

DECEMBER 2008



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Hunched over his walking stick, the old man came out of the woods. The road was nothing more than a couple of overgrown tyre tracks. He was wearing a pair of black rubber boots bought at Coop Forum in Handen a few weeks earlier, and a dark brown raincoat from Tempo in Fältöversten.

He wasn't much of a man for buying clothes, he never had been.

The ground was still free from snow, but the frost had the trees and bushes in its iron grip. It was a genuinely cold day at last, and perhaps the snow would arrive that evening.

In the icy woods, where the trees' dark green needles were the brightest colour in an otherwise greyish-brown palette, a black dog appeared up ahead of the man. A Labrador retriever. The dog studied its owner, lowered its nose to the ground and ran off. A few yards later, three more black dogs came running, all the same breed and size. They crossed the track and vanished into the bushes on the other side. The old man followed them. He could hear the rest of the pack behind him, three bitches and a male, wandering back and forth over frozen sprigs of blueberries and thickets of ferns.

They were on their way home.



The man lived in a dark red cottage just south of Landfjärden, roughly halfway between Nynäshamn and Stockholm. Through the thick forest outside his kitchen window, he could see over to the island of Muskö during the winter. It was only a few hundred yards from his gate to the water's edge, and there were plenty of spots for his dogs to splash about during spring and summer. Labradors were a breed with webbed toes, after all, bred for retrieving things from the water.

The eight adult dogs lived with the man in the main cottage, and the two outhouses were for the litters of puppies. He had been breeding Labradors for almost twenty years, and preferred dogs to people. That was why he lived in the cottage in the woods. Since there was neither mains water nor reliable electricity in the area, he was left to his own devices. His neighbours kept their distance, the closest living in the urban development that started twelve or so miles to the south.

The man had gone to meet the buyers himself during the first few years, but he had always lost his temper when the fat old ladies asked whether the dogs needed a lot of exercise and when the spoiled young kids pulled on the puppies' ears. And when he lost his temper, he had raised his voice and slapped away the children's snotty hands.

It had never been God's plan for him to be a salesman. These days, he had help. People from other kennels displayed the puppies and young dogs for him, they even looked after the business side of things. And took all the credit, not that the old man cared.





When he returned home from his morning walk, it was just before nine. His cottage consisted of three rooms and one kitchen. Since the dogs always brought half the forest back into the house with them, and the old man had been having back trouble for the past few years, there wasn't much point in cleaning. He didn't let the dogs into the kitchen, meaning it was the only room that had some kind of order to it. He turned on the coffee machine.

He was expecting company.

He knew them well enough to be sure they would turn up when he asked them to come. He assumed they were afraid of him, and they wouldn't be the only ones.

Sami Farhan was first to arrive.

The old man saw him approaching along the path from the main road. The bus from Västerhaninge to Nynäshamn stopped up on the 73, and the cottage wasn't much more than ten minutes into the woods.

It had been years since Sami had last sparred in the ring, but he still moved like a boxer. Despite his big, heavy body, he was quick and light on his feet, and it took him less than a minute to make his way from the gate up to the house. He was wearing a short grey woollen coat that seemed better suited to the trendy Nytorget on a warm spring day, and he had white trainers on his feet.

The man let him in. The eight black dogs were so excited by his unexpected visit that they came close to flooring the boxer.





Since the man's second guest clearly hadn't been on the same bus, they would have to wait another thirty-five minutes. That was the amount of time between departures. The old man grabbed the key to the outhouse from a hook behind the door, and they went out into the yard together.

'How are your brothers, Sami?' the old man asked.

'Why?'

'I saw your older brother Ali a while ago, but it's a long time since I saw the younger one, Adil, isn't it?'

'Yeah, that's his name.'

'Everything OK with him?'

'You'll have to invite him over and ask him yourself if you're so interested.'

The man nodded and looked down at the ground. An amused smile played on his lips. Sami's touchiness where his brothers were concerned was the same as ever.

