shut.

I turned on the lamp that stood on the desk and started writing today's journal, as soon as Katarina had gone back to her room and left us alone. It was around nine o'clock when I began the first line, and now it has passed the midnight. I feel much better than how I was before I started, the annoying anger has been released quite a lot into my journal book. I think our headmaster is right about the power of writing, that it really helps.

And this is the time I usually become very sleepy, but today is different. So far I haven't felt any sleepiness yet. The heartbreaking image of my little brother's chest still keeps hovering in my mind. And

it could have broken Katarina's heart as well, if I ever let her in the room to see Gudmund's wounds, while she was sobbing on the floor.

I haven't yet figured out what had made those terrible bruises on Gudmund. And if it was done by Katarina, where did that happen? They couldn't have just disappeared from the house to somewhere else when Katarina did all those things to my little brother, and I had checked every room to look for Gudmund after I came in the house from the snowman. And why Katarina did it so much worse than before?

I want to figure out these questions, but don't know how to do it.

And I have an idea for what I am going to do next after I soon finish today's journal. Instead of heading to bed and keeping flipping in my bed afterwards, I am going to sit in the armchair and ask for some help from my hero Sherlock Holmes.

There must be some tips I can learn? Or I may become a little Sherlock after I finish the book?

Who knows.

13/12/2012 Stockholm

It's Thursday's noon now. Two hours ago, I woke up with a terrible hangover, which clearly made my problem even worse. It took some time to remember what had happened last night, not because of the hangover or the blackout, but the intense content I experienced in the bar - which is usually dominated by sports obsessed men - 'The White Horse'.

And from now on, a few hours later, this dinner date will be at Harriet's place, where I will meet the girl who I haven't seen for days. For that reason, I can't have too much time for writing. So I have set the alarm at five o'clock in the afternoon, as the time for the writing to stop and the freshening up to start.

Yesterday evening, before I walked out of the apartment, it started to snow. First, it was only a few snowflakes slowly swinging down under the streetlight's coverage, which was quite a romantic image one could rarely find during wintertime in Stockholm. I did fantasise a bit about how beautiful it would look if Harriet could dance in that mild snow. She is very good at dancing, and having snowflakes like velvets sway around her would make the dance into a solo ballet on the stage.

Yet, my hunger interrupted my fantasy, making me afraid that I could faint at any second. So before I pressed down the handle of the door, two pieces of chocolate were put in my mouth in case my blood sugar would be too low for me to take the fifteen minutes' walk, in the cold, to the bar.

The snow started getting heavier as I walked closer to the destination, blocking my sight when I was going through the woods on the shortcut. I was surprised to see -when looking at the front glass door of the bar - the amount of snow that was covering me. Having shaken it off my hair and my jacket, I dragged the door open and walked in, scraping the snow that was stuck in the soles of my boots while dealing with the steamy glasses with my both hands.

The bar was full, even at a time before seven o'clock.

It was the ice-hockey national between Sweden and Norway, which had just started a few minutes before I got in. Unlike most Swedes, I have never found any interest of mine in winter sports. I love the sports I could do during summertime, football, basketball, swimming, and occasionally, tennis. And when it's winter, I prefer sleeping to those exhausting and highly dangerous sports. The only winter sport to which I would give it a go would be skiing, when it would become a necessary part of my murder plan.

And since I don't usually spend my time watching sports, especially not ice-hockey, when I was on my way towards the bar table, the thought in my head was that it would be very awkward if I had to be involved in a conversation with others, meaning that I had to do my best to not leave any comment that would indicate my general ignorance of others' beloved interest, otherwise, either their idiotic laughing and shouting would interrupt my eating and drinking, or some of those violent lunatics would bring me a lot of trouble I never wanted to deal with. I thought about leaving and walking another five hundred meters to a restaurant in the heavy snow, but gave up the idea very quickly. 'As long as the kitchen is open, I will stay.' I said to myself while queueing to order.

The kitchen was open. But since that was dinnertime and a lot of orders had been taken before mine, I had to wait for quite a while to have my food served. I sat down by the bar with a pint of Mariestad, having a gang of three skinheads on my left and a couple in their fifties on my right. And as I had noticed, the place was much more crowded than during the usual ice-hockey nights, with many of them coming to watch the match purely for supporting our national team.

It was so suffocating for me when a bar was crowded, while, for others, a place dense like that could better let out their emotions during the match. The crowdedness during a game was more an intimidating fact, to a non ice-hockey lover who wasn't a national team supporter either.

If not sipping my lager, I tried my best to keep my focus on the screen and show some passionate moves while everybody else was doing so. Because staying detached from the game could be interpreted as a provocative challenge to those three skinheads, who might bring on a situation in which I didn't want to be involved.

Ten minutes later, my phone started ringing. It was Peter, my agent. I wanted to make my way through the crowd at first, but gave up trying in the end and picked up the phone. The voice from the other end was not so clear, probably because the signal got weakened after traveling through the heavy snow. In that case, my voice on his phone should sound even worse, since there was always the disturbing background noise of shouting and clapping while we talked. Luckily, I could manage to hear what he was talking about, and after raising my voice three times louder than usual, Peter told me that, to him, what I was saying started to make sense. He first asked where I was, and I told him the truth that I was watching the game in a bar, no surprise, so was he, but from his tele at home, on his sofa.

When the nonsense greeting was finished, Peter moved straight to the business, 'Listen, Sebastian. I have got a contract offer from this big television series producer, he wants you to write a story.'

'WANTS?' I didn't like that word.

'Well, he hopes you will be interested. And the money is quite good.' Peter corrected his words, unwillingly.

'It seems that you APPROVE of this OFFER very much, AM I RIGHT, Peter?' I had to stress the key information in the sentence in case they would have been covered by those sudden cheering or swearing around me if I didn't.

'To be honest with you, Sebastian. You are right. I think we can do this.' He answered after a pause.

'Could I PHONE YOU in TWO HOURS to talk about this?'

'Great! I will talk to you in two hours then!' His enthusiastic tone suggested that he believed I would agree with the offer. And I hung up the call.

When I raised the pint to take a sip, on my back, a hand landed there. It was a small hand, which should, as my first reckoning, probably belong to a woman or a kid. The touch was firm, reminding me of the greetings I used to receive from friends, when I still had any, of my boyhood.

I turned my head to the right so I could see, from the corners of my eyes, who that was and what she or he was up to. And as my eyes caught her face, without any control, I had a bad choke and nearly spilled the rest of the pint on the table.

'Are you alright, Sebastian?' There came her voice.

Not having any idea about how it could be possible, I found out it was Margareta, my psychiatrist.

I kept saying sorry to the barman, the couple on my right, Margareta, and that skinhead gang, while hurriedly clearing the mess before me with seven or eight pieces of tissue paper. I felt it lucky that it happened when Sweden was on the winning side of the game, otherwise I could have given those three violent, patriotic drunks a very good excuse to release their anxiety and aggression, which would have brought me into one of the most terrible things in life, a bar fight, and what was worse, a bar fight with three masculinely built up skinheads.

'Hi, Margareta. Didn't expect to meet you here.' Finally I had the chance to respond to her surprising greeting.

'I am just going to get some drinks for me and my friends. We are sitting by the table over there.' She pointed at the table next to the small stage where I would sometimes find those local bands play horrible folk

music. Two women were sitting there, waving at Margareta and me with a high spirit.

When I moved my eyes from the direction she was pointing at, she continued, 'Join us if you don't have any company.'

Margareta didn't wait for me to reply. Instead, she turned her head away while stepping in the gap between me and those skinheads, called 'Service' to the barman, and ordered two glasses of white wine and a double scotch. We had a quick chat, when Margareta was waiting for her drinks to be served, to help each other figure out how we had bumped into each other in an over-crowded sports bar of a rural district half an hour away, by train, from the city centre. I told her that my place was around, and she told me that they were three high school best friends having an ice-hockey night out after the dinner at one of her friends' apartment nearby.

'Could you bring a drink for me and walk with me to our table please?' Without having my reply to her earlier invitation, she handed the glass of scotch to me.

I took the scotch spontaneously. And with the purpose of not surrendering to her control, I, in a slightly provocative way, asked, 'How could you be sure that I want to join your company in the first place?'

Margareta looked at me wearing an unnoticeable smile, 'You have taken the scotch. It says you will walk with me to the table. I am not sure at all if you want to join us. If you do, you can just sit down with us; if you don't, you can still walk back to where you are after bringing the scotch to our table.' She used a casual pose to end her lecture, which automatically made me laugh.

The next second, she started moving towards the little stage, and I followed, with the scotch in my left hand, and in my right one, a fresh pint of Mariestad. Margareta didn't look back to check if I was behind, but walking through the crowd with two glasses of wine in her hands, expressing her confidence to me that she knew, for sure, I had no other choice but to say yes to her invitation. I lifted the double single malt higher and took a glance at it, getting the hint that it was for Margareta.

Having managed to avoid bumping into any of those ice-hockey fanatics on the way, Margareta, while her two friends were looking at me with their curious eyes, put down two drinks on the table, turned around with a winner's smile on her face, and introduced me to her friends, 'This is Sebastian. A friend of mine.'

I thought she was joking at first, but then her face told me she wanted to see me as a friend, particularly in a bar where she didn't intend to involve her professional life in conversations. So with a genuine smile, I greeted her two friends, 'Hi, I am Sebastian. Good to meet both of you.'

'Emma, and this is Camilla. We are Margareta's friends from high school.' One of them did the introduction for both of them, leaving the other having nothing else to add.

But Camilla, with the desire to take part in the beginning of the conversation, did add, 'And we usually meet up once a month to watch an ice-hockey match in a bar.'

'Oh, great. Are you enjoying the game so far?' I asked the most appropriate question I could think of while I was sitting down on the seat next to Margareta, placing the scotch safely on the table before her while receiving a thank-you smile from her.

'Great game, isn't it? I am happy that we are winning.' Emma said to me in her amused tone when I was still adjusting my seat to the angle that would make me feel most comfortable. I knew it was gonna be tough, to be in a conversation with three women, more precisely, three married women of the same age.

Camilla looked at me when I had finally fitted myself in the seat, adding her commentary on the game at first and then a question. 'I like the game, too. And how did you meet Margareta?'

Shocked as I was, I had a panic attack when I heard the question, and ended up with a reaction of looking at Margareta to seek her help. It was like as if my super talent of lying was suddenly wiped off my head and I didn't know what to do, to get over the embarrassment. But I was sure that Margareta was gonna make something up to explain the introduction of me she had made a minute ago.

She gave me a witty look, and then turned her head to face her friends, 'We met in the opening party of an art exhibition. Sebastian is a friend of the artist's, and he is an artist himself.'

'Yes, that's right. That's how we met each other.' I gave a smile to Margareta, as my compliment to her well articulated story, and then another smile to Camilla and Emma.

During the next fifteen minutes of the conversation, those two married women checked basically every aspect of my life, about which they could think of asking, leaving Margareta barely listening and me coming up with almost every answer as a mixture of lie and truth.

When Emma and Camilla, mainly Emma, kept asking questions about me (the stranger who had suddenly showed up as a surprise at their girls' night out), Margareta just listened, with her patient, professional look, in the same way as what I had collected into my memory from our first meeting. And as exchange, I got to know that three of them met each other in the same high school in Odenplan, and Margareta went to the US to study Psychology, while the other two continued their lives in Stockholm, after the gap year of their traveling together around the whole planet. When they came back, Emma went to Stockholm University to study Law and then worked as a consultant in a law firm in Normalmstorg, and Camilla got admitted to Stockholm School of Economics to study Management and became a freelancing businesswoman, working for several medium size Swedish fashion brands to develop their oversea markets.

I could sense a tension between them when they were talking about their careers. One was always trying to sound as passionate as she could when the other was waiting for her turn. As a matter of quite surprising fact, I didn't get bored of listening to the school girls' competitions of which I hadn't had much experience before, and realised that it was not a bad time at all since I had Margareta as another audience to watch the live show across the table.

The question time ended with Camilla going to the toilet and Emma going out for a cigarette, and the latter of the two already had a bloke following her while she was on her way out. It was understandable why Emma was so attractive to all the blokes in the bar who were watching

a game to which they were obsessively devoted, with a beautiful face, and a mature body wrapped in a tight black dress which was just small enough to show half of her thighs and breasts, Emma had got everything that could drive a man mad. That bloke, who followed her out, even put Emma's coat on her before they were to pass through the entrance door.

'You fancy Emma, don't you?' laughed Margareta, when she saw me paying all my attention to her friend while she was walking away.

'There is no way I could say no, is there? She is very attractive.'

My psychiatrist took a sip of her whisky before she continued, 'Well, she is playing the same trick every time, just for having fun from turning down those dick directed young men.' There was a cold laugh from Margareta when she finished her sentence.

With the word dick being replayed in my head, I laughed. And the next second, I realised if it was not the occasion to advance for an unconditional sex with Margareta, then it should be the perfect chance for me to dig into the background of my psychiatrist's life, in order to have a better resistance to her hypnotherapy in the future. Or if lucky, the conversation could work for both of my purposes.

'Do you live here as well?' I tried to figure out the information I couldn't get from hitta.se, the website.

'No, as I told you, this is where Camilla lives. I just came here for the dinner and our ice-hockey night.'

It was hard to tell if Margareta was deliberately keeping her personal information from me or simply giving the exact answer to my question.

So I asked again, doing my best to hide my intention of figuring out where she lives, 'Isn't it very far from your place to here? It must take quite some time.'

'Not very far really. I live in Sollentuna. So it takes about ten minutes by the commuter train. And how long have you been living here?'

Sollentuna, though it was not a specific address of her place, the neighbourhood where Margareta lives did suggest quite a deal of information about her. A municipality where Moderaterna has been ruling all the time, meaning people like Margareta are very likely to be relatively wealthy. It is an area where mostly live the middle class ethnical Swedes, which entails the possible fact that Margareta is a home person who prefers to live around her own kind.

‘Nearly a year now. A bit too far from the city though. I wish I will become horribly rich someday so I could buy an apartment in Södermalm,’ I answered her question, ‘which is very unlikely to happen.’

The ironic ending gained a laugh from her.

Before Margareta talked again, she made a pause and tightened her eyebrows, as if she was choosing one most suitable question, from many options, for our friendly conversation. After a few seconds, she resumed from the pause, and said something which got absorbed into a huge uproar in the surrounding.

The sudden applauding from the crowd covered her voice so I had to look at her patiently, suggesting that I didn’t hear what she had just said, and she had to turn her head to see the screen to check what had happened in the game. Sweden scored another goal. The noise got eased after Margareta moved her eyes away from the screen and gave her attention to our conversation again.

‘How is your wakeup now? Is it getting better?’ She repeated her question.

‘No, not so well.’ I had to take a sip of my beer after I talked about a topic that was so depressing.

When I had put down the pint on the table, Margareta asked me if I had tried the solution she suggested on Monday.

‘No, I haven’t. My girlfriend had been away from Stockholm for a few days. And she is just back now. So I hope soon I could see how it would work.’ At the moment I finished answering, I suddenly realised that I had just talked about the life of Henrik that shouldn’t have been

mentioned to the psychiatrist of Sebastian. However, since I didn't add much detail to it afterwards, I believed it shouldn't be a big problem.

Margareta made a very soft 'uh' when I mentioned my girlfriend. She didn't respond immediately, but took a long sip of her scotch. After she left her drink on the table again, her eyes landed back on mine, which were curiously looking at her.

'I didn't know you had a girlfriend. On the papers, it says you are single.' said she, with calm.

'Well, it was filled in, some time ago, by the first doctor I met. And you don't have to be completely honest with every question they ask, do you?' I explained, with a light laugh in the end.

She laughed, and took another sip from her glass, giving me the time to think about something regarding Margareta I needed to figure out. I took a look at Emma, who was chatting with the bloke who followed her out, with a half burnt cigarette between her fingers. Then I moved my eyes to Camilla, who was still queuing for toilet. When Margareta finally moved her body a bit leftwards, I asked, 'So Emma said you went to Harvard to study Psychology?'

'Yeah, it was quite a long time ago.' She gave a smile to me and continued, 'I always wanted to go to that big country when I was growing up in Stockholm. So when I finally had the chance to apply for a university after high school and our gap year, with the best grades among the students and having passed a few mandatory tests, I was so excited when I got the letter of admission from Harvard, within which lay the offer of scholarship. Then I just went there, after a whole summer of crazy parties with my friends who all chose to stay in Sweden to continue their educations. Pretty silly.'

'Silly?' I echoed, automatically, with a sense of confusion rising, when I heard that word.

'You know, both for me and my friends.' She moved her eyes away from Emma, whom she was looking at early on, to a further distance, and kept sharing her story with me. 'A young girl who was obsessively curious about how things could rock in that big country and the rest

of us who didn't believe there could have been a different way of living outside Sweden. It made them jealous of me when I went there, and a few years later, me jealous of them for having not chosen the adventures I had. But you do stupid things when you are young, and regret them a few years later, don't you?'

She saw my amazed face after she finished, then smiled as if she had been told a light-hearted joke, and asked, 'Have you ever been to the States, Sebastian?'

'No, I haven't.' I replied, noticing how abnormal it was for a young person of my age to not have been there.

'Oh, that's so strange. Anyway, back to my story. Boston is a great place, a bit like Europe, but the school life is more stressful there, and all those endless campus parties every weekend.' She hesitated for a second, and then kept talking, 'That's also where I had all my romances in the States. I fell in love with four different guys, all of whom were the smartest in Harvard during those years, but eventually ended up with a life with a businessman who has no sense of humour or decent principles after I moved from Boston to Manhattan. Just a lesson about how life could play jokes on you.'

Her talkativeness had made me wonder if it was the scotch that had been telling her story.

'But why didn't you stay in Boston with your boyfriend?' Too late, I came to realise how offensive my question sounded after it slipped out of my tongue.

Her face looked a bit irritated first, but soon got eased after I told her that I didn't mean anything, only being a bit curious. Then she kept on talking, 'When we finished the last year together at Harvard, it turned out that I was still obsessed with how splendid my life could be in Manhattan, how close it could get to what I had known from Sex and The City while growing up as a teenager. Yet my boyfriend had a much maturer view on his life, who had always wanted to extend his academic life to a further level by entering the graduate school. And in the end, we had to split up. I went to Manhattan and got a job in a decent office. And he continued his life in Harvard, and later started teaching after he

finished his degree. Now he has already become one of the youngest professors of Psychology in the States.'

'Wow!' I couldn't contain the expression of admiration for what she had told me. 'How brave you were to make that decision!'

'Brave? Or you can say naïve or ignorant.' said Margareta, in a bitter and sarcastic tone, 'As my life began in Manhattan, I, gradually, came to realise how big the difference could be between the life on the television series and the one of your own. Of course, I got promoted very quickly in the office since I was, perhaps, the brightest and most promising young psychiatrist the whole city had at that time. And because of my Scandinavian look and background, there was this endless queue which was formed by those so-called successful men, who were waiting for their turn to take me out for a date. For a while, I did enjoy that frivolous life I had been dreaming of for so long. But after I got to the top of the office, with my clients being those influential figures of the city, and had woken up on different beds with different men who were all in their midlife crises, the horror, out of nowhere, arrived in my head, telling me what a stupid decision I had made to leave Boston for that hollow life in the biggest capital of the world. And in the end, I was thrilled by how aimless my life had become. More devastatingly, I found it impossible to fall in love with anybody again.'

I put my hand on Margareta's shoulder to give her a bit of consolation. The topic was becoming heavier and heavier, and I knew I should then switch to some lighter subject but there was still something I had to fish out of Margareta's head.

'And then you decided to try marriage?' I asked.

She finished the rest of her scotch, looking at me with her moistened eyes, and then continued, 'I thought maybe getting married to someone might give me some energy for my life in Manhattan, so I began to take dating seriously. Five years ago, at work, I met my husband who came as a representative of a factory which produced anti-depressants. He was quite serious about what he was doing, and certainly had a convincing way of selling his products to us. After a few meetings, he asked me out for a dinner and then we started a relationship which turned into a marriage in the end. It did give me some new energy after

we got married, especially after our child was born, who is the cutest boy in the world. I love him with my full heart, but not my boring and undisciplined husband who even later turned out to be an unsuccessful businessman.'

She sighed, and almost started weeping before I put my hand on her shoulder again. I told her that life plays tricks to everyone, and there are billions of people who have been through much worse things than she had. When she raised her head with her usual confident look, I knew she had managed to get composed and put all her emotions together. Having said thanks to me, she switched to topics like what kind of interests I had, to lighten up the atmosphere of our conversation. While at the same time, Camilla was walking out of the toilet, and Emma, who was still followed by that bloke, had finished her cigarette and was on her way back to the table.

When they both got closer, Emma gave me and Margareta a wicked smile the meaning of which I couldn't fully understand. A second later, it came as a total shock when Emma lowered herself to give me a kiss, which I didn't reject and also made the face of that chap behind petrified. Emma turned around after she finished the kiss, and introduced me to that poor bloke, 'Please meet my boyfriend Christian.'

I saw his face turning red before he stormed away from us in outrage. After he disappeared from the bar, three of them, Emma, Camilla, and Margareta burst into an enormous laughter all together, leaving me sit with my confused face that was still troubled by what had just happened. When their laughing was about to stop, three of them looked at me and said at the same time, 'Thank you for saving the night, Christian!'

Then out came another big, hysterical laughter.

As they later explained to me, it was the trick they had played each time they went to a bar and Emma got the attention from someone. Most of the times, Emma would do the kiss with a complete stranger who was on his own in the bar, and apologised to him that she was too drunk and had mistaken him as his boyfriend, when the other chap was pissed off and went away. And to keep the story as ridiculous as possible, Emma always used Christian as the name of her imaginary boyfriend.

The ice-hockey game finished a few minutes later. Sweden won, and the noise level in the bar boomed up so much that it could actually make the pillars, the floor, and the ceiling shake.

Three of them felt amused, both with the match result and what they had played during the evening, as we walked out of the bar before everyone else was about to leave. It was still snowing.

I took a different direction from theirs. And before we split, Emma said sorry to me, Camilla told me it was really a pleasure to meet me, and Margareta looked at me with her mischievous eyes as if she was willing to tell me something or expecting some action of mine. I said goodbye to all of them, then gave a look of deep admiration and appreciation to Margareta for what she had shared with me during the evening. And after three handshakes, I turned right to walk on my way back, still feeling the long and firm grip of Margareta on my hand.

Heading home in the snow, I gradually completed the jigsaw of Margareta's marriage and life, some part of which hadn't yet been told during the conversation between us. I guessed Margareta must have totally got bored of the life in Manhattan with a husband she didn't love a year ago, and with the high reputation and the top class professional skills she had, she decided it was the right moment, before her child reached the school age, to come back and continue her career in her home country where she could have a family and a group of friends to relate to.

And as an attempt to convince her incompetent husband to agree with her decision, she clearly portrayed Sweden as a place where it was so easy for a businessman to achieve success, since it had a much less competitive social environment than the one in Manhattan. In the end, Margareta might even have put her cards on the table to let her husband choose between divorce and immigration to a wonderland, leaving him no choice but to go with his decisive and confident - also incomparably attractive - wife to Stockholm.

It was only about ten o'clock when I had entered my apartment. After pouring a glass of scotch for myself, I remembered there was

something I had forgotten to do. I took out my phone and dialled Peter's number.

'Hi Peter, this is Sebastian.' It got picked up very quickly.

'Evening, Sebastian. I have been anxiously waiting for you to call.' His voice did sound anxious to me.

'So, what is that offer all about?' I asked.

'Okay, as I told you before, it is offered by one of the biggest television series producers in Sweden. He wants a story from you.' He was about to end the sentence. But after a second's pause, he added, 'And the payment is really good.'

'Alright, I will start to write a story after the New Year.' I just wanted to end the conversation sooner, since I didn't enjoy talking about business with Peter, and had the plan to write a new story next year anyway.

'Great, I am so glad that you are interested. There is just one condition.' He had a long pause, which made me suspicious of what he was about to say.

'Which is?'

'He wants to you write a story based on an incident.' His voice became hesitate.

'What incident?'

'Well, I don't know how he has got to know this. Maybe he had friends in the police or he was a friend to the family of the girl you were dating once.' He made a pause again.

'What are you talking about?!' I knew what he meant. It was my anger speaking.

'You know, the girl you were once with, who died in a hotel room. And you were with her the day she died.'

'Ellinor. You mean.' I was trying my best to hold back my rage.

‘Yes, yes, Ellinor. He wants you to write a story based on how she died in the hotel room since you were also there. And as I have heard, there was another woman in the same room when that poor girl died.’

I held the phone for a few seconds to calm myself down, and at the end, said emotionlessly to Peter, ‘Please write down what I will say and pass it literally to that big producer friend of yours.’ I paused, and continued after getting a yes from Peter, ‘It’s this. I will write the story, if the planet is to be burnt in hell, and the only way to prevent it from happening is to put the story on the screens to keep the demons before their televisions. But the planet is not going to be burnt in hell, so go and fuck yourself.’

I hung up the call and switched off the phone when I finished.

I don’t remember exactly how much scotch I had taken afterwards before I fell on the bed. But as I could see right now, the bottle I started with is already empty, and there is a new bottle with half of it gone.

Now the alarm rings, meaning it’s time for the writing to stop. And after all these days, to meet Harriet does feel a bit exciting.

I guess it will be a nice evening for me and the confident looking Harriet who has just achieved one of the biggest successes, so far, in her career. Very likely, she will then be very hot in bed. And I wish, that my wakeup tomorrow morning will be much better, as Margareta has suggested.

26/12/1990 Östersund

I had a terrible dream last night. The nightmare was so frightening that I woke up during the middle of the night, and found myself sobbing. My sweater and my Sherlock Holmes book were both wetted by my tears, so I must have been crying for some time during the dream. The first thing I went to check, after waking up, was to see if Gudmund was okay. I got closer to his bed and saw him still sleeping in the same curled up position, murmuring something I couldn't get a clear idea of. He was in my dream, so were Katarina and myself.