In the yard between the two outhouses, the old man had a root cellar. It had been built during the fifties. Stone had been laid on stone in the old-fashioned way, and there was moss growing on the roof. After just a few decades, the building looked as old as the woods surrounding it.

Flanked by the eight dogs, the man and Sami stopped at the cellar to fetch food for the puppies. It was where he kept the dogs' food, the paper towels and toilet paper, and everything else that wouldn't fit into the larder in the main house. The cellar was much bigger than it looked, blasted into the rocks behind it.





At the very back, shrouded in darkness, the old man had fifty or so boxes stacked on top of one another. Each was filled with banknotes, sorted into plastic pouches. There were notes of all denominations, and the sum total exceeded 300 million kronor.

In all likelihood, the money was on the verge of rotting in the cool, damp cellar.

But the old man wasn't worried about that. There wasn't anything in particular he wanted to spend it on, after all.

He asked Sami to carry the dog food, and they went to feed the ever-hungry puppies in silence.

When they returned to the main house, the old man disappeared into his bedroom one floor up, and Sami sat in the kitchen, staring at the water running through the coffee filter for ten long minutes. He had always had trouble sitting still, and without even thinking about it, he impatiently began tapping his foot so vigorously that his entire leg shook. He stared out the window and eventually saw Michel Maloof approaching through the woods. Right then, he also heard footsteps on the stairs; the old man was on his way back down.

Michel Maloof was shorter than Sami. He walked with his shoulders gently hunched, though he also moved quickly and determinedly. He was wearing a pair of boots better suited to the forest, but it was obvious he was freezing. When the old man opened the door, Maloof's face cracked into its characteristic grin, revealing two rows of teeth that shone bright against his well-groomed black beard.





‘All right,’ he said.

He held out his hand, forgetting that the old man never shook hands. Thanks to the dogs and the chaos of the situation, there was no time for embarrassment.

‘Sami is already here,’ said the old man.

‘Sami?’ Maloof repeated. ‘That Sami?’

There was a barely perceptible sharpness to his tone. Other than that, it was impossible to determine what Maloof really meant by his question. His ability to hide what he was thinking and feeling was legendary; no one would voluntarily play poker with Michel Maloof. His expressions were imperturbable, the customary smile not affected by any external circumstances, and his movements were slow, as though well considered and thought out.

He ran a hand through his beard as Sami appeared in the kitchen doorway.

‘What a surprise,’ the boxer said.

If you wanted to work with Michel Maloof or Sami Farhan, everyone knew that you couldn’t be messing about with drugs at the same time.

Despite this, Maloof’s and Farhan’s paths had never crossed more than fleetingly.

Not before now.

They sat down at the worn kitchen table. Sami and Maloof both had their hands wrapped around their hot coffee cups, and Sami wondered how the man could live somewhere so cold. One of the dogs began to howl outside the kitchen, and it didn’t take long for his relatives to join in. The old man





silenced them with a brief command, without even needing to raise his voice.

Sami and Maloof glanced at one another.

They shared the dogs' respect for the old man, though they couldn't claim to know or like him. He wasn't the type of person you felt much affection for. Still, whenever he got in touch, they came. Why wouldn't they? The old man often had interesting ideas.

'You're not wearing enough layers,' he said when Sami asked about turning the heat up.

Sami held back from telling him that you could buy battery-powered heaters these days, if the problem was the lack of electricity in the cottage.

'I've got a suggestion,' the old man continued. 'Or perhaps a question.'

Sami and Maloof were listening. The difference between the two men was particularly clear when they sat next to one another. Sami's gaze was open and encouraging, it waited eagerly for the next sentence, it was urgent. Maloof sat with his face turned away, tense and seemingly uninterested, lost within himself. When he briefly met the old man's eye, it was with the cautious curiosity of a watcher.

'There's a building in Västberga,' the old man said, 'I know you're both familiar with it. A building containing a huge amount of cash. And an opportunity has arisen . . .'

The dogs growled. They started playing, and it soon sounded like they were tipping the furniture in the next room. But their game came to an end without the man having to say a word.