As I have now found out, I didn't get into my bed yesterday night, but fell asleep on the couch, with the book lying on my stomach. It was around four o'clock when I woke up, and I turned on the lamp on the desk to take a look out of the window, encountering the complete darkness outside the house. Those images from the nightmare kept flipping from one to another in my head when I was sitting on the chair and trying to calm myself down. My hands kept shaking on the desk, and at the same time, my heart beating unusually fast.

About five minutes later, I managed to get out of the chair and went to fetch some milk from the fridge. I poured a glass of milk into the source pan, then warmed it on the stove for a while before I let the milk slowly warm my stomach, with the hope that it would help to block what I had seen in the dream so I could go back to sleep again.

It was deadly silent in the whole house at that time of the night, which made me scared and start to imagine things. What I am usually afraid of is that some ghost or zombie would suddenly put their hands

on my shoulder and drag me away, but this morning, when I was standing in the corner of the kitchen while drinking the warm milk from the glass, what actually scared me was that Katarina would show up and take me to the place where I had been in the dream.

Not daring to stay long all by myself in the kitchen, I quickly washed the glass and the source pan after I swallowed the last mouthful of milk, and then ran upstairs into our bedroom, forgetting to turn off the kitchen light. Before I finally locked the door of our bedroom, I got really threatened while passing Katarina's room that was between the staircase and our room. I could imagine how horrific it could have been if Katarina ruthlessly opened her bedroom door and blocked my way with her merciless posture I had seen last night when she brought back my poor little brother to our room. I don't know how I would have behaved then, probably just starting to scream and running out of the house to the extremely cold countryside with my thin sweater on.

I know the horror was simply created by my imagination, but it seemed so real, so likely to happen. Though not really believing in any kind of superstitions, I would still be frightened by what they could project in my mind when I was left alone in dark and helpless places.

Ironically, thanks to my quest for the warm milk, my hands were shaking more seriously and my heart beating faster and heavier than when I had just awoken from the nightmare, making it even harder for me to calm myself, ripping the fantasy - that I could get back to sleep - off my head. I sat on the bed and kept my eyes away from Gudmund, staring at the dark window instead, which was covered in steam, before I turned bored enough to take off my sweater and get into the bed.

Then I tried to imagine something else, something like how I made the snowman during the day and how lovely last summer was, to keep my mind away from the nightmare I had been through. But no matter how hard I tried to imagine something nice or how tightly my eyes were shut, Gudmund's mumbling from the next bed continued to hold the replay button, to have my mind go through the horror film I was in again and again.

Now those images have been shown for so many times that I wouldn't even manage, as I assume, to forget it when I eventually enter my adulthood.

So I have to put down the dream, to lock it in the papers, to have another object, other than my head, in which it can be kept. I remember the principal's words very well, writing is help.

The nightmare started from me being awakened in the armchair by a faint noise in the house. I put down the book and stood up to see if the noise was from Gudmund or not. I walked stealthily towards his bed, and found out that he wasn't there when I got closer. There were two pillows under the blanket, which made it look as if my brother was in the bed. I did a quick search first in the room. He was not hiding in the wardrobe, or squeezing in the gap between the bookshelf and the wall, or rolling up under the bed, or tightly fitted in his treasure box with his favourite dolls.

There was no more spot in the room that could be a possible place for my little brother to be. So I went to see if the door had been opened, and found out it was still locked from inside as how it was after Katarina sent him back. It began to make everything into a story in Sherlock Holmes book, me as a detective looking for my little brother who had disappeared from a chamber.

After I quietly opened the door and stepped on the crunchy wooden floor outside the room, I saw the door of Katarina's bedroom was not shut. There was no light coming out, and I listened against the door for a minute but heard nothing. It took some time before I gained enough courage to push the door open, little by little. And when I had finally slinked in, I realised there was no one in that thrillingly dark room. So I retreated to my bedroom and came back with a lit candle.

Illuminated by the light from the candle I was holding, it was bright enough for me to see what an entire mess was lying around me. The bed sheet and the blanket had fallen onto the floor, leaving two pillows sitting in the centre of the bed alone. Her wardrobe was wide open, and there was not a single piece of clothes hanging in it, only a long row of hangers on the rod. The chair was lying on the spot before the vanity

table. And all over the table, were disorderly placed Katarina's makeup kits. The room looked as if it had been robbed by someone, who came in with the purpose of looking for something crucially valuable.

Having done the second check around the room, I was certain that neither Katarina nor my little brother could be there. And same as how I walked in the room, I left with my full attention focused on not to touch a single thing of the mess, and pulled the door handle slowly till the door came back to its position before I pushed it open. After a few seconds on the doorway, I picked up the candle I had left on the floor and carefully went downstairs.

There was no light in the living room or the kitchen. And I wandered around with the candle in my hand, checking every room on the ground level of the house. Toilet, storage, pantry. They were in none of them.

I started to wonder if they had left me alone in the house and gone somewhere much nicer or got kidnapped by some criminals. But when I stood in the centre of the living room, I could feel they were still in the house and that faint noise I heard while I was upstairs had become a bit louder.

And my strides turned more impatient as I spent longer time searching for them. Then suddenly, out of nowhere, I got trapped by something around the corner of the massive woollen carpet in the living room, and fell onto the floor, which put out the candle and knocked it off my hand. It didn't hurt too much when I fell, since I was still in the dream.

Then, just before I tried to get up from the floor, I heard a voice, similar to what I had heard before, traveling into my ears, through the wooden floor and the woollen carpet beneath my head. Having figured out where that strange sound came from, I stood up, lifted up the conner of the carpet, and folded it onto the rest of it.

In the totally dark living room, a dim light crept out of the gaps between the floor planks that were covered by the carpet before, making the area around my feet visible enough for me to see what trapped me down to the ground earlier. It was a whole piece of warped plank sticking out of the planks around it, the edge of which took me down and put out the candle. I tried to lift it, and managed to do it with a little effort.

Astonishingly, it was not a piece of plank I had lifted up, but a half size door, under which was placed an extremely steep ladder which led to the cellar of the house, which I neither had known nor could have imagined. I put my leg on the first step of the ladder and waited for a long time, trying to decide whether to take the second step or not.

One pushing force was telling me that it could be the place down there where Gudmund was and I had to save him, and meanwhile, another pulling force was listing all the scary things that could happen to me if I entered the cellar.

In the end, the fearless explorer part of me won the battle and dragged me, step by step, into the world of the unknown. I tightened my whole body while climbing down the ladder, taking nearly half a minute for every step to descend. As if I was walking on a thin thread between two mountain peaks, I was scared that a single wrong move would have me fall all the way to the ground and get me killed. My ears were so alert then that I could hear the noise better, which came from the deep down of the cellar. It was a young boy's screaming. I knew it was Gudmund, and he was not alone.

I became much relieved when I had lifted my foot from the last step of the ladder and put it on the cold concrete floor. Having placed the other foot on the ground as well, I leaned against the ladder to take a long and deep breath. In the dream, I really believed that I was in the real world. And when I could breathe properly again, I decided to make a move forward.

Without anything in my hands, I kept my fists clenched as I got deeper in the cellar. It was a narrow corridor built in bricks, and there was an opening at the end of it, which the light and the screaming were traveling through. And the door wasn't closed.

I outstretched my head forwards while I was walking, and saw there were two shadows on the floor when I finally found myself stand before that opening. One was standing, and the other was in an unusual position. From how the shadow looked on the floor, I thought it was a Vitruvian Man floating in the air.

And when I raised my head and caught what was happening in the most secret chamber of the house, I could no longer control myself. There were four strong wooden posts standing in the centre of the chamber, in each of which was nailed a thick rusted steel ring. And on each ring, a rope made of one of the four different dresses was tied, with the other end of each rope fastening either an arm or a leg of my poor little brother.

Gudmund didn't have any clothes on and was uplifted a meter above the ground. I saw all the bruises on his body, which caused him a great amount of pain, distorting his face that was covered in his sweat. He was occupied by fear, which left him crying and screaming, as the only two options he could have for his reaction.

Gudmund tried to struggle. But the harder he struggled, the greater pain he received from his arms and legs. Then he stopped, and waited for the other person in the chamber to do more harm to him, with his body shaking, as a sign of his begging for mercy.

And as my eyes moved to the standing figure in the chamber, I saw an image which was so frightening that I will never be able to forget it. It was our mother Katarina, and yet not our mother Katarina. It was a Katarina I had never seen before. Like Gudmund, she didn't have anything on. But unlike Gudmund, from how excitedly and confidently her body was moving, I could see she had the total control of the whole situation. And there was a leather whip, about half a meter long, held in her hand.

I raised my head so I could see her face. Her eyes, in which I hadn't seen such anger and determination before, totally scared me. It was a wild fire in them which could burn down anything in the world, regardless whether it was good or bad. On her cheeks, those capillaries were fully charged with blood, making her pale face look vital and vicious. As if she was going to fight a war on the battlefield, Katarina moved closer to Gudmund, with the handle of her whip being gradually raised from her knee to her shoulder and then above the top of her head.

As my first reaction, I shouted out aloud and closed my eyes when Katarina was about to wield down the whip. I didn't see what happened, but my screaming didn't prevent the whip from landing on my little brother's terrified body. There was first this heart clenching

sound, and then Gudmund's devastated screaming. With the hope that Katarina might stop the torture because of my presence, I opened my eyes. And then, there came the second strike.

Katarina's face changed dramatically, while she waved down her arm to land the whip on Gudmund's chest, the full sequence of which, like a slow motion video, has been played again and again in my head since the nightmare ended. At first, like a volcano which was about to erupt, her veins were bulging on her temples and around her neck, her teeth were gritting so hard that the muscles around her jaw looked as if they were going to tear her skin open, and her wrinkled forehead was pulling her eyebrows closer and pushing her threatening eyes into her eye sockets. Then, while the whip was swinging in the air, the anger on her face was replaced by an expression of joy. The both corners of her mouth were lifted upwards, the fire in her eyes had almost cooled off, and the redness on her cheeks increased. And when the whip hit that tiny, wounded chest, a huge relief appeared on her face, like what can be found on people's faces when they have finished something stressfully important. Then at the end, Katarina's face was refilled with the anger as she had in the beginning of the whiplash. And I knew, she was going to do it again.

I kept shouting, and then began to cry. But as if I didn't exist, Katarina didn't give me a look at all and Gudmund was totally swallowed by fear and agony. Having tried my best to move my body to stop the awfully evil thing that was happening right before my eyes, I found my feet, like they were nailed to the ground, couldn't make a move. With my tears dripping off my chin, I cried the same words in a loop, 'PLEASE STOP, MUM! PLEASE!'

But my begging for Katarina's mercy didn't stop anything. And her whip landed on Gudmund's little body, repeatedly, until the horrific image became foggy and finally began to fade. The moment after Katarina, Gudmund, and the chamber of evilness vanished before my eyes, I woke up from the nightmare.

And the dream was replayed, exactly in the same order, for a few times more in my head before I ran out of energy and put myself into sleep.

It was nearly lunchtime when I opened my eyes again. Gudmund was sitting in the armchair, already having himself dressed. I said good morning to him, to which he didn't reply, but instead, continuing to look out of the window, hopelessly, as if his life was no longer with him. After getting off the bed, I walked to my little brother, trying to see how he was doing.

Gudmund didn't at all react until I said to him, 'I am sorry for what happened in the cellar', which I stupidly messed up between my dream and the real life. And right after I mentioned the last word, my little brother moved his eyes, abruptly, from staring at the window to meet the ones of mine. And I was surprised by his sudden move and the mistake I had made. He gave me a look, looking a bit confused and very annoyed. And his lips stayed shimmering for a few seconds before he said, 'What are you talking about?'

'I am sorry. I had a nightmare and was confused by that.' I explained to him.

After staring at me with his questioning eyes for another few seconds, Gudmund turned his head to his left and began to look out of the window again. Being quite disappointed by how I had behaved, I moved away from my little brother and had my attention caught by a piece of paper that was sticking out of the gap between the door and the floor. I walked to the door and pulled the paper out of the gap.

It was a note, left by Katarina.

'My dear, I am so sorry for what have happened yesterday. I was visited by the devil and I promised it won't happen again. It's alright if you don't want to talk to me today, but when you feel hungry, just open the door, I have left some food for you.

I love you, Mum.'

Having read what was on the note, I brought it to my little brother. He didn't intend to pay any attention to it, so I left it on the tea table before him and went to open the door. I could feel Gudmund was staring, with his accusing eyes, at my back when I was opening the door, which obviously was the big thing he was afraid of. To be honest,

because of what I had experienced in the nightmare, I was afraid to find Katarina standing outside as well. But I was starving, so should be Gudmund.

And it was only a food tray, not Katarina, waiting by the threshold after I opened the door. There were a few cinnamon rolls, a pack of chocolate, a plate of scrambled eggs, and a few pieces of ham placed on the tray. I picked up the tray, brought it into our room, and then quickly locked the door after I shut it. Gudmund instinctively turned his head back to look at the window when I turned around, being mad at me, as I would guess, for what I did. Somehow, I could sense what was in my nightmare was related to what have happened to my little brother yesterday, which I will have to figure out.

I put the food on the tea table, beside the note from Katarina, and then brought two cinnamon rolls with me when I moved to the armchair next to the one Gudmund was sitting in. Not saying anything to my little brother, I held one of the cinnamon roll in front of him while I started eating the other, letting the lovely smell of the delicious sweets soak into his worn out body.

He resisted for a while. But after all, my little brother was still a little boy like me. So when I had finished mine, Gudmund turned his head back, raised his arms to take what's in my hand, and started biting off the roll hungrily. I asked him to eat more when his cinnamon roll was finished, but he said no. A moment later, he got up from the armchair, without saying anything to me, walked straight to his bed and slid into it, leaving me to what was left on the food tray.

After finishing everything except chocolate, I brought back the tray to the doorway and went to check how Gudmund was doing. He was already asleep, in the same hedgehog style as last night, with his innocent face sinking into his arms. So I opened the pack of chocolate, left nearly half of it on the side table next to his bed, and started writing the journal.

Katarina came to knock on the door at dinnertime, telling us she had brought some food and wanted to talk to Gudmund. I didn't open the door or answer her, because I knew my little brother wouldn't want me to do either of them. What I did was I waited patiently for

the sound, which was made by her steps, to move away, and then stealthily, brought the food into our room without catching any attention from the room next to ours. Our dinner was more or less the same as what we had for lunch, except there were some strawberries, instead of chocolate, as dessert. Gudmund got up and joined me for dinner, still not talking much. However, I could sense his anger towards me had decreased a little.

I kept writing the journal after Gudmund went to bed again. Many things have happened since yesterday, some were terrifying, some were purely my imagination, only a few I did enjoy, and most don't make any sense to me at all.

It's almost midnight again, which means my body clock will soon force me to sleep. The last thing I want to write today is what of last night has troubled me the most. It is about my little brother's attitude. I just don't understand why he insists on keeping all the horrible things to himself, instead of asking for my help, and how he had managed to maintain a good intimate relationship with Katarina before, since I know yesterday was not the first time for those horrible things to be put on Gudmund. He was deliberately hiding everything from me, for some reasons, which I want to figure out.

Of course, I am feeling furious at what have happened to Gudmund. But what drives me more nuts is that I don't have his trust on me, that my little brother, who I would do anything to guard, couldn't share with me his horror.

15/12/2012 Stockholm

The heavy snow was still falling, when I looked out of the window after waking up in the afternoon. With my eyes foamed by the horrible daily event, I saw, through the window, there was a thick mist, created by the falling snowflakes, withering like a velvet curtain which one could expect to see in a theatre. It started to snow after I left Harriet's flat around three o'clock in the morning, and it had turned into a seriously heavy one when I walked out of the Tunnelbanan station at T-Centralen to catch the night bus.

Twenty minutes later, Bus 592 arrived, and I nearly passed out on the seat after I got on the bus. Standing in a heavy snow on a cold, early winter morning was indeed very exhausting. I took a nap while the bus was driving me home. And it was quite lucky that I woke up from the nap just two stops before the one close to my apartment, otherwise what a disaster it could have been if I slept ten minutes longer.

I did oversleep on a night bus once, about a month after I moved here. And I was already at its final destination, Arlanda Airport, when I woke up. It was also a damned cold winter night. And it would take an hour for the next bus to take me home. So in the end, I spent the rest of the night sleeping on the cold steel bench inside the airport until Bus 584 began running in the early morning.

It felt as if I was walking through an icefall when I tried to move from the bus stop to my apartment. And I had to reach out my both hands to the front while each of my feet were carefully putting itself one step before the other. Because my boots were not fit for walking on

the slippery ice, I did fall down when I was walking on the icy passage between the car park and the entrance of the two-storey apartment building I live in. And my lousy boots have tried to kill me during this winter for quite a few times.

It was at five o'clock in the morning when I finally put my electronic key on the reader to open the entrance door. From the glass in the door, I saw that my whole body was entirely covered in snow, and even my face had a layer of snowflakes from my cheeks to my chin. After hearing the click sound from the key reader, I dragged the door open and stepped in. When I stood on the nylon carpet to rub away the mud in the soles of my boots, I patted the snow off my clothes, my hair, and took off one glove to wipe off what was on my face.

And I was totally out of energy after I walked upstairs and opened the front door of my apartment. Having the door locked, I switched on the light in the hallway and found a letter lying before my feet. I picked it up and began to take my boots off. It was from Margareta's clinic. When I had finally hung my jacket on the hanger and placed my scarf and gloves on the shelf, the feeling of being in control returned, which relaxed my highly stressed nerves that had been putting pressure on me since I walked into the train at Bandhagen, the green line Tunnelbanan station in the southern outskirts of Stockholm. I went to the bathroom to take a warm face wash, and then sat on my bed to get undressed. Before I got into the bed for a good sleep, I opened the letter and a new appointment was written on it,

**'Wednesday 19 December 2012 13:00
o'clock to Margareta Burström.'**

Helen

As I now recall my memory, it was also on an early Saturday morning, nearly a month ago, when I left Harriet's flat after our first date. I got on the Tunnelbanan train from Bandhagen, and kept going through every piece of information of Harriet I had managed to collect, trying to picture how the plan of killing her could be roughly drafted. Some ideas

were about to hit when the train was approaching Medborgarplatsen, making me feel excited about the possibility of working out the solution for Harriet's death right after our first date, until the sliding doors opened and a girl, who was buried in a deep sorrow, walked in.

After seeing her walk into the coach, my mind completely blanked out what was previously going on in there, and commanded my eyes to fix on her exhausted but still extraordinarily beautiful face. She didn't look at anybody after getting into the train, stumbling, like her mind was captured by some ghost, towards the closest seat and falling onto it. From her face and her slim body shape, I could tell that she was definitely below thirty. The dress she was wearing said it was a nightclub she had been staying in during the night, and her agonised face with some slight signs, left by tears, gave the clue that she probably had just broken up with her boyfriend during clubbing.

In the beginning, it was her hairstyle, same as my mother's, which had my attention, and then the similar proportion of her face to the one of my mum. I kept staring at her face while she was walking towards the seat she had picked, and found out that she had my mum's nose and lips. And the sorrow on her face was disarming.

As if there was some sort of magnet effect that had been generated by her, my eyes were grabbed by her tired body that was lying against the freezing window, watching a piece of beauty whose soul had probably been betrayed by the so-called young love a while ago.

As I had realised since she walked in the train, the excitement in my mind, which was initiated by what I was about to do with Harriet, gradually grew bigger, to a scale after which a familiar wicked idea kicked in, like how it happened in Clarion Hotel's corridor, leaving only one voice in my highly stimulated brain, 'Go and get her! Have a wild adventure!'

She sat one row before me, on the other side of the passage, and faced the same direction as I did. I could see the back of her head and the half of her face as she kept lying against the window. And I watched her patiently, waiting for any potential moves she was about to make. Her eyes kept staring at the dark river hopelessly, when the train was crossing the bridge between Slussen and Gamla Stan, showing the

scale of her sadness to me, looking so wounded that she couldn't have more teardrops to wash her face.

To be honest, my first reaction, after seeing her sad and serene face, was to go up and comfort her. I did almost make a move before the killer instinct overwrote the sympathetic and caring part of me. However, though the compelling chemistry totally occupied my emotions, I still managed to preserve a slight piece of genuine appreciation for her admirable physical beauty.

When the train stopped at Gamla Stan, no one got in the coach and she was still in the same lifeless posture since she sat down. The noise from the wheels, when the train started again, seemed to have an effect on her. Hurriedly, she moved her head away from the window and put her back upright, which, as a clear message, informed me that she was about to get off the train at T-Centralen. After the train had gone underground again, the reflection of her face on the window became tangible enough for her to check how it looked. She took a cotton handkerchief out of her handbag to wipe off the tear traces around her lower eyelids, then had another look at her reflection on the window after putting back the handkerchief in her bag, and put a strained smile on her face, which made her look less sad.

My plan for the wild adventure began to have a form when the train was slowing down. She stood up from the seat, as how she behaved when she came to take it, without paying any attention to anyone, who were either sitting or standing in the coach. And I remained on the seat till she had walked out to the platform through the sliding doors. Then I got up and passed the other sliding doors in the same coach, when she had walked ten meters away, and followed her.

I kept a safe distance of twenty metres between us, taking the path that wasn't in the coverage of those monitoring cameras on the ceiling. And when she reached the middle of the platform, instead of heading for the exit to Sergels Torg that was fifty meters away, she went down the staircase to the level where she could possibly take the red line, either towards Ropsten or Mörby Centrum. I took my first step downwards after she disappeared from the space on the lower level my sight could cover. Then I did my best to walk, more or less, in the same pace as

she did, so the distance between us would still be the same after I got to the platform below.

But there came a panic when I walked to the lower level, that I couldn't see her before me, and there was no train pulling over on either side of the platform. My first reaction was to take a look around to check if she had turned and walked towards the other direction, but my rational thought warned that idea off since this aggressive action would very likely be recorded and later get the suspicion from the police, since I still wanted to carry on with the adventure. And within a second, I decided, taking the risk of losing her track, to walk down another level, for the possibility that it was one of the blue lines she was going to switch to, instead of the far more probable destinations on both red lines.

Worriedly, I took the long staircase in the quickest way I could manage, and immediately turned right after I went down. It was so exhilarating that I saw her again, who was about to step onto the moving walkway. Then I took out my phone, pretending to check something on it while I started moving forward, so regarding the situation that we were the only two persons in the same massive blue cave, neither she nor the camera would get much information of my face. And more safely, I prolonged the distance between us to around forty meters.

When I had walked through the long cave to take the escalator at the end of it, going down to the deepest level, probably, of the whole capital, I saw, while descending on the escalator, that she was walking towards the right side of the platform, where would come the trains that headed towards either Akalla or Hjulsta, not Kungsträdgården, which, as I thought before, could be her destination.

'Akalla five minutes, Hjulsta twenty minutes.' That was what I saw on the digital display hanging from the ceiling that was covered in the rough blue paint.

I stood by the self service machine, where I could get an angle to have a view good enough to spot every single person when they were getting into the train. And that was a safe place to hide from the cameras as well. Having taken a peek at the whole stripe of the waiting area, I found out, that including myself, there were only about ten people, and she was sitting on the bench at the middle point of the long platform.

The distance was too far for me to observe what expressions her face was wearing, but I could see that she was staring straight at the blue stone wall behind the railway tracks. There was neither commercial nor artwork hanging there, unlike the spaces on the two upper levels, only having this enormous piece of roughly carved and painted stone wall stand before her, and me, and the rest of the passengers.

Having played the phone trick for five minutes, the train to Akalla arrived. All the doors were opened, and five passengers, one of whom was her, walked in. And before I took my long strides towards the last coach, I counted the coaches from the one she got in to the end of the train. It was four.

The sliding doors shut off one second after I dragged my feet onto the floor of the train. Since no camera was installed in the train, I quickly walked through three coaches and sat on the right side by the window, guessing she should be in the coach before mine. There were a gang of three guys slightly younger than me sitting in the same coach, who were totally pissed by the amount of alcohol with which they had poisoned themselves. They talked in such noisy way that it could annoy all the passengers in the three coaches near them, laughing and boasting about their pointless lives, which, as they believed, could compliment their infantile manliness. I feared maybe she would move forward to other coaches because of the irritating noise from those drunks, but there was no sound of high heels hitting the floor coming from the front.

Focusing all my attention on looking diagonally out of the window after the train stopped at every station, my mind managed to block the noisy distraction from the other side of the coach. My curiosity got increased after the train had stopped once more and without my eyes seeing her walking out to the platform. I didn't expect to see her leave her coach at Rådhuset or Fridhemsplan, but as the train had passed Stadshagen, Västra Skogen, Solna Centrum, and Näckrosen, my interest to explore the background of my target began to outrun my desire of ending her life right away.

When the train moved on from Hallonbergen, without her being seen on the platform, my guess about her background was formed, assuming that she was a student, presumably an IT student, living and studying in Kista. And a few seconds later, having been staying underground for

nearly half an hour since the train left T-Centralen, we left the tunnel and found ourselves crossing Järvafältets Nature Reserve, which is usually a lovely place to see in the daylight regardless what season it is. And even during the pitch dark night in the cold winter, the thick spotless snow, which was covering the whole area, bounced the weak light emitted both from the stars in the sky and a few street lamps in the park, making the scene so serene that I had nearly forgotten what I utterly needed to focus on — my wild adventure.

I moved my eyes away from the window when the park was left behind and the view was blocked by a row of tasteless apartment buildings, and managed to regain my full concentration to stare at the platform as the train entered the station. The engine started powering off and the brake began to function, then the train gradually slowed down to stop by the elevated platform above the ground, which is quite rare to see in the city. There were a few young couples standing on the other side of the platform, waiting to get on the train that would bring them back to the city, probably after a party, or a late dinner and a few drinks in a pub. And on the side by which our train was about to stop, there was no one waiting.