‘I know of a woman,’ he continued, ‘who I think could be . . . of assistance. There’s a chance, at the very least. She’s looking for . . . company. She’s registered on those sites? You know, the kind where you make dates?’

Sami and Maloof nodded. If it had been someone else talking, they would have laughed at his choice of words, about ‘making dates’. But with this old man, there was no joking. With him, you kept your mouth shut and listened.

Instead, they drank the coffee, which was strong and bitter, and waited for him to go on.

‘That’s why I asked you here,’ he said after a short pause. ‘I thought it might be something for you. Maybe you’d like to meet the girl? She’s your age. Go out and eat dinner with her. You can say you got her details from the ad.’

Maloof and Sami glanced at one another. Neither of them had ever been lacking for women in their lives.

‘I don’t think I can, sadly,’ Sami eventually said. ‘You know we’re having another baby, right?’

‘I know.’ The old man nodded. ‘Pretty soon, isn’t it? Your son can’t even be one? What was his name? John? Has he been christened yet?’

‘I can’t date a girl,’ Sami said without answering his questions.

He stomped his feet in an attempt to warm them up, and explained:

‘Not even pretending. You know what I mean? Plus, I’m not doing that kind of thing any more. I’ve got something else on the go. You know?’

The man nodded, but his expression hadn’t changed. It was as though he hadn’t heard Sami’s objections.





‘And what do you say, Michel?’ he asked.

‘Yeah, I mean,’ said Maloof, ‘I can date anyone. I mean . . . this girl . . . there’s a police station two hundred yards from that place in Västberga. She can’t . . . change that, can she?’

The man didn’t reply.

‘No, no,’ Maloof continued, both cautious about disagreeing with the old man and keen to share his doubts, ‘And, yeah . . . they’ve got guards in reception twenty-four seven. A hundred cameras. One of the most secure vaults in northern Europe? But . . . maybe she knows all that?’

The man didn’t seem to catch the irony.

‘Meet up with her,’ he repeated, and turned to Sami. ‘Listen to her. She might happen to say something of interest.’

Sami pulled at the neck of his sweatshirt as though he needed to get some air.

‘No thanks, not for me,’ he politely replied, as though he had been offered another biscuit.

The man stared at him with no expression on his face, and then he turned to Maloof.

‘Michel?’

‘Yeah. Or’ – he changed his mind – ‘I don’t know?’

‘If you take her out for dinner, I’ll foot the bill,’ the old man said. ‘And if it leads anywhere, I could imagine helping out financially.’

‘Sure, sure.’ Maloof nodded. ‘No.’

‘No?’

Maloof made a gesture so vague it was impossible to interpret. He didn’t want to seem negative. He looked at Sami, who shook his head almost imperceptibly as he rubbed his hands to





warm them up. Both had a huge amount of respect for the man with the dogs, but this time he seemed to be clutching at straws.

‘That disappoints me,’ said the old man, getting up from the table. ‘That really disappoints me.’

A dense silence spread through the kitchen, and both visitors felt uneasy.

The man took a piece of paper from his pocket and handed it Maloof.

‘You could at least take this? The girl’s personal details. And the rest of her contact details. In case you change your mind?’

‘Thanks,’ Maloof replied, taking the slip and shoving it into his jacket pocket. ‘You never know. You don’t.’

‘I think that you and Sami could achieve something really . . . interesting if you worked together,’ the man added.



FEBRUARY-MAY 2009



2

Michel Maloof had decided to go for a walk through the newly built waterfront area along Hornsbergs Strand. He was wearing a thin black coat over his dark suit, and the smooth soles of his shoes hadn't been designed for the icy ground. Every now and then he slipped on the path. He was carrying a black briefcase in one hand. It acted as a kind of counterweight, helping him keep his balance when he turned onto the path down toward the canal on the other side of the Ekelund Bridge.