All the doors were opened a few seconds after the train had completely braked in the station. I tightened my grab on the belt of my messenger bag and left my eyes wide open to observe what was about to happen on the platform. Those drunks in my coach shouted something rude and unclear before they rushed out of the train and nearly fell to the freezing ground. She didn't turn up in my sight. Then all the doors were shut. When the engine began to drag the train forward again, my doubt began to circulate, threatening me that, very likely, I had lost my focus at some point and missed seeing her leave the train at some stop during the whole route.

After the train entered the underground tunnel again, I had a minute of losing my patience, during which time I was about to get up from my seat and walk into the coach before the one I was in, to check if she was still there. But luckily, I contained myself and waited for the train to lie still next to the platform in Husby. And when I looked at the platform with my almost burnt out hope, as a big surprise with which I forgot how to cope calmly, she appeared on the platform with her tired and bemused

walk. So quickly, I stood up and moved to the closest exit on the back, then squeezed through the closing doors.

Then I figured out a way, safe but also risky, about how to get deeper into the adventure. There were two exits, each of which sat at one end of the platform. And as I had found out after stepping off the coach, we were the only people on the whole platform. She walked towards the head of the train, and I took the other direction. With my long strides and no breaks while walking, I managed to get out of the station in a speedy but unsuspecting way. And as soon as I got into the unmonitored centrum, I began to run on the slippery road, towards where the other exit would lead her, hoping that I would catch her in my sight before she disappeared into any small alley on either side of the main road.

My mood was totally escalated when I was fifty meters away from the Tunnelbanan sign, under which she stood, as she lit a cigarette. I was making some noises as I tried to stop running, but it was fortunate that it didn't get her attention. There was no light around me, so I kept waiting in the complete darkness, for her to move on.

Having inhaled a few mouthful of smoke, she started to walk away from the exit. And at the same moment, I put on my first steps towards her, in a speed which would allow me to catch up with her, before she left the zone that was illuminated by the light coming out of the station.

I took a quick look around the neighbourhood when I was approaching her. There was this deadly silence in the area, without a single light from any of the apartments around the centrum. When she was about forty meters away from the exit and I was twenty meters behind her, she noticed that I was walking towards her. And the light from the station was strong enough for her to have a clear look of me.

Knowing I was able to deal with confrontations as such with ease, I turned up my innocent face and said hello to her when the distance between us became less than ten meters. She didn't say anything back, but stood there and looked at me with her confused eyes, questioning about my purpose in silence when I was getting closer.

'Hi,' I repeated my greeting when I was within the range that would permit a possible conversation, 'can I have a cigarette please?'

She stared at my face for a few seconds, still remaining silent. When the cold air had turned my smile into an awkward yawn by petrifying my both cheeks, she made a laugh, the first one I had ever seen on her face. And it made her disarmingly beautiful.

'Oh, I am so sorry, of course you can have a cigarette.' She answered, then opened her handbag to search for the cigarette pack.

I said thanks when she opened the pack to let me pick the last one that was left inside. But when she was trying to light the cigarette for me, the cold wind kept blowing the flame off the lighter. After managing an embarrassed laugh to cope with this ironic situation, I asked whether it would be better that we could find an alley where the wind couldn't reach, and she said yes, with a laugh in return.

We started chatting as we walked in the direction to the apartment she lived in. She looked much more relaxed, with a cigarette in her hand, than how she was in the train. I first asked why she chose to live in Husby - a badly rumoured suburb - to which she said, that for her and her boyfriend to live together, it was cheaper to find a big apartment in Husby than in the inner city, and the life in Husby for her was quite convenient, except the fact that the time for traffic was a bit too long.

For a few times, while she was talking, I deliberately stopped my walk, using excuses as tying up shoelaces or looking at a direction for something I made up which was not there, to switch to the other side of her by which I was walking, so, from the footsteps in the snow, which the inspectors were to find out in the morning, it would look more likely that she was stalked rather than somebody was accompanying her. And as I had quickly found out, she, who had refused to have any eye contact with other passengers in the train, was quite an easy-going and talkative person, belonging to this type who could keep talking for a few seconds before realising their company was not there anymore. So she did take five or six steps forward when my walk had paused for changing sides. And when she had noticed I was no longer by her side, she turned around, looking frightened, and after a second, put down

her head to stare at the ground, like a child who was disappointed by her parents.

As if no one had listened to her for a long time, she kept talking about the area she lived in, before we finally got into the alley below her apartment, not even asking me, oddly enough, what I was doing in Husby. We stood around the corner of the concrete block when she was trying to light the cigarette for me again. And as her focus had moved to the cigarette and my mouth, I rolled my eyeballs upwards and didn't spot any light behind those windows, curtained or not, above the alley. The building above my head almost looked like an abandoned infrastructure if it had a few broken windows. And the rough concrete surface indicated the lack of long expected maintenance. After my cigarette was lit, hers was almost finished. So she took a new pack from her bag, unwrapped the plastic folio and picked the one in the centre. This time, I lit her cigarette with the lighter she had handed to me.

I inhaled it and kept the smoke in my mouth, to taste what was so mysterious and powerful about these little killers of a harmless look. It was a herbal one, usually preferred by girls, with a taste which was too mild, even for a non-smoker like me. The herbal cigarette didn't choke me up but somehow relaxed me. I kept looking at her face when she took more of her second cigarette, being pleased to see the change on it, which continued to lose the reflection of her stress and depression, slowly, as her cigarette burnt shorter. About twenty seconds after both of us had our cigarettes lit, she started to tell me about herself and the frustrating life she was living in.

First, she told me that her name was Helen, then she asked for mine, to which I told the truth. And when she started the storytelling, her eyes moved away from me to stare at a bush, covered in snow, in the middle distance. One year ago, she found this apartment in Husby after spending all the credits she had saved during the years of queueing in Stockholm Bostad, a housing agency, for a better life with her boyfriend she had hoped for a long time. And her boyfriend, a vocalist playing in a band which was merely doing gigs in bars to make its name last, met Helen during one of his gigs five years ago. As an eighteen years' old at the time, Helen defencelessly fell in love with the young leading vocalist of a newly founded rock band. And after dating for a couple of weeks, her boyfriend, who used to squeeze himself with his band

mates in a two room apartment, the living room of which was used for their rehearsals, moved in Helen's first student accommodation close to Rådmsgatan Tunnelbanan station.

Helen went to study cookery in the Restaurant Academy around Globen, while her boyfriend kept his cocky life of a rocker and dreamed in his overblown vision that, one day, his talent would be discovered by some big agent, who would then polish him up and turn him into a super rockstar. So, within the years while Helen was studying, she had to take overloaded part-time jobs, in order to cover the expense for herself and her waiting-to-be-aspiring boyfriend.

Her parents and friends had kept telling her to break up with him, since they began to live together. But she held on, with a will strong as iron, believing that if she tried hard enough, their life would eventually be improved to a stage which could provide both of them with a small pool of happiness.

Even her boyfriend saw him as a big man who could easily pick up his teenage naive groupies - those fairytale believers who had spent most of their time, day and night, fantasising about going to bed with rockstars - Helen held on; though everyday was hard, and all the fights between them, continuously, shook the loose foundation of their relationship, Helene held on; because she had hope, praying that one day her boyfriend would finally grow up to become someone responsible on whom she could rely her life, Helen held on.

Helen finished her studies two years ago, and then started working as a waitress at a restaurant in Medborgarplatsen called Kvarnen, which, in the view of her boyfriend, became a good argument for a more extravagant life. But very soon, Helen's salary couldn't afford those endless bills that constantly came through the front door of the accommodation she was about to give back, so she began to take shifts in the kitchen of the restaurant and work in the early morning as a mail girl for the post office. What had made her life even harder, she also had to look for an apartment which would cost more than the student one she had lived in during the past three years.

Her second cigarette was finished as her story was paused. And after spitting the cigarette end to the ground, Helen lit the third one.

Her elevated emotions continued to interrupt her storytelling, before she managed to inhale a few smokes to ease her nerves and help her get composed. I looked at her, compassionately, until she went on talking again. The light from the street corner, like a smooth veil, mildly covered Helen's face, which looked maturer than her actual age. Her eyes were closed after she put the lit cigarette in her mouth, and I saw there was a drop of tear getting squeezed out of the corner of her eye, her reddened right eye.

'Are you alright, Helen?' I asked, in the most caring tone I could perform.

Without answering, she nodded slightly, and raised her hand to take away the tear drop that was about to roll down her cheek. And when her eyes were opened again, she thanked me for listening to her story and passed her cigarette package to me so I could have another one to warm myself in the cold.

'So what happened then?' My curiosity encouraged me to work out what had broken the heart of this beautiful young woman, who was about to weep a few seconds ago, before me, a life threatening stranger to her.

'Before I got this apartment here, we were nearly fighting everyday.' She looked at the middle distance again when she continued her story, 'I found out he had been taking his groupies home while I was having my night shifts in the restaurant, once I even caught them in our bed. He kept telling me, while asking for my forgiveness, that it was the stress he was having which made him behave stupidly, and made his promise that nothing like that would ever happen again. But he never keeps his promises.'

I noticed she was about to lose the control of her emotions again when she was talking about her boyfriend's betrayals. Her voice started shaking and her eyes couldn't focus on anything. So she made a pause and took a few deep breaths to calm down her tumbling temper. And after a few more mouthful of smokes, she was able to talk about her life again.

‘My heart got broken each time he cheated on me. I kept crying for having believed in all my hopes for someone who had never cared about my feelings.’ Her voice was full of sorrow, ‘I tried to break up with him. But every time I was about to say my decision out, his innocent face, which I have always loved, would gain the power to stop those words from coming out of my mouth. And I still believed that there was a good heart I could see, through his eyes, in him, which had been seduced by this lust driven world. So the idea came to me, that if I could find an apartment that was big enough for us to relax, and far away enough from the wasted centre of Stockholm, maybe everything in our life could change for better.’

‘Was that why you decided to move here?’ I made a response so she wouldn’t feel tired of talking without stop.

‘Yes. When I saw the offer on Stockholm Bostad, I immediately felt this was the hope.’ She lifted her head a bit and moved her eye balls upwards, ‘He was really excited and happy with this idea too, since he believed a neighbourhood like Husby would fit a rocker like him much better. And it did work for a while after we moved here. I was happy to have a living room, a kitchen, a bathroom of our own, and he was curious of the new area which was totally different from where he had been brought up. That was the time when I believed our life was about to have a nice shift, though I had to take an hour more to commute between home and work. We had even managed to spend a few weekends in Ikea together, to choose curtains, carpets, and things like that, for the new apartment. For the first time, after all those years of fighting, we were like a couple again. But good things never last long enough in my life.’

As I can remember from what had she told me, after a few hopeful months in Husby, her boyfriend’s ego went out of control again. Sometimes he wouldn’t even come back home, but spent the night in his groupie’s place. The fights between them began again. And as time went by, month after month, Helen’s patience was gradually washed away by every bit of disappointment, big or small, from her ruthless boyfriend.

However, there was still this slim piece of hope deeply rooted in Helen’s heart, which kept dragging her out of the apartment, after a

few hours of makeup, to go out with her boyfriend, to every bar, to every nightclub, where, sometimes, she would even see how he went on to pick up girls, from one to another, right before her eyes. Helen described the humiliation as a sharp chisel stabbing again and again into her soul, which had already been savagely torn apart.

And I also remember, that she couldn't talk any more after mentioning that devastating chapter in her life. She could no longer contain herself. Then she started to cry. Her tears kept coming out of those two tortured eyes and sweeping through her exhausted face. I didn't do anything other than standing there, watching her being ruled by that unbearable rush of sorrow. And the next second, she, to my surprise, put her arms around my neck and hugged me tightly, letting her tears fall on my jacket and telling me that she had finally slapped him in the face, while he was kissing a sixteen years' old girl right before her, and firmly said to him it was all over between the two of them, in the nightclub around Medborgarplatsen they went to for celebrating their five years' togetherness.

As I could feel, the hug from her was so tight that she must be mistaking me for her boyfriend, whom she still deeply loved. Then, when she had moved her head from my chest and looked at me, from her eyes, I saw her expectation, pleading me to say or do something. So I put my hands on her cheeks and kissed her.

When we were warming each other's cold lips during the kiss, the hot breath from her nose gave me the signal that it was the right time to end my adventure before it went out of my control. Not letting her notice any unpleasant tension, I slowly moved my hands from her waist, to her chest, to her clavicle, and finally, located them around her long and lovely neck, while at the same time, my tongue began to taste her iron will and the heartbreaking life she had lived through from the mixed flavour in her mouth.

She didn't shout or fight aggressively when I was strangling her neck tighter and harder. As if she either knew what I had been planing to do or accepted her life being taken by someone she could like and trust, to emancipate her tortured soul from the hopeless world she no longer had the will to live in, Helen left her life to my hands.

I met her eyes when I was taking her life away. There was no anger, or horror, in them, but a sense of indifference, saying to me how little her life meant to her in the end.

Five minutes later, her breathing had finally stopped and there was no pulse around her wrist. Very gently, I put her down on the snow, letting her pass the last moment of her short life in peace, with me observing this instant of aesthetic beauty. Before I took my sketchbook out of the messenger bag I was carrying, I stood there to enjoy how the whole scene looked.

In front of the concrete building that was coarse and rusting towards its ending, on a spot where the yellowish street light poorly illuminated, the dead body of a beautiful young woman was lying in the middle of the thick and harmonious snow, glamorously, and gradually, emitting the warmth left in her to the space above, like a superstitious transcendence, from a world of misery to a parallel universe which contained all the possibilities for every mystery to exist. For that moment, I really believed there could be a world in which only the spirits lived.

I let her lie in the snow, and took my sketch book from the messenger bag. It was a night around minus ten centigrade, which had my both hands constantly shake, and made it hard for me to draw Helen's face with precision. The lines kept being broken by the slips of my pen, and I drew one eye out of proportion.

When the sketch was finished, I had completely lost the feeling of my right hand. So I put it back into my glove, to warm it, and then held the sketch, with the other hand, next to her face. It made me laugh when I compared her face and the sketch, because of the amateur quality of the portrait I had just drawn.

At first, I wanted to rip the paper off and do a new one as soon as my hand was warmed. But as I took the sketch from the ground to have a close look at it, a very unique quality in the drawing, different from the rest of the others I had done, was revealed to me. The distortion of her face and its mispositioned parts, as if the sketch was drawn by the face itself, resembled Helen's miserable life.

After putting back my sketchbook, I opened Helen's handbag, and took the cash, and her iPhone, out of her wallet. Leaving both her handbag and the wallet on the ground, I had my last gaze at the young woman who had a strong will and a heroic faith for love, picked up the cigarettes ends of mine that I had thrown to the ground before, and walked down Norgegatan, on my way towards Kista.

There was no one else on the way during that half hour, and I waited a few more minutes until the first morning bus to Sollentuna arrived. The driver didn't give me a suspicious look, and I smiled at him, to show the friendliness I had been practicing towards every bus driver since I moved to this big city.

After sleeping through the whole Saturday, I woke up on the early Sunday morning and checked my phone that had been switched off the day before. There was a message from Harriet, saying that she enjoyed our first date and hoped to see me soon. So I put a draft which I could edit and send later in the conversation box, then started my day. In the afternoon, I went to the centrum and bought all the major newspapers from different stores.

On each of them, there was news about Helen. Quite as I had assumed, they all hid the fact that the victim was an ethnical Swede. So I put them to my shelf and went to the news pages in their websites, where the same news were published. And in the comments below those articles, as I guessed what I would find out, many users had left the information of Helen's identity and her life details. All the comments blamed the newspapers for covering the truth, some of which expressed their hatred towards the suburbs and those inhabitants with an immigrant background in the Järva area.

And on Monday, the news got updated. An innocent fifteen years' old boy, born in a Somali family who escaped to Sweden in the late 1990s, was marked as the suspect, just because he used Helen's iPhone - which I deliberately left on the blue metro line on Sunday evening - to send his friend a text message about this greatest discovery in his life.

One day later, when I went to see Harriet again in her apartment, I saw a piece of Aftonbladet on the dining table. There was an article, over a whole section, revealing the victim's tragic love story, which

had turned the murder case to a narrative for public entertainment, making her boyfriend popular in several days' time, helping his career to escalate.

We read through the whole article together after we had dinner, and Harriet was crying when I read the story in the paper to her. She looked at me in tears and asked if I would do the same thing to her, which came as a shock since she sounded as if she had already known all the horrific darkness I had been keeping to myself. But very quickly, I realised it was just her sympathetic reaction to the love story between Helen and her useless rocker boyfriend, and she was afraid that I would break her heart as how Helen's boyfriend had done. So I held my arms around Harriet and asked if she was scared, who told me, in response, that she was not scared, but sad, feeling sorry for what a young girl could go through in her life.

Time went on, but the investigation into the murder case didn't develop any further. So the media stopped covering it and people soon forgot everything. From what I have heard during my time in public transportation and bars, Helen's name and her story were only mentioned when people were discussing that good looking bloke and his talentless rock band, who had suddenly released two albums and made their name in the insipid world of pop music in this country.

And a week ago, an article in the local newspaper, which covers the whole Järva area, questioned the possibility that it could be the rocker who hired a hit-man to murder his girlfriend, for advancing his career. Those few people, who had read it, only saw the story as a joke and reminded them of their hatred towards the suburbs, when they were talking about the undiscovered suspect, who, as they believed, must be from Husby and had at least a foreign background.

So that became the end of Helen's story, the case of which would never have a chance to be truly unraveled.

Harriet

And it's time to talk a little about Harriet now. I first found her profile photo on the dating website, where I had registered myself with one of my fake identities, Henrik. Like my mother, Harriet had the medium long, light blonde hair. And from her evasive eyes above her tightly sealed lips, I very quickly gathered the information that it was a piece of repressed personality which she had.

To be truthful, Harriet didn't look very similar to my mother. Her eyes were smaller, her nose was higher up, and she had slimmer cheeks than my mother's. And what really hooked me in the photo was her tortured and twisted spirit, which was reflected in her aching eyes, belonging to someone who had been tired of the life she had lived through.

I sent a message immediately to her with the well hinted expression of my appreciation for her profile picture and the profession she worked with. From what I had read on the website, Harriet was a graphic designer, while I, as described on the page of my personal details, was a freelancing writer, not telling anything about what I exactly wrote.

It took three days to see her reply, during which time I had tried to collect as many background details about her as possible from internet. In the message of her reply, Harriet apologised first, using being busy at work as her excuse, and suggested to meet up for an afterwork coffee on the Friday afternoon of the week. I agreed with her suggestion and got the second message from her, which contained the place where the date was to be set. It was a very bizarre bar around Medborgarplatsen, which not so many people of my age would like to go to, named after one of my favourite novelists, Charles Dickens.

I arrived there at a quarter to six, fifteen minutes before the time she wrote on the message, with the purpose of getting familiar with the surroundings and the interior space of the bar. Though the name of the place had never been heard from any conversations between people below forty years' old - regardless whether the conversation was about the bar or the writer, as I found out - it had a quite warm and cozy old school style which I like.

The space was huge and there were many seats around, most of which were unoccupied, making it hard for me to decide where I should sit during my first date with Harriet.

And after a few seconds of thinking and feeling, I walked to the leather bench against the wall, where was placed a cupboard containing a few medals and some ancient golf balls. The dark hair waitress, who had a very feminine looking body, came and asked if I wanted to order something, either food or a drink. After placing my jacket on the back of the chair on the other side of the table, I asked for a glass of water and told her that I would order later, since I was expecting a friend of mine.

It was a clear Friday afternoon. The snow had stopped a couple of days ago, and when the sun was shining before the sky turned dark, the streets were unusually bright, due to the thick chunks of snow that were piled on the both sides of the street, the thick chunks of snow which smoothly bounced the sunlight to the dark facades of those buildings in the shade.

From the seat I was sitting on, the view of the sidewalk outside the bar could be clearly obtained through the big and recently cleaned shopwindow. A few groups of office people passed by, carrying bottles of alcohol in those green or purple plastic Systembolaget bags, and chatting with each other in their well performed happy faces, which hadn't yet been worn out by the long and endless winter that had just begun.

There were also few of those, who walked through on their own, all having their hoods covering their heads, only showing their facial jewelries to other people. They looked young and angry and full of rebellious will, hindered by the huge amount of repression within them, which kept stopping them from making any challenge to the environment they were in. No wonder then, as an alternative choice, that they decided to pick their faces and their own hated body parts for those piercings to go through, expressing their arguments, against nature and its creation, that they possessed the power to reconstruct, or sometimes deconstruct, themselves.

The lights on the street were automatically switched on at six o'clock, and five minutes later, the front door of the bar opened. A young

woman in her thirties, who was wearing a dark blue jumper, stepped in. She took off her baseball cap, which previously shadowed her face, and let her shiny blonde hair sway down to her cheekbones. Then her insecure eyes caught mine, which were watching every single move she was making. And a second later, a forced smile turned up on her briefly but nicely made up face, confirming my speculation that she was my date, and the next victim on my murder list, Harriet.

I stood up from the bench and waved to her, while she was slowly undoing the zipper of her jumper as she got closer, under which were dressed a light sky blue sweater and a white collar shirt. On her lower half, she had dark skinny jeans and a pair of white converse sneakers. Quite stylishly, Harriet didn't wear any jewellery at all.

Having her jumper put on top of my jacket, Harriet reached out her relatively small hand to give me a rather boyish grip, and said, 'Hello, sorry I am a bit late.'

'It's okay, I have only been here for a few minutes.' Then we both sat down at the same time.

As awkward as always, it was a dreadful experience during the first five minutes of our first date. The topics of the conversation, which began with where we lived, to what we did for living, then continued with where we were brought up, how many cities in Sweden, in Europe, and around the world we had visited, and what they were.

And when the first five minutes had passed, the conversation finally moved into a stage which usually indicated the level of difficulty for the rest of the date. We began to talk about our interests.

Music became the first area where we exchanged our favourites. Harriet told me that Joy Division and The Smiths were her favourites, which came as a bit of shock to me since she was the first girl I had ever talked to who was into the culture of post-punk. Then she talked about how she discovered Joy Division in the first nightclub she went to, when she was fifteen, and then got obsessed, fanatically, with Ian Curtis, the frontman of the band. That was the time when she spent every kroner of her pocket money to buy their posters and albums. And it was her dream, for quite a while, that she hoped one day she could

marry Ian Curtis, before the tragic death of the singer was revealed to her by her father, which broke her heart and nearly had her starve herself to death. Her body was deeply in sorrow, rejecting any food from her parents. And in the end, her parents had to take her to a hospital, and then, a psychiatry ward.

I listened, nodded, sighed, and sometimes laughed, while she was talking about her obsession with Joy Division, or more precisely, with Ian Curtis. When she had finished her story about the band, I shared with Harriet my knowledge of Ian Curtis and Joy Division, which I had gained from a memoir written by a member of the band not a long time ago.

Harriet was surprised that I could almost recite the poem written by Ian Curtis, 'Failures of The Modern Man', which was reedited to be the lyrics of the song 'Failures'. And she went excitedly intrigued when I was telling her how her dream lover was betraying his wife by having a romantic affair with a girl from Belgium and shamelessly womanising after every gig they did in the UK and outside their homeland.

It made our date so much easier after we had found out that there were some bands which were both of my interest and hers. Then the dark hair waitress interrupted our conversation, which was heating up, by asking us, hastily, what we would like to order. Though annoying her question was, as both of us felt, we took some time to consider what to tell her. Harriet ordered a bottle of English ale and I wanted a pint of Irish dark beer. The waitress noted down what we had ordered and passed me a complex look before walking away, leaving me and Harriet to resume our conversation from where it had stopped before.

As our talk continued, I recommended her a few bands which were influenced by Joy Division and their period of the post punk era, and Harriet smiled when she was listening to me.

After Joy Division and Ian Curtis's part was finished in our conversation, Harriet asked me which band was my favourite, to which I thought for a few seconds and failed to give her a name. So instead, I listed a few of them, from the Beatles to the latest indie bands. She insisted that I shall pick one band from what I had listed, but I couldn't. And in order to end that seemingly forever-going question, I concluded

to Harriet that maybe I was someone who just liked music in general, which made her smile again.

And before our drinks were served, we talked a bit more about our teenage years, when we were both a headless groupie for rock bands. I left a twenty kroner bill as the tip to the waitress after she put down both of our drinks on the table, the generous gesture of which made that aggressive look go away from her face, and which also showed my deliberately intended kindness to Harriet.

Our topic got switched to art as we started sipping our drinks. Harriet contributed a lot more to the talking than me, while I just mentioned a few big-name artists with whom I was familiar, such as Pablo Picasso, Vincent Van Gogh, and Claude Monet, not with the purpose of covering my identity as an artist but simply as a matter of fact, that I just didn't know anything about those names Harriet was passionately regarding as the most influential and inspirational figures to her design work. So as a result, silence, nods, and smiles, all of which became my only ways to respond to her talking.

After maybe fifteen minutes' time, I had nearly finished my Guinness while Harriet's Newcastle remained almost untouched, since she was the main speaker, and I was the main listener who would hold the pint to the mouth during the time of figuring out the proper responses. So I raised my hand and ordered another pint when the waitress came closer, giving to her another twenty kroner as tip.

Harriet noticed the lack of my reaction to her after my second drink was served. She made a pause, took a few sips of her English ale, and looked at me with her eyes squeezed. After putting down her bottle, she asked what I wrote as my career.

It was really a tricky question, since none of the screenplays was written under the name of Henrik and nearly all of the published articles were possible for people to track on internet. For a few seconds, I was terrified by some possible consequences of my reply, such as saying something suspicious that could be proven as low quality fabrications, if Harriet would have the interest to check them out.