He was early. The meeting wasn't until two, meaning he still had twenty minutes to kill. He had parked his pale grey Seat Ibiza right outside the entrance to the G4S offices on Warfvinges Väg. The car was the most anonymous he had ever driven; if he left it in a big car park, he might even walk straight past it. But for Maloof, it was often important not to draw any attention to himself, and the Seat Ibiza seemed to have been designed with that very ambition in mind.

Even so, he didn't have the patience to sit and wait in it for almost half an hour.

He had never come this close before.



It wasn't nerves he was trying to shake off during his quick walk, it was excitement.

The cold weather was back after a warm January, but the narrow canal was still clear of ice. Maybe the city made sure to keep all its channels open? He didn't know anything about Stadshagen, it wasn't his neighbourhood.

Michel Maloof had been born in Lebanon. When he was six, his family had fled the country's bloody civil war and made their way to Italy, via the coast, but for his father, the final destination had always been clear. They were going to Scandinavia, that paradise on earth. How or why his father had come to believe that the Nordic countries were the solution to all their problems, young Michel hadn't known, but he hadn't been raised to question his father. Their journey from Italy continued north, and the bright colours and warm winters of the Mediterranean were replaced by cold Norrland seriousness. Maloof's lasting memory of that time in his life was that he had been freezing. Constantly.

After their first year in Åsele, in the north of the country, roughly halfway between Östersund and Arvidsjaur, even Maloof's father had decided that he was fed up with the silence, the darkness and the forests. He made the family pack up their few belongings once again. The dream of Sweden still lived on, but living so close to the Arctic Circle was too extreme. So the family set down roots in the Stockholm suburb of Fittja instead, a place many associated with criminality, poverty and social problems. But it was there that the family had finally found the security they had been searching for, where the positives were





so great that the negatives could be ignored. It was where they lived to this day.

At the foot of the Essingeleden Bridge, Maloof turned to head back. A fine layer of powdery snow was covering the grass on either side of the path, making the grey afternoon seem a little brighter.

Of all the neighbourhoods in Stockholm, Stadshagen, tucked away to one side of the city centre, was one of the most anonymous. The district had been an industrial area since the fifties, with no other ambition than to offer cheap square footage and accessible docks. It was only recently that the politicians and town planners had realized that the location was far too good to be an industrial and business wasteland, and they were poised to transform the area into an attractive place to live.

As Maloof walked back up onto Hornsbergs Strand and saw the signs of the building work, which had been temporarily brought to a halt by the cold, he felt the familiar relief at not living in central Stockholm.

He liked Fittja and never felt the urge to come into town; in fact, he almost always wanted to get away from it.

He looked at his watch. Ten to two.

Maloof took a deep breath.

An older woman with blow-dried blond hair and glasses with black frames was sitting in reception. On the wall behind her, the G4S logo glowed like a religious icon for its employees to bow down to every time they came into the office.

The woman gave Maloof a stern look as he climbed the stairs from the street.





He unconsciously straightened the knot in his tie, quickly pushed his long hair behind his ears and ran a hand over his neat beard. Then he smiled broadly.

‘I have a meeting with Anders Mild at two?’

The woman wasn’t falling for his charms. She nodded reluctantly and told him to sit down to the right of reception while she called Mild’s secretary.

The minimalist sofa was even less comfortable than it looked, and, as Maloof sat down, he was reminded of just how much he disliked wearing a suit. The modern cut felt tight across his shoulders. He had bought a dark red tie the day before, and it had taken twenty minutes of increasing frustration to manage a nice knot. How was anyone supposed to feel successful with a noose around his neck?

Maloof leaned forward and peered down the corridor of offices. The man he was waiting for, Anders Mild, was the managing director and head of G4S in Sweden. Without Zoran Petrovic’s help, Maloof would never have managed to arrange this meeting, and as Mild’s secretary came down the corridor toward him, Maloof realized how Petrovic had managed it.

Mild’s secretary was very young and very cute.

Maloof got to his feet. He realized he was clutching the handle of his black attaché case far too hard. He shook the girl’s hand.