After swallowing a few mouthful of Guinness, an idea came across my mind, telling me that it would work best for me if I lied about my career. Casually, and with confidence, I lowered the pint from my mouth and said, 'Actually, I am nothing but only a ghostwriter.'

'Ghostwriter? What does that mean? You write ghost stories?' Harriet's eyes were gazing, at me, with a few flames sparkling in them.

So I had to explain a bit about ghostwriting, as a career, from what I knew to her, and then picked some insignificant autobiographic books, which not so many people would read, as the examples of what I had written. Luckily, I was able to register some book titles in my mind when I was wandering around in bookshops for passing my time.

As a relief to me, she didn't get deeper into the field of which I knew very little, but rather brought up the topic of literature in general. As it went on, we discussed philosophy and some modern thinkers, whose works I couldn't manage to read, with fluency and consistency, longer than three pages. Harriet kept talking about her admiration for those great names, but failed to explain, in brief, a single point from any of their works to me when I asked, making me feel rather awkward. I could detect the slight sense of resentment in her response to my questions, suspecting that Harriet might not like to be challenged, especially when she was talking about a subject she passionately loved. So instead, I began to imagine what was under those fabrics Harriet was wearing - while she still kept talking about philosophy to me - the action of which, as a case study, could better reveal the mystery in the mind of a human being than those theories made up by a handful of logic obsessed morons.

As it went, I moved my eyes away, from her animated face to the more seductive parts of her female body, and in the meantime, downing more beer into my stomach. And Harriet noticed that I didn't have much interest in everything she had been talking about.

'You don't like philosophy, right?' asked she, in a tone which expressed the level of her disappointment.

'Yes,' I responded very quickly, putting down the pint and moving up my eyes to look at her face again, 'I like philosophy, it's just the modern

ones are so hard for me to understand. They always make me sick when I try to penetrate a few lines to get their point. The thinkers I like were from the time of the Ancient Greece.'

She laughed, which cleared away all the disappointment that had been staying on her face. 'Good and old ones! But they were not sophisticated as the modern ones, so there is more intelligence contained in those books I have read.' She chanted, showing me how proud she felt.

Therefore, I had no choice but to surrender. 'Well, you win.' I sighed bitterly.

When the topic of philosophy was talked over, Harriet took a few mouthful of beer from the bottle, since she must have been really thirsty after all those talking.

'Do you read novels?' I asked, after she put the bottle on the table.

'Yes, I read novels. All kinds, classics, and modern ones as well. I usually read them while I am on my way to somewhere.' She made a pause and thought for a while before asking, 'Do you still remember the first novel you have read?'

I removed my elbows from the table and leaned my back against the wall, helping myself to remember something from a long distance in time. After a few seconds, I got it - the answer to Harriet's not so easy question - out of my mind, 'I am not sure if it was my first novel, but I would say it was the collection of Sherlock Holmes. I just felt they should be my first. But I can't remember when I read them.'

Harriet held her breath for a few seconds before bursting into a laughter, which attracted the attention from other people in the bar.

'Detective stories!' She was still laughing and it made her voice unstable, 'The favourite of every stupid boy's!'

I smiled, then asked what was her first novel.

'Do fairytales count?' said she, with an amused voice, and a cunning expression on her face.

I put out a posture to make me seem serious, and said, 'No.'

But my acting was interpreted as something funny by Harriet, so she laughed again, when I crossed my arms over my chest and deliberately brought my backbone unnaturally straight.

'Then I think it should be Norwegian Wood. I read it when I was thirteen.' Her eyes stopped blinking, staying focused on the wall behind me. 'I remember we used to go to a cafe and sit there for a whole afternoon to read the book. When we all had finished the same chapter, we would get some coffee and sweets and talk about who should play which role in the story. Then we would imagine as if the story was happening to us in real life. Pretty silly.'

I was amazed by her happy face. Not recalling what I had planned about how to end Harriet's life, I just looked at her, with an affectionate smile on my face, while she was talking about her younger years.

'That was such a wonderful time I have always wanted to return to. All the innocence we were living with, in our everyday lives, before it was filled up with all the ashes, left from the burnt out vitality.' Her voice went lower and gradually faded away when she talked retrospectively, reminding me of how the mood of a woman could dramatically change, even during one single sentence. 'I guess life is like the one Naoko lived in Norwegian Wood. Happiness only survives in the age of innocence and ignorance, and time is just a process of putting pain over joy and replacing naivety with frustration. Eventually, it's both brave to take our own lives at a young age and to live through all these agonising years till the end.'

She sighed as if she was talking to an old friend of hers. Somehow I believed that she was imagining me as one of her oldest school playmates. Intentionally, I had a cough to bring her back from the deep ocean of her own memories.

Harriet looked up and had an awkward smile, 'I am sorry. I don't know why I was talking about that. Have you read that book?'

'I know it's a good book, but I haven't read it. Anyway, I watched the film. That was really beautifully crafted.' I tried my best to construct my

reply in a way which could distract her attention from the unresponsive fact that I didn't read probably the most influential book in the world of Harriet.

'Films?' She talked in her mocking tone, 'They are made for lazy people who lack the power of imagination.'

I smiled, and meanwhile, was impressed by the surprising boldness her words contained, when she was slightly drunk and heated up.

'You are a writer, right?' Her confidence continued to dominate our conversation, 'In your knowledge, who have influenced literature the most in the last hundred years?'

Sitting on the bench and staring at the pair of eyes that were full of excitement, I suddenly found myself having lost the ability to form a proper sentence to answer the question Harriet had just asked.

'Is it a tough question for you?' She sounded challenging.

'In a way, it is a tough question,' I looked at her, thanking her for giving me the clue to start talking again, 'There were so many great writers in the last century. I like Hemingway, Rudyard Kipling, Henry Miller, Virginia Woolf, and so on. But it's not fair to say any of them had the most influence on the writers of younger generation.'

'What do you think of Kafka then?' said she, immediately after I finished my sentences that didn't provide a definite answer, which she might not even care to know.

'Oh, right. Kafka.' The name crossed my mind when Harriet said it out, making me feel so stupid for forgetting the fact that Kafka was Ian Curtis's favourite writer, whose books I had never read, 'I know it sounds silly, but I actually haven't read any of his works. Though I have always been sure that they would inspire me.'

I thought about lying and making up some ignorant remarks first, but then gave up the idea, since she must be an expert of Kafka's works. And feeling embarrassed again, I put my head down after seeing her superior looking and highly satisfied face, as if she had received a big reward of a competition a moment ago. I kept my head down to

stare at my beer, reaching out my hand to grab the glass. Though it had rarely happened before, the situation of being so diffident did make me feel a great deal of discomfort.

To my surprise, Harriet daringly put her hand over mine, at the moment I touched the glass. I raised my eyes, and watched her with confusion.

The next second, she said firmly, 'Come with me to my place, I will show you all of them.'

Willingly, Harriet took her jumper and my jacket with her and walked towards the exit of the bar. I followed her, passed through the almost empty place during its happy hour, got out of the front door that was held open by Harriet, and let her arm take mine, when we stepped down the staircase to the Tunnelbanan platform in Medborgarplatsen.

The first part of our date turned out to be splendid, especially when being compared to what happened between our sitting in the train and my walking out of her flat in Bandhagen. Our words began to die out as the train got us further into the southern part of the capital. Then after we sat down in her small living room, a bottle of red wine was opened and some moody music played. But the atmosphere was not as it was in the bar and the conversation between the two of us couldn't maintain its romantic essence any longer.

As the anxiety between us increased when our chatting was reaching towards its end, Harriet leaped from her spot in the couch, grabbed my head with her two unusually masculine hands, and kissed me.

The music didn't get switched off when we started undressing each other. We moved from the couch to her bedroom, while our lips were still sticking together. I could still hear the music playing behind the firmly shut bedroom door while making love to Harriet. The melody kindly distracted my attention from Harriet's sleepy and groggy face, which elevated my desire to kill.

After we made love, Harriet began to talk about her hard life while I was still lying beside her in the bed. She told me about those tough days at high school, the crazy first two years of her wild life when she

went to study graphic design in Konstfack, her first and the other tragic relationships, the struggles in the beginning of her career, those love affairs during life escaping holidays, the shocking death of her parents in a car crash, her nervous breakdown during the funeral, and how she finally recovered from the psychiatric care centre in the hospital.

I asked why she registered herself on the dating website. And as she told me, the reason for that was she didn't have time, or belief, to plan a romance. So it was easy for her to go from man to man, with the faintest hope that she might spot a Mr. Right as her life companion for a period of time.

Harriet started sobbing when she said that her belief in romance and love had died long time ago and now the only thing that troubled her was the fear of dying alone.

And in return, she asked me for the reason why I registered on the website, but soon realised how redundant it was to ask a guy for the purpose of joining the game of dating.

'You just want to sleep with as many girls as possible before you get tired of switching, don't you?' She quickly added, before I could answer anything.

I didn't say anything, leaving a bitter smile as my confirmation to her forthright insight.

After a long and unpleasant silence, I got up from the bed, after telling her that I had to leave, using having an important meeting the next day with the current client I was working for as my excuse.

'You guys always want to run away as soon as you have got what you want.' Harriet was laughing cynically when I started dressing up.

She didn't even want to look at me when I walked to the door of her bedroom, staring at the window on the other side of the room, and gazing into the darkness, as if her whole spirit was swallowed by the hollowness and shallowness from the cold, merciless world we all live in.

But it surprised her and put back vitality in her body, when I asked, 'Can I call you, Harriet?'

Standing in the door and looking gently at her beautiful body that was lying in the bed, I waited to see her reaction.

Her head suddenly turned back to face me happily, and nearly at the same time, her body swiftly jumped up from the bed and brought her lips to mine. Then we kissed again.

That was what had happened between me and Harriet, before the adventure that resulted in Helen's unfortunate death. Or I could say that it was fortunate for Helen to die, in the sense of releasing her soul from her already cracked and crucified life.

Truthfully, when our dating had just begun, I believed Harriet's life would be taken, very soon, by me. I made a rather uncreative plan of copying what I had done to Maria and finishing everything within the first two weeks.

As the killing becomes growingly routine and unadventurous, the whole process from picking up a victim to playing a game with her, and at last, to ending her life, means a lot less exciting and mysterious for me, only leaving the satisfaction of the reward - which arrives at the end while looking at them complete the transition from life to death - as the major motive for me to continue my life as a serial killer. This life has been revealed to be a form of addiction, not as an exploration, not any more, to the unknown mystery as it was in the beginning.

Things change, fast or slowly, in every possible way which, sometimes, no one could ever foresee.

Which I hadn't cared about too much before and now am getting really bothered by, this irritating transformation of my adventurous serial killer's life to an addiction, and the sickness of it, felt really depressing. And now what's more depressing, my morning disorder from which I cannot recover.

And another ironic thing is that out of my expectation, my hatred of Harriet has begun to go in another direction that is beyond my plan.

It seems to me that Harriet's life has been improving in a positive way, as we keep seeing each other more and more. Each time, she would look happier and sound more cheerful than the last time we met. The spirit I could sense in her eyes is no longer the repressed and painful one, which I saw in her profile photo on that website.

She laughs more than before, and sometimes would tell me some jokes which could bring up my mood. Dangerously, I notice that I have started to enjoy her company. It makes the depressing winter, which everyone in this country has to endure for the most years within their lives, a lot easier for me, at this particular period, despite my morning abnormality.

It scares me, every now and then, when I find myself genuinely wanting to go back to Harriet, though I still believe strongly that, one day, I will carry out a plan to take her life away. Or perhaps it is something else that frightens me, that it is possible I have started falling in love with Harriet, for the most stunning version of herself she could be, which means, perhaps Harriet is the solution for my life, the unproven solution for the troublesome, risky, and dramatic life I have been living in for a year.

Last week, when we met in her place before Harriet left for her business trip to London, I felt extremely happy to see her. After the sensual and pleasant sex, we lay in bed next to each other, and Harriet said to me, in her most affectionate tone, 'Henrik, I think I am in love with you.'

I smiled, and moved my eyes downwards to see hers, which were filled up with content and complacency. I knew she was waiting for my response, so I kissed her, instead of saying anything that should have been a commitment she was desperately expecting, and put my arm around her shoulder, to hold her gently, until she fell asleep.

Because of Harriet's light snoring, I couldn't get into sleep that night. My eyes kept staring, restlessly, at the ceiling of the dark bedroom that was gloomily rendered by the light - coming from the bathroom - which

leaked out of there and crept through the gaps underneath the doors into the bedroom. And my mind was spinning, calculating all the possible consequences I was to face if I gave up the idea of taking Harriet's life and let myself, as my feelings would suggest, take the challenge to fall in love with Harriet, whose miserable life had been totally transformed by my existence. I had this vision for a while, imagining myself ending up in an honest and serious relationship with Harriet, before a turn from Harriet's body interrupted me.

Carefully, I moved away my arm from the spot under Harriet's head and stared at her pleased face, gathering there must be a happy dream going on in her brain. The dim yellowish light landed on her face, illustrating her as an angelic baby, whom everybody else in the world would adore.

In my heart, I heard a voice saying it was a piece of perfection lying beside me, who I could worship and love and rely my life on. While at the same time, a pile of arguments were generated in my head, which was running rationally to tell me how dangerous and impossible my life in the future would become, if I seriously started to live a life with someone who would occasionally remind me of my mother, the image of whom would repulsively disgust me.

For start, I didn't use my real name, so it would be a big problem if I had to hide my true identity all the time while being with Harriet. Then, I had to live as a ghostwriter to make money. Plus, I also had to carry out an unsuspecting plan for 'Sebastian' to disappear from the world. These three issues alone would bring me too much work to do.

And the result of my emotional decision, if I were to start this romance with Harriet, would remain uncertain, unpredictable, and uncontrollable. What was more serious, it would mean I couldn't make art or write journals anymore. The fear of not having the freedom to express the essential part of myself stressed me, pulling me away from the fantasy that, maybe, there could be a completely new life, a much different one out there, if I were to live with Harriet, by using Henrik as my new and only identity.

Rather unusually, I became indecisive and couldn't clear up the mess in my mind to have a promising solution. At the end, during the

rest of that night, I kept lying awake beside Harriet, the happy girl who was cutely snoring during her deep sleep. Without a single idea in my head, I left myself to the insomnia which helped me skip the morning blackout for the first time since it started.

Having woken up, Harriet saw my weary eyes after she finished rubbing hers, and asked if I was feeling okay. I told her that I had a bad sleep, before she went to the kitchen to warm up some milk for me. Some minutes later, she returned with a tray, giving me a cup of coffee and some milk, then began to pack, while I was lying in bed, sipping the warm coffee from the cup and watching her aesthetic movements of picking out her shoes and clothes from the wardrobe. And she came to give me a long kiss before dragging her small luggage across the apartment to the door.

After Harriet left for her flight to London, I dosed a few of her sleeping pills and took a nap on her couch. When my eyes were slowly closing down, a message was displayed in my head, 'Her destiny, as she returns, shall reveal.'

Minutes were ticking away constantly, and days kept going by one after another. I believed I would miss Harriet's company in the beginning, when she had just left. But I didn't. Astonishing as it was, I found it much easier, and even relaxing, to get back the gift of loneliness, by which others would usually get freaked out. To me, it is the freedom that would enable me to distance myself from everything within the actual life I am having. It allows me to access the perspective of reviewing all the contradictions and ambiguities which have been bothering me. And in the end, an idea, sometimes sounding insane, would offer me a solution, which I could put into operation - by using the power of my intelligence and my instinctive sensitivity - to bring all the bothers to an end, and reward me with peace and a refreshing start in my life.

After a few days of passing through every image of Harriet I could picture from my memory, the joyful and hateful ones altogether, my rational mind reached a deal with my vibrating emotions, approaching the final conclusion. The dangerous idea, which I came up with while lying in Harriet's bed the night before she left, was excluded. And

it felt pragmatic to continue with what I had already planned. To kill Harriet, it was, but perhaps with a totally different ending, which shall be challenging enough, so I would have to use the best of my imagination, to engineer a poetic and, at the same time, practical murder. Her face, after her death, should still be captured in my sketchbook and pinned up together with the faces of the other women I have killed so far, on the wall of my secret studio in Södermalm.

However, to speak truthfully, my determination to put her life to an end didn't affect my genuinely good mood when I had a great time with Harriet this week, from Thursday evening till Friday afternoon, since she came back from her business trip.

Which was exceptional, Harriet, as a vegetarian herself, cooked some salmon for me so I had some food I could really enjoy during our dinner, which I had been missing since Harriet was away from Stockholm. And we drank the bottle of white wine I brought and some sweet liqueur she kept in the fridge, while Harriet, as the main speaker of our conversation, constantly shared what she had been through in that big capital of the Western world in her imaginative style and enthusiastic tone, the presentation of which was accompanied by her expressive body language.

Harriet talked about those meetings first, about how those managers from the manufacture company who were impressed by her talent, which was presented in her design samples. Then she described the long working evenings with the design team that was organised by the English, and how she, being the leader, tried to push everything to the top quality finish.

I laughed with her when she told me the story about her having a fight with a girl in the team, who persistently refused the positive cooperation with Harriet and the others, particularly with Harriet. So she had to put the girl out of the team, to make things start going again, which got a great admiration from the board of the company, who appreciated her boldness and decisive spirit, both of which managed to drive the whole process forwards.

When we had finished dinner, Harriet started joking about those horrible meals she had to take during her days in London. All those

tasteless microwave packs, wrapped by a piece of plastic folio, made her miss so much, perhaps for the first time in her life, the things she had been eating in Sweden.

During the whole conversation, I kept leaving witty remarks on what had been told by Harriet, saving me from the situation in which I had to make up a whole new story, to explain what had happened to 'Henrik', while I had lived as 'Sebastian' when she was away. In fact, she seemed to forget asking anything about what I had been through until I was walking with her to the bedroom. Without telling anything that had happened during those days, I just said to her that I had been writing some chapters for a project and it was going well.

She smiled, and gave me a kiss. Then we made love.

And I think, the reason why I have started to enjoy Harriet's company is due to her increased confidence, plus, a more relaxed and expressive way of behaving. There is a sign behind all those definite moves, forthright sentences, her more dominant sexual demands and performance, which shows that, Harriet, the woman who used to fear her life, has begun to dare everything.

So overwhelmingly irresistible, her naked body held my gaze for a very long time after we made love. I studied her posture, listened to her heartbeat, felt the warmth in her breath, then lightly kissed her cheek.

As the night went deeper, Harriet began her babyish snoring, and the sleepiness in my body kept accumulating. Finally, I put my arms around Harriet's soft and smooth waist, before entering the oblivious bliss of sleep.

On Friday, we didn't do much. It was cold and messy outside, in other words, an ordinary winter day in Stockholm. So we spent the whole day and whole evening staying inside her apartment.

Which was a bit unfortunate, Margareta's suggestion didn't find its chance to be tested. Harriet was already taking her bath in the toilet when I woke up, and as usual, I suffered the life-sucking blackout again. After I managed to get up from the bed, the energy within my body was just enough for me to drag myself into the kitchen. There was some

dessert left on the kitchen table from the last night's dinner. So I took a piece to feel being alive again. Then, when I felt better, I cooked some breakfast for Harriet, some scrambled eggs with salad, and a few slices of bacon, which I had put in her fridge a week ago, for myself.

In her tiny kitchen, Harriet owns an espresso machine, which is an abnormally luxurious thing, especially for such a small apartment she has. I brewed two double espresso when Harriet started to dry herself after bath.

We had a lovely breakfast. And it was a great joy to see Harriet wearing her wet hair, from which the water drops would occasionally fall onto her food in the plate when she ate. Instead of talking, I and Harriet flipped the same piece of newspaper till we finished our food.

After breakfast, Harriet asked for my help to take a look at her latest pattern designs. She laid her sketchbook on the dining table, still having her double espresso unfinished, and began to show me her work.

To be honest, I was really impressed to see her designs, which looked maturer, better crafted, and with a much stronger characteristic than those she used to draw. I tried to be critical, but failed to draw any criticisms, even after the most picky part of me had come out to look for the flaws. So in the end, I was only able to make compliments, which made her laugh, having her smile tell me that it was only compliment she was expecting from me.

She worked a bit afterwards, while I spent the few hours during that morning sitting in the couch and browsing some fashion magazines to which Harriet had subscribed.

Harriet looked seriously attractive when she was concentrating on her work. Her eyes would sometimes gaze, giving her a dominant look which increased her hotness, drawing my full attention from those magazines that were filled up with models dressed in highly commercialised styles. So I decided to put down the magazines and spend the rest of the time, before lunch, watching the most beautiful Harriet I had ever seen.

We ordered some pizza for lunch. Harriet asked why I kept looking at her when she was working in the morning, and laughed, again, when I told her how attractive I found she was then. With her mouth full of pizza, Harriet leaned forward to give me a kiss. And it made me giggle when she tried to feed me with some pizza in her mouth while we were kissing. I didn't refuse, and let her play the game she surely enjoyed. And I was still giggling when she sat down on her seat.

Harriet stared at me, with her two fists under her chin to support her head, and then said, 'Do you know how much I love you, Henrik?'

Not telling a lie this time, I naturally responded, 'No, I don't. But I know how much I love you, Harriet.'

Her face then melted with a smile, and a few tear drops fell out of her eyes. Very quickly, Harriet grabbed my both hands, held them in hers, and pressed them on the centre of her chest.

Her heartbeat was strong and fast, pumping some blood up to her face, giving her an amiable blush.

Thrown by the sensational image of Harriet, I, sitting on the other side of the table, found myself unable to resist her beauty any more. So leaving the pizza lying unfinished in my plate, I stood up and wrapped Harriet to my chest. She started to cry in my arms when I kissed her on the forehead, letting her tears go through my shirt to warm my skin.

Then a glimpse of the silver lining sneaked in between the blinds and landed on her hair. For a moment, I began to doubt the decision I had made during her absence, and felt, that the sublime figure I had in my arms was the one with whom I was supposed to spend the rest of my life.

I moved my arm to the back of her knees, while the other one was still caressing her back, then lifted her up from the chair she was sitting on. She was light, and didn't resist my action, helping me to maintain the balance by putting her arms around my neck. On the way to her bedroom, which hadn't been tidied up since we woke up in the morning, Harriet kept sobbing, in joy, mumbling something to herself which I didn't manage to catch.

We had sex in bed while most of our blood was still staying in our stomachs.

Perhaps the lack of blood in Harriet's brain was the main cause for turning up her unfocused face again, at the moment of our intimate intercourse, irritating enough to remind me of my initial motive for getting involved with this woman, with whom I had just begun, unacceptably, to fall in love.

For the rest of the afternoon, we lay in bed, in silence, watching the light on the ceiling slowly being washed away, bit by bit, as the sky kept darkening since we entered the bedroom. Harriet sensed the unease, but didn't break the awkward peace. And I could feel, that for a few times, her eyes were eagerly located on my face. Yet without building any connection with them, I placed mine on the ceiling so I could make the least attempt to achieve some freedom for my thoughts. The calm face of mine, which Harriet always finds irresistibly charming, assisted me to secretly work out the ultimate destiny of the woman who was lying next to me. Of course she couldn't notice the whole process that was going on in my mind, which was well hidden with the help from the special gift I was born with.

I stayed for dinner, for which I went out to do the shopping in the ICA around the centrum. When I returned, Harriet, who had finished tidying up the bedroom, was sitting in the couch, flipping the same magazines I was reading in the morning.

'Can you believe how bad the fashion industry is nowadays?' She started talking in that sarcastic tone I hadn't heard for a while, 'These soulless boys and girls do their best to play smug, just because they are told to fit in those stupid styles designed by a few attention seeking fashion design fascists. No wonder the whole industry keeps degrading!'

I didn't say anything, but walked towards her instead, gently putting my hand on the back of her head, and whispered, 'Now, let's cook something.'

Her mood was brought up again when I took her favourite baby tomatoes out of the plastic shopping bag. Then we made some simple pasta together for dinner.

We had some wine while eating, but didn't talk as much as the evening before. Harriet asked something about my work, which was not a tricky lie for me to articulate since she knew so little about how a ghostwriter works.

Then Harriet talked about her childhood to me. As a little girl, she had her father who protected and cared for her very much, while her mother kept picking up problems with her. At the beginning, Harriet didn't quite understand why her mother didn't love her since she was very little, but soon figured out the reason after she turned six years' old.

Her father took her to the cemetery at her birthday, and showed her the grave, under which her biological mother was buried, who died on the operation bed after giving birth to the new born Harriet.

She cried so hard, exposing the weakest side of herself to me, which massively arose my desire to stop her from breathing. Yet, at the same time, a great deal of my sympathy, not knowing where it was from, was awakened, making me want to cry with her. However, with the intention of not showing Harriet any of my weakness, I controlled my emotions, not letting any tears fall out of my eyes, and performed in a very gentle and mature way, by giving her my consolation. I listened patiently, and softly rubbed her shoulder with my palm.

We spent some hours together after dinner, before I realised that I had been with Harriet for too long in a row, and felt I was bearing an increasing stress. So I told her that I had an early morning meeting on Saturday, for which I had to leave her place and get some preparation work done in my study.

She saw me off to the door when I was leaving. With her weary eyes holding a sign of expectation, she said, after we kissed goodbye, 'Henrik, do you know what day next Monday is?'

At the beginning, I was confused, not knowing what she was talking about. But two seconds later, my blank brain started to react, and worked out that she was referring to the anniversary thing most girls, as I know, seriously care about.

‘Sure, one month of our happiness!’ I answered, trying my best to give some enthusiasm.

‘That’s right. See you when your work is finished then. Take care. And I love you.’ She blew a kiss to me while I was walking towards the elevator in the middle of the corridor. And I gave her a wave and a nicest smile I could form on my face.