‘Can I get you anything?’ she asked as she showed him into a large meeting room with a view out onto the roofs of the surrounding buildings and the treetops down by the canal. ‘Water? Coffee?’

‘Sure,’ said Maloof. ‘That’s fine, thanks.’





He pulled out a chair in the middle of the long table and set down his briefcase on the one next to it.

‘Do you need to use the projector?’ the girl asked, still not sure whether her guest had said yes or no to the offer of coffee.

At first, he didn’t know what she meant.

‘For the presentation?’ she explained. ‘You’re giving a presentation to Anders, no?’

Maloof shook his head. ‘Right, right. Yes . . . no projector today,’ he said, patting his briefcase with a smile. ‘This is my presentation.’

She nodded, not caring what he meant, and then left him with the door open while she went to fetch her boss.

Maloof was far too worked up to sit down.



Along with Zoran Petrovic, Maloof had done a lot of research. G4S was the world’s biggest security company. Operating in 125 countries, it was also one of the largest private employers, with over 600,000 staff globally. The company’s humble origins could be traced back to Copenhagen, where, around the same time as fireworks lit up the night sky to celebrate the dawn of the twentieth century, a small firm that hired out night guards had been born. A few decades later, the company was renamed Group 4 Falck, but it would be a while before its growth really took off.



‘It’s all about money,’ Petrovic had explained to Maloof. ‘You can chug away for year after year without anything really happening. I mean, who hasn’t run a security company? But without resources, you’re not going to get anywhere.’





Some time after the dawn of the next century, the venture capitalists had suddenly turned their attention to the security industry. They opened their coffers, brandished their whips, changed the company's name to Group 4 Securicor and launched an extensive takeover plan. In Sweden, the once state-owned ABAB fell victim to the growing firm, and Petrovic turned nostalgic and told a long, pointless story about how he used to trick ABAB guards in an industrial area.

Group 4 Securicor, or G4S, grew rapidly on the London Stock Exchange and eventually split into two distinct business areas: G4S Secure Solutions, which dealt with surveillance, and G4S Cash Solutions, which handled the secure transport of valuables.

Anders Mild was responsible for G4S Cash Solutions in Sweden, and he didn't leave Michel Maloof waiting for more than a moment or two in the meeting room. Mild was blue-eyed and average height, with a neck that barely seemed able to support his head, and he was dressed in a shiny grey suit and an expensive pale blue shirt that was unbuttoned at the collar. He moved energetically around the conference table, shook Maloof's hand and nodded toward the older man who had come in behind him, but who had chosen to remain on the other side of the table.

'This is Rick Almanza,' Anders Mild said, introducing his colleague. 'Rick here is responsible for our European activity, Michel. He's my boss. I told him about our meeting, and he thought it sounded so interesting that he flew over from London to join us. Is it OK if we continue in English?'

Maloof smiled and nodded.





Could it be true? What exactly had Zoran Petrovic said? Anders Mild didn't know a thing about Maloof, who hadn't even used his real surname when he booked the meeting, to avoid any problems with Google. Did people really fly over from London on such vague grounds? Was it a trap?

Suspicion was precisely what he needed. He felt his racing heart slow, his nerves give way to energy and this new challenge sharpen his focus. This was how he worked.

He was only ever nervous before the task itself, never while he was sorting it out. He nodded and enthusiastically shook Rick Almanza's hand over the table.

'English. No problem. I'm truly honored.'

Anders Mild went back over to his boss's side of the table and sat down.

Maloof debated whether to move over to the whiteboard, but decided against it. It wasn't like he had anything to draw on it, anyway.

He glanced at the lapel on Mild's jacket, where there was a small G4S logo badge. Michel Maloof had been robbing secure transport vehicles bearing that same logo since his early teens. Did the two men opposite realize that they had just let one of Sweden's most notorious robbers into the boardroom of the world's biggest security firm?



3

Out in the hallway, Sami Farhan tied his boots, pulled on a thick, dark green down jacket over his polo shirt and was just about to step into the stairwell when he heard John wake.

He paused in the doorway, his fingers silently drumming the handle, listening tensely. The cot was in their bedroom, by the window. Since it was only six in the morning, he had pushed the door shut to avoid waking Karin or the boy. He stood completely still for a moment, and the babbling seemed to stop, but then he heard an expectant gurgle that gradually increased in volume.

The baby was definitely waking up.

Sami gently closed the front door and quickly made his way back down the hall and into the bedroom, still wearing his coat and boots. Karin was sleeping, but she turned anxiously in the big double bed. She had been up at least two or three times during the night, he wasn't exactly sure. Sami lifted the tiny body from the cot and held the boy against his soft down jacket, gently rocking and lulling the little bundle. But his efforts were doomed to fail. John was hungry, and no amount of rocking would fix that.

'What time is it?'



Karin mumbled into the pillow. Sami carefully lowered the baby onto the bed next to her. The scent of breast milk practically made John howl, and Karin pulled back the covers, revealing her round, pregnant belly as she uncovered her breast.

‘Where are you off to so early?’ she asked, still not knowing what time it was.

Sami was sweating under his thick coat. He stood there irresolutely, rocking nervously, as though he were still holding the baby. He couldn’t tear his eyes from them. The pregnant woman breastfeeding the tiny child. His family. The scent of bodies filled the room. Skin, closeness.

‘Are you going to school?’ she asked.

He grunted. It could be interpreted as a confirmation without actually being one.

‘What’s the time?’

The minute Karin opened her eyes and turned her head, she would see the digital clock on the bedside table. He told the truth.

‘Five past six.’

‘Have they started doing dawn lectures or something?’

She smiled, but her eyes were still closed. The baby guzzled.

Sami was enrolled at the Kristineberg culinary school, in his second semester. He had always been good at cooking, but now he was going to learn the trade from scratch. He had promised her. When she got pregnant for the first time, she had given him an ultimatum. In her usual clear way, she had explained that if there was a risk that the father of her child would end up in prison, she would find a new one, one who had different





ambitions in life. Either Sami stopped using his days to plan one spectacular robbery or break-in after another, or he could clear off right then, before he became emotionally attached to the baby. And vice versa.

There had been no question for Sami, it had been obvious. He was willing to do anything for Karin's sake.

That was why he had applied to Kristineberg. He had finally decided to get himself a real job.

'The whole class is going out to Frihamnen to meet the boats coming in with shellfish,' he answered, bending the truth slightly.

Like always, he talked with the help of his arms and hands. He showed the direction of Frihamnen, mimicked the boats moving into the harbor and made a gesture that might have represented some kind of shellfish.

'Go,' Karin whispered with a smile. 'Get going. We might fall asleep again . . .'

He nodded. Tapped his foot like he was keeping time with a techno tune at double speed. But still, he couldn't move. John was feeding noisily. Karin could sense his hesitation. She opened her eyes and looked at him, standing fully dressed in front of her.

'You're so damn handsome.' She smiled. 'Don't just stand there being so ridiculously handsome, get going.'

He smirked, nodded again and freed himself from the spell by turning abruptly and heading back out into the hall. He ran down the uneven stairs of their old building on Högbergsgatan. Those thousands of hours in the ring during his teenage years had left their mark; he practically flew down them.





As he stepped out into the cold February air, he allowed himself to fill with pride. During all their meetings and discussions last autumn, he had kept the feeling to himself. There had been so many loose ends that he hadn't wanted to talk about it in advance. But now he finally dared believe it was actually going to happen.

Sami jogged down the street. The snow that had fallen during the night would blow away as the day wore on. When he turned the corner onto Katarina Västra Kyrkogata, the bare trees in the churchyard were like black silhouettes against the dark grey sky. The sun wouldn't rise for hours yet.

The plan was to be back home with Karin by lunch, after a quick stop at Systembolaget to buy a magnum of Moët to celebrate.

When he reached the car, he sat down behind the wheel with a smile on his face. Without Karin and John, he reminded himself, he would never have made it this far. Without them, maybe he wouldn't have even tried.

He drove toward Katarinavägen, thinking about all the warnings he had been given over the years. Bitter former bachelors who missed their carefree lives. Those who knew enough to say that babies meant no sleep to begin with, then no sex, followed by no life. He would say they were partly right. He was sleeping badly and his sex life was nothing to boast about.

But John was a miracle who outweighed it all.

Change was always difficult. People stayed in the same jobs for year after year because they didn't dare try anything else. They hung out with childhood friends they had long since





grown apart from, who were easier to call up than finding anyone new. Sami's childhood had been one long journey of discovery through the southern Stockholm suburbs. If it had been twenty or forty different addresses in the end, he had no idea, but it didn't matter. In his day, the segregation hadn't been what it was today. Back then, people had just been lumped together, Muslims, Christians and Jews. Turks, Iraqis and Yugoslavians. He had learned to get along with everyone, had found it easy to talk and become friends with both Finnish migrants and African refugees. He had become a chameleon, been forced to learn how to quickly adapt to new situations.

It was something he made use of now. He had thought it before, but this time it was real. For Karin's and the kids' sake, both born and unborn, he would leave the criminal life behind him. He would shed his skin. Not delete any of the thousands of names in his contacts list, but add some new ones instead.

It wasn't the easiest way to go about it, but it was his way.

Sami Farhan drove across Skeppsbron and through Blasieholmen. It was Tuesday morning, and the traffic in central Stockholm was still sparse. Across the water, he could see Af Chapman, the ship that had been turned into a youth hostel. Its illuminated white hull lay quietly in the water, which was as black as a pool of ink.

He was out in good time. What he called being careful, others might call a need to be in control.

He really was going to Frihamnen. But he was going there alone, not with his classmates from Kristineberg. For him, the





hours behind a school desk were over, there wouldn't be any more lectures on cooking. He would never be able to give his family the life they deserved by slicing cucumber for cold buffets or pouring béarnaise sauce over filet mignon.

Today, that morning, was the first day of their new lives. And, like always, it was luck that had given him this chance. It hadn't been easy to find the money. He had gone in with everything he had, all the cash he'd been able to withdraw. Plus he had brought in other financiers. His brothers, first and foremost. They had mocked him, doubted him and called him 'the fishmonger.' But they had still made the investment, like so many of his other friends and acquaintances. Karin's uncle had even stepped up, and all without her knowing a thing. Clean money being placed into a lawful business.



By the time he reached Nybroplan, the city had clearly woken up. There were people walking from Strandvägen toward Hamngatan, and from Blasieholmen toward Östermalm. Stockholm's wealthiest neighbourhood had never appealed to the Södermalm resident Sami. Besides, the suburbs felt more present in the city centre than they did where he lived, and he had long since had enough of the suburbs. Karin Flodin was born and bred in the streets around Nytorget, and the schools there were some of the best in town. It was in Södermalm that his children would grow up.

Sami had loved Karin for as long as he could remember. He'd always believed that one true love awaited every person, and he had been lucky. He had met his while he was just a teenager.





The moment she transformed from his unattainable, youthful obsession into his actual lover, the love he felt for her had deepened in a way he would never have been able to predict. Vague dreams became a physical reality. Crumpled tubes of toothpaste, unwashed plates and scrunched-up underwear on the bathroom floor were all points of irritation that had never featured in his fantasies. But nor had he been able to imagine how the skin of her stomach would smell in the morning, how her eyes would glitter when she looked at him, or how she would grab his hands whenever he told a story, hold them still and gaze deep into his soul, revealing things about him that he hadn't even been aware of himself.

When she added the next role to those she had filled earlier and became the mother of his child, his love had undergone another transformation. It was most obvious when he thought about how he would feel if he lost her. That had always been his worry, but he could no longer imagine a life without Karin. The thought was too painful.

That was why Sami Farhan was in the car on that dark, early February morning. Driving along Strandvägen toward his new life.

